

ABÁSFALVA COMMUNITY PLANNING WORKSHOP

*“Gathering together: this is only the beginning;
staying together: progress;
working together: success.”*

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Background

For five years the Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council (UUPCC) Community Capacity Building group has gradually expanded its Community Planning Workshops in Romania. Earlier trip reports (posted on the UUPCC website: www.uupcc.org/communitydevelopment) have reported on work in Árkos, Felsőrákos, Bencéd, and Torockószentgyörgy. Each workshop has added new dimensions to methods and trained new facilitators. Abásfalva was no exception. It was the first workshop: (i) with a substantial Roma (gypsy) presence; (ii) in which facilitators used an LCD projector as part of real time data implementation; and (iii) in which one of the long-standing PCC partnerships was involved. The Abásfalva-Bedford partnership goes back more than 15 years.

Abásfalva is a small community. According to the 2002 census, the total population is 376, 197 of whom are men and 179 women. The number of houses in the village is 143, but the records show 125 households, so 18 houses are empty or temporarily inhabited. The census of 1992 showed 386 residents, 209 men and 177 women. According to age and employment, of these 386 there were 105 children, 89 retired persons, and 192 active in the workforce. The population of Abásfalva is composed of Hungarians and Roma, but during censuses the Roma population declared themselves Hungarian. The 1992 census established 371 Unitarians, 10 Roman Catholics, 2 Calvinists and 3 Baptists.

Among the Hungarians there are few children of school age, thus creating a problem to keep a school open. In the last year the government has closed one school and even the second school is at risk. The school that remains open goes only through the fourth year. Any children in higher grades are bused to a regional school, riding at least an hour in each direction. Because there is no employment in the village, young people (both Roma and Hungarian) see their only future is to leave, thus creating a gentle downward slide in population every year. Among the Roma there are large numbers of school-age children, but difficulty in getting to school (either walking to the village school or the long ride to the regional site) discourages many of the Roma youth.

The large numbers of elderly in the community, especially among the Hungarians, make a special need for health care services. But there are few available in the village. The nearest clinic is about 5 kms away, far more than they can walk. Yet few of the villagers own cars so most never see a doctor. A nurse visits twice a month. The village has a piped water system though in some places the pipe lies above the frost line and in the coldest days of the winter the pipes sometimes freeze.

The village's only significant livelihood is farming. Villagers cooperate in livestock management, employing a village shepherd to manage the village herd, amounting to roughly 40 milk cows and a somewhat larger number of sheep and goats. Most households keep a few chickens and many have at least one pig. But even the agricultural base is threatened by Romania's recent entry into the European Union. New health standards now required by the EU are slowly strangling the village's agricultural existence. Most farmers do not meet EU standards for slaughtering pigs so can no longer do their own butchering. In five years time it will be illegal to milk by hand – only milking machines will meet EU standards. No farmer can afford to buy a milking machine and cooperative use of a few shared machines would require major changes in the barn and feeding arrangements for those who owned cows. Crops of potatoes and vegetables continue unchallenged but it may be only a matter of time before even these basic staples are threatened. Few farmers own tractors and, instead rely on teams of horses to do their plowing and moving farm inputs and harvests back and forth from barns to fields.

Perhaps the ultimate irony is that the village's agricultural system and local production capabilities may be among the most sustainable in Europe and perhaps among the most sustainable in the globe. It may represent the goal of sustainable livelihoods that many societies today are talking about but not achieving – very low consumption of petroleum products, low transportation costs for food, high use of organic and renewable fertilizers, few petrochemical inputs in food products, home heating almost totally based on renewable wood supplies, and local vegetables stored in very traditional ways over the winter – I ate a delicious apple in April that was picked last September. Thus I write with a sense of irony as I watch Abásfalva struggling to preserve a sustainable life style that may be on the verge of extinction.

These background notes set the stage for the planning workshop that was held from 25 to 27 April in two rooms of the school house that is about to close. Preparations for the workshop started well ahead of time and included, in September 2007, a meeting of the Abásfalva Association, a not-for-profit civic improvement society with members from both Abásfalva and the Bedford UU church. After lengthy discussion about costs, anticipated results, and reviews of previous workshops, the Association decided to go forward with the planning workshop. Páll Krisztina, head facilitator for the recent Torockószentgyörgy workshop, accepted the invitation to lead the Abásfalva workshop and assumed responsibility for all preparatory arrangements. She met with key leaders in the community, including Kerekes Péter, the Mayor of Homoród-szentmárton (there are 12 villages, including Abásfalva, in his jurisdiction), Rev. Barabás Áron, Unitarian Minister in the village, and László János, an active business and civic

leader in nearby Udvarhely and Abásfalva. A few weeks before the workshop, Krisztina and the other facilitators visited every house in the village, distributing written invitations. Announcements were made in church and the invitations personally delivered to every Hungarian and gypsy household. Finally, on the evening of the first village meeting the facilitators “worked” the neighborhoods, encouraging all to come.

