

# **Implementation of Community Work in a Socially Excluded Locality as Viewed by Its Participants**

## **Abstract**

This paper presents a case study on the implementation of community work in a socially excluded locality. The objective of qualitative research was to answer the following research question: How do the participants involved view the method of community work? Furthermore, the paper brings insight into community work, especially the model of community development and the contextual framework of the case study. Finally, the research results and the subsequent recommendations not only for the practice of community work are described.

## **Keywords**

community work, socially excluded locality, case study

## **1. Introduction**

principal topic of this article is the method of community work and the implementation of its model of community development in a socially excluded locality in the district of the town of Frýdek–Místek<sup>1</sup>. Despite the fact that community work in professional literature (Novotná, Schimmerlingová, 1992; Řezníček, 1994) is considered to be one of the relevant methods of social work when it comes to addressing the problem of spatial exclusion, there are only a few studies in the Czech Republic (Havrdová, 2013; Gojová, Geletičová, Mastná, Sádiová, Žembová, 2012) summarizing experience from its use. This fact was also a motivating factor in preparing a case study of its implementation within the project of the Moravian-Silesian Region entitled "Support of Social Services in Socially Excluded Localities in the Moravian-Silesian Region III" and also the "Program of Social Activation Activities with Community Elements," which was based on testing the method of community work, especially the model of community development in socially excluded localities. One of the partial objectives of the project was to try to use an empowering approach to clients in practice, based purely on the needs of the population in choosing topics and ways of solving the situation of the community itself. The fact that the project implementer was not a non-profit organization, which has been the case with the described examples in the Czech Republic, but rather the Regional Authority itself, which greatly influences the city's policies and is impartial in local policies, made this project quite exceptional and unique. For this reason, a case study method was used in the research, which allowed for a look at the case as seen by individual participants (not only by the residents of a socially excluded area). The implementation of community work in the socially excluded locality of Frýdek–Místek has become the case in this research. The aim of this case study, the results of which are presented in this paper, was to understand how individual participants interpret the method of community work.

## **Research Issue**

The issue of socially excluded localities in the Moravian-Silesian region is significant, as evidenced by the nationwide surveys commissioned by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, prepared by GAC spol. s.r.o, when the number of socially excluded localities (SEL) in the region increased from 28 in 2006 to 78 as captured by field research in 2015. The

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<sup>1</sup> With the consent of the research participants, anonymisation of the city was not required.

analysis of socially excluded localities in the Czech Republic<sup>2</sup> defines a SEL as a locality where more than 20 people living in unsatisfactory conditions are concentrated, while these conditions are indicated by the number of beneficiaries of the cost-of-living allowance. These persons then inhabit physically or symbolically a bordered space.<sup>3</sup> The number of persons living in SEL in the second most populated region in the Czech Republic has also increased (it is now 19-23 thous. persons). Compared to 2006, when 10-10.5 thous. inhabitants were living in SEL, it is an increase of 105% (GAC 2006, 2015).

The socially excluded localities are perceived as "Roma" populated, even in those cases where the Roma do not constitute a statistical majority in a given location. The boundaries of these locations can be symbolic, for example when the locality is perceived as a "bad address" or it is referred to as a "house of horror", "ghetto", the "Bronx", etc. In these cases, there is a risk that such labels are given to all localities where the Roma live (GAC, 2015). It is clear that SELs point to extreme social differences and inequalities in society. (Mareš, 2013)

The Czech Republic proposes to address social exclusion and therefore the issue of socially excluded localities through the "Social Inclusion Strategy," which has been prepared for the 2014-2020 period. As a basic tool for the social inclusion of socially excluded persons or persons at risk of social exclusion, the Strategy of the Czech Republic states about social work: *"In order to strengthen social work as an essential tool for social inclusion, it will be necessary to increase the number of social workers in municipalities. The current condition of the number of social workers is in some municipalities considerably inadequate. An increase in the current number of social workers by 50% would achieve the target state of 2,500 social workers in municipalities with extended powers."* (MLSA, 2014)

At the level of the Moravian-Silesian Region (hereinafter MSR), the Integration Strategy of the Roma Community 2015-2020 (MSR, 2015) which is in line with the national strategy of the Czech Republic, is being implemented. A key factor for a successful MSR strategy implementation is considered the cooperation of all participants involved in addressing the situation of socially excluded citizens at all levels, that is at the level of the community itself, at the level of individual municipalities, at the level of non-governmental organizations, schools, etc. Support for the implementation of community work can also be found in the Action Plan of the Strategy for Combating Social Exclusion 2016-2020, which in its measure 2.2.1.1 supports the implementation of community work, also in its measure 5.2.3.1 the participation of people with experience of social exclusion in social inclusion projects, and in its measure 5.2.3.2 implementation of community social work in socially excluded localities. This requirement fulfils community development as a model community work (Popple, 1996), which is based on the empowering and participation of residents and development of self-organization within the communities living in the SEL localities.

Based on national strategies for social inclusion, regional strategies as well as follow-up municipal strategies are elaborated. The town of Frýdek–Místek was one of the three cities involved in the MSR project; in its Strategy for Social Inclusion the town defines the implementation of community work to be one of its priorities.

From the text above it is clear that the need to implement community work appears at all levels of social inclusion strategies. The main research question aims to identify how the key participants view the implementation of community work. The view of all participants involved can then be very crucial and important in developing social inclusion strategies at local levels.

