

# Analysis of the operation and activities of extracurricular study groups in Hungary

## Research paper

Budapest, September 2008 - February 2009

### 1. Regulation, funding

Extracurricular study groups have been operating in Hungary for more than ten years<sup>1</sup>. Initially developed and ran by NGOs, the extracurricular study groups aimed to support the ‘neglected’ pupils of Hungarian public education, and more specific the multiple disadvantaged pupils<sup>2</sup>: “such an institution that fosters the schooling success of multiple disadvantaged and Roma pupils and so improving their future chances in the labor market and social integration.”<sup>3</sup>

According to the Public Education Act § 95. (1) m), the tasks of the Hungarian Minister of Education shall include the “designing and wide spreading of extracurricular methods (so called “Tanoda”) in order to support the educational success of disadvantaged pupils”.

In coherence with the Act, the extracurricular study groups shall maintain three specific goals<sup>4</sup>:

- To foster the educational success of their pupils
- To reduce the effects of social disadvantages of the pupils

---

<sup>1</sup> From the '90s programs had been run in several municipalities across the country that aimed the extracurricular educational support and development of children from disadvantaged background and/or of Roma origin. The activities of these programs contained - besides the common goal of educational development – competence development, cultural-, social- group- cohesