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New ways of partnership in rural development planning

Abstract: In the programming period 2014-2020 the LEADER Local Action Groups (LAG) are facing new challenges in finding new ways for effective planning, management and creating synergies to be prepared for the implementation of multi-funded community-led local development approach. The Faculty of Landscape Architecture and Urbanism of Szent István University carried out several landscape planning processes on rural areas with strong territorial focus, handling environmental and societal conflicts in a sustainable manner in the course of its educational programme. The Faculty members and the LAG for Living Balaton Uplands (Éltető Balaton-felvidékért Helyi Akciócsoport) have established a flourishing partnership to share information and gain practice in landscape based planning management and science communication among all the actors of rural development such as farmers, business people, local government, civil organizations, and of science, including researchers, planners and advisors. In our paper we highlight the results and experiences of this multiple co-operation in complex and integrated rural development planning process in two pilot micro-regions in Hungary.

Keywords: rural development, planning, partnership, knowledge sharing

Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Hungary have just elaborated their development strategies for programming period 2014-2020. The local rural development strategies try to generate effective and productive projects with fewer financial resources based on local conditions and resources, structures of co-operations generating synergies. The working organisations of LAGs in Hungary cannot undertake the role of a multi-funding agency yet, but members know that, beyond the well-defined projects financed by LEADER, there is a need for place-based plans as well. The colleagues of the Living Balaton Uplands LAG (Éltető Balaton-felvidékért Helvi Akciócsoport, Figure 1) noticed the rural development research and planning projects of Department of Landscape Planning and Regional Development of the Faculty of Landscape Architecture and Urbanism, Szent István University (the former Faculty of Landscape Architecture, Corvinus University of Budapest). Based on the good relations among the University teachers and the LAG members, the head of the LAG's working organisation invited Faculty members to take part in common projects. The projects were carried out in two pilot micro-regions in frames of educational projects. By using the results of research activities of the university we were focusing on a place- or rather landscape-based approach, taking into consideration not only the needs covering by the LEADER programme but all the development needs of the project area. This more complex approach in rural development planning presents opportunity to learn the multi-funding approach for stakeholders in rural development.

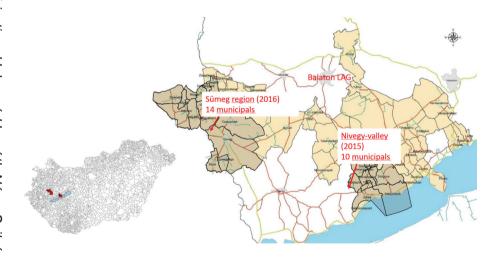


Figure 1. The study areas Source: own construction.

The main principles of our work were derived from the European Landscape Convention of 2000 and from the National Rural Strategy 2012-2020¹. According to the Convention, landscape interpretation and the management of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors resulting landscape shall act "from a perspective of sustainable development [...] so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes" (Art. 1. Definitions). Landscape is not only a sum of natural features but "is an important part of the quality of life for people" and "is a key element of individual and social well-being" (Preamble). This interpretation of the landscape connects landscape planning to the rural development. The National Rural Strategy 2012-2020 is the most complex rural development document in Hungary which specified the main goal of rural development for the country: to improve the ability for keeping the population of rural areas. The National Rural Strategy presses the complex, integrated, bottom up organised and the landscape based planning as well. Knowledge transfer, namely the use and application of research results in the practice in the field of rural development and agriculture, is one of the main priorities of the Hungarian National Rural Development Programme 2014-2020² according to the Common Strategic Framework of 2012. These principles are the basis of our common knowledge and the planning goals in the pilot projects.

Methodology

Our programme aimed the development of pilot rural areas were organised as an educational project, which has a long-standing tradition in education (Verók and Vincze, 2011). In the 19th century, the so-called project method was applied by several researchers in the field of architecture and engineering in the United States, then spread to other countries and to more diverse study areas (Knoll, 1997). The term of project in pedagogy has its roots in the American reform pedagogy, which emerged around 1900. William B. Rogers, Calvin M. Woodword, and Charles R. Richards, as significant experts in this development, used the word project as a synonym for 'practical problem solving' (Knoll, 1997, Hortobágyi, 2002). The project method is a way of acquiring knowledge by elaborating a product (in our case a study and a poster), during which students aim to discover as many connections and links as possible to each individual problem. Such a method seems to be supporting the complex and integrated planning process with several stakeholders.

