Micropol

Telecottage Movement and Integrated Community Service Spaces (ICSSs) in Hungary

**Sphere: Services**

**Facility:** Telecottages and Integrated Community Service Spaces

**Good Practice Title:** Telecottage Movement and Integrated Community Service Spaces (ICSSs) in Hungary

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**Brief Description of Good Practice:**
The Hungarian telecottage movement – as special type a "Telecentre"- grew out of a community development programme in 1994 in Csákberény, a small mountain community in mid-western Hungary. With assistance from the Democracy Network (DemNet) programme, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 31 new telecottages were established in Hungary between 1997 and 1998. The country has more than 250 telecottages now.

Telecottages are located in rural villages with population smaller than 5000, and they are an integral part of the Hungarian government’s approach to providing rural communities with access to government information and services and with an opportunity to achieve local economic regeneration. Telecottages are owned by the local community and run by local businesses on its behalf with an exclusive focus to serve local development needs by offering a wide range of ICT services.

Based on the European “e-Europe” initiative the Ministry of Economy and Transport introduced the eHungary program in 2004 aiming to provide every person in Hungary with internet access by setting up "eHungary points" in public spaces like libraries, schools, cultural centres or telecottages. The e-Hungary points are network of public Internet access points so they do not provide telework service, but they are important milestones in the development of the telecottage movement, because mainly these access points started its work in the telecottage building. While the almost 1500 e-Hungary points are simple free internet access points, the 250 telecottages provide a wide range of services to the rural inhabitants.

Based on the services of telecottage movement and e-Hungary points multifunctional service centres (Integrated Community Service Spaces - ICSSs) were established in the rural areas by renovating, modernising and using the abandoned buildings in frame of the Agriculture and Rural Development Fund.

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1 Murray B., Small World Connections: **THE HUNGARIAN TELECOTTAGE MOVEMENT IN** Latchem, C. and Walke D. (2001), **Telecentres: Case studies and key issues**, The Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver
Integrated Community Service Spaces are like the classical culture centre, village house, youth club, community house and library all together, integrating to these, other facilities and institutions which can provide adequate services like telecottages, Civic Community Houses and e-Hungary points. The different services were divided in two groups within the tender. From one hand, there are tasks which have to be done by each community space. These obligatory services are the running of a library, organization of educational programmes, internet access and giving information about different fields of interest. On the other hand telecottages have voluntary tasks, which are different from place to place. The aim of the ICSS system is not to duplicate the existing proper, high quality services (telecottages, e-Hungary points), but to complement the missing ones, and to complete the scope of available facilities while improving the quality. In this way the ICSSs are a good basis for telework services the rural areas. Currently 276 ICSSs are working in Hungary and 359 are under development.

**Why the good practice was used:**
As you can see from the map below the number of villages (population less than 5000 people) is quite large in Hungary (89% of the total settlements: 2826 villages from the 3154 settlements). BUT there is huge contradiction in term of the numbers, because despite of the large number of villages only 35 % of the total inhabitants live in countryside now.

Number of cities and villages in Hungary

(Villages with population smaller than 5000 you can find in white colour)
Moreover (or due to this fact?) these villages are poorly provided with state and public service delivery, educational institutions, retail- and business services and job opportunities. From this reason tehcottages and ICSSs are integral part of the Hungarian government’s approach to providing rural communities with access to government information and services in and with an opportunity to achieve local economic development also in terms of smart work/telework.

What are the benefits of the good practice:
Telecottages have worked in Hungary since 19 years, so they are already a brand in Hungary. The people in countryside have trust in tehcottages (and e-Hungary points/ICSSs) because the tehcottages play significant part in the social life of the villages. Telecottages are more than communal hubs, they are service centres/workspaces and meeting areas with wise range of IT assistance. They provide integrated services in the rural areas, and having these integrated services are better than installing ICT equipments in the school/library/cultural centre/post office etc.
In case having the telework service in the telecottage it is easier to build trust towards the employers, because they also have trust in the services and controllability of the work.
It can be said that one-third of a telecottage is about computers, and the other two thirds are about servicing the local community via other means. Surprisingly fewer than half of the approximately 50 Hungarian telecottage services are ICT-based, for which informatics equipment and Internet use play an integral role. The conception of Henning Albrechten, the father of telecottage, of a centre of competence, is a very sound one. It is reasonable to speak of a kind of community centre of intelligence in the sense of modernization, to the extent that intelligence is simply the capacity to adjust to one’s surroundings and situations. This requires not only the possibility to use computers and the network, but also the capacity and support of the community and the programme organization and
management (based on community participation, programme organization, elaboration of grant applications, development of education and training).

