

[How-to Guide]

Coaching in the Szabolcs Segregated Roma Settlement (Pécs, Hungary): Building Momentum in nine months

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June, 2014

This guide was finalized in the framework of UNDP Regional Centre's [Area-Based Development \(ABD\) Initiative for Inclusion](#)

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Community coaching cannot function on its own. We as coaches need to have access to expert and professional groups with whom we can bring together members of our target communities.

We offer you a glimpse into our 'open kitchen'. The Client, as well as the audience to which our project is accountable, gets to peek into certain phases of the process, and in some situations can contribute to its success with individual "spices" to the recipe in the form of advice and feedback. These key points of the process where modifications can be made are marked with a .

The necessary ingredients (targeting 900 people):

- ♦ Two or three coaches (or approximately one coach per 300 people)
- ♦ Abundant access to good equipment (computer, printer, telephone, camera, blackboard, paper, office supplies etc.)
- ♦ Dedicated time: 3 times weekly 4-8 hrs in the field, and approximately 2-8 hours a week for tending to details, preparation, organizing, documentation.

The Place for Everyone - "Area-Based Interventions for making the most of EU Fund for Sustainable Housing and Inclusion of disadvantaged Roma (explicitly but not exclusively targeted) in pilot areas in Romania & across the border to Serbia, FYR Macedonia and Turkey" implemented by UNDP Bratislava Regional Centre

<http://localdevelopmentforinclusion.org/>

The good coach already has some experience in the field, is able to follow and adapt to the methodology, and has a wide network within the wider environment (the city), in which the target area is located. She is able to facilitate group work, and is able to 'hold back', letting the beneficiaries do the work. She can guide, prepare and mentor, and is not uncomfortable if coaching sometimes merges with individual case management and problem solving.

It is an advantage if the coach is also already locally engaged (although this also entails risks, for the coaches themselves have a critical role in breaking the established hierarchies to allow for community activation and re-organization), and is able to capitalize on the opportunities provided by his or her main/original employment through the coaching process. The good coach is able to devote full attention to the target group.

The recipe:

For a community of 900 people, take three coaches, and after completing a basic training, place them in the target area. Their basic training will contain an introduction to the coaching methodology, the exact delineation of the target area, the competencies, what they are authorized and expected to do, and guide them through the process of documentation.

The steps:

Preparatory Phase

Collecting first impressions: This is an absolutely essential phase. If left out, it can never be made up for. You would need a camera and a map (as detailed as possible, and on which we could mark what we found, and where). It is advisable to complete these first impressions on two or three occasions, during clearly differentiated times of the day, as well as different parts of the week.

Here is a little list of things to keep in mind when first going out into the field:

Environment and surroundings:

- ♦ Street layout - is there a public square, what are nexus points, where people tend to gather;
- ♦ The accessibility and regularity, availability of public transportation (how did we travel there, how we parked, etc.)
- ♦ Pedestrians
- ♦ Visible public utilities, other characteristics (drinking fountain, outdoor toilet, etc)
- ♦ Garbage, and orderliness- disorder
- ♦ The condition of houses

- ♦ Are there houses for sale, and how many
- ♦ The positioning of public service buildings
- ♦ “Flavours”, colors, aromas (smells).

People:

- ♦ Youth - elderly
- ♦ Men- women
- ♦ Whom do we see at which times of day on the street, or in the garden; are they loud, do they speak to each other, what kind of social distance is kept
- ♦ Do they speak with us, engage easily in communication with strangers, or not

Animals:

- ♦ Are there animals (dogs, cats, livestock)
- ♦ How are they kept, do they roam the streets unattended

We write down our experiences and impressions and document them with pictures. In the shop, in the pub, and other social places, we can freely engage in conversation with locals, present ourselves and provide an overview of the task ahead. First impressions are powerful enough and fresh in our mind for about 3-4 hours, but it's important to leave plenty of time for reflection and recording after each field visit.



We present our experiences and first impressions to the Client.

Household and individual interviews (1-2 months)

A: It is good to have a short script about our programme (who we are, why we came, how long we will be there, what we will do, etc) at the time of our first conversations and household visits. While reiterating this information during the second visit, we also ask locals for references to people in their community they think we should be in contact with. Starting with these individuals, and through further references, we conduct individual and household interviews, and we get to know the targeted community on a much deeper level.