Participants of the projects

The Faculty members and the LAG have established a flourishing partnership to share information and gain practice in landscape-based planning management and science communication among all the actors of rural development such as farmers, business people, local government, civil organisations, and of science, including researchers and planners.

 $^{^1\,}http://videkstrategia.kormany.hu/download/4/37/30000/Nemzeti\%20Vid\%C3\%A9kstrat\%C3\%A9gia.pdf$

² https://www.palyazat.gov.hu/az_europai_bizottsag_altal_elfogadott_operativ_programok_2014_20

The lead partner of the project is the Faculty of Landscape Architecture which is the only institution in Hungary educating landscape architects. The first landscape plans to increase crop yields were elaborated at the Faculty of Landscape Architecture by Professor Mihály Mőcsényi in late 1960s in Hungary. After the political changes (i.e. since 1990), land use planning, regional and rural development, green infrastructure planning and development as new topics were added to landscape planning. On the basis of European traditions in the frames of landscape planning, we pay attention to the involvement of local people, farmers, owners of the land and the local government. Development plans are carried out considering a wide range of topics such as: land use, water management, traffic, agriculture and local economy, tourism, social well-being, climate, heritage, environment and nature protection. We try again and again to improve the education since the new challenges and to put into practice our research experiences to give them further to the students and the stakeholders in the planning projects as well. Our expectations from the common planning projects were to:

- get complex, real world experience and planning task for the students;
- practice the integrated, multifunctional approach in team work;
- have one project from analysis to plan;
- get planning experience in an interesting environment;
- have a low cost budget, involving additional sources into education.

The LAG for Living Balaton Uplands was established in 2008 with the partnership of 134 NGOs, communities and enterprises. Its main goals of the association in the recent planning period are (HVS, 2013):

- exploring, mapping, protection and propagation of the cultural and natural heritage of Balaton Uplands;
- increasing public participation, enhancing local identity, common thinking and working;
- marketing of local products and services;
- · development of quality of tourism services;
- discouraging young people from out-migrating.

However, the local development strategy has been elaborated by considering the requirements of the LEADER programme, LAG's colleagues were open to think in a wider context to solve problems and find new ways to reach their objectives. They were particularly engaged with the landscape-based development using local resources of the planning area. Unfortunately, there is no opportunity to enlarge the LAG's working organisations so they cannot manage any other project by using funds other than LEADER. Their expectations from the common planning projects were to:

- have better knowledge of the landscape values and inner resources;
- get new, fresh ideas and views for the local development strategy and project generation.

The other stakeholders of the pilot region were connected with the university people through the head of LAG at the beginning. Later, good working connections evolved among all the participants of the project. During field trips, interviews and workshops university people met the mayors and other stakeholders of municipalities, such as major farmers, food manufacturers, local people and civil organisations.

Pilot regions

For the analysis of the land use changes and the stable land use forms of the micro-region we used historic descriptions, open access historic military maps (18th and 19th century) and data of the Hungarian National Spatial Planning Database. Our survey areas were the Nivegy Valley and the micro-region of Sümeg situated in West-Hungary. Most of the villages have a population of fewer than 1000 residents.

The Nivegy Valley is a part of one of the most important tourist destinations of Hungary, the (Lake) Balaton region. The whole Nivegy Valley is a protected landscape area and part of the Balaton Uplands National Park. This is a beautiful hilly landscape, termed the 'Hungarian Mediterranean'. Within the Nivegy Valley, tourism is not common, the locals mostly work in agriculture in vineyards. However, the short distance to Lake Balaton and the beautiful panorama on the lake and the surrounding hills could make the valley a favourite destination for tourists. Forests fragment the landscape characterised by vineyards with old cellars and pastures. The locals, however, wish tourism only to have a smaller, complementary role to agriculture, horticulture (in addition to the traditional grape cultivation, orchards have emerged and wine production has advanced in the last two decades) and livestock farming (cheese production), thus retaining the fundamentally cultivation-focused character of the land. This is different from the aims of the communities located directly by the lake, as local developments there primarily aim to promote wide-scale tourism causing overuse of the shore villages. The goal of the common planning project in the Nivegy Valley was to:

- develop landscape and tourism to diversify the local economic activities;
- strengthen the local population's identity.