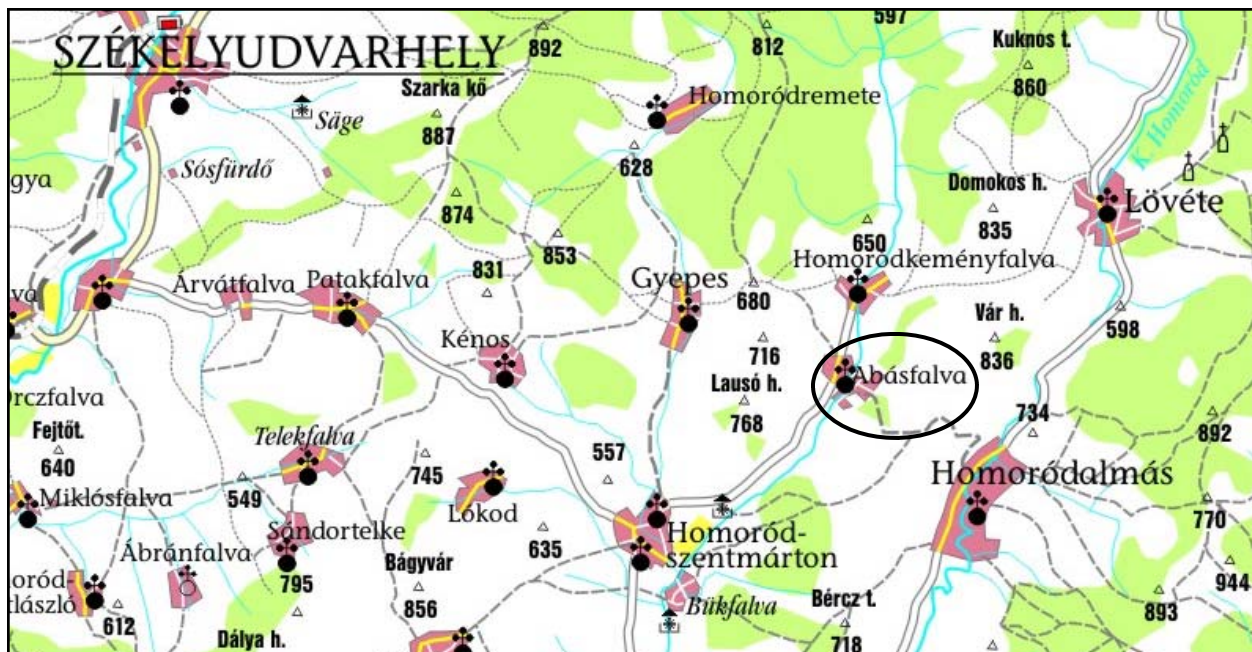
And come they did. The first evening we had 50 residents and to everyone’s delight, included roughly half gypsy and half Hungarian. As far as we could tell, this was the first time in the village’s recent history that the two groups sat together, planned and discussed together, and on the second night came to full consensus on their priority needs. If the workshop did nothing else, setting the precedent and documenting the fact that collaboration among these two primary groups in the community is possible made the entire effort substantial and worthwhile.

But there was more. A quick description of the tools and a presentation of a few of the documents will illustrate what took place.

Background Information

Location

The village lies at the foot of the Hargita mountain range, in the valley of the Nagy-Homoród (along the 131A paved county road); it neighbors Homoródkeményfalva, Homoródfürdő, Gyepes, Almás and Lövete.



According to the records, the settlement was already in place in the 1560s. Tradition says that there was a clerical manor in Homoródszentmárton in the 14th-15th centuries, which had estates at the border of today's village. The inhabitants were brought in by the parsons/clerics of the manor, called "abbé" (abbot), and so the village received its name from the abbots: *Abésfalva*. Later, the name changed to *Abásfalva*, because it was easier to pronounce.

Most houses have closed interior courtyards. In the beginning of the 1800's, painted furniture of the local artist, Mózes Balázs's, became popular. The villagers were known for their sheep breeding, calcining (converting lime stone into quicklime), weaving, and sewing. The records demonstrate that the settlement was mostly Unitarian even in old times, although at one point it had a Greek Catholic Church. The present Unitarian Church was built in 1879; there are no records of the earlier medieval church. The inhabitants of Abásfalva were mainly Székely (Szekler), but besides the native Székely, there were immigrated, Magyarized Romanians and relocated Roma (gypsies). The forefathers of today's Roma in Abásfalva were moved in by farmers who owned big plots of land.