B: Depending on who become our main clients, we could ask to be introduced, and present our work, to local decision makers and professionals. In this way we can prepare individual interviews with them as well (kindergarden, school, the leaders of social and health service centres, representatives of social organizations, local political representatives). We can also ask them for references of people with whom it would be important to initiate contact. Thus, our activities become introduced to a wider range of local actors.

Attention: Beware that, in both cases, close personal circles are created, and each circle provides a perspective to a certain small section of the community.

The first family we visited in the Szabolcs segregated Roma settlement had been living there for 17 years. They referred us to three more such families, who in turn referred us to another three. Thus nine interviews later, reluctantly, we came to the conclusion that most families in the settlement are long-term residents, that they live in orderly environments, make regular payments on their flat, take their children to school – whereas this was the only characteristic of these nine families making up the micro-community.

This is why it is good to pick up many strands, to approach the community from many angles, as they all reveal its differences.

Individual interviews and conversations get recorded on little information cards, and the data gets transferred into a Partner Map. Even though the conversations run their course on freely chosen themes, there are always elements all conversations come back to: if given the ability to choose, would they stay or go? What does she/he like about the life here? What are the main advantages? Are there disadvantages, problems, and if so, what are they?

The next phase of the process builds onto these collected problems. The collected problems, orgaized in groups, become the focuses of the working groups.

In the course of individual interviews, we also comb through individual concerns and problems, which we try to support if we can, this way also strenghtening relationships of trust and reciprocity with the community. The management of individual cases, and the engagement of residents, needs to be a constant process throughout the project cycle. It is also necessary and advisable to 'refresh' the working groups by introducing new community members to them. As the working group devotes attention to getting to know new members, this also stretches and expands the circle of people influenced by the coach.

 We deliver the Partner list to the Client, and on a workshop organized for the purpose, we introduce the 'special' cases and characteristics of the settlement, those defining features and characteristics setting apart the residential area/targeted settlement.

 In the framework of the interviews, we meet with local politicians and representatives (whom we approach as interview subjects), using these meetings to inform them about our work and experiences to date.

CONTACT INFORMATION CARD	
Name	.....
How could I call you?	.....

Address:	.....

Family:	.....

Telephone, contact information:	.....

Interest area:	.....
children-	.....
job-	.....
vision-	.....
infrastructure-	.....
development-	.....
social services-	.....
culture-	.....
self-help-	.....

The Establishment of Working Groups

As soon as the focus areas emerge (i.e. work-employment, school-education, community, housing), in the course of individual house calls, IN PERSON we invite the residents we've come to know, to join the first working group(s). The working groups take place in a closed space (in the community house, later potentially in some of the residents' gardens, or in other public places), and are scheduled at regular intervals, as feasible. We always record the next set working group date, and we also place calls and give messages to several of the residents a few days before. During the working groups, we update members with the progress of work, we establish the rules, and we record our goals and planned methods.

Given the interviews we conducted, and seeing how the focuses were emerging, we could have also formed some groups and simply invited many of the residents to the working group(s) in the course of the interview. But this is not what we did in this phase. The issues and problems were very interlinked and overlapping, and the majority of them we couldn't clearly list in just one or the other problem area (health, education, housing etc --according to which the working groups are normally divided)—this is why we decided to do it the other way around.

We first invited all of those concerned, and together brainstormed and mapped out the problems. Afterwards, we grouped them according to the main issue areas, and asked the participants to select and volunteer to work on a certain issue area.

This is how the thematic working groups were established.

The main criteria of subsequent working groups were the frequency of meetings, methodology to be used in the group work, common rules, pre-established (predefined) goals, the democratic functioning and representation of groups.

Constant content elements were: introduction, notes and reminders, feedback session (what happened since we last met, what are the new developments), current tasks, calendar (what are the next tasks which are set and agreed on), etc.

🔑 As the programme attracts increasing attention among participants and the wider public, we start receiving increasing number of invitations for planned community events, which we pass on to the working group participants. We start with some first, still 'passive' local participation (engaging participants from our targeted communities) in programmes of direct relevance for our program.

🔑 The Client already provides us with concrete advice, comments and problems as feedback on our work. In the process of involvement and engagement, in this stage we also start finding solutions to small problems of a technical nature (small technical assistance to the targeted community).

The functioning of working groups — preparing the Urgent Needs Plan as a first step

During working group sessions the working out of tasks and activities related to specific issues happens in two main directions:

On the one hand, it is very important that we are able to categorize the problems (into *less important- very important- urgent*), and that we could map out the realistic approaches to finding a solution: short-term, manageable within 1-2 months (it does not require a lot of money, or a separate grant proposal, etc); or manageable in the medium-term (within 5-6 months, because coordination is necessary with a wider range of actors, requires additional preparation work, and possibly necessitates some funding); or manageable in longer-term (it would require the preparation/writing of a separate project, need to work out a more complex implementation scheme, etc).

On the other hand, it is especially important that next to the outlined problems, we immediately also brainstorm and map out the possible solutions --we ask for and note down the advice and ideas next to each problem (let's imagine, what would be needed for a certain problem to be solved?), and next to them we also outline the internal resources located/accessible in each of us and in our community.

The collected and categorized problems, and their outlined solutions, will be embedded in the so-called **Urgent Needs Plan**. In the course of working group sessions, we continuously gather the commonly collected information. Later however, it is worthwhile organizing and editing the interventions in a table, which

- ♦ proceeds according to a timetable (immediate - medium- term – long term interventions);
- ♦ contains solution proposals;
- ♦ takes into account the resources necessary to the solutions (external and internal, what we could contribute to this process, and in what we seek for help/support).

The Urgent Needs Plan serves as the itinerary or the main strand guiding our work: from this stage, the work of the working groups is organized according to it.

Two or three occasions are sufficient for the preparation of the Urgent Needs Plan, although we should not be disconcerted should more time be required. We should expect that the individual members of the working groups will work in different dynamics, and progress at different speeds. Whereas sometimes the outlining of one or two problems may absorb the whole allotted time (1- 1.5 hours), and will require additional group meetings, in other occasions (if the consensus is greater, or there are not so many personal stakes, which prolongue the working out of problems), 1-2 occasions will be enough to consider and work out cycles stretching half- or one year forward.

The working process, and dynamics of the working groups, will be influenced by the personality, habits, and established roles of the individual group members in the community; naturally, there was community life long before the beginning of coaching activities, and some members arrive to the 'gatherings' (working group sessions) with 10, 20 or 30 years of experience. The more vocal among them however, as in any community, are defining figures, and if we are not on guard, can influence and steer the group work process with their positive or negative predispositions, habits and opinions.

During our work in the field, we came across two-three very defining and strong personalities, who felt as immediate stakeholders to every issue which was being discussed and worked out, and wanted to join each and every thematic working group. As one strategy, we were able to assuage and manage their constant and strong presence by scheduling the working group sessions rather densely (so technically the voiceful person did not have the time to participate in each of them). On the other hand, we entrusted them with some important tasks (some individual errands and negotiations), which gave them the recognition and confidence and prompted them to leave space for participation and self-realization of others, without feeling their key roles were being infringed upon.

Of course, this did not go without conflict, but until the situation was normalized, we let the participants play off the 'match' on the meetings, but we also paid attention and made sure all different opinions were being voiced and discussed.

The coach never distributes justice, with the exception of ensuring that everyone

gets to be heard. If this one condition is ensured, then sooner or later the debating sides (stemming from the number of supporters and its conclusiveness) will themselves reach a concluding point and a standstill. If this does not happen, the coach could suggest that both solutions to the problem are recorded and tried out, so that the practice could provide the outcome with which is convincing and acceptable for all of them.

Other similarly tricky situations (from the point of view of coaching activities) is sometimes created by residents who are predisposed in an especially negative (real or perceived) ways, and place such negativity in the problems and solutions outlined in the Urgent Needs Plan. The success of establishing personal contact and interaction with them is contingent on personality and the situation at the moment.

Sometimes it is effective to involve the 'troublesome' resident by provocation, e.g. organizing a cleaning action of his/her yard or the street in front of his house with the help of the members of the community. Another solution is to start to work with a female relative first (or a male relative, if the coach is a 'he'), one more distantly related to the family, and using the contact with this woman, get closer to the troublesome person, using preferably the individual case treatment methodology.

The essence is that the opportunity for engagement and joining the group work and process should be present and open to every member of the community (even those of the circle of problematic residents); that they should be able to enter and join the working process at any time – we know each other, and hence it is unavoidable that sooner or later, any conflicts of interests will come out in the open in any case.