The micro-region of Sümeg is a backward region in Transdanubia made up mostly of small villages. The centre of the micro region is the town of Sümeg with fewer than 7000 residents. In the southern part of the region and in Sümeg there is considerable tourism related to the Balaton recreational area. The region is mostly of agrarian character with a share of arable land above the county average. During socialism the agricultural associations employed the majority of local population. After the collapse of the regime many people lost their jobs and the share of population employed in agriculture fell to 8% in the pilot region. The surrounding small towns cannot provide enough jobs for the mostly uneducated labourers. Since the long-lasting decline, many people became demotivated and seems to have dropped out of the job market permanently. The population decre-

ase and the out-migration from the micro-region is significant. The goal of the common planning project in the Sümeg micro region was to:

- develop rural tourism and the local economy through sustainable landscape management;
- protect the landscape ecological values;
- develop 'greening' proposals.

Method of the projects

Landscape Architecture MSc students of the second study year usually carry out a complex planning project. The whole programme is composed of a semester study with two weeks of practical training. In the spring semester of 2014/15 we held a workshop focusing on five settlements of Nivegy Valley and in 2015/16 we elaborated plans for 14 settlements of Sümeg micro-region. The areas were examined from more aspects and the students worked out a landscape development concept on a regional scale, which implied a sort of viewpoints specified by the teachers (and LAG) participating in the educational model project. In all projects we define specific aspects based on research results (especially Illyés, 1997; Kabai, 2009; Máté and Kollányi, 2011; Filepné, 2013; Jombach and Egyed, 2013; and Filepné et al., 2014).

The students solved different problems in the framework of subjects during the term that all focused on the Nivegy Valley and micro-region of Sümeg. The integrated semester courses were: Land use planning and regional development, Rural development, Green infrastructure, Tourism, Heritage protection, GIS and Digital planning techniques. During the semester, students worked in the framework of the subjects doing preliminary desk studies, and a one-day visit on the spot. At the end of the semester we had the possibility to spend one week in the planning area. Finally, students worked out the development concept in the workshop focusing on new and appropriate ways for evaluation of landscape values and conflicts, for development of agriculture based on landscape conditions, and sustainable rural tourism.

SWOT analysis was elaborated to assess and highlight the complex environmental, economic, ecological problems and possibilities (Figure 2). The local economy in Sümeg micro region was assessed by students from Pannon University too. We can use their results in revealing the local strengths, weaknesses, and potentials and to create proposals harmonising land uses with natural and cultural environment.

Students tried to collect, structure, evaluate the goals and requirements related to all local needs using problem tree and planning goal tree method (Figure 3). At the end of the planning process maps and plans were elaborated using GIS programs. In each case, comprehensive landscape management studies were elaborated (ca. 170 pages with maps). The last challenge of the project was for the students to present the results and proposals to the municipalities and other interested people.

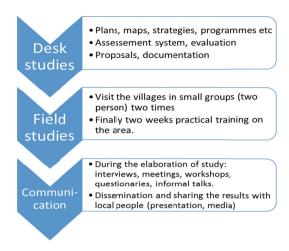


Figure 2. The planning process

Source: own construction.

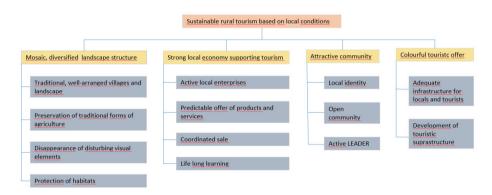


Figure 3. The planning goal tree composed for Nivegy Valley

Source: own construction.

