

## COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR THE DELIVERY OF SOCIAL SERVICES

### HANDOUT

Hungarian Association of Community Development

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*"Open to your communities - Impacts of developing community-based approach in the field of public services"*

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## Community-based solutions for the delivery of social services

Dear Reader!

You are reading a publication that is the fruit of three years of international cooperation, supported by the European Union, between three renowned Czech, Hungarian and Polish organisations.

The Centre for Mental Health Care Development (CMHCD) in the Czech Republic has launched a Recovery School<sup>1</sup>, supporting people recovering from mental illness and their families, and is actively involved in developing professional support for people with mental health problems.

The Hungarian [Association of Community Developers](#) (HACD) is a national non-profit organisation dealing with community development, community-based solutions to local problems, and the launch and development of community-based services. In partnership with the Satu Mare Sub-regional Centre for Basic Social Services, KÖFE has developed the know-how to transform day care for the elderly into a community-based service.

The Polish [Centrum Wspierania Aktywności Lokalnej](#) (CAL, Local Activity Support Centre Association) is a national organisation that has been developing a community-based methodology to support local communities for more than 20 years. In partnership with the Wolski Cultural Centre in Warsaw, they have developed a new approach to involve the community, especially vulnerable groups (e.g. migrants, refugees, mentally ill people and others) in the development of the activities and services of the cultural centre. The community space, named Wolska Mosaic, was created and is being developed for the local community, and in particular for vulnerable groups. These initiatives are based on the concept of inclusive culture and the idea of a community cultural centre.

Although the three partner organisations focus on different target groups and different groups of beneficiaries of public services<sup>2</sup>, the supporting activities are organised around common principles. These are: integrating people in difficult circumstances into the community and supporting community residents in accepting and understanding vulnerable people.

The opportunity to jointly adapt a methodology that is relevant and useful for all three organisations (*Recovery College*) was provided by the project "*Opening up to our communities - the impact of developing a community-based approach in public services*", funded by the European Union Erasmus+ project.

At the beginning of the work, it seemed quite challenging to reconcile the different target groups/participants and the different organisational types, but during the project process we found and discovered wonderful opportunities for mutual learning and support, and very promising examples of synergies.

Our experience has also shown that this transformation is not an easy process and that it can take a long time for a service to become community-based. During the transformation process, we faced a number of issues and practical challenges. Do people with mental illness have the same needs as refugees or the elderly? How useful is our help,

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<sup>1</sup> The project is based on a methodological basis of methodological and networking cooperation, of which CMHCD is a member. For further details see. [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> The meaning of "public service" varies from country to country. For the interpretation of the term by some teams, see the case studies on the processes implemented in the "*Open your communities*" project (published on the websites of the three organisations).

or how can it be even more useful? What realistic possibilities (financial, spatial...) do we have to help? What are the best practices for involving service users in co-creation? How can we motivate stakeholders (service users, community members, professionals) to actively participate in this transformation process?

These are just some of the questions we asked ourselves during the project. There were many more. In compiling the manual, we came to the conclusion that no one has an "instant cookbook" that can ultimately be applied to all institutions and all types of services.

We have therefore focused on core values. The things that bind the three organisations together, that we really care about, that we don't want to deviate from:

- For the service to be really useful, we need to create it together with future users: **co-creation**.
- Our aim is to make people (staff, volunteers and users) feel comfortable with the different dimensions of the service: **inclusive attitudes and practices**.
- We are in the same boat. **Sharing personal experiences is** a natural way to help.
- The declared aim is to bring public services **closer to** local community members.

The manuals developed by the three participating organisations were translated into the national languages (Czech, Hungarian, Polish) and English. They are available on the websites of CMHCD, HACD and CAL.

In the spirit of co-creation, the professional teams welcome any feedback, further questions or comments.

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## Introduction

The Erasmus+ national project "Open to your communities", aimed at transforming public services and making them more community-oriented, is implemented in cooperation with the Satu Mare Sub-regional Social Basic Services Centre. The aim of the project is to develop one of the basic social services for the elderly, the day care for the elderly (day club) of the Satu Mare Small Area Basic Service Centre, and to make its operation community-based. The time needed for the transformation process, which started in April 2022, is well beyond the timeframe of the project and is still ongoing.

Nevertheless, it is an important aspiration and the aim of this professional material to provide a model and a starting point for other professionals, institutions and maintainers interested in community-based operation to transform their services.

In addition to the present document, we also recommend to the readers the action plan (Molnár & Fodorné, 2023), which contains the background, the organisational framework, the planning process and the steps of the transformation, as well as the case study (Nagy et al., 2023), which presents the results, experiences and the methods used in more detail, and gives a comprehensive picture of the development work in Nagyecsed.

## I. Community, community development, community-based delivery of services

Community and all related concepts are in vogue and are often and willingly used in politics (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2022). Efficiency, community action, participation and capacity building are seen as key elements of community development. The meaning of community development as a concept is multifaceted and widely debated, and has appeared in professional discourse as: community engagement, critical pedagogy, community organising among others (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2022). In the UK, several practitioners have previously argued for the formulation 'critical community practice' (Butcher et al, 2007). In her synthesis, Ilona Vercseg also refers to the many variants of the term community development and the fact that in some countries the term community engagement is used instead of community development (Vercseg, 2020:18). The concept of community development is also internationally associated primarily with the non-profit, civil sector and less with governmental organisations and services, these self-organising small communities taking their destiny into their own hands and struggling to achieve democracy, local economic

initiatives and infrastructure development (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2022). In many cases, governments reduce the primary purpose of community development much narrower: combating poverty and working to solve visible social disadvantage, which can obviously be part of community development, but it should be noted that the concept itself has much broader potential (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2022).

One of the earliest definitions of community development, as formulated by the United Nations, that it is a process of creating opportunities for social and economic development and progress with the active participation of the whole community (UN, 1955:6). And the definition of community development, as set out in the Budapest Declaration during the Community Development Meeting in the year of Hungary's accession to the EU, defines the concept as 'community development develops people's capacity to be active members of society through community groups, organisations and networks, and prepares institutions and public, private and non-governmental organisations to engage in dialogue with the population in jointly defining and implementing changes that affect them' (Craig et al., 2004).