 In this phase, apart from the Client, we also meet with the local service providers, authorities, and their representatives, who are all stakeholders in the problem and issue areas outlined in the working plan. This is where dialogue begins. The coordination and negotiations are already running their course with the active participation of the local community. We record and keep track of appointments and meetings, joint visits, and concrete names of people who are by now familiar with our project and the given institutional system and could be of help in the process of orientation and planning of interventions.

 By this point, it is not only us who go out and reach to stakeholders, but we ourselves also receive many visitors and interest in our work.

Implementing the Urgent Needs Plan

The intervention plan determines and structures the rhythm of the work of the community. Designed in the suitable way, it is also able to serve as the basis of

coordination with actors and stakeholders positioned outside the immediate pilot area – such as institutions, civil society, local government and administration, public utility companies, etc.

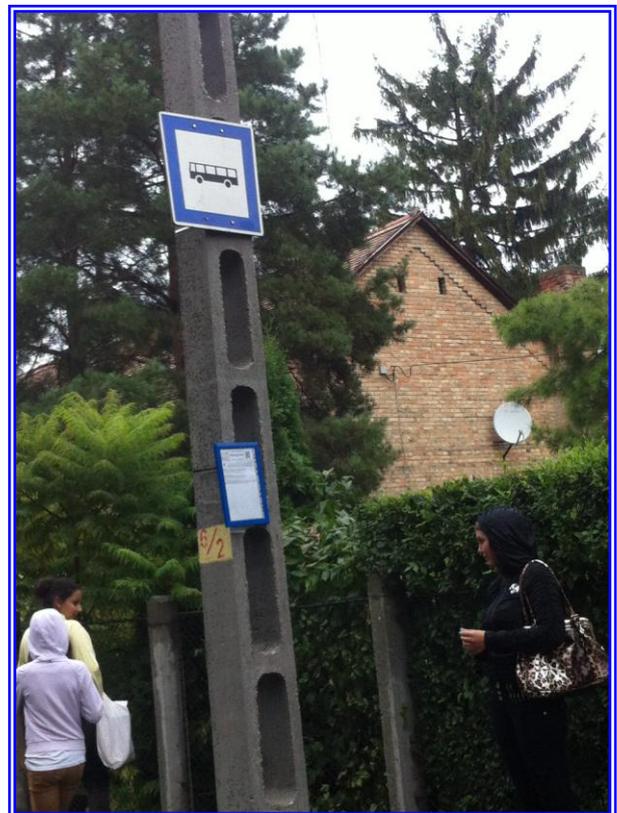
It is advisable and often most efficient to bring the actors to a common ('round') table according to a problem or issue area—those actors able to extend help and support the solution to a given problem. The representatives or spokespersons from the local community in turn prepare for these discussions and negotiations with the goal of representing community interests in the most effective/best possible way in these discussions.

The community spokespersons are democratically elected from among each working group, by voting. Their role (by all means after basic preparation) in these discussions is to negotiate and make statements, express views and opinions on behalf of the community. These discussions are truly effective only when they are not one-sided, that is, when these representatives and their respective communities are not just asking and demanding for help and solutions, but rather able to outline and propose more than one solution to a given problem— solutions in which the community itself undertakes an active role (offering its work, energy, contacts, ideas, etc).

If the spokesperson is able to present him/herself and negotiate in a prepared, comprehensive, self-confident way, then the outcomes are achieved in a quick and swift way; these outcomes are visible and facilitate and help the life of the whole community.

One good example of the above process was the relocation within the pilot area of the 316/A bus stop. This intervention did not by itself require any financial arrangements, what was needed is only that several members of the affected community were able to speak about it, and that there should be a common will to solve the problem.

On the first meeting with the leader of the local bus association, the elected community representative was able to relay the issue that the very busy road number 6 is dangerous for pedestrians as there is no crosswalk, no traffic light or any other street facilities; and that instead, it would be effective to establish a stop (an opportunity for pedestrians to be able to board the bus) at the site where the bus turns around. The bus association manager advised for a joint visit to the site, in cooperation with other



public partners (public road authority, Biokom Kft.), in which members of the working group also took part.