Abásfalva can be approached on the 131A paved county road. One km north of the village is Homoródkeményfalva, and 11 kms from there lies Homoródfürdő. Moving 4.5 kms to the south the village borders Homoródszentmárton, and 3 kms west it abuts Gyepes. Eastern neighbors are Lövéte, 7 kms away, and Homoródalmás, 3.5 kms away. Because of the bad condition of the roads, there is no regular bus service to the village. The residents go to the nearest village, Homoródszentmárton, to catch a bus. There are relatively few cars in Abásfalva, and most people walk 4.5 kms to get to Homoródszentmárton, or on occasion, go by horse cart. A few years ago, thanks to those who left the village, the bus service was started again, but due to worsening road conditions and the low number of people using the service, it was discontinued. The leaders of the neighboring village of Homoródkeményfalva initiated a van service twice a week, which the Abásfalva residents use.

Unfortunately, several hundred years of communal culture and spirit of the village were largely destroyed during the communist era. Residents today are reluctant to work together, and often put their own interests ahead of anything else. Sooner or later they will learn that without WORKING TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY there will be little development.

Labor conditions

Agriculture, animal breeding, and logging are the main income generators for the village. The unemployment rate is very high, mainly among the Roma; therefore, several breadwinners are trying to secure the financial situation of their families by taking up seasonal work abroad (mainly in Hungary). The Hungarian youth try to earn their livelihood in nearby towns. Currently there are only two youngish families who work in the village and four other young families commute to Székelyudvarhely for work.

Housing conditions

Village residents live in self-built houses or homes bought from others or inherited from family members. Every house has a little garden and side buildings (a summer kitchen, a barn, a stable, etc). Abásfalva has a cultural house, a pub, a hardware store, a grocery store, an elementary school, a middle school, and a church. The village was built along the main road; it doesn't have many side roads. Most houses have closed interior courtyards. The inhabitants, irrespective of their ethnicity, keep their houses clean and tidy, relative to what they can afford. The public buildings are old and dilapidated. Although they do a few renovations every year, these are not sufficient. The censuses and conversations with local leaders show that there are no homeless people in the village.

The Process

Government and non-government agencies, focusing on development and planning over the course of 20 years, have created many participatory tools to enable communities to become the architects and managers of their own development.

The implementation of some of these tools may be new, but the tools themselves are very old. One of the tools, the *Community Sketch Map*, asks the villagers to draw a map of their community. The purpose of this exercise is to collect and organize knowledge and information on something the residents know a great deal about. The second, more important purpose of the sketch map is to serve as a base for further talks on community needs and problems. Working together on the sketch map is an effective tool to help identify accomplishments and needs and it also facilitates the ranking (conducted on the second day) of the needs identified. The participatory planning process makes use of other tools as well, including census data, gender calendars, timelines, trend lines, institutional analyses, household questionnaires, and community action plans. These tools, in the hands of skilled facilitators, help the community organize its knowledge, mobilize its resources to identify solutions, and create action plans designed through gaining group consensus. If the community is equipped with an action plan that is supported by the entire community, local leaders are encouraged to look for outside partners (government agencies or NGOs) to mobilize outside resources.

The UUPCC and the Unitarian Church of Transylvania helped organize the community planning workshop in Abásfalva.

Summary of Findings

The villagers gathered in significant numbers during the three meetings, over three consecutive days. There were approximately 40 to 50 people the first two days with representatives of the Roma actively participating. Unfortunately they were unable to come on the final day because of a funeral service for an elderly woman who had died earlier in the week.

The first step involved drawing the sketch map, in two small groups. This tool encourages everyone to participate and to feel as an active contributor to the process. Comments during the map exercise included: “where is our street?,” “mark the Rozs Street!,” “what do you think?” These comments document that the community was very active during the mapping. After the exercise, each group presented its map to the full group. The discussions that followed pointed out areas in need of infrastructural as well as rehabilitative improvements. Two other groups were prepping institutional analyses, noting that there are few active institutions in the village. The most important institutions highlighted were the church, the school, and cultural institutions. The analysis revealed that there is little interaction between these institutions – they seem to work independently of one another.

The community sketch map and the institutional analysis highlighted two important priorities: (1) lack of basic infrastructure, and (2) small needs related to issues within the local community. But there were also several large infrastructure needs mentioned including: a water and sewage system, health care, renovation of gas pipes, and durable access roads. Community-based needs identified included: renovation of the church and the weighing house, establishment of a health care facility, and so on. On the second day, a consensus building tool called *Pairwise Ranking* enabled villagers to prioritize their identified needs, comparing one pair at a time. The ensuing priority list showed the community’s consensus about their highest priorities. On the third day, the ranked needs are translated into tasks required to solve the needs and specific action plans drafted. The challenge that the community now faces is to implement the action plans created and then start thinking about the less important ones too.

The three-day workshop highlighted that:

Institutions. The existing institutions are designed primarily for self-sustaining agriculture (subsistence farming), which worked well in the past. There is need for a water and sewage system. This is an expensive infrastructure that cannot be implemented solely from local resources – it requires long-term planning and substantial financing from the government and other agencies. The realization of infrastructural deficiencies is a challenge for the existing institutions: they have to work more closely with government agencies and learn more about how and where to submit grant applications. These needs require a reorganization in the major institutions of the community and will be worked on as long range goals.

Leadership. The reorganization of the existing institutions demands creative, visionary leaders. There is no doubt that Abásfalva has such resources although there may be need for leadership training in which participants acquire specific skills: devising contracts, writing grant applications, implementing projects, and learning about group decision making.

Physical infrastructure. The existing infrastructure does not conform to the EU norms (for instance, the milk processing norms and rules). The created action plan will provide the opportunity for villagers to become familiar with EU standards so that they can become active participants in the free market economy.

Economic infrastructure. The community managed to attract small ventures into the area that are very successful. This is a remarkable achievement for this little village and an example for future opportunities. The community has the capability to attract investments that would provide jobs and better living conditions. This would potentially increase the possibility of young people staying in their home town and preserving the traditions of their community.

Abásfalva is under Homoródszentmárton's jurisdiction. During the meetings, we overheard some discontent expressed among the Roma community toward the efficiency of the Mayor's Office. They reported that staff sometimes did not listen to their needs and discriminated against them. The biggest problem facing the Roma is the delay of social assistance (financial assistance, child allowance, etc.). They feel that they often get it later than those in other neighboring villages.

Data Collection

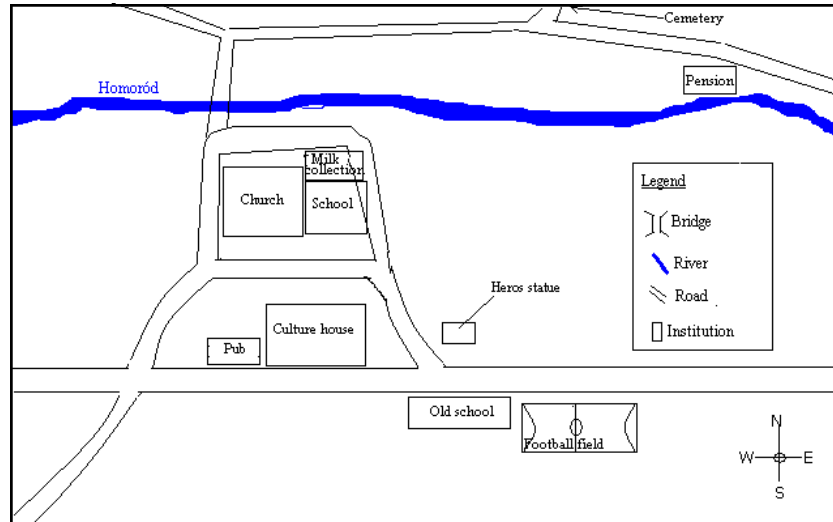
Sketch Maps

After preparatory talks with key leaders and groups in the community and the distribution of useful materials about the Capacity Building process, we started the community planning workshop. The first evening 40-50 people attended the meeting. Since there were mostly men present, the facilitators encouraged the participation of women for the following two meetings. However, their numbers remained relatively low. The drawing of the sketch maps was fast and smooth and a lot of discussions emerged. The villagers split into two groups and two maps were drawn. The sketch maps helped identify the most urgent and important needs the community faces:

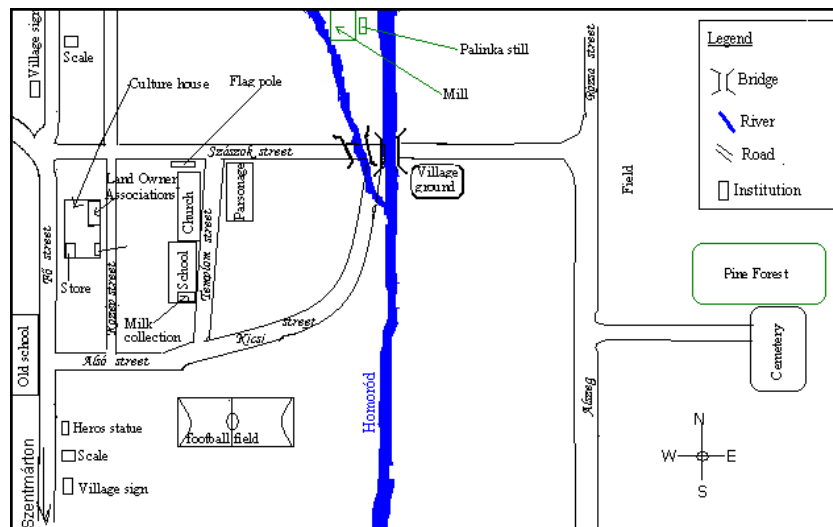
- Renovation of the old school building – students commute to the neighboring village, which takes a long time;
- The issue of Roma: they are part of the Abásfalva community, people have to learn to live together;
- Restoration of the old mill and the local distillery;
- Transformation of the local cultural house into a multi-functional building.



Sketch Map 1: Abásfalva



Sketch Map 2: Abásfalva



Institutional Analysis

The analysis of institutions, prepared on the first evening, proved a useful tool in determining community resources. The analyses revealed much similarity between the two groups. Three institutions are the most influential in the community: the church, the school, and the cultural associations. However, there is little or no cooperation among them. The institutional profiles also showed that there is no interaction between business-related groups (for instance, the milk collecting center) and the central institutions identified above. We couldn't tell whether this happened as a reaction against the forced and "dictated" collaboration between these institutions in communist times, or because this is how they have functioned through many centuries of coping with the basic physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of village life.

Kindergarten and elementary education are available in the village. Of the school children, 95% are Roma. Most Roma parents send their children to school for the various assistance allowances that they receive (child allowance, free snacks, American partner churches' support in high school, or higher education).

The local middle school was transferred 4.5 kms away from the village, to the neighboring township of Homoródszentmárton, due to the low enrollment of school children. This move led to fewer elementary school children continuing their education, painfully revealed to us during map-drawing and institutional analyses in some of the adults present were reluctant to participate in the exercises because of their limited literacy and writing skills.

The leadership of the village consists of a judge, the Unitarian minister, and the leaders of the Forest Association. There are no service clubs, or social service organizations. The members of the Women's Association were active in the early 1900s, but nowadays they rarely meet. The only community association in the village is the Forest Association that tries to help with the various problems the community faces. The village receives substantial support from Bedford MA, the Unitarian Church's partner church. They visit the village every year and, along with financial help, volunteer in varied activities for the elderly (cutting wood for the winter, small agricultural jobs, cleaning the cemetery). A successful private entrepreneur, born in Abásfalva, is a financial supporter of the village. With his help the water system was renovated and he initiated the foundation bearing the name of the village. He also initiated the *Caritas* Elder Care Service and provides gifts for children at Christmas and other relevant holidays.

There are no leisure activities for people in Abásfalva. There are no youth clubs, groups, cultural, or sports activities. The local (mainly Roma) population frequents the bar in their spare time; the youth go to the discos in the neighboring villages. The only fun activity is the traditional grape harvest celebration, but only when the children or grandchildren of transplanted villagers come to the village to organize the event.

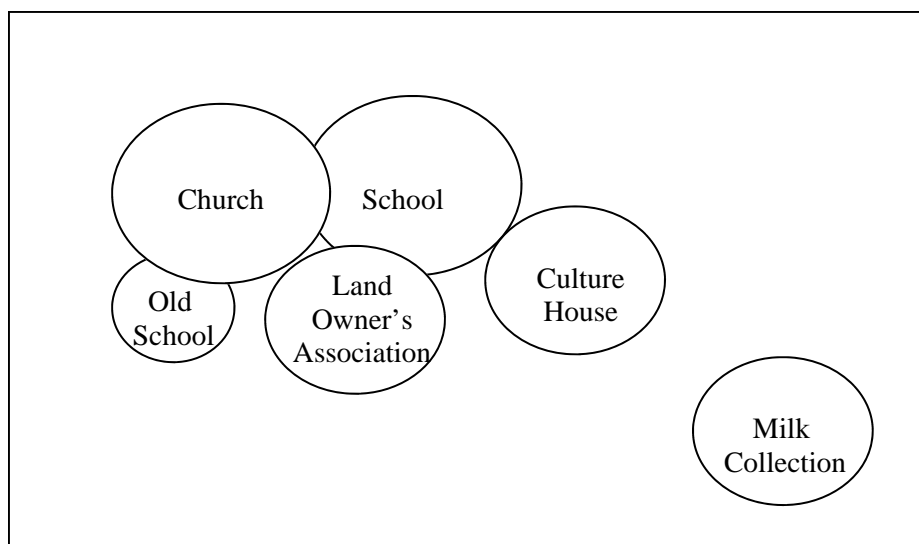
The stories of cooperation and working together that previously existed in the village were repeated in the two following evenings. It is the hope of the workshop organizers and the vil-

lage leadership that these stories, along with the participatory means of devising the action plan, will play an important role in restoring some of this community cooperation in implementing the action plans.