Compared to these two definitions, the International Association of Community Developers (IACD) has significantly broadened the meaning of the term. According to the IACD, community development is a practice-oriented profession and academic field that promotes participatory democracy, the right to sustainable development, equality, economic opportunity and social justice through a variety of organisations, education and empowerment of people, whether in local, urban or rural communities (IACD, 2016). The concept has a consensual basis, but this is coupled with differences arising from different practices, and therefore it is in fact a definition and meaning that is constantly evolving in space and time (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2022).

In the professional discourse of community development, the literature first talked about community services, then about community-based services, and then about community-based operation and management (Farkas et al., 2023:3).<sup>3</sup>

The history of community development in Hungary goes back to a longer period, but its actual and contemporary emergence can be directly linked to the expanding practice of public education in

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of community-based operation is clarified later in the document (p. 7)

the 1970s (Vercseg, 2018), "such predecessors were the public education initiatives that appeared in universities/colleges at that time" (Péterfi, 2014:14).

- **The first quarter of the 1900s:** just as the so-called settlements appeared in several places at the end of the 19th century (e.g. Toynbee Hall in London or the Hull House Neighbourhood in Chicago), a settlement movement similar to the European/North American model also made its way in Hungary after the shock of World War I. "Settlement houses are also known in Hungarian as people's houses, settlements, social centres, and are essentially community centres "settled" in poor neighbourhoods, which organise their educational, cultural, recreational, sporting, health and social activities according to the needs of the poor living there" (Vercseg, 2018:11). Rezső Hilscher, who has many links with the Hungarian movement and the so-called 'college colony' that represented it, also linked the spread of the settlement movement to the emergence and spread of the idea of the so-called social idealism that compensated for the often unjust distributions of liberal ideas and market-driven processes. The motto of social idealism is that 'the ills of society can and must be helped' (Hilscher, 1989). These initiatives were interrupted at the outbreak of World War II and for a long time were unable to flourish again under the long decades of state socialism (especially in the first half of it).
- Modern community development in the Western sense grew out of the public education in the **1970s** (Vercseg 2018:57-63). Several ideas emerged from this period: youth club movements, "open house" programmes, community house programmes (Makovecz I., Beke P., Varga A.T.) (Beke, 2016:83), the establishment of the Association of Community Developers in 1989, the introduction of community development as a subject in university education and its important role in social education within the framework of community social work, the establishment of the Civil Radio in 1993, etc. Even though the all-time powers are rarely incorporate or use the knowledge of the field, innovative practices and models have been developed decentrally, with a few prominent players, which, taken together, could form the basis of a comprehensive programme.

Community development is local, but it is also possible to run organisations or institutions along the same lines. Community-based operation and management is also a feasible process for some services. The practice is still in its infancy in the country, but some pilot application initiatives for

community-based operation of specific types of services have already been implemented. One of these was the 'Active Communities - Active Community Involvement' EFOP-1.3.1-15-2016-00001", which aimed at increasing social activity, strengthening community engagement, supporting the relationship between municipalities and community institutions and the municipal population (in the example mentioned, changes were specifically initiated in relation to the public services of cultural institutions) (Communities in Action, 2019). According to the description of the publication related to the project "Communities in Action", the meaning of community service is: "Community service is any service related to community functions that serves community purposes, contributes to community development, strengthening social networks, enhancing the quality of leisure time" (Arapovics & Vercseg, 2017). The institutions involved in the project showed an upward trend in attendance and number of volunteers (Polonyi, 2019). The project also examined the attitudes of the population. Two data collections were carried out in 2018 and 2019. No significant change in the attitudes of the local population was observed between the two surveys, although this is probably due to the short time interval between the two dates, as the actual activation of the population and the community-based provision of services could not be achieved in such a short time (Hegóczki & Bacher, 2019).

Another innovative example was the CoSIE project<sup>4</sup>, a programme for the transformation of public services involving 10 European countries. Each of the partner countries involved in the programme tried to transform and modernise its public services, taking into account local needs, using the co-creation<sup>5</sup> method. There was also the opportunity to create new types of public services that did not yet exist, but which met real needs. The Hungarian experiment aimed at developing a new public service model to support the development of the local economy in disadvantaged small villages (Csoba & Sipos (eds.), 2021).

Making services community-based can be an innovative way of change and development for social services for all target groups, as these public services usually have to cope effectively with increasing demands and usually resource constraints, so the involvement of community resources can

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<sup>4</sup> Co-Creation of Public Service Innovation in Europe ([www.cosie-projekt.eu](http://www.cosie-projekt.eu))

<sup>5</sup> One accurate description of the concept of co-creation in the perspective of community development is that it covers "the co-creation of how the organisers, implementers and users of a service work together to initiate, plan, organise, implement and evaluate the outcomes of a service" (SCIE, 2015)

contribute to their success. In our view, there is a basic model that serves the transformation of public services well, but it needs to be 'fine-tuned' to suit the groups of users (e.g. services for disabled or elderly people, basic services or residential services). The sequence of transformation steps needs to be considered from the perspective of the target groups and the host community, as there is no one-size-fits-all approach, and the groups involved and local characteristics can have a major impact on a successful transformation process. Depending on the target group, there may be significant differences in the way the service users and the host community are prepared and work with them.

Regardless of the service users, it is worth looking at the characteristics of community-based social services and traditional (non-community-based) social services (Table 1).