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<sup>2</sup> GAC. 2015. *Analýza sociálně vyloučených lokalit v ČR*. GAC spol. s.r.o.

<sup>3</sup> "SELs are explicitly or implicitly defined as the space (house, street, district) where persons, in whom we can identify the symptoms associated with social exclusion, are concentrated. Such places are negatively perceived by their neighbours." (GAC, p. 11, 2015)

## **Foundations of Community Development**

Henderson (2007) describes community work as a participatory approach to collective problems, which is based on models of civil society and participatory democracy. Duhnam (in Navrátil, 2001:131) then defined community work as *"a process of conscious social action that focuses on interweaving needs and existing resources in the community, supporting group solidarity and group co-operation in the community while supporting changes in the community."*

The heterogeneity of the concept of community work as stipulated by a number of definitions, procedures and based on various theoretical concepts, has likely led the authors to start talking about approaches in community work (Thomas, 1983) or about models of community work (Rothman, 1989, Popple, 1996). According to Payne (1997), the model is a generalization of what is happening in practice that is a description of certain principles, and patterns, elaborated into a structured form in order to provide social workers with consistency. It is, therefore, some sort of guideline that social workers can follow in their practice. The first division of models or approaches of community work was attempted by a research group led by Eileen Younghusband in the 1960s. This study distinguished two approaches in community work, namely community development and community organization. The community development can be identified at the same time as one of Rothman's models (in Zastrow 1989), which further differentiated the model of social planning and social action. Rothman (in Zastrow, 1989) defines community development as including a large number of people in solving their own problems.

Schuringa (2007) sees the ability to apply an empowering approach that she puts in contrast to the provider approach to be principal for the community development model. The difference between these approaches is reflected in different views of the inhabitants of socially excluded localities. The "bottom-up" approach to a subject is applied in an empowering approach, whereas a provider approach implies the "top-down" approach, and therefore it is geared towards a service and help oriented approach. An empowering approach is a process in which the community itself starts the process, contributes with thoughts and ideas, and decides what and who should do it. This approach assumes that if the community identifies the problems on its own and implements its solutions, it will be much more motivated and will keep the achieved results.

Community development is both a method and a process. She sees the process as a change that is happening within communities and is aimed at creating better conditions for solving the problem. The method of community development is a way of stimulating and influencing change in a positive direction. The current definitions of community development are divided into two dimensions that is supporting local activities and influencing institutions. Or it can also be seen as a community work, representing a supportive profession defined as a set of methods and skills that are used to empower local communities, to initiate self-organization and to bridge the gap between the excluded and the mainstream society (Schuringa, 2007). Roberts (in Popple, 1996) states that the knowledge and skills that are applied in the community development model can be used to give people the chance to grasp power and control over their own lives. Based on experience with projects geared to local development, Schuringa (2007) chose five key principles of community development:

1. Empowerment – means to realize one's qualities and strengths and to solve one's problems, or at least try to address them. What is essential is the awareness of the process that leads to solving problems and the need to change an individual's life. It is a change from a passive to a pro-active approach.
2. Multi-dimensional approach – Addressing social exclusion requires a comprehensive approach that must include solutions to its multiple causes at the same time. Combining activities in different areas (such as education, housing, employment,

health, safety and leisure) and the use of accessible community resources is the best way to achieve sustainable results. Inclusion – Activities of community work also need to focus on community participation in society, since isolation is the main cause of deprivation. The principle of inclusion seeks to establish the contact of the community with the majority, local institutions and authorities, and to emphasize equality of interrelations, which is key to inclusion in society.

3. Sustainability – It is essential to seek a structural and ongoing solution. Schuringa (2007: 29) gives an example: *"Humanitarian aid only keeps people in dependence and apathy; they only learn to ask for more. They are not stimulated to do something on their own, which also reduces their self-esteem and self-confidence."* Schuringa (2007) considers an investment in people themselves to be a key element of the process; although it is a longer process, it gives impetus to and faith in achieving goals using people's own strengths and abilities. The goal is to create a mobilized community that solves its own problems independently.
4. Creating conditions for the development of the movement – The ultimate goal is not only to strengthen the local community but also to interconnect local organizations because many problems cannot be solved solely at a local level.

During the process of community development a minimum of four important lines appear. First, attention is focused on problem solving, especially at the beginning when it is necessary to achieve concrete successes that would stimulate community residents to leave their passive attitude and to create a sense of trust and self-confidence. In the second step, an organizational structure has to be built, which is gradually being established during all stages of community development and involves many people. The third line is educational. At the very least, the leaders and the participating community residents must acquire an array of new knowledge and develop new skills in the actual process of community work. The fourth line is represented by external relations, which are especially important for connecting the community with the outer world and for creating a so-called communication bridge. At the beginning of the process, community residents are mostly focused on problem solving; gradually, and with the assistance of a community worker who has been assigned to provide advice and support them in solving their problem, the inhabitants also start focussing on the other three lines (Schuringa, 2007).

From the aspect of individual phases of community work, it is important to move from the knowledge of the community and its problems, through the planning of intervention steps, the preparation of the support implementation plan, to the evaluation of the implemented action (Gojová, 2013). Schuringa (2007) divides the process of promotion of community development into three phases. The goal of community development is to achieve a "mobilized community" through work on addressing specific problems in the community (so-called "external strategies" – problem solving and so-called "internal strategies – reaching a mobilized community"). In seeking a solution to any problem, we must always take into account how our activities and work on solving the problem can contribute to an internal strategy, i.e. what people will learn during their work, how they will be involved, how their self-organization and relationships with the environment will be strengthened (Schuringa, 2007).