Results

The local governments and the LAG appreciated the studies, and were surprised by the comprehensive holistic, cross sectional approach of the students. We carried out a detailed landscape analysis, which is usually skipped in the general planning process in Hungary. Examined, related themes, topics were:

- landscape history stable land uses, trends of land use changes, sensitive (rapidly changing) areas, possible ecologically optimum state (help to greening);
- land uses, land covers recently;
- cultural and natural values of the region;
- local economy: agriculture and forestry, manufacturers, market possibilities;

- social conditions;
- water management issues;
- landscape functions and existing and potential ecosystem services: economic and agricultural potentials; nature conservation priorities; accessibility; landscape aesthetics; tourist potentials.

In the scientific literature the term of landscape functions is usually referred to the goods and services offered by regions, landscapes, land use systems and all the technological, cultural and economic aspects of land use are stressed besides the abiotic and biotic components (Lamarque et al., 2011). In our project we applied a method based on the research of Bastian (1997) and modified by Filep-Kovács (2013).

Targeted assessment was carried out to reveal the real natural base for agriculture and the local economy (related to the landscape) in order to find the optimal land uses and the best agricultural techniques to keep the ecological values of the landscape. Farmer's expectation was to get proposals on greening measures to fulfil the demands of the Common Agricultural Policy. It included an invasive plants survey and finding techniques to avoid their rapid spread. Moreover, protection measures and management advice for sensitive, valuable lands. Beyond and through greening, green infrastructure became one of the main project objectives.

The European Commission adopted the Green Infrastructure Strategy in 2013³. The strategy highlights the role of green infrastructure in spatial cohesion using the place-based approach. Green infrastructure preserves local values enhances local identity as during green infrastructure planning aspects of regional development, heritage protection and built infrastructure are considered as well. (Benedict and McMahon, 2001). Because of this multifunctional approach, green infrastructure planning is an effective rural development tool.

A local green infrastructure typology was set up in our project according to land use forms and land covers. We found that:

- green infrastructure is beneficial both for agriculture and for protection of ecologically sensitive areas;
- green infrastructure development contributes to tourism and recreational development as well.

However, as the scale of the planning task was regional we elaborated detailed greening proposals for farmers to make clear the real opportunities and possible economic and ecological benefits of development of green infrastructure.

The land use conflicts were evaluated and presented on maps (Figure 4) in particular in the themes of landscape values and heritage applying Hungarian

³http://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:d41348f2-01d5-4abe-b817-4c73e6f1b2df.0014.03/DOC 1&format=PDF

methods elaborated at the university (Csemez, 1996). These methods reflect the local conditions but are based on international research results (de Groot and Braat, 2012; Constanza et al., 1997). An important issue was the heritage protection and development of thematic routes (greenway network, wine route, pilgrimage route, proposals for the national blue line hiking trail) with detailed line sections, hot spots, catering possibilities, values along the road. On the one hand the goal of this work was to contribute to local economic development through new tourism development possibilities and on the other to local heritage inventarisation and protection.

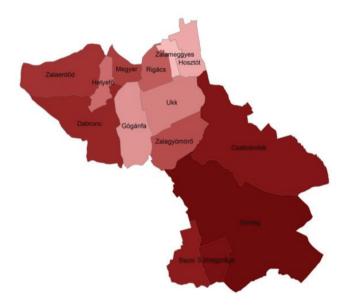


Figure 4. The inhomogeneous Sümeg micro region. Different areas – different potentials – different proposals

Source: own construction.

The ecological mapping was focused on connectivity and gap analysis of ecologic network. Students provided site specific planning proposals for each village. The main proposals are summarised in Table 1.

This analysis can be a basis for further planning in order to better utilise landscape resources. For effective rural development it is highly important to fit, adapt land use to landscape conditions especially in agriculture and tourism. The colleagues of the LAG can utilise the landscape analysis and study in their day-to-day life. The formulated project ideas based on local natural and cultural resources such as the elaborated plan of a greenway can be used directly in project generation, also serving as a good basis for bottom-up development. In the landscape architect education these workshops were really successful as our students were able to face challenges from real life. The co-operation meant a win-win situation for the locals, the LAG and Szent István University as well (Table 2).