Table 1 *Expected benefits of community-based social services compared to non-community-based services (Fodorné & Molnár, 2023b)*

<b>Impact of development on the institution</b>	
<i>Institution operating on a traditional basis</i>	<i>Community-based institution</i>
It does not involve local and community resources	Ability to mobilise local and community resources
The partnership within the institution functions with the usual form and intensity	Strengthening a real partnership within the institution
The service is delivered in the usual way and at the usual pace, with little focus on the personal needs	Service efficiency increases, responds to real needs/demands
The public does not have an insight into the functioning of the institution, but participates as an outsider	The public gets to know the service, the work that goes on there
<b>Impact of development on users</b>	
Acceptance of service users remains unchanged among the population	Increasing acceptance of users among the population
Service users are members of an institution more isolated from the community, so their supportive background in this respect remains unchanged	Strengthening the supportive and relational background of service users
People living in the care area do not experience co-creation, so they do not participate in joint development	People living in the service area feel that their quality of life is improved, that the community is doing something for them, that they are participating in development (co-creation)
<b>Impact of development on the municipality</b>	
	Strengthening social solidarity

The local community is not involved in the process of co-creation, so it cannot live off its own resources in this respect	The local community becomes aware of its own resources, joint action, a real process of co-creation
Institutional relations in the municipality will continue to function as usual	Strengthening the links between institutions in the municipality

The Association of Community Developers (HACD, in Hungarian: KÖFE) has already addressed the possibilities for community-based development of public services through its previous projects. Between 2010 and 2014, the TÁMOP 5.1.3 project "Community opportunities in the fight against extreme poverty - Self-organisation and inter-professional cooperation" (KÖFE, 2014). Subsequently, the projects "Community services - community management in small towns", 2014-2016, included the community-based provision of services by different service providers (Fodorné et al., 2023). The project "Serving communities in small settlements", 2018-2020, examined how to make public services accessible to all, and produced a policy recommendation and a manual. In the latter project, the concept of community-based service was formulated, which can be summarised as follows: 'A community-based service is a way of meeting needs and wants that is embedded in the local community, i.e. it is local; it builds on personal or local community needs and resources; it works in partnership with local people on an equal footing; it mobilises internal resources; it works in partnership with other services and with other actors in the local community' (Gyenes, 2020). In the current project, this definition was used as a basis for the joint work of the professionals, which naturally involved members of the local community, different organisations, the users of day care for elderly people (i.e. the older people themselves) and professionals working in the care sector.

## II. The process of social service communitisation

In this chapter, the main steps towards community-based service delivery are presented, based on the results of the national development projects and initiatives referred to earlier, as well as on the experience of the ongoing transformation of the day care services for the elderly in Nagyecséd. Our aim is to provide guidance to professionals on the possibilities of introducing a community-based mode of operation within the operational framework of a social institution, the possible tools and methods of implementation, and the difficulties/challenges that may arise during the process.

For a fuller understanding and interpretation of the development process, we present some important features of the town involved in the current pilot programme and of the institution itself. This will help to put the transformation process in Nagyecséd into context.

*Nagyecséd is located in one of the most underdeveloped parts of Hungary, in the Northern Great Plain region, with a population of 6227 on 1 January 2023.<sup>6</sup> The settlement is characterised by a declining population, with emigration leaving ageing parents without a natural support system. The Satu Mare Sub-regional Centre for Basic Social Services, run by the local municipality association, provides compulsory basic social services (social catering, home care, alarm system based home assistance, day care for the elderly) and family and child welfare services in the municipality. In addition to the municipal services, three church services (Greek Catholic, Reformed, Baptist) also provide home care in the municipality. The "Jót s Jól" association in Géberjén also provides day care and support services for people with disabilities and psychiatric patients living in Nagyecséd. The municipality has a kindergarten, a primary school and a secondary school. The Municipal House of Culture and Library provides opportunities for education, entertainment and sport. Nagyecséd has a good basic health care (adult family doctor, dentist, and a public health service). There is no local public transport in the municipality, interurban services are infrequent and only run on the main street. The long distances within the municipality prevent older people from managing their affairs independently, using services and meeting their cultural and community needs. Day care for the elderly is available from 8:00 to 16:30 from Monday to Thursday and*

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<sup>6</sup> Source : <https://nyilvantarto.hu/hu/statisztikak?stat=kozerdeku>

from 8:00 to 14:00 on Fridays. The service is free of charge. The club has 41 members, with an occupancy rate of 35% last year, it is 60% less than in 2019. 56% of those eligible for the service are over 70 years of age, 6 of whom are over 80 years of age (Nagy et al., 2023).

**1. Figure 3 - Steps to implementing a community-based operation - a flowchart or other visual representation of the steps described below**

**1. Step 1: Setting the intention**

The development of a community-based service can take several forms: it can be initiated by the local community or a group of local people, or it can be the result of an external initiative, such as a public initiative or a request from the maintenance of a service, or a decision by the social institution/service provider.

*The transformation of the service in Nagyecsed was initiated by the head of the institution. By developing community-based services, the institution aims to improve the efficiency of day care for the elderly. The overall objective of the development is to ensure long-term sustainable access to higher quality social services for the city's population, by strengthening social responsibility and solidarity: "Making older people a value in Nagyecsed".*

**How will the service change as a result of the community transformation?**

- By consulting and actively involving service users and community members in decisions about services, the institution is more likely to be able to provide services that are well adapted to the real needs and changing demands of local people and communities.
- Increased community initiative and participation of staff and service users.
- The institution/service becomes better known in the community, and its network of contacts expands.
- This way of working allows for a more efficient use of existing resources and the mobilisation of additional resources.

- Feedback from participants in the process will allow for further innovation in the professional content of the service.
- The ability of the service to adapt to changes and changing conditions is improved.
- The community initiative strengthens community solidarity through shared experiences, events, activities, donations and contributions.

What conditions are needed to start the transformation process?

- The institution/service provider supports or at least accepts the process.
- Most staff are open, understand the purpose of the process and are motivated to change.
- They know and/or use community work methods in their daily work. In their absence, the involvement of a community development practitioner is necessary or strongly recommended to start the process.
- There are residents and/or local organisations in the municipality who are open, receptive and mobilisable in public affairs.

The approval and support of the service provider is essential for the introduction of a community-based mode of operation. In terms of its role, it cannot be ignored that it is the responsibility of the provider and/or the institution to establish the framework and conditions for operation, and it is also their responsibility to ensure that the service operates as required by law and relevant professional regulations. The level of active involvement of the institution/service provider in the transformation process may vary. Nevertheless, *"it is important to find a key person among the decision-makers who can help the process by being committed to the cause."* (Molnár & Fodorné, 2023)

In the case of an integrated organisation, i.e. one that includes several services or types of care, we consider it advisable to start with the transformation of one selected service and to continue with the others in a staggered way.

The following points are worth considering before making a decision:

- How much scope is there for new types of activity, involvement and innovation in the operation of the service? Are there activities within the mandatory tasks that can be organised in a community way with the active participation of community members?