### **Contextual Framework of a Case Study on the Implementation of Community Work in Frýdek–Místek**

The case study deals with the implementation of community work in a socially excluded area in Frýdek – Místek. The situation analysis, elaborated by the Research Institute of Labour and Social Affairs (2013), defines this SEL in Frýdek–Místek (hereinafter F-M) by the following

streets: Míru, Dlouhá, Sokolská, V. Vantucha, Křížíkova, Hutní and Skautská. The location is quite close to the city centre, from which it is separated by a busy road and approx. a 400-metre section of Míru Street, which is used mainly for business purposes (car repair, building supply store, fishing equipment). The border of the locality consists of a moderate forest cover, the Ostravice River, and a railway station, which divides the locality into two parts (a section of Míru, V. Vantucha, Sokolská streets and a section of Křížíkova Street). The locality thus represents two socially excluded localities adjacent to each other (Situation Analysis, 2013). Part of the locality includes an outdated playground with four playing elements (a sandpit, two monkey bars and a swing), a concrete playground and several fruit trees. The situation analysis (2013), in terms of the structure of the population in the whole socially excluded area, defined the number of children under 15 years old to be 36% of the total population. According to the population census data, a total of 686 persons are registered for permanent residence in the locality (i.e. on seven investigated streets), which represents 1.2% of the population of Frýdek–Místek. *"In estimating the total population of the Locality, however, we can deduce from the findings of a community social worker, according to whom approximately 450 Roma live in the locality, of which approx. 250-300 reside in Míru Street. However, it is not only the Roma who live in the locality - on the streets of Dlouhá, V. Vantucha and Sokolská, located near the Míru Street, there are also some non-Roma households."* (Situation Analysis, 2013:11)

The community work was primarily concentrated and carried out on the streets of Míru, V. Vantucha and Sokolská, primarily due to the nature of the Moravian-Silesian Region project, under which the community workers (project coordinators) worked and were funded.

Community workers, Maiwaelderová and Žurovcová (2015: 29), both described the locality: *"The monitored locality in which we operate is situated on the outskirts of Frýdek–Místek, not far from the town centre. It includes four two-story apartment houses, a municipality-owned rooming house and private owners' apartment buildings. In the centre of the locality there is a concrete football field with goals. There are mostly Roma families living in municipality apartment houses and the rooming house; private homes are owned by the majority population owners who rent the apartments. Approx. 350 inhabitants reside in the locality, but the municipality perceives only the section, with mostly Roma families, as being "problematic."*

An important contextual framework of the case study is the wording of the Moravian-Silesian Region project, especially the key activity no. 6 (Program of Activation Activities with Community Elements), which the community workers followed in their activities in the locality. The project activity lasted from March 2014 to September 2015, focusing primarily on active involvement of residents of selected socially excluded localities located in the region in order to increase their participation in improving coexistence in a given locality. The activity was based on the gradual empowerment of the inhabitants of the locality to assume responsibility for the current state of life in the locality and to increase the competence to make a positive change in the current state of the locality. Specifically, it was an active involvement of the inhabitants of the locality in the process of defining the most difficult problems, the planning of activities and the measures leading to their solution and the subsequent implementation of these activities. The concept of community work was fully in line with the concept of the community development model as presented in the theoretical foundations of this paper.

Two coordinators implemented the above key activity in the F-M SEL, as well as in other localities involved in the project. The main task of all the coordinators was to accompany individual participants through a community development model process, to prepare and implement local meetings, and to coordinate planning processes. Another partial task of coordinators was to provide communication and communication bridges between residents,

local self-government and social services, plus to be advisors in the communication, planning and cooperation matters at a local level. One of the project assignments was to build the so-called local group in the Localities (the locals elected a resident's council in Frýdek–Místek which they named the Válcovny plechu Housing Project Council<sup>4</sup>), represented by elected residents' representatives, which could be supplemented by other participants and an important condition of membership was willingness and motivation to change. The project assumed the activities of local groups in the planning of joint actions improving the living conditions of the population, completion of minor repairs, negotiations with local self-government, improvement of the environment for children, etc. An important condition of the project was not to specify the implementation of activities but to implement such activities that the residents themselves, based on their own needs, will set up since achieving factual, visible and easily measurable changes in the site's environment will strengthen the confidence of the target group in its own abilities and skills to act positively and effectively to change the environment of the locality in which they live (Moravian-Silesian Region, 2014). The aim of this key activity was to motivate the locals toward a more active approach, to develop their abilities to solve their own problems, to develop self-confidence, to develop cooperation skills, to participate in planning processes, and to implement planned changes.

### **Research Methodology**

The case study is a method of qualitative research because it can perfectly fulfil the basic objectives of qualitative research – it examines current phenomena to their depth in the actual context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clear (Yin, 2009:18). Diving into the depth of one phenomenon will allow us to thoroughly understand the researched subject. A key research topic was a case study on the implementation of community work in a socially excluded area of F-M. The aim of qualitative research was to understand how individual participants of community work in Frýdek–Místek perceived the implementation of community work (the Moravian - Silesian Region project). The main research question (MRQ) of this qualitative research was: **"How is the implementation of the method of community work in a socially excluded locality of Frýdek–Místek interpreted by individual participants?"** This main research question was then used to derive 3 partial research questions, which aim to more accurately describe the perception of this method by individual participants. All partial questions constitute an answer to the defined main research question, however, they are organized without any internal hierarchy. In reference to the theoretical background, we understand community work as a process, facilitated by community workers, leading to the achievement of goals in the context of the so-called internal and external strategy. For community work participants we consider involved residents and other workers active in SELs participating in community-based activities. In line with this conceptualization, we understand the complex of the processes, results and activities of the community workers to be the "implementation of community work" and partial research questions (PRQ) were also derived according to this logic:

- PRQ 1: How do the individual participants interpret the process of community work method in the F-M SEL?

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<sup>4</sup>The council of Válcovny plechu housing project was elected by community residents in May 2014 in local elections. It consisted of 8 members – 6 women and 2 men, 6 Roma and 2 non-Roma. Already at the very foundation of the Council of Residents, the members were looking for a name that would not be associated with the designation of a "socially excluded locality" or Míru Street, since this name was associated in F-M with a "bad address." After a joint research into the history of the locality, the residents and members of the council agreed to the name of the Válcovny plechu Housing Project Council.

- PRQ 2: How do individual participants of community work interpret the results achieved in the F-M SEL during its implementation?
- PRQ 3: How do individual participants interpret the status and role of community workers during the implementation of community work in the F-M SEL?

A case study, in which the unit of analysis is the case, was chosen as the research objective. The case may be a person, an event, programs, implementation processes, or organizational changes (Miovský, 2006). With respect to the research objective, the case study was conceived as a descriptive study (Hendl, 2005), aimed at a complete description and understanding of the phenomenon. The research made use of the following techniques to obtain data: a focused interview, meetings from the discussions about community work in Frýdek–Místek as part of the above mentioned project and a published article of community workers describing their implementation of community work. Conducted interviews with individual participants in community work were divided into two content sections. The first part of the interview was focused on questions about expectations from the project implementation, the second part of the interview consisted of questions about the status and role of community workers and the process of implemented method in the socially excluded locality. The last part of the interview was related to concrete results of the implementation of community work in the SEL itself. For the purpose of the research, a method of intentional selection of the research group was chosen (Miovský, 2006), since, due to the stated objective and method of community work, the interviews were only carried out with participants in community work, people who cooperated or participated in partial activities of community work implementation.

The key to the method of case research is that the respondent is selected on the basis of predetermined characteristics and criteria and must always correspond with the aim of the research (Miovský, 2016). The research sample was made up of women and men aged 35–56, namely F-M city officials, field social workers providing social services in a socially excluded area, representatives of the majority population living on the border of a socially excluded locality and residents of a socially excluded locality. A total of 7 interviews were conducted (3 interviews with the SEL residents, 2 interviews with field social workers (FSW1, FSW2), 2 interviews with officials from the Security Risk and Crime Prevention Department (hereinafter "SRCPDO 1" and "SRCPDO 2"). The analysis also uses written materials, namely the minutes from evaluation meetings to assess the progress of the MSR project in the town of Frýdek – Místek, which was attended by community workers, officials and field social workers of the municipality authority as well as an elaborated paper for the Social Workbook: The Role of a Social Worker in Community Work, aka Community Work (not only) with the Support of the Region, in which community workers described and reflected the implementation of the project as seen by community workers.<sup>5</sup>

The data obtained was then openly coded, which meant careful reading of all data and code search. Stake (1995) considers analysis to be a matter of understanding and interpretation. Hendl (2005) considers the analysis of data in case studies to be relevant with the coding of the collected data being analysed. Following the coding, the so-called *categorical system* that, according to Hendl (2005), serves to reduce the data obtained and helps arrange the data material. The result was 7 main categories containing the codes.

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<sup>5</sup>MAIWAELDEROVÁ, Zuzana and ŽUROVCOVÁ, Hana. Community Work (not only) with the Support of the Region. Social Workbook: The Role of a Social Worker in Community Work. 2015, (2), pp. 28-33,

<b>Category</b>	<b>Codes</b>
<b>Expectations from community work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joining the community work (CWork) in the locality</li> <li>- First impression from CWork</li> <li>- First contact with community workers</li> <li>- Motivation of participants in CWork involvement</li> </ul>
<b>Community workers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Role of a community worker</li> <li>- CWorker approach</li> <li>- Status of CWorker in the community</li> <li>- Prerequisites of CWorker for community work</li> </ul>
<b>Community workers vs Field social workers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual vs. Community</li> <li>- Encounter of different approaches</li> <li>- The views of the residents on the diversity of approaches</li> </ul>
<b>The Process of community work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Selection of activities (selection of community work objectives)</li> <li>- Clients of community work</li> <li>- Social Work Process vs. Community Work Process</li> <li>- Existence of the Citizen Council</li> <li>- Time needed for the implementation of community work</li> </ul>
<b>Residents Council</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Functioning/Activities</li> <li>- Results</li> <li>- Foundation</li> <li>- Control mechanisms</li> <li>- Recommendations</li> </ul>
<b>A residents Council Member</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The issue of "Power"</li> <li>- Selection of members</li> <li>- Selection of membership candidates</li> <li>- Education of members</li> <li>- Variety of member composition</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Locality status/condition</li> <li>- Foundation of a football team</li> <li>- Leisure time activities</li> <li>- Involvement of the locals</li> <li>- Improving mutual relationships</li> <li>- Interconnection of the locals with the surroundings</li> <li>- Collaboration with city representatives</li> </ul>