In the telecottages the trainings and education are organised according to the local needs. In the ICSS the frequency of the trainings is fixed to the followings (every ICSS has to organise the following events):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of the training</th>
<th>Frequency of the event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agro/rural development trainings/educations</td>
<td>Quarterly (in every 3rd month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial/taxation/company development/other economical training</td>
<td>Terminally (in every 6th month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainings developing digital literacy</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR trainings</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What problems/issues were associated with the good practice:

- As in general in case of governmental developments or developments connected to EU funds, the main question associated with the GP is “How to maintain?”

Certainly it is not easy to find the right financial tools but based on the long-time experience of the telecottages the following complex sustainable solutions are the minimum needed for financial maintenance:

- 1/3 of total expenses covered by incomes generated from services
- 1/3 of total expenses covered by local resources (local government/local businesses)
- 1/3 of total expenses covered by grant programs/projects

- The other question arised regarding the GP is “How to choose/ keeping update the necessary services?”

On the basis of the expericance of running telecottages, the Hungarian Telecottage Association defined a minimum set of the telecottage services.

Because of national differences, cultural particularities and economic and technical contexts, it is difficult to define such terms that would be valid at an international level. However, based on the Hungarian experience, a generalized telecottage minimum is described below. It is important for the environment and the partners of telecottages, that there be a clear description and guarantees for the nature and service capacity of this new type of institution.

In Hungary all telecottages provide the below mentioned “minimum services”, but certainly there are also “optional services”, which could be useful for the local community. When establishing a telecottages it is always a problem to choose the necessary services. It is important to mention that no single telecottage/ICSS can offer the full range of services, so there is not any “typical telecottage”, because the most important we learnt that the services always should be tailored to needs of communities.

But to avoid the initial problems it is advisable to study the following “minimum” and “optional” services. As you can see from the tables “telework” is in the optional part.

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2 United Nations Development Programme Europe and the CIS/Hungarian Telecottage Association: Telecottage Handbook; p. 27
Minimum set of telecottages services

**Services minimum**
- Public telephone use
- Copying
- Scanning
- Printing
- Multimedia computer use
- Use of office (applications) systems
- Broadband internet access
- Teaching (basics of computing)
- Computing instruction (personal help and introduction)
- Public interest provision of information
- Help with administration

**Technical minimum**
- Number of workstations proportionate to population served
- Computers with clearly-defined technical parameters (e.g., multimedia)
- Workstations connected to the local network
- Determined level of peripherals provision
- Given level of software provision
- Given number and quality of phone lines
- Predetermined broadband Internet access from all workstations
- Premises that are secure, accessible, and adequate in size

**Operational minimum**
- Responsible operator, manager, legally valid organization
- Embedded within the community
- Clearly visible sign outside, detailing opening times and list of services and prices
- Own website
- Fixed opening hours
- Professionally-trained service staff
- Regulations for service, house rules
- Ordered and transparent financial administration
- Systematic evaluation of operations
- Service development orientated to requirements
### Optional services in the telecottage

#### Public e-services
- Public information*
- General administration, agency services*
- Services for area or village management
- Agricultural information*
- Library services
- Social care services
- Child protection services
- Health services
- Labour and employment services*
- Public works services
- Telework services**
- Financial services (e.g. tax, social security)*
- Education and coaching services**
- Services for spotting and ministering talent
- Local statistical and map services**
- Services supporting other local public tasks

#### Local business services
- Canteen
- Office and documentation, virtual office services**
- Computer use support services*
- Computer games*
- Local business intermediary service, virtual market
- E-commerce and business agency*
- Tourism services*
- Telework services**
- Distance education**
- Advertising services*
- Web studio – homepage building, server services**
- Purchase, construction and repair of computers
- Purchase and rental of software*
- System administrator service
- Banking service*
- Selling of goods

#### Local and network services for NGOs
- Grant application and project development*
- Local public interest information services*
- Local information centre
- Settlement web page*
- Civic centre service*
- Local media and publicity services
- E-democracy*
- Community memory and local history
- Community development
- Virtual expansion of the community*
- Club service
- Events management services

Note: this is not an exhaustive list.
* Services requiring ICT equipment.
** Services requiring direct and continuous broadband Internet access.