- Do the staff in the service have sufficient time and capacity for new and additional activities related to the transformation?
- Are the financial resources for the transformation process available?  
Costs may include, for example, the fees for the employment of development experts (community development, organisational development), study visits, exchange visits, training courses and events.

## **2. Step 2: Designing the service transformation process**

### 2.1. The "core of actors" and its widening circle

In the initial phase of the process, the central core of the process is formed, the "circle of actors" in community development terminology, whose members initiate, launch, communicate, monitor, plan the process and organise the next steps. Initially, the planning group may consist of a representative of the provider, the head of the institution/service, external experts involved in the process, and then it is gradually expanded to include staff, service users, representatives of the local population, key people who can later become the driving force behind the process. A community development specialist / development practitioner is necessary to get started, but the community mindset needs to become internal, it is important that the community takes the lead later on (Vercseg, 2020:19). An advisory board can be formed from groups of stakeholder representatives to assist, support, monitor and evaluate the process. In the spirit of the co-creation approach, the participants will jointly define the principles and values that they and all the individuals and organisations involved will be committed to upholding in the course of the joint work.

### 2.2. Planning the communication of the transformation process

The initial period is also responsible for planning the internal (towards staff, service users) and external (towards the maintainer, municipal organisations, institutions, population) communication of the transformation process, i.e. who, whom, when, through what means, how to communicate about the initiative, the process, the events taking place, the results achieved and the possibility to get involved, and through what channels and in what way feedback, questions and suggestions can be sent. Planning is aided by a preliminary assessment of the need to change current communication

practices. What are the most appropriate means and channels to reach a wider public (e.g.: institution/service provider's website, newsletter, FB page, local/community FB groups, local newspapers, local media, information events, institutional open days, etc.)? It is important not to think only in terms of one-way information, but to develop appropriate multi-directional channels and institutionalise them in the community, i.e. to regularly and in an organised way feed information related to the transformation process into local public channels and to start a back-and-forth dialogue. It is through these channels that the process becomes a topic of public discourse, and that people in the municipality become aware of the process in which the institution invites them to participate and expects them to do so.

### 2.3. Identifying the actors and possible roles in the transformation process

In order to transform the service, we invite stakeholders to think, plan and learn together, resulting in joint actions, activities and developments. Community-based service development is a multi-stakeholder activity, involving not only the staff and users of the service, but also the population of the municipality, institutions providing public services in the municipality, church and civil organisations, and self-organising groups. At the beginning of the process, it is worth considering who are the stakeholders involved in the service, who have or could have an impact on the transformation process or could become active participants in it, and what their interests, objectives and expectations might be in relation to their participation.

Table 2: *Potential actors identified in the transformation process in Nagyecsed, their roles and methods of involvement (Source: Adapted from the Institutional Transformation Action Plan)*

Cast	Roles	Inclusion methods
Institutional service users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They can contribute to community-based operations by offering their personal resources and mobilising their ideas</li> <li>- Their expertise can help to develop services more effectively; improve institutional communication</li> </ul>	Community interview Community discussion Community design, co-creation

Professionals/institutional staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Professional competence development, knowledge, experience</li> <li>- Strengthening the coordinating role within the institution: bringing new experiences and success stories to service users through joint actions</li> <li>- Liaising with local partners, expanding contacts</li> <li>- Documenting activities, informing partners, maintainers</li> <li>- Providing public forums between groups and institutions</li> </ul>	<p>Community discussion</p> <p>Community design</p> <p>Professional workshops</p>
Residents (family, friends, acquaintances)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthening institutional communication, service mediation</li> <li>- Offering their personal resources</li> </ul>	<p>Open days</p> <p>Community conversations</p> <p>Community design</p>
Reserved by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensuring the conditions for the conversion</li> </ul>	<p>Continuous information on the process</p> <p>Community design</p>
NGOs, Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Active involvement in Community affairs</li> <li>- Partner cooperation in the organisation and implementation of joint programmes and fundraising</li> </ul>	<p>Professional workshop</p> <p>Joint planning</p>
Churches and NGOs providing similar services in the municipality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knowledge and experience sharing (professional experience, information on target groups, suggestions)</li> </ul>	<p>Continuous communication on the evolution of the process</p>
All other municipal, civil and religious institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organising joint programmes</li> <li>- Mediation and communication of services</li> </ul>	<p>Professional workshop</p>

## 2.4 Preparation of the Service Transformation Action Plan



In the Service Transformation Action Plan, stakeholders plan the transformation/community planning process<sup>7</sup>, i.e. how to address and involve the actors identified above, with what purpose, how and in what timeframe. The document should also set out the predefined objectives, the planned steps, the related tasks and the actors and persons involved in their implementation. The action plan should be continuously amended and updated in the light of the results of joint reflection and planning with local residents and organisations.

*The first step in the transformation process in Nagyecsed was the selection of the participants in the community work. Three groups were identified: professionals working in the institution, day care users and representatives of the population (key people identified by the institution's staff). Due to time constraints, the work was carried out simultaneously, with all three groups meeting monthly. The workshops provided participants with an opportunity to learn about the basics of community functioning, and also gave them the opportunity to explore the situation, analyse it and set objectives. An important insight for us was that we involved the population in joint planning earlier than would have been ideal. It is only when staff and the older people who use the service are able to articulate more clearly what they want to achieve through the transformation of the service that the local community will really understand how they can contribute to the community-based operation. Another important lesson we have learned is that it is more effective to first introduce professionals to the basics of community-based working, to motivate them to change, to then work with service users and only then to reach out to the local population.*

### **3. Step 2: Preparing staff and service users for the transformation process and for community action**

#### 3.1 Service user and staff engagement

The main stakeholders of a social service are the professionals working in the service and the service users; without their commitment and active involvement, community-based operation is unthinkable, where the service provider takes the initiative by reaching out to local residents,

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<sup>7</sup> "Community planning is when stakeholders are effectively involved in the planning process from a very early stage." (Arapovics-Vercseg, 2017.) This can be achieved through a process of stakeholder identification and activation, planning preparation, situation mapping, resource assessment, shared vision and strategy creation.

institutions and organisations. Addressing, activating and involving the local community requires professional knowledge that can (and must) be acquired. This is an important role for the community development practitioner.

