

Connecting the Cultural and Social Spheres of Services

1. Project Relevance

This case sheds light on a collaboration formula between organisations and institutions from the social and cultural spheres, developed at the local level in one Romanian city. The CASPEV centre for elders provides various kinds of support to seniors from Baia Mare, from legal advice and health care to learning opportunities and leisure activities. As an example concerning the general attitude towards seniors, every activity facilitated by the centre is decided by means of a questionnaire answered by all the members: they choose which activity would suit them best, and they also propose new activities. With the Centre's support, in most cases, the elders themselves are the ones to put the ideas into practice and they are responsible for the results. The Centre practically makes its material and financial resources available to them, encouraging them to take action. The elders can tie friendships; they can spend their plenty of spare time in a pleasant and constructive way; they can learn new things (such as navigating on the internet and sending e-mails) they find useful for them; they can engage in cultural activities (such as singing in the choir or attending an exhibition of one of the members); and they can find a solution to some of their own current problems.

The approach is informal and the planning of activities is made on an ongoing basis, as a response to proposals. What drives the employees are mainly good principles and strong values, combined with a lot of altruism. The target group is comprised of the elder citizens of the Baia Mare city; however, no particular means are employed to reach them.

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2. Background and Aims

The Centre came into being in 1999, because no similar place had previously existed in Baia Mare. The elders spent their time with their families and friends, and they managed their difficulties according to their own specific possibilities. Baia Mare City Hall had the initiative to create such a Day Centre for Elders; they turned a former power plant, which was decommissioned, into the building that later housed the Centre. From that date on, the administration of the Day Centre fell under the responsibility of the Caspev Association – Centre for Social Assistance to Older Persons (a non-profit, apolitical organisation). The original project (the rehabilitation of the old building) received financial support from various state institutions and private organisations; some of these institutions and organisations keep sustaining the Centre's activities. The very existence and development of the Centre would not have been possible without the support provided by official institutions. Thus, maintaining a good relationship with such institutions is of vital importance to the Centre (of course, the Centre has members who were once employed by the very same institutions, so the connections between them are quite powerful; moreover, if necessary, the Centre can become a political advantage to the politicians involved).

3. Description of the Target Groups

The target group is comprised of all the senior (retired) citizens of Baia Mare (137,976 people in 2002, 139,731 in 2008, of all ages. Between 2004 and 2006, out of all the Baia Mare citizens, 12.8% were older than 65). All of them live in urban areas.

<p>Project name: Centrul de zi pentru vârstnici (Day Centre for Elders)</p> <p>Coordinating organisation: CASPEV Association, partner: County Library "Petre Dulfu" Baia Mare</p> <p>Countries involved: Romania</p> <p>Types of organisations involved: Non-profit organisations, public institutions, local authorities</p> <p>Implementation level: Local level</p> <p>Website: http://caspev.ro/ (only in Romanian)</p>

3. Outputs and Multiplying Outcomes

No project outcomes can be replicated exactly, since they consist of special events organised and the members' own experiences. In total, 400 members attended the internet courses. Many special events take place every year (they celebrate at least 12 special occasions; each and every month, they set a day to celebrate all members born during that time interval; they organise personal exhibitions for the artists of their group, concerts for the Centre's choir, etc.) The ecological group has around 30 members (nevertheless, anyone is welcome if they wish to join even on a single activity); in summertime they make trips in the surrounding areas whenever they wish.

The project is visible mainly at a local level.

5. Impact and Sustainability

The Centre's activities have attracted 6000 members so far, and the quality of their lives improved considerably since they joined the Centre; this is the conclusion reached by the people who are running the centre, based on the feedback they received from the members themselves.

The success recorded by the Centre at a local level seems to rely on the particular context, and it remains a matter of reflection to what extent can this kind of partnership and institutional cooperation be replicated and multiplied in other places from Romania or other countries. The Centre is funded by the local authorities and more human resources would be necessary in order to better organise and develop its activities. However, some practices could be applied in other contexts: constantly asking feedback from the participants and taking it into account, allowing them to get involved in most stages of an activity and to have various initiatives, involving their relatives whenever possible (at a celebration, for example), and using education in a personalised way.

The development potential of the Centre is extensive. It already has the support of its members and of the community, as well as the attention and encouragement of different public institutions and private organisations. Fund raising is an activity covered by one of the Centre's employees (but this is not her only responsibility); some of the members involve themselves in organising different activities and they help with whatever skills they have; partnerships are being made by the Centre with relevant institutions/organisations in order to facilitate the Centre's development; volunteers (from another association) participate in the group activities initiated by the Centre and its members. Thus, most of the Centre's resources (and the most important) are human resources.

6. Educational Process

Apart from the internet and computer courses, there is no formal educational process going on at the Day Centre for Elders in Baia Mare. The educational processes at the Centre are mainly informal and non-formal. In the ICT courses, the lecturers are librarians of Baia Mare County Library "Petre Dulfu", based on the cooperation with this institution. The lecturers use interactive methods of teaching, continuously asking feedback from the elders and acting accordingly. Every trainee receives personalised information. These courses had a great success and are constantly requested by the members. All the other cultural and educational activities happen informally and without any specific methodology. Generally, each person who wants to share his/her opinion on a particular subject is listened to and treated with respect; interaction between members is encouraged by the Centre's activities, and all members who wish to involve themselves in any activity can do so freely. Open questionnaires are frequently used by the CASPEV staff to reach all the members of the Centre.