Source: authors own, 2016

### **Interpretation of Key Categories**

Due to the nature and mostly the extent of the paper, interpretations of categories responding to partial research questions will be interpreted herein. In addition, we also provide



interpretation of the Residents Council and the Residents Member categories since the participants discussed and described their views of the status of the Residents Council as a self-organized group or a representative element of the given community, which is very closely related to the process of the community development model itself. Individual categories and codes are within the presentation of data illustrated by direct statements of communication partners. The categories are interpreted by a summary of all views (of all participants) on the given category.

### ***The Process of Community Work Based on the Needs of Residents***

The research participants characterized the process of implemented community work using several key aspects. The first aspect of the implemented method was the selection of activities and the direction of work exclusively by the residents themselves. *"Actually, they never told us what we were supposed to do, everything was based on what we had agreed to, so we cannot complain, we did what we wanted to do and what we ourselves wished to address."* (Citizen 3) A city official also noted the choice the activities of community workers made were primarily based on the needs of the population, *"they started working on what they felt like they needed to resolve; there was some attempt here before, such as that we offered them flower boxes to plant flowers...so now it's not about flowers that officials want, but for example about replacing the cubicles (note author's note: cellar cubicle)...it's about what these people want."* This fact was also reflected by the community workers themselves. *"We often 'only' bring in our view or missing information, to link their needs with the surrounding resources, but we never say what they need to or are not supposed to do."* (CWorker)

Another aspect of the process of community work that emerged in the interviews was the views of the choice (selection) of partners/residents with whom the community workers cooperated. *"You'd worked with the more active community members."* (FSW1) However, a field social worker also connected a risk with this fact: *"At the expense of active community members, others enjoy the benefits."* In connection with this, she made recommendations for community work in general. *"I think it's important to get to know people first."* (FSW1) The citizen no. 3 described the relationship of results with the residents' activity. *"I think it brings the most results and the greatest progress to those active members of community work; of course, it also and always has an impact on the others, and nobody can decide for them whether or not they want to get involved...it's up to them."* (Citizen 3) *"The most important thing for us is to give space to those who are active and gradually work to attract other supporters. The success or failure of community work, based on our experience, depends on personal and family ties in the locality, mutual relationships, conflicts, past experience, which play the most important role."* (CWorker) In the interpretation of the field social worker, the question was raised whether it is right or moral that the work of the more active members also benefits others. It represented a perspective of certain merit in contrast to the view of the resident who is active in the process of community work, and according to whom the achievement of benefits for the others is a natural part of the community work process.

The participants often compared principles and processes of community work with principles and processes of field social work. From the point of view of field social workers, the role of community workers was easier, and not so much bound by institutionalization and standards of social services compared to their own activities. They often compared the "clients" of social (field) work with the partners of community work. *"In social work, you most often work with those who need the biggest amount of help, meaning that this type of activity can take from you a lot and you have to give a lot of yourself into it, then there's a burn-out risk and so on, while here you work with the most capable ones from the community, with the community elite"* (SRCPDO 1). A local resident perceived the differences in both methods. *"The social worker tackles private personal problems...it's sort of a micro-region; the community work*

*tries to involve a lot of matters at once, the other stakeholders, such as the municipality and such.*" She attempted to draw borders between them: *"In the community work, not everything can be done...for example if there is some troubled family and you don't want to get them into trouble, so there is social work getting involved...I think that every municipality should also think about how to address these things at the community level...that's the way I see it according to our results."* (Citizen 3)

The Head of the Social Prevention Department reflected on the desirable outcomes of community work process in the context of the SELs. He stated: *"The current activities of community workers are, in our opinion, rather focused on the stay of the community members in the locality and improvement of the environment in which they live"* (VOSP), which he viewed as a negative aspect of the project's intention to contribute to social inclusion. During the interview, the researcher recorded the opinion of a city official on the duration of implementation of the community work in relation to the possibility of achieving the results. *"I think a year and a half is too little time to make people feel excited and enthusiastic, but what is there then...letting them fiddle around here, I'm a bit worried about it...it should have taken longer, at least twice as much. I see all the pitfalls in this."* (SRCPDO 2)

### **Community Workers**

The structure of the interview revealed that all the addressed participants expressed their views on the status and role of community workers. Since the concept of a community worker is unknown and abstract in the field of social work as well as for social workers, community workers have introduced the beginning of the entry and the position description. *"The concept of a community worker was completely unknown to them, and they could not imagine anything under the term. We tried to define our position by making clear that we were not officials, were not employed by the municipality and were not providing social counselling. On the other hand, we talked about how we could be useful to the community members"* (CWorker). A field social worker evaluated the approach of community workers, especially in terms of the nature of their work and behaviour: *"I think that over time you managed to find your way to them through your open attitude and loving behaviour"* (FSW 1). She also defined the role of community workers: *"You certainly didn't behave like officials...they perceived you as their partners and friends"* (FSW 1). Finally, she was also critical and recommended the procedures for the selection of community workers: *"Next time, I would, as you may know, want to have unbiased people there...no ties...it has a huge impact on the entire community."* What the field social worker meant by the absence of bias was to have neither private nor working ties with the locality, municipality authority and/or with other community work participants.