In this way it was possible to work out the solution acceptable to all through a common effort. This action was considered a great success for the members of the working group, who saw what a visible outcome could be achieved with just one or two meetings and coordination efforts. For the community, the action and its outcome offered hope and won people's confidence in being able to achieve results, if they step towards representing their interest in an organized and united way.

It is very important that after taking part in the negotiations, the spokespersons return to the group to give feedback and inform the working group about the progress. In the occasion of our first coordination meeting, several of the issues we raised up met with success; we were able to arrange for numerous further meetings and implement coordination efforts, which we continuously follow and guide ever since. The first meetings and discussions offered a lot of positive feedback to the spokespersons contributing to their self-esteem and self-confidence in believing that they are capable of achieving their goals if they are willing, and if they work in the direction of problem solution.

The negotiations are the platform for the setting up of new meetings, on which it is possible to discuss and work together to solve problems in a closer circle consisting of those concerned, and able to offer concrete actions for visible outcomes.

The discussions and coordination efforts based on the interventions detailed in the Urgent Needs Plan run continuously throughout the course of the project. Through the process of solving the urgent but smaller issues and actions with which the process begins, various contacts and relationships get established, which are essential and serve as a basis when approaching the larger-scale issues and projects (for instance the longer-term projects like infrastructural developments, and the creation and implementation of other projects).

Implementation of small development actions

The working groups plan small actions and projects in connection with the formulation of the Urgent Needs Plan. The thinking through and realization of these activities is the task of the community: the budget, planning and timing of activities, the background/preparatory work and organization — they assume responsibility for all of these. The good coach only moderates and guides the process. The small financial resources necessary for the implementation of these small actions are provided by the Client, who supports the projects (entailing the purchasing of only the most necessary items) which serve to mobilize the whole community, and could serve as preparatory work for the longer-term projects to be realized.

How are the small projects born? In every working group, new ideas emerge and form out of the various conversations. These ideas are discussed and thought through in a common process; we outline the available internal resources in relation to every idea, and delineate our goals related to the realization of the project, as well as the expected outcomes.

A good example in our pilot area was the so-called 'mobile kindergarten' project, which offered care for the children of the settlement, and provided content-full recreational/free time activities. At present, every Monday and Wednesday from 5 to 8pm, the children get space at a 'private sports park', where they can play soccer, badminton, and other ball games, together. For realizing these activities, the Client sponsored the purchasing of two soccer goals and two balls. All other necessary supplies and efforts are provided by the parents and children. One or two parents change shifts and supervise the children during the game periods; we ensure the visibility of the initiative and the opportunity for the children through posters.

The results of the small projects: the project approach is established, and the community learns what actually stands behind the phrase 'grant application' — planning, organization, preparation, realization, assessment are all part of the process, during which, at every state we go over what is happening and what our goal is during the given work phase. Through involvement with the small projects, the system of the larger projects also becomes more clear and accessible. The community acquires a sense of time (and timing), money, and the amount and value of work which goes into such projects.

In the case of both small projects and longer-term projects, we collect the project ideas on forms, which are in turn included in the Project Dossier; in this way they are systematically collected and always accessible. The Project Dossier is also a good 'compass' for local development, often shedding light onto years ahead: next to the ideas exclusively requiring community work, space is dedicated to the ideas requiring programmes in the value of hundreds of millions (Hungarian forints), awaiting for the possibilities created by the opening of the door to the process of project writing and realization, to which the community is now introduced and in which it becomes an active participant and partner.

Maximum benefit of these forms is derived when in relation to every idea, we go through the complete list of most important questions, and we document the ideas and issues which emerge in the discussion, since this is how not a single good idea will be lost. We also record the name(s) of the person(s) who offered the idea, the main goals and activities of the potential project, the timing and phases as well as the most important budget items. In the event of a concrete working out of such a project plan in the future, the foundations of a good project proposal would already be in place.

 The small projects give a simple and implementable response to everyday problems. Often, the Client or the community assumes the responsibilities of certain institutions, for whom the provision of such services exceeds diminished current capacities. In such cases, continuous coordination with the institutional systems and service providers (i.e. kindergartens, public surveillance) is of foremost importance. This coordination, as well as the introduction with the project and its activities, is the task of locals.

Please see the Sample Project Information Form below.