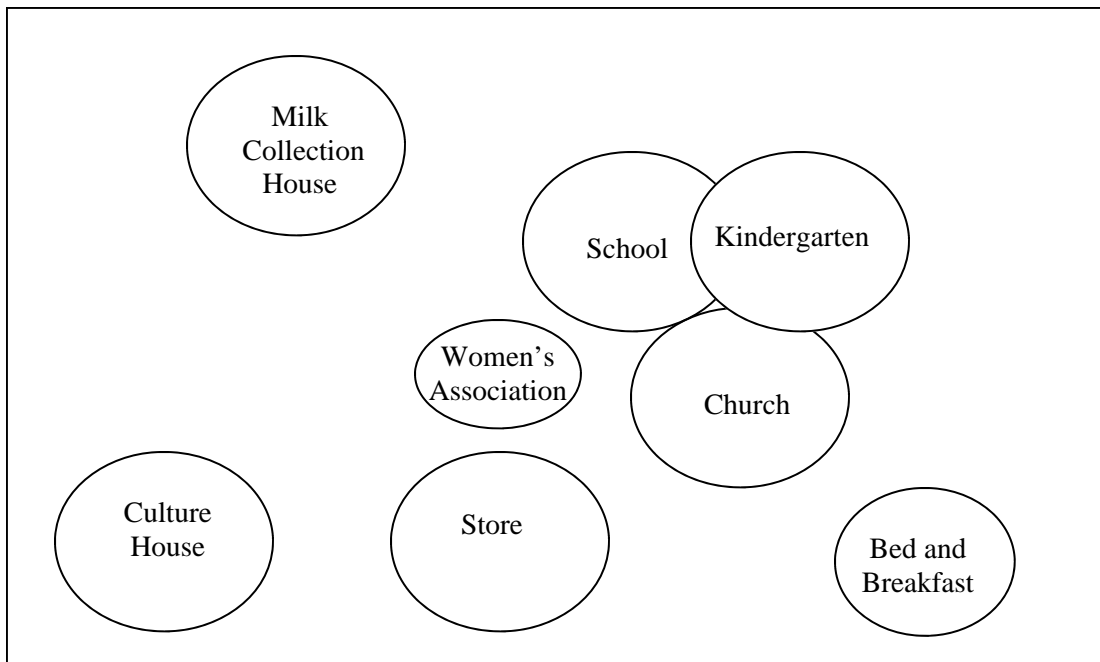


In the two institutional analysis diagrams that follow, the size of each circle shows the importance of the institution that it stands for. The overlapping circles indicate the strong connection between the institutions. The farther the circles, the bigger the gap between the community organizations. The analysis revealed that the most important institution in Abásfalva is the church – the only institution that works well, and the building itself needs renovation.

Institutional Analysis 1: Abásfalva



Institutional Analysis 2: Abásfalva



Unranked Needs

The map and institutional analysis helped identify several important needs – a broad list of problems emerged during the discussions of the first meeting. The second evening focused on ranking the needs according to two criteria: needs for which only local resources are required and needs that require outside help. The following list presents these items, unranked. The list formed the basis for the next exercise, *pairwise ranking*. Note that some needs appear on both lists.

| Local Solutions Possible | Some Outside Help Required |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Village Museum | Water and sewage facilities |
| Youth Center | Weigh house |
| Agricultural improvements | Stream control |
| Agro (village) tourism | Bus service |
| Funeral Home | Renovation of bridges |
| Herb collecting center | Public cleaning services |
| Cell phone access (signal) | Jobs |
| Fire station | Road |
| Health clinic | Renovation of church |
| Renovation of cemetery | |
| Weigh house | |
| Soup kitchen | |
| Renovation of church | |

Pairwise Ranking

Pairwise ranking is the most important task during the planning workshop. The exercise serves three purposes: first, the villagers, in groups, discuss their views about the needs identified, comparing two items at a time. During the discussions everybody has the chance to speak up and listen to the others, and together they can come to consensus about the highest priorities for the community. Second, since there is no voting, the community members can come to full agreement about their final list of priorities and can take measures to create action plans addressing the most urgent needs. Third, pairwise ranking prepares the community for the next step, the problem analysis of the high priorities.

Before we started the exercise, the villagers added three needs to their list: renovation of the church, a community kitchen, and a village scale to weigh livestock and agricultural produce. Interestingly enough, these additions later became the community's number one priorities. Pairwise ranking revealed why social services are important for the village: poverty, unemployment, and other factors demand them. The community has only one social service, home care for elderly (*Caritas*). The villagers are in need of other social services that could help their living conditions. The ensuing discussions caused a lot of disagreement between the Roma and the Hungarians. But it did more. The ranking exercise enabled the entire group to reach agreement beyond the disagreement. The discussion gave opportunity for anyone with an opinion to express their views. It also provided a setting in which people could listen to one another — an opportunity not always available for some of the poor or marginal voices in the community. Speaking and listening are the two fundamental ingredients required to produce community ownership of an idea, in this case, projects that the community could implement to help themselves. The ownership component worked. It was an interesting time in the life of Abásfalva

The community identified the weigh house as its highest priority. However, the renovation of the church, which came out second, is very important for them too. The results are shown in the figure on the next page.