Resident no. 2 described the beginning of the cooperation as follows: *"We have made friends with them, they were nice."* The residents described the mutual relationship as being friendly and mutually beneficial. *"They were on the same boat with us...they were so much more accommodating and helpful. I see them as my friends...they are on the same level as I am"* (Citizen 1). *"They were partners for me who transformed into my friends or relatives."* *"I think the community workers' need was that you somehow manage, organize...and for me you were the main connecting element with the other side of the pitch"* (Citizen 3). The resident also expressed the relationship between residents and community workers in general: *"There's someone here who wants something (=residents) and someone who offers new opportunities (=community workers)."*

An official described the role of a CWorker with emphasis on sustainability, external community contacts and social pedagogy. *"They were co-ordinators...from what they did I felt like they were teaching people some new habits and skills, so that people would maintain them...and they did it on the basis of some experience or some method...so they were some*

*kind of teachers. There were also situations where you acted as intermediaries between the municipality and the community. They were like partners or friends...I definitely did not feel like they were some superior officials...you were already able to tell from listening to the kids calling them 'Aunt'." (SRCPDO 2)*

### **The Residents Council**

In line with the project timetable, the Residents Council was established in the local elections held in the locality at the end of May 2014. Its establishment was understood by community workers as a fundamental condition for the implementation of the community work process.

*"To be able to begin systematically working with people on the implementation of their wishes, we needed to bring together a group that would be willing to devote some time to it regularly. So we started preparing the elections for a citizen council whose members would represent the locality. However, at the time neither us nor people from the locality had a clear idea of how the council would function and what problems would be solving" (CWorker).*

Although the Council was planned out in the project, one of the residents perceived its establishment as an initiative and impulse of the residents themselves *"How you asked us what we could do to put it together...we suggested the council" (Citizen 2).*

The actual process of the functioning and existence of the Council has brought food for thought. A city official was surprised by the establishment of the Council and the election of its members – namely that the residents managed *"to elect the Council themselves and that it functioned as a proxy element."* He also spoke about the efforts of the residents to revoke the label of the socially excluded locality, namely: *"the change of their name such as the Válcovny plechu housing project that had the negative label of a socially excluded locality" (SRCPDO 1).* A field social worker talked about existence of the Council and the impact on its members. *"It actually boosted their self-esteem...they felt very important that someone was listening to them and that they had something to say."* He expressed his worries about the risks of community work. *"The problem is that community work has given power to some people in the Council and some are abusing it to settle their own matters, not for the benefit of the locality" (FSW 2).*

There are some ambivalent feelings in the statements of the F-M town officials associated not only with establishment of the Residents Council, but also with the council functioning or its achieved results. *"I was surprised by the establishment of the Council...that they can apply the elements of representative democracy in such a community...so I was surprised...it is interesting that those people feel that they can deal with what they want and for the whole community" (SRCPDO 2).* This statement confirms that town officials tend to perceive the SEL residents as passive and with no interest in resolving their own situation. City officials also expressed doubts about the legitimacy of the Council's establishment and its representativeness. *"I see the Residents Council as a negative aspect...more time should have been allocated for formation of the Council...I think you had little time within the project timeline" (FSW 1).* A field social worker tried to identify and explain his department's negative attitude towards the establishment and functioning of the Council: *"The Council itself is good, but there is a lack of control mechanisms, re-elections, additional election...not allowing the people to voice their express objections against the Council."* Another department official also expressed the risks of the Council's activities: *"It is clear that not everyone will agree with this, and will applaud the Council, but it exists so that they can learn how to do it" (SRCPDO 1).*

The residents were mentioning in interviews not only the establishment of the Council, which they perceived as a positive outcome of community work, but also specific activities, outcomes, which the Residents Council has reached, and the difficulties and condition in which the Council currently was: *"Our council was successfully established, new cellars shall*

*be constructed, we got cellar windows...now if only the washrooms came into being. It all happened because we kept going into meetings with the municipality and talked to them" (Citizen 2). "The Council succeeded in initiating a great deal of cooperation with the municipality...we were able to influence the city as well...that they now start coming here...the mayor has asked everyone to come to the round table to discuss things" (Citizen 1). One of the Residents Council members commented in an interview on a demanding character of the Council's activities: "To tell you the truth, I'm quite tired of it...it's hard, especially those negotiations in the offices... I'm tired of that" (Citizen 2). The citizen no. 3 spoke of the current activities of the Residents Council, and repeatedly emphasized the need for a community worker in the community. "We are able to communicate today or somehow come to agreement, but I still think that we are not at the level of any standard association or organization or that we wouldn't need a community worker" (Citizen 3).*