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Table 1. The main proposals developed by the university people

Type of proposal	Detailed proposals
Land use change	Tree plantations of native species Land use change to pasture Spontaneous shrub growing change back to pastures New forest plantations Planting small scale orchards with local varieties Vineyards plantation
Green infrastructure connectivity proposals	Forest belts Tree lines along roads Rehabilitation of degraded waterways Rehabilitation of small mining sites Rehabilitation of farms Buffer zones around plantations
Protection and maintenance	Shore management of lakes Protection of reed beds Maintenance of drainage water channels Mechanical cutting of invasive plants Protection of wetlands Protection of solitaire trees and groups of trees Protection of high value forests
Municipal green infrastructure	Intensive maintenance of city green Plants fitting to local character Tree supply at city alleys Setting up ecologically valuable areas on the settlement edges Historic park restoration

Source: own compilation.

Table 2. Benefits for university and the Leader Local Action Group (LAG) of the common project $\,$

Benefits for the university	Benefits for the LAG	
Up-to-date knowledge development in education:	A comprehensive rural development study was made/provided; The study is a very good starting point or source (also a digital database) for later development studies (ecological plans, land use plans, greening plans, rural development studies, tourism plans etc.); Detailed plans (project proposals were formed) for example thematic routes; Detailed survey for highlighting the disparities of the region; New possibilities for public works involvement; Detailed cultural, natural heritage inventory for local values raising the local patriotism; It was almost free research for the LAG; Draw attention to the importance of cooperation.	

Source: own compilation.

The common projects carried out in the two micro regions have resulted in useful lessons beyond the practical results. Such cooperation shows for students how general principles of rural/regional development can work. The basic principles we would have liked or were able to convey to all of actors are listed in Table 3. Experiences can strengthen all the participating partners to believe and to adopt principles in their practical work.

Table 3. Working principles in the partnership

General principles	Putting theory into practice during the common planning process			
Equality, solidarity	 The urban-rural relation becoming horizontal, mutual, interconnected in a regional planning aspect. There are elements, good patterns to be followed by people living on local society periphery. 			
Free of charge, voluntary work	• To be able to complete a task without high investment if the local knowledge, interest, data, contribution available.			
Interrelation	• Bilateral learning process were started between experts, teachers, students, local people, decision makers, farmers etc.			
Maximum effort benefit	 Students could gain real life work experience. Local people can get programmes, plans based on local research. Contribution to public work programme. 			
Reflection	Revealing the local values strengthens local identity.			
Sustainability and value protection	 All sustainable rural planning should be based on local landscape conditions and local land uses, landscape potentials. Students were trained to recognise and understand these values. 			
Complexity	• In the local development plans, complexity means that next to partial interest all economic, ecological, sectoral interest are taken into consideration.			
Sensibility and making sensible	 Local patriotism draws attention to local values and minor details of landscape in students. Understanding different interest of different local groups. Developing communication skills. 			

Source: own compilation.

Discussion

The majority of the principles listed in Table 3 are also listed in one of the Cork Declarations. We propose the following statements based on our experiences for further discussion:

Previously, several plans and studies were elaborated for the research area
but these were not really approved by the local population so the realisation was not successful. Rural development plans based on local landscape
conditions are expected to be realised rather than plans without such roots.
In our opinion, additional analysis would be important in rural development programmes to explore landscape history, land use changes, potential
land use forms and landscape functions. Stronger spatial focus is necessary
in the planning process.

- The stakeholders of rural development shall consider open access and volunteering much more important. Very often behind the unsuccessful project is the lack of money. Our project would not have been realised if any stakeholders had to pay for it. Cooperation and successful projects can be realised based on local resources and common efforts. (Of course it does not mean that there is no need for financial resources).
- The viability of rural regions depends on the active and engaged local community and not on investments. The local value inventories which enhance identity, and successful land use forms reflecting the local landscape conditions can mobilise local actors.

Conclusion

The multidisciplinary project was a real success for the university and the stakeholders of the study area because it created a win-win situation for all the partners. The application of the project method in education was very useful for the students, because it made it possible for them to use and apply their theoretical knowledge in practice. The settlements got a real complex, well-founded development programme and ideas for their future development. The method presented in our paper is especially useful for those regions which lack financial and human resources.

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