As far as health care is concerned, it is only the township that has a local clinic and a pharmacy. The family doctor is willing to come to Abásfalva twice a week, but the village does not have a public space or a room where the doctor could examine his/her patients. Hence, the local people have to go the township, even with minor problems. This is exceptionally difficult for elderly people and mothers with infants. People with severe medical problems or emergencies are sent to the nearest town, Székelyudvarhely.

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Pairwise Ranking

| | VM | YC | AI | VT | CP | HC | FS | MC | FH | JO | RC | R | K | Ch | WH | Score | Rank |
|---------------------------|----|-------|----|-------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|------|
| Village Museum | | YC/MM | AI | VT | CP | HC | FS | MC | FH | JO | RC | R | K | CH | WH | 0,5 | 11 |
| Youth Center | | | AI | VT | CP | HC | FS | MC | FH | JO | RC | R | K | CH | WH | 0,5 | 11 |
| Agricultural improvements | | | | AI/VT | CP | AI | FS | MC | FH | JO | RC | R | AI | CH | WH | 4,5 | 8 |
| Village tourism | | | | | CP | VT | FS | MC | FH | VT | RC | R | VT | CH | WH | 5 | 7 |
| Cell phone access | | | | | | CP | CP | MC | CP | CP | RC | R | CP | CH | WH | 9 | 4 |
| Herb collecting center | | | | | | | FS | MC | FH | JO | RC | R | K | CH | WH | 2 | 10 |
| Fire station | | | | | | | | MC | FS | JO | RC | R | FS | CH | WH | 7 | 5 |
| Medical care | | | | | | | | | MC | MC | MC | R | MC | CH | WH | 11 | 3 |
| Funeral home | | | | | | | | | | FH | RC | R | K | CH | WH | 6 | 6 |
| Job opportunities | | | | | | | | | | | RC | R | JO | CH | WH | 6 | 6 |
| Renovation of cemetery | | | | | | | | | | | | RC | RC | CH | WH | 11 | 3 |
| Roads | | | | | | | | | | | | | R | CH | WH | 11 | 3 |
| Soup kitchen | | | | | | | | | | | | | | CH | WH | 4 | 9 |
| Renovation of church | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | WH | 13 | 2 |
| Weigh house | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 14 | 1 |

Ranking order

- | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Weigh house | 5. Fire station | 9. Soup kitchen |
| 2. Renovation of church | 6. Job opportunities | 10. Herb collecting center |
| 3. Renovation of cemetery | 6. Funeral home | 11. Youth center |
| 3. Roads | 7. Village tourism | 11. Village museum |
| 4. Cell phone access | 8. Agricultural improvements | |

Problem Analysis

After the community had come to a consensus on its highest priorities, it was time to analyze these needs and discuss why they became problems over the years. It was clear from the very beginning that the locals had been thinking about the church renovation for a long time and had also been thinking about seeking outside help to do something about it. The other priorities were similar to other villages' needs, such as the lack of health services, bad (or lack of) infrastructure, as well as a water and sewage system.

The weigh house was a particular priority. It had been derelict and dilapidated for years. They had come up with a solution in the past and chosen a new site for the weigh house but the project had never been implemented. It had been abandoned not only because of shortage of funds, but due to lack of overall organization, meetings and talks, and a joint effort on the part of the community. The villagers agreed that the weigh house is their most urgent need and tried to come up with solutions.

The community also discussed the renovation of the church, their second priority. In the end, the residents realized that the local small-scale priorities (renovation of the church building and the weigh house) demand local solutions and do not require much outside help. They need to acquire skills and techniques that would help them in carrying out their plans and these challenges surfaced during the ongoing discussions. The action plans created to solve the community's highest priorities require new skills from the villagers. These are touched upon in the latter part of the case study.

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Problem Analysis: Weigh House

| Causes | Previous coping strategies | Opportunities/ Solutions | Institutions |
|---|--|---|---|
| private land lack of money organizational problems no excavators | - it was built on the land of the old collective - they chose a new place, but nothing was done further - they talked about it at landowners' meetings | - there is a site for it - promise for excavators - human resources - Forest Association will pitch in with timber | Village community Local Council Land Owners Association Business Men Entrepreneurs Private Companies |

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Problem Analysis: Church Renovation

| Causes | Previous coping strategies | Opportunities/ Solutions | Institutions |
|--|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no whitewashing - old church - the plaster is falling down - it leaks - lack of heating - weak tiles on fence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inside renovation done - church surroundings, courtyard tidied up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> funds (from transplanted villagers, entrepreneurs, partner church, local council) volunteer labor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Village community Local Council Land Owners Association Church |

Action Planning

People reflected on their needs overnight and the third evening, when time came for action planning, the residents changed their order of preference, putting the renovation of the church ahead of the weigh house. This proved that the villagers did not remain passive but actively thought about the issues at home. The residents also modified the action plan of the weigh house and agreed not to relocate it as that would mean higher costs. They should come to an agreement with the owner of the land where the current dilapidated weigh house is.