### **A residents Council Member**

Regarding the membership, and especially the specific members of the Resident Council, many responses and the necessity to mention the risks related to the empowerment of the residents of the exposed locality, were expressed by the officials and staff of the town of Frýdek – Místek. The Head of the Social Prevention Department had shown a very negative attitude towards the elected members. *"We perceive rather negatively the establishment of the Council of Válcovny plechu housing project. The actual concept of the SEL council is not bad, we only believe that the current choice of people is not in line with the needs of the socially excluded locality."* He tried to clarify this statement: *"The activities of the council divided the SEL into two camps. One camp is made up of members of the council, their supporters and, in large part, relatives of council members. The other camp is made up of other residents who do not respect the council and perceive it as a 'family' clan lobbying for their own interests; there are also some fears from members of the council."* He predominantly blamed the current members of the Council from the division – these people, in his opinion, *"are not competent for such an activity."* The field social worker also touched upon the issue of membership in the Council, commenting on it as follows: *"Certain people crowded the meeting...people we do know and you don't know...but we know what kind of people they are...that they were not interested in the benefit of the whole community"* (FSW 1). Her colleague subsequently tried to propose criteria for the selection of Council members. *"Every family should have its representative and they should take turns to make sure that each family has its own representative"* (FSW 2). Community workers in this context reflected how it was difficult for municipality staff to accept a change in the role of the residents (from passive recipients to participants) and an empowering approach (vs. the more traditionally used provider approach): *"We believe that some of them have a hard time accepting the active participation of the residents – non-professionals in activities which they have previously provided solely themselves. Our task, therefore, remains to win their support for the Council activities."* (CWorker)

The officials from the Security Risks and Crime Prevention Department expressed concerns about the sense of influence and power that residents could gain as a result of their membership in the Council. *"I'm a little bit afraid of this misunderstanding of the role of power, of those who get into power, which on the other hand I can see with politicians that they cannot cope with this...much less with these people...I fear that it will harm the whole community"* (SRCPDO 2). In this context, they mentioned the process of the schooling of the Council members, as well as the environment. *"They have to learn how to work with the power, both the council members and the others, such as the representatives of the town or the officials."* (SRCPDO 1)

One of the non-Roma members of the Council shared her joy at being elected. *"I was pleased with my election to the Council...well, I knew that I had authority among these people; I had the highest number of votes together with residents no. 2...although it was claimed that it's all only about the Roma community, we, the non-Roma, were also elected."* The interview revealed that not only the Roma wanted to be involved in the events and development in the locality but there were also non-Roma people who felt oppressed. *"I'm glad that the people from the majority also got involved."* (Citizen 3)

The heterogeneity of the Council's composition, which was supposed to ensure greater representativeness and legitimacy of the Council, was also a goal of the community workers. *"We consider it very important that the composition of the Council is varied, meaning that it includes women, men, Roma and representatives of the majority population, people of different education and age"* (CWorker). Throughout the whole activity of the Residents Council in the locality, the community workers have been of the opinion that: *"Members of the Council also grow personally, are more self-confident, more considerate about the whole community and about its future."* The community worker's statement confirms that choosing and setting up a local council contributes to the achievement of the goals of community work, especially the goals resulting from its internal strategy.

### ***The Outcomes of Community Work in the SEL after One Year***

As part of the implemented project and according to the participants of community work, several outcomes were achieved. The first part of the outcomes is associated with visible changes in the community related to the condition of the locality, and the activities implemented in the locality. Some participants in the interviews conducted regarding the outcomes of community work compared the situation in the locality before the start of the project. *"It was just such a closed and isolated locality...the municipality was trying to sell most of the flats...I don't think they wanted to make it nicer, but I think it's a pity to destroy it."* (Citizen 1) and based on the comparisons they identified specific changes. *"We improved the playground...we acquired benches and football nets... we also painted fences... we purchased some extra equipment. Before the place was nasty, unmaintained...now it looks normal"* (Citizen 2). *"That tidiness and order now...that things started to change...it is more neat...painting the playground even for the blind people, that's something really noticeable."* (Citizen 3)

The specific results or outcomes were also mentioned by employees of the municipality of Frýdek – Místek. *"We unambiguously agreed at this workplace that it was a visible and positive step in transformation of the locality...several visible activities were completed - the pitch was repaired, some benches were built, the rings started, the children were dancing, the boys started playing football"* (SRCPDO 2). The field social worker then emphasized an activity for the local boys and especially the impact of this activity. *"What was really great was the football...when I see the boys...how many kids are running across the field...how they give each other high fives, adhere to the rules...that's a great job. It's perfect preventative action, and I'm glad it lasted"* (FSW 2). The resident of the locality brought attention to the prevention and effective spending of leisure time: *"Thanks to establishment of the football team and accompanying trainings, the kids have no time for drugs."* She also warned of the risks and expressed her disagreement with, in her view, the low level of involvement of parents in the activity: *"Just because your parents do not want to get involved too much, that is stupid. Let the parents attend those trainings with their children to let them appreciate that they have everything for free."* (Citizen 1)

On the level of changes related to the so-called external strategy the community workers described the following achievements: *"we managed to achieve replacement of metal nets in football goals for non-sounding textile ones, installation of benches and litter bins in the*

*vicinity of the playground, the painting of three house entrances in the locality behind the railway tracks, and the installation of an information board at the playground. In addition, the installation of cellar windows in municipal houses, a binding promise to build cellar cubicles and the approval of a new playground development in the locality, opening in June 2016 was also achieved"* (CWorker). They also listed activities created for the locals, especially for children. *"The members of the Council lead the Roma dance ensemble entitled "Amare Čercheňa." Young guys from the locality established a football team that regularly practices and participates in the "Don Bosco League." A member of the Council started the activity "Česko čte dětem [Czech Republic Reads to Its Children]"* (CWorker)