It is important that during the preparation of the participants:

- understand the purpose and need of the transformation process;
- learn about and understand the principles of community and participation, the basic concepts of community functioning and how this is changing the day-to-day operation of the service;
- understand their own role in the process of "co-creation";
- together, they identify the values of the service (*Why is the service good for them and what values does it represent?*), the areas where they would like to see change (*What should change?*), the strengths and opportunities (*What are the untapped potentials of the service?*), and their own internal resources (*How can they contribute to change and innovation in the service?*).

*(In the case study on the work in Nagyecsed, we described in detail the process and content of the planning with staff and older people, the tools and methods used, and the experiences of the development professionals.)*

### 3.2 Involvement and training of staff

The openness of staff in the service is crucial to the success of the transformation process. To ensure their buy-in and commitment, it is important to communicate clearly, simply and understandably about the transformation from the outset, so that they understand exactly what the goal is, what their involvement will contribute and what opportunities and responsibilities it will bring.

The main motivations and objectives for staff participation can be:

- They acquire new knowledge and professional competences through shared (end-to-end) learning.

- With their knowledge, experience - their personal resources - they can contribute to the better functioning of the service.
- With their suggestions, ideas and initiatives, they have a greater say and impact in the day-to-day running of the service and in decisions affecting its operation.
- Through joint activities and actions, a sense of belonging to the community and group cohesion is strengthened.
- The efficiency of the service is increased, and the co-creation methodology allows for a more flexible response to needs.

Community-based service organisation requires a different attitude and approach from service staff. Social services are typically dominated by individual case work and case management, so participants need to be prepared to integrate a community approach and the tools and methods of community work into their everyday operations. This means, on the one hand, tasks related to the process of transformation and to the previously identified actors of community action (the narrower and broader groups of the local population, institutions and other organisations operating in the municipality), to address, sensitise, involve and activate them, and to identify and mobilise individual and community resources. On the other hand, staff also have an important role to play in empowering service users to become active participants, giving them the space to implement their ideas and initiatives. The existence and development of equal partnerships between participants is essentially a matter of attitude, but joint planning and preparation, as well as actions, i.e. shared experiences and learning, are in themselves an attitude-shaping factor. The professionals of the service provider are (or can be) also the inhabitants of the municipality, so what and how they communicate about the service, its activities and the planned transformation in their daily contacts and interactions as representatives of the institution, has an impact on the attitude of the local community towards the service provider and the service users.

### 3.3 Involvement and training of service users

In community-based operation, service users are actively involved in the implementation of the service's activities, and are therefore not only users but also shapers of the service's activities and operation. Social service providers provide their services to people of different ages and in different situations, and this can be a determinant of the extent to which and the ways in which users can become participants in the transformation process. It is the task of the service provider to ensure

that the opinions, ideas and proposals of the users are articulated and given space in the process, and that they are involved as widely as possible, according to their skills, abilities and individual circumstances.

From the point of view of the process, it can be helpful if the beneficiaries select key people among themselves who can inspire others with their activity and commitment, and represent them in cases where it is not possible to involve all the stakeholders, for example on a study trip.

#### **4. Step 3: Engaging the community - exploration and planning**

All stakeholders have an important role to play in community exploration and planning: they can contribute with their own resources (e.g. expertise, network of contacts, experiential knowledge from different life situations) to the collective reflection, to the identification of values and resources that can form the basis for service development planning.

##### 4.1 Reaching out to local residents

Since the whole population cannot participate in the transformation process, it is important to reach as many people as possible during the exploration and planning phase (Gyenes, 2020). In addition to providing information, the aim of reaching out to the population is to get their opinions, ideas and suggestions on the operation of the service, to identify their resources, and to encourage their participation, involvement, events and programmes.

What can motivate local people to get involved in the community?

- They are consulted and their opinions, suggestions and ideas are taken into account, i.e. they can have an impact on the functioning of the institution and services, and indirectly on the affairs of the local community.
- A sense of usefulness by contributing their personal resources to the functioning of the service or institution.
- Their social network is strengthened and expanded.
- Through joint activities, they can acquire new knowledge, skills and competences.
- New relationships and joint work develop community and strengthen solidarity.

The choice of activation methods can be determined by the skills of the people involved, but also by other existing opportunities and available resources. There are a number of well-developed methods for reaching and involving the population, which can be adapted to the development objectives of a functioning social service during the transformation process. Their objectives and essential elements are briefly summarised below.

- Conducting a community/population interview

Face-to-face conversations are the most effective way to reach people, build relationships and trust, and activate them to get involved in community and service issues. Individuals and groups of people who are key to the operation and running of the service (e.g. the target group of the service, potential service users, relatives, etc.), as well as some key representatives and opinion leaders of the local community, can be invited for a face-to-face interview or discussion. The interview basically asks about the general local well-being, the relationship between the individual and the community, community development ideas, capacities for action, resources that can be channelled into the transformation process. However, the interview can also be tailored to the service and its more specific objectives for transformation. This can also provide important information on local awareness and perceptions of the institution, satisfaction with the services provided, service gaps and needs (For more details on the method, see Vercseg, 2004).

*In order to involve and activate local residents, the staff and users of the Nagyecsed elderly day care centre paired up their interviewers to contact elderly residents over 65 living in the municipality to improve the utilisation of the facility. Together, they considered beforehand who the elderly people were who could be potential users of the service. The interviews identified the needs of older people outside the institutional service, which will help to improve the effectiveness of the service. The interviews will also provide the elderly residents of the city with an insight into the services provided by the institution. The interviews were based on the following questions. What is it like to be an elderly person in Nagyecsed? What should be changed? How? What is it like to live in old age? What would it take for her to come here? Can you recommend someone to visit?*

- Organising community discussion(s)

Community conversations are an opportunity to involve a wider range of people not directly affected by the service. At the discussion, the initiators can explain the purpose of the transformation process, report on the experiences of internal workshops and public interviews, and outline the

problems and opportunities that emerge. The discussion will provide an opportunity to hear participants' views and suggestions on the functioning of the service and the situation of the target group, and to commit to further cooperation and propose the involvement of additional participants. As a result of these discussions, issues and courses of action, alternatives are outlined around which joint activities and actions are organised (For more details on the method, see Vercseg, 2004).