SAMPLE PROJECT INFORMATION

1. Project number	'7.
2. Project name	Local second hand shop
3. Project owner details	Lakatosné Hajni
4. Contact information (responsible for communication)	Romsits Anita Éva 70/7713577, romsits@retextil.hu
5. The sites of project implementation:	Areas 1, 2 and 3
6. Local needs and project justification	<p><i>For families living in deep poverty, ensuring proper clothing is extremely challenging. Since they live in the outskirts of the city, and transportation is costly (includes at minimum the price of a ticket), they are rarely able to use even the price discounts on clothes offered in the city.</i></p> <p><i>Beside clothing, other necessary items in the household (bed linen, tablecloths, towels, etc), are hardly accessible at acceptable prices. Currently no store, located in the city or closer to the settlement, offers a solution to acceses to these goods.</i></p>
7. Project goals	<p><i>The establishment of a periodic second hand shop, offering clothing for accessible for the community prices. To the extent that the clothing could be acquired through donations, then the proceeds from sales would be used to support community programs.</i></p>
8. Project activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Researching oppotunities for charistable donations</i> - <i>securing a place</i> - <i>finding sales staff and volunteers</i> - <i>promoting the activiy/ advertizing</i> - <i>utilization of the proceeds, collection of experiences</i>

Community empowerment and the withdrawal of coaches

For the community coach, this is a scary and even painful phase. It is important to be able to transfer and pass our knowledge and experiences to member(s) of the community who, during the time spent together, have proven they're able to independently lead the then already mobilized and established group, according to the commonly established practices and rituals.

In the interest of continuity, we continue to work with the actor(s) who have emerged as community leader(s) and organizer(s) as a result of our programme. With time, a system could be established whereby an external coach (one coming from outside the community) could work next to one (professional, mentor?) from inside the community, following the same principles as in the very beginning when two external coaches worked together with the community.

The distancing and parting with the community does not follow a linear pattern, and could not be imagined as something evolving from one day to the next, whereby we progressively distance ourselves from the community until one day we are completely absent from their lives and the common work remains but a distant memory. Rather, we remain there for them, as advisors, as crisis managers, as resource persons in difficult times when things seem blocked or stalling — like Mary Poppins in children's lives. *She was there with us, she showed us the adventurous opportunities hidden in simple things, she taught us, then left, but always comes back, if we're in big trouble...*

Parting with the community? We have not thought about it yet

At present, we continue our activities, since the first nine months were enough to just 'carry the baby' into physical reality. In the target area, the true adventure begins only now — the small projects are being implemented, they gain shape, and the new actors/leaders in the community who emerged in the process are just now making their first steps towards becoming internal coaches, professionals and mentors.. We are collecting and recording the longer-term projects. A model housing development is currently being planned through the joint work of the community's working group for housing and the housing department in the local municipality. We are planning infrastructural developments, and are in the process of starting to prepare grant applications. In many ways, this is just the beginning of our work in the Szabolcs Roma settlement!

Expected Outcomes:

If we followed the recipe well, in the process maybe adding some additional 'spices' and further developing the recipe according to taste preferences and opportunities, then at the end of the process (with the passing of the first 9-15 months) we will have a mobilized community, a community free of bigger unresolved internal conflicts, whose members:

- ♦ Meet regularly;
- ♦ Are able to state and constructively present their opinions as community representatives in external forums and platforms, to represent the interests of the community, and to share the feedback and experiences of these activities with the rest of community members;
- ♦ Are able to think through and plan, from the beginning to end, small projects, as well as to participate in their implementation;
- ♦ They have the preparation and understanding that problem solutions are most often not linear, but rather spiral-like and cyclical in character. They support each other, especially when there are setbacks and hope for success is almost all but lost, and they celebrate the successes of the community together.

Using this formula, even though we engaged a wider circle of community of approximately 20 percent, those possessing the above characteristics represent a smaller portion of the community. A type of new 'elite' emerges, one able to work effectively for their community, supported by those next to them, whose number continuously increases.

During the implementation of the small projects, the community also grows physically, and the solutions to problems figuring in the intervention plan support and ease everyday life. As an additional result, under the implementation of the small projects, the members of the group learn and internalize the process, so that they would be able to implement similar tasks and activities by themselves in the future.

Through working together in the team, besides improving neighbourly relationships, the people involved from the community get to know each other in a completely new way and develop new relationships, so that a deeper and more meaningful network is created between the members of the group – discovering, in and about each other, new skills, qualities and possibilities.