Other outcomes that individual respondents mentioned were impacts that were not so obvious and immediately visible, and were related to the so-called internal strategy. These included, in particular, the transformation of relations with the municipality authority, mutual relations between the residents, personality growth of the community members and their activation. A town official outlined a more comprehensive assessment of the results associated with the so-called internal strategy: *"Old people, young people, children, officials, town workers...they all became involved...even people here, in the municipality, learned something new and gained a more positive relationship to the locality"* (SRCPDO 2). A field social worker then spoke mainly about the consequences of interconnecting the town's representatives with the residents. *"You were able to persuade people, who were never in that area, to visit, for example town representatives, or top leaders in this town who have the power to make decisions or change something...that was a big plus. People have noticed that someone was interested in them...and that they were no longer at the periphery and viewed as troublemakers...they were also asked to share their opinions"* (FSW 1). We had a similar opinion as a community worker when we openly indicated that *"a communication bridge between the town's leadership and the members of the locality has been created at a symbolic level"* (CWorker).

Residents described a transformation in relationships and reflected an increase in their own competencies. *"So people became more interested in what was going on...before they were just interested in what the money was spent on, from where the money was coming...it was just always the greed and indifference from others. More people can deal with those in the offices, they are a bit friendlier to each other...I think we have finally learned to communicate with each other"* (Citizen 1). *"Community work has also brought visible changes to other residents...for example, children have started behaving differently to each other. There's communication between both parties (a playground is a landmark) now...it all somehow brought people together"* (Citizen 3). The local resident then talked about improvement of her own relationships in the locality. *"For us as a family it means even more...we know the concrete people, concrete children...we understand the relationships and we have good relationships with people around."* She continued by also listing the improvements in relationships at the municipal level and she emphasized *"negotiations with the authorities and gaining contacts both at the official level and with the town's top leaders"* (Citizen 3).

### **Conclusion – A Summary of the Participants' Views of the Community Work**

The research has brought several themes to light that deserve more attention. One of them is the fact that community work clients are empowered during the process and gain new competencies, even while acknowledging that there are some risks associated with this process. One is the use of the achieved influence (power) to promote one's personal intentions. Another issue raised by the participants was related to the extent to which community work can contribute to mitigating social exclusion. Some representatives of the municipal authority have even viewed the encouragement of the relationship of community

members to SEL and its enhancement in terms of achieving social inclusion as insufficient, and, in their more extreme statements, as counterproductive.

Another theme discussed was the implementation time of community work. The duration of the project, that is, one and a half years, was considered insufficient by one of the participants. He was worried about the risk of frustration, raising enthusiasm without any sustainable results, and recommended a longer period of community worker actions in the locality of at least three years. He pointed out the possible unintended consequence of community work – the deepening of social exclusion, if community workers are not allowed to stay in the area for the sufficient time.

The community work participants were quite agreeable with each other in interpreting the results of community work that were related to our so-called external strategy. These results were related to real improvement of the condition of the locality, such as rebuilt and installed benches, maintenance and repair of an existing concrete playground and improvement of order and tidiness in the locality, but also initiation and development of leisure activities for children (a football team, a dance ensemble or participation in the “Czech Republic Reads to Its Children” event). Both locals and community workers were also adding results associated with the so-called internal strategy such as improving relations between residents, increasing competencies, creating a connection between the residents and the town representatives, and partial inter-connecting of the majority with the minority in the locality.

A highly discussed part and a variously interpreted implementation of community work was the establishment and functioning of the Residents Council. Municipality workers expressed worry about the abuse of power that people gained in connection with their membership in the Council. They also discussed the criteria of membership in the Council and about who is suitable for representing the community. They considered the Council's current functioning to be counterproductive; some of them saw the possibility of growth and learning in it. On the contrary, the variety in the Council's composition was appreciated, especially the involvement of the Roma and the non-Roma parts of the locality, not just in the functioning of the Residents Council.

The research was carried out in a relatively short period of time (from September 2015 to January 2016) and captured the implementation of community work at a certain stage. For a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the interpretations of the implementation of F-M community work, it would make sense to go back to individual participants and to ask, clarify and disseminate themes that I didn't manage to capture during individual interviews or the themes which couldn't be captured due to the particular stage of the project. By returning to the field, greater saturation of data and more detailed and comprehensive understanding would be ensured. In spite of this limitation, the research succeeded in identifying key and ambivalence-inducing themes that have been associated by the research participants with the community (community work) and the so-called empowering approach in the context of spatial social exclusion. The research output could also be the following recommendations for community work practice, which some of the participants explicitly stated in relation to the identified risks. The knowledge of the process of community work by community workers is crucial, however, it is obvious that all of the interviewed participants in particular appreciated their partnership and human approach. Residents have perceived community workers as part of the community, primarily because, in their opinion, the workers defended their interests. The greatest tension was due to differences in the locally applied approaches (a provider approach by field social workers and an empowering approach by community workers). This was manifested mainly in the theme of so-called abuse of power by the municipal workers, which was mainly connected with the election to the Residents Council. The interviewed residents tended to perceive their membership in the Council as a tool of enhancing their own self-esteem and an opportunity to learn how to deal with acquired competencies. This

situation can be interpreted as the low readiness of municipal workers to the consequences of activating and empowering methods of working with clients, which they can perceive as threatening and destructive for their routine role as a professional.

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