#### 4.2 Addressing and involving local institutions and service providers

Addressing and involving professionals from local service providers and institutions serves to prepare the ground for the development of inter-professional and inter-institutional cooperation. "Coordination and cooperation between the institutions, service providers, professions/professionals involved in the settlement community, and entrusted with tasks and responsibilities, is also of great importance from the point of view that their individual, well-defined target groups together, in a broader sense, make up the local population as a whole." (Molnár et al., 2014: 51)

Building partnerships with local institutions and organisations can bring multiple benefits to the actors involved. They can learn from each other's perspectives, approaches, values and professional experience. They can identify opportunities for cooperation, pool their resources to achieve common goals, and make proposals for involving and reaching out to new actors. It is worthwhile to meet professionals in person, to get to know their activities before inviting them to joint workshops for local service providers and institutions. At these events, we can explore what each can offer to the other and how we can contribute to the activities of other services and institutions. (For more information on the tools and methods to support the development of inter-institutional and inter-sectoral cooperation, see Arapovics-Vercseg, 2017.)

#### **Step 5: Running and maintaining the community-based service**

One of the most important outcomes of community planning is the process itself, where cooperation and trust are established. Through community discussions and professional workshops, the implementation of jointly defined objectives and activities gradually leads to community-based operations. The maintenance of partnerships and the involvement of other partners in their implementation is an ongoing activity. A system of cooperation, communication between partners and division of labour is being established and institutionalised, i.e. integrated into everyday practice. Guarantees for maintaining the community mode of operation need to be built into the operation;

one possible way of doing this is to have a properly equipped advisory body to take over the provision of the community process, thus making the process self-operating. *"The advisory board should include all the actors involved in the process. This group has a community development base, a perspective, a deeper insight into the process. It is important to prepare the group so that they can provide information and knowledge to help the transformation process, and the advisory board can also play a role in maintaining community functioning"* (Molnár & Fodorné, 2023).

The current tasks of the 8-12 member board may vary depending on where the institution/service provider is in the transformation process. For example, it may promote the process of community engagement, identify resources, involve additional partners, make recommendations for revising the professional concept and programme of the service, evaluate the implementation of community-based functioning, etc.

### **Difficulties and challenges encountered during the transformation process**

Difficulties may arise during the conversion process. It is not always easy to make participants understand that such a transformation will not solve pressing service gaps and problems in the town, at least not in the short term, as the development is not fundamentally focused on gaps but on building on existing individual and community resources. Community-based operations have other types of benefits and advantages for the actors involved (see above).

The transformation process triggers an organisational change, so it is necessary to be prepared to manage the change processes (e.g. by learning about available methods and/or by involving an organisational development specialist). Changes in daily routines and operational practices, changing roles may trigger resistance from both institutional staff and service users. As regards professionals, it is important to emphasise that the transformation does not qualify or question their work (their professional identity), but it is an opportunity to develop a new approach to service planning and organisation. Resistance may also arise because they do not understand why the process is happening, so it is important to discuss and interpret the process with them again and again. The transformation process means additional tasks for the staff involved in it, and active involvement of service users, so it is advisable to "create forms of public recognition of community activity" (Molnár & Fodorné, 2023).

Getting the public involved - especially in communities with little organisation - is not necessarily an easy task. There may be reasons for passivity, such as not reaching out in the right way and through the right channels, a lack of community involvement, distrust of local institutions, etc. Residents who participate in community conversations and feel that their views are wanted, that they can shape the process, will over time become engaged in the service. This is why it is important not only to ask them for information, but also to have regular feedback and to create channels for local publicity. (For more details on suggestions on how to address resident passivity based on experiences of socialising cultural institutions, see Arapovics-Vercseg, 2017.)

### **III. Findings from focus group and expert interviews during the transformation process**

During the period of transition to community-based care in the day care of elderly people in the Satu Mare Regional Social Basic Service Centre, focus group interviews were conducted with the elderly people involved in the care and the professionals working directly with them in the service. The aim of the data collection was to examine the positive and negative experiences and outcomes of the transition to community-based provision, both for the older people using the services and for the staff. The aim was to find out what processes are helping or hindering the process of transition, what is expected from the transition while it is still in the implementation phase? What does community-based operation in day care for the elderly mean, how can they formulate it, what makes the service community-based? We also looked at how the involvement of service users and professionals in the design and implementation of the transformation (co-creation) worked as an important determinant of community-based functioning. It was important to explore what positive or negative expectations they had in the start-up phase. Are they had already experienced any changes in the functioning of the day care for older people in the transformation phase that were clearly related to the transformation? The focus groups were followed by a one-on-one structured professional discussion with the project's community development specialist and the project's professional manager on the project's start-up, the meaning of community-based operation in this social service and the results achieved so far.

The focus group interviews took place in the summer of 2023 at the institution in Nagyecsed, while the technical discussions were conducted online. Due to their high participation (27 people in total),



two focus group interviews were organised for the elderly service users, including all of them present in the service on the day of recruitment. For staff (4 people), the focus group interview were conducted in one session. 2 people from the project management and implementation side participated in the technical interviews.

The focus group was chosen as a qualitative method because in the current transformation process, the older people concerned are a collective group, which can be considered a well-defined and relatively small group in terms of numbers. Focus group interviews provide an opportunity for participants to share their experiences in a group setting on the questions and issues raised, creating a sense of familiarity and similarity, which can lead to a dense discourse and more emotionally saturated opinions (Oblath, 2005). These denser discourses and lively discussions have been achieved, mainly in the discussions organised for the service users. Due to time constraints, the data from the focus groups and professional discussions were processed using a thematic processing method; after listening to the recorded audio material, a summary thematic matrix was created from the transcripts of the responses and reactions to the selected themes, which included the answers and reactions to the questions asked. The method was used to target the topics that were important for data collection and to make it possible to examine them in a short time.