### How the success of the Good Practice was measured:

As described in the first section the “Telecottage movement” is very successful in Hungary. In the last 19 years almost about 250 telecottages were established. Currently Hungary has the world’s highest number of telecottages per capita.
On the success of the telecottages 276 ICSSs were established since 2004 in Hungary and 359 are under development.
Moreover 1500 e-Hungary points are also working.

**Description of process experience using the Good Practice:**

It is a fact that the telecottages were the basis of the ICT based rural development before the EU access. With the times the functions of the telecottages are always modified, but it is important that not only the building, the ICT infrastructure and the broadband internet is available for different services in these telecottages, but also these buildings are the basis of the social life of the villages. It is a core success factor, because when establishing a popular working/service centre– next to the minimum infrastructure/services- the inhabitants should feel that the telecottage (or the SWC) belongs to them.

**Learned lessons:**

Based on the experiences of the running telecottages a handbook is written with the title: "*How to establish and run a successful telecentre- A practical guide for community development practitioners on strategies for ICT-enabled community empowerment (based on the Hungarian telecottage movement experience)*"

All of the lessons learnt are available in English in the handbook, but please let me highlight some core practical success factors.

As mentioned before to choose the right service in the basis of a successful telecottage, but in order for both employees and users to be aware of what the telecottage is doing, it is useful to establish and post service regulations:

- *Company sign and logo* – The telecottage sign should be prominently posted at the entrance. Without this, the telecottage does not have a ‘face’. If the settlement is large, it may also be useful to put up a visible road sign, to direct visitors to the telecottage.

(Hungarian telecottage logo: ![Teleház](Hungarian_telecottage_logo.png))

- *Hours of operation* – Opening and closing times indicate when users have access to services. This requires flexibility. For some telecottages, it is a common practice to give the key to reliable users.

- *Services and price list* – An important devise for achieving reliability and demonstrating transparency is an accurate service and price list on display.

- *The reception* – Considering the many services and openness of the telecottage environment, the reception area plays an important role. Often it is simply a place for conversation, until it becomes clear what the visitor would like to do.

- *Visitors and regulars* – The majority of users will in fact become wellknown regulars. Thus, it is worth considering from the outset mechanisms for connecting regular users to the telecottage, and how these will work (club membership cards, prepaid cards etc.).

- *Advertising the telecottage* – Website, billboards, newsletters, leaflets, business cards, advertisements, and so forth, provide publicity for the telecottage. Word of mouth can certainly spreads news quickly, but it does not communicate accurate details about the services offered.
- **Service statistics** – From the beginning of operations it is important to maintain an itemized record of usage of services by type, and by type of user (anonymously, of course) according to gender and age, and further categories as warranted by the context. A record of requests that cannot be fulfilled and other suggestions should also be collected. This data can be highly useful for reports and improvements.

- **House rules** – It is important to elaborate and display house rules governing the telecottage’s operation and use of its services. Making these conditions clear to all reduces scope for confusion about appropriate practices and possible arguments or tension. These are especially important for welcoming children into the environment.

- **Quiet and noisy activities** – Having a wide array of services requires suitable and sometimes special circumstances. It is particularly important to physically separate quiet and noisy activities (rooms, parts of the premises) and to require and provide suitable conditions (e.g. for teleworkers).

- **Service spaces** – It is important that the spatial and other conditions of service functions (waiting room, behind the scenes operations, workshop space, storage space, rest rooms) are designed in such a manner to not disturb basic operations, while also being easy to service and secure.

- **External locations** – The external locations for certain telecottage activities and services (e.g. school computer rooms, home workstations) can also form part of telecottage development and operation. These should be included in the elaboration and regulation of suitable conditions and profile.

- **Network presence** – The virtual activity of the telecottage is an integral part of its operation (e.g. the telecottage web page), and as such, it is desirable to organize this element (at least in its basic form, although this is not always possible) before the telecottage is opened.

- **Payment, invoicing, accounting** – Meticulous financial procedures and administration (providing receipts, records of income and expenditures, separate budgets for programmes, keeping an inventory, etc.) are extremely important to practice from the outset. These ensure a secure and prudent environment, and transparent operation of the telecottage: the very basis for eligibility for any outside financial support.

**Main Facts. In qualitative or quantitative terms:**
Hungarian telecottages and Integrated Community Service Spaces are multifunctional service centres which provide tailor-made, wide-range of services (mainly ICT services) to the local communities. They are part of the local social life and centre of the rural development (from social and economical point of view) in the countryside.

**Useful Links:**
- Telecottage: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPDWauzWfWA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPDWauzWfWA)
- IKSZT: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0nOvq5SfNk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0nOvq5SfNk)