It is important to note that at the beginning of the ranking there was disagreement, with some viewing the school among the most important, others the milk collecting center, the weigh house, or the church. Some even wanted to turn the Cultural House into an entertainment center. During pairwise ranking, some were already thinking of solutions to the problems: “the village cannot expect funding from the Mayor’s Office, yet the church has to sustain itself,” “the Forest Association can help a lot.”

We started the action planning the second evening but delayed finishing because additional local leaders were expected at the final session. The third day discussions were heated with tension in the air. The previous evening, the residents resisted use of volunteer labor and community support. Nonetheless, the last day a new energy emerged and they came up with names – people who will be responsible for carrying out tasks to implement the plans.

During the conversations, some residents commented that there are funds and grants available that they could apply for. One of the facilitators then mentioned that these funds do not achieve wide distribution because village communities do not know how to apply. Then she added that if the community knows exactly what it wants to do with the money and how to write the grant application, it will have very good chances to receive the grant. Applying is not easy. What one needs is persistence, persistence, persistence! There are funds and opportunities, but one has to know how to make good use of them. The action plans follow.

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Action Plan 1: Community Scale

| Suggested activities | Need (labour, material, money) | Who act? Who will follow up? | When? | Indicators |
|--|--|---|--|------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To compromise with the owner in a small place which is necessary for the scale house - Community meeting, community work - Woodfelling and cutting - Transport to the new place - Bringing the Back Hoe from the mayor - Building the scale house - Checking and certifying the scale - Choose a responsible of the scale | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - wood - transporter - public work - money (funds) - certificate of the sale - back hoe - responsible of the scale | <p>Szocs Laszlo will talk with the owner</p> <p>Zsombori Balazs will organize the community meeting with Local Council, Land Owner Association</p> <p>Homorodi Gyula will organize the public work.</p> | <p>First week of May - compromise</p> <p>Second week of May – community meeting</p> <p>The end of May - build, public work</p> <p>June - responsible</p> | |

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Action Plan 2: Renovate the Church

| Suggested activities | Need (labour, material, money) | Who act? Who will follow up? | When? | Indicators |
|--|---|---|---|------------|
| <p>Renovate the plaster</p> <p>Outside whitewashing</p> <p>Painting the windows</p> <p>Renovate the roof</p> <p>keeping order the environs of the church (inclusive the fence)</p> | <p>Money funds (inhabitants, who emigrates from the village, entrepreneurs, partner church, local council)</p> <p>Expert</p> <p>Inhabitants, public work wood</p> | <p>Minister, warden, church council</p> <p>Homorodi Gyula, Gergely Tibor, Bencze Aladar, Gergely Elza, Szasz Erzsebet</p> <p>Laszlo Gabor (informate the emigrates)</p> | <p>First week of May</p> <p>15. July 2008..</p> | |

Afterword

The exercises ended on a high note. While it remains to be seen what the community will do to implement one or more of their action plans, it is clear that much was learned during the three days of meetings. Three lessons stand out:

1. There is a renewed sense of self-confidence, including both the Hungarian and the Roma communities within the village. The Mayor attended the last session and expressed confidence that the plans were not complex or difficult to accomplish and that he too would see what he could do to help.

2. There is a new realization that the community can learn how to plan and act on their own, including strengthening existing institutions such as the Women's Association, the Forest Association, the Abásfalva Association, and many more. There also was discussion of thinking about new associations such as a milk cooperative or agricultural association. This is a major change, given the legacy of the communist era and the villagers' anxiety about any kind of local association.

3. There is a new realization that Abásfalva does not have to wait for outside experts to come and they do not have to beg. The legacy of the communist regime left one set of lessons. The initial impact of the European Union is creating a new and sometimes uncertain feeling about what it will produce. The planning workshop suggested to many in the village that there are ways that the community can cope with the challenges as well as the opportunities that the EU is creating. Small grants, stronger linkages to external partners, and training opportunities in leadership, decision making, planning, financial management and many related topics are but a few of the benefits. The entire village will not necessarily partake of these opportunities. But some will. And those who gain new skills and understandings can become the vanguard of a new leadership core who will have learned to listen to the people and to focus and channel the energies that well-intended village residents bring to their community.

It was an interesting and worthwhile set of planning exercises for the people of Abásfalva.

Sources Consulted

László Gyöngyi: *Közösségfejlesztés Abásfalván*. [Community Development in Abásfalva]. BA paper.