## Results

### **1. The realities of community-based operation, the factors facilitating and hindering transformation**

The service users in both focus groups looked forward to the process of transformation, but the essence and meaning of community-based operation was, according to the interviews, difficult for them to grasp. What they understood by the transition to community-based operation in their institution was difficult to articulate. More often, they reported a sense of expectation or very general things: *'We are just waiting to see how this will end'* (focus group with service users). Concrete practical examples of this were few and far between; after the question was asked came a long silence, the main benefits mentioned were more diversified opportunities and programmes, and improvements in the situation of staff (e.g. more resources, financial resources). The difficulties and gaps that are present in many other institutions at the national level as a result of the communitisation were mentioned, e.g.: easier access to care and return home (provision of transport

services), the possibility for people who need home care to use day care, the development and provision of specialised care services, especially in homes for the elderly (nursing homes for elderly people), in the municipality (currently there is no such possibility locally). According to their feedbacks the initial expectations gradually began to transform, and the actual meaning of becoming a community was getting clearer: *"It was so interesting because at the beginning everyone thought that there would be a project like this and then the money would come now, but it would be good that there would be money for this and that. And when we realised that it's not about that, it's about moving at a community level, so that we can express our opinions here, so I'm not waiting for you to offer me a coffee, but I'm going to go and make it myself, or what kind of programmes can be made that are community-based and we've had a lot of these events in a year that have been the result of that"* (service users' focus group). The fact that older people who use the service have become more proactive, more willing to share their views and more open to collective thinking was confirmed by professionals.

The professionals involved in the process, like the service users, initially found it difficult to articulate what community-based operation meant, especially for their institution: *'It's still a complete blur to me'*. But they also said that the picture was gradually coming together in a mosaic as they moved along the implementation path, and even gave facts to why the transformation was taking place at a very good time. *I think Aranka came at the right time because we had to rebuild (after COVID) and we were able to open up a bit with a change of approach"* (service users' focus group). In relation to the factors that help and hinder the transformation, professionals felt that the municipal embeddedness of professionals working with older people was an important determinant. A concrete example of this was given: there was a colleague who had not lived in Nagyecsed for more than a decade, and her work to engage potential service users, i.e. a part of the municipal population, was significantly more difficult than that those colleagues who were long-time residents. How long and in what form and role the professional carrying out the transformation has been present in the municipality has a strong influence on the acceptance, inclusion and interest of the service users, the community of the municipality. *"What I have found most is that we have now gone out to interview people, and those who have been better known as workers have a different attitude from the people outside. For example, M. did not live in the municipality, they don't know her so well"* (focus group interview with professionals). *There is a gradual opening of trust and yes, it was felt in the interview"* (focus group interview with professionals). *I think if I were to do*

*this work in another town, I would have to put in immeasurably more energy" (focus group interview with professionals).*

They also mentioned the size of the town, which they said can also have a major impact on the success of the transformation, as they believe that the larger the town, the more difficult it is to carry out a similar transformation process. The attitude of the management and staff of other institutions in the town can also be a determining factor.

The difference between a community-led service and a community-based operation/management emerged in the professional discussions: according to one staff member, the latter also involves assigning responsibilities to participants. According to the community development practitioner, the actual community-based operation is achieved when there is a broad awareness and acceptance of the operation, and other people and institutions from the municipal level are involved. In the case of the institution: older people are involved in planning and implementing their own affairs, they have a partnership with the staff and, most importantly, the staff of the institution understand what it means to work in a *community-based* way. *"It was more about the recognition, we talked to them a lot about participation, about the community itself, they recognised the need for change and that it was their role, that they had a responsibility and an opportunity to make a difference. And from their side it was a very big achievement" (expert interviews).* This latter recognition was also echoed in the focus group with older people (see p. 23).

## **2. Involving users and professionals (co-creation) in the transformation process**

During both focus group discussions, the service users clearly confirmed that they had been involved in the process of the transformation, and that the planning phase was already organised around joint creation and thinking: *'We heard about it about a year ago, Aranka came and presented this project, of course she consulted with everyone, we discussed what it would be about. In the light of that we went further, the trip to Prague came, we brought the experiences of that, so we told what had happened and then we started working together" (service users' focus group).* The feedback showed that the co-creation continued after the first session, the professionals leading the transformation made regular visits to the elderly day care, talked to them, and their involvement in the transformation has been ongoing ever since, and they can share their opinions and suggestions.

According to the professionals, they were not involved in the planning of the project, in the definition of the objectives, they only became aware of the project when the external professionals visited the institution with the implementation plan; at this point they became involved, together with the service users. *"In answer to your question, not sure we got enough support, it was put together as we went along (what the project was about and what its purpose was). The preparation phase was left out, in hindsight" (focus group interview with professionals).* It is important to note that in the interviews, the professionals said that during the start-up period, several staff had life circumstances such as sick leave, a new colleague, the birth of a grandchild, which caused them to miss longer or shorter periods of work or to suddenly have to cope with a lot of new information, which could have made it difficult for them to engage in the process.

According to the project professionals, the process of co-creation started from the very beginning, the involvement of both service users and professionals started on the same day: they invited the participants to a partnership, indicating that this kind of transformation process and the transition of a social service to a community-based operation was a new experience for them too.

### **3. Changes in the transformation phase**

During the interviews, both groups confirmed that, although the process of transformation is still ongoing, the positive benefits are already being felt.

It is noticeable that the institution is becoming more open, is looking for contacts with other institutions providing public services, has strengthened its existing relations (e.g. church) and is planning to establish a dialogue with other (e.g. local NGOs). It was pointed out that, although there was a more formal relationship with the kindergarten in the town, the change in the management of the kindergarten and the transformation of the Service Centre has led to a positive development of this relationship; not only they invite the children, but the kindergarten has also invited the elderly people from the day care centre to them: *'We even baked for the kindergarten children. They took it away and offered it. Now they invited us, the elderly, to the kindergarten exam. So that we could go too, and not just the children would come to greet us. So there is really always something going on" (service users' focus).* A cardinal programme in the focus of both target groups was the

so-called "open day" programme, which purpose to address the community of the town, to involve more potential service users to elderly day care and to make visible what happened in the service. *"They think that now there is this elderly care centre, it's called elderly care homes, and they think that the elderly come here, sit here until noon, then go home, they have no idea what's happening here. On Wednesdays, for example, the reverend comes, and every Wednesday there are other activities. There's handicrafts, whatever, there's projections. If there is a nice film, they show it. Elvira and Ilike feel what is in our mind and they can help us. The people outside don't know that"* (service users' focus). As a result of the open day, several new applicants have already arrived at the day care centre. In addition to opening up to the outside world, a number of new ideas have emerged, such as: a handicrafts exhibition, a foreign language course, the production and publication of a joint recipe book and distribution to the residents of the town, the production of a club newspaper. As a result, the elderly felt that they had become more active, and in this context they also stated that *"we have become a real community"* (service users' focus). Although this statement is still a fact for themselves, seeing themselves as a community can be an important step in connecting with the outside community of the town.

It is important to note that the service users perceived more colourful and varied programmes as a result of the process of communitarisation in their own institution, but the extent to which this is related to communitarisation is difficult to measure, because in 2022 the institution received financial support from another grant specifically for the organisation of programmes, which was spent on the implementation of varied programmes.

No negative aspects of the transformation process were identified by the service users, who said that the present phenomena that could be described as negative date back to the period before the transformation.

The opening up to the community and other institutions was also felt by the professionals: *"One of the benefits is the opening up from the kindergarten, or most recently from the Reformed Church, this baking of sponge cakes, we also receive donations. One of the bakers offered a cake for the day of the elderly, but his father is also a service user, so he knows about it"* (focus group interview with professionals). Opening up to the local community was particularly successful where the person concerned had some connection with the day care for the elderly, for example a relative attends the institution. They indicated that it is important for them that they are already active Facebook

users, so that the programmes and the pictures taken there are public, showing the daily life of the people who use them.

The visibility and 'opening up' of the service was confirmed by the expert interviews and was felt to be an important benefit of the project, which was still ongoing at the time of writing. Since one of the project's objectives was to make the service visible in the municipality: *'It was also a starting point that as a consequence of all this, the elderly might become more accepted in the municipality, and for this to happen, the issue of the elderly must be made public, the municipality must be made aware that this is a public issue' (expert interviews)*. Progress in this respect can be seen as an important result. They also perceived a change in the functioning and attitudes of the older people who use the services, since during the transformation process they reached a point where they recognised their own role, their impact, the importance of their participation, and that the key to change actually lies in their active participation and involvement.

#### **4. Summary**

Overall, both the users and the professionals interviewed who work directly with them associate positive thoughts with the community-based transformation of day care for older people. Users clearly stated that they were involved in the process of transformation from the very first step. In this respect, professionals felt that there was some delay and late information, with some commenting that the period of preparation had been missed. This feeling of a lack of involvement may also be partly due to the fact that several of them had changes in their personal lives during the project start-up period which affected their work activities (long-term absence, new colleague). From the implementing side, the professionals did not perceive any delay. In order to avoid this conflicting perception, it might be useful to include a regular feedback system during the implementation process, which would allow to react immediately to situations that arise.

What is meant by community-based service, what makes a service community-based, is difficult to define for both users and staff. When the same question is asked about a specific change in their own institution, it is easier to give examples. The experts' discussions suggest that it is in the day-to-day operations, during the process, that it "comes together" for the participants what exactly this means. One of the keys to success and community involvement in the process of transformation is the embeddedness of the workers in the municipality. The longer a professional has lived in a given

municipality and the more at home he or she is in the community, the more effective the transformation and the more effective the community involvement and outreach can be. Both the users and the professionals and experts involved feel that the relationship of day care for the elderly is evolving, changing and intensifying towards other institutions, with the municipal nursery and the church being mentioned in particular. They no longer invite others only to their institution, but are also invited elsewhere, which is seen by many as a significant change. The opening up to different institutions and local organisations is seen by professionals as being really successful where there is a receptiveness and similar openness, so it also depends to a large extent on the attitude of the management of other institutions. One of the most important examples of opening up to the local community so far, cited by both groups studied, was the open day, during which potential older people (not yet in need of care) were specifically approached and invited to their own open day. The service was presented, and people could get to know the day care for the elderly and the people working in and using it through a discussion and baking session. The open day also led to a number of new applicants wishing to join the service. The more colourful programmes were appreciated by the users as an effect of the process of becoming a community, but they cannot be separated from the government support for 2022, which was awarded and implemented, and which specifically allocated extra money to the organisation of programmes. As a result of this communitisation, the current users of the service hope for new resources, opportunities and more users, and an important result is that they themselves have become a community as a result of the transformation, where collective thinking and proactivation are important.

Day care for the elderly is perceived as a niche service that contributes significantly to their well-being. Particular emphasis the companionship and community activities which provide a very positive experience for older people, who are often alone and without a partner. However, getting to and from the service is becoming increasingly difficult for them as their physical condition changes, and the possibility of a care home for the elderly in the town was raised several times in both focus group discussions with service users, which could provide a significant gap-filling function for people with higher care needs.

**To learn about community-based methods, we recommend:**

- Organising study visits, exchange visits.
- Access to knowledge materials to help you deepen your understanding of the topic, which we strongly recommend:
  - ✓ Ilona Vercseg (2004). Community development lessons for beginners and advanced learners. Community Developers Association, Budapest. Parola booklets <http://www.kka.hu/062568aa00708a67.nsf/0/c25665214fdbda8ec1256f1800529729?OpenDocument>
  - ✓ Molnár A. & Fodorné Papp I. (2023). Community solutions in public services - an action plan. Transformation of the day care for the elderly in the social institution of Nagyecséd ([https://kofe.hu/wp-content/uploads/Dokumentumok/2023/Cselekvesi\\_terv.pdf](https://kofe.hu/wp-content/uploads/Dokumentumok/2023/Cselekvesi_terv.pdf))
  - ✓ Nagy É. et al. (Dr. Kinga Vajda, Gabriella Farkas, Ilona Fodorné Papp, Aranka Molnár) (2023). Community solutions in public services - transformation of the day care for elderly in a social institution "Let's make the elderly valuable in Nagyecséd" - Case study (<https://kofe.hu/wp-content/uploads/Dokumentumok/2023/Esettanulmany.pdf>)
- To take advantage of the funding opportunities provided by the Association of Community Developers:
  - ✓ the possibility of personal consultations (in case of questions or dilemmas),
  - ✓ Community training,  
which you can enquire about by e-mail at [egyesulet@kofe.hu](mailto:egyesulet@kofe.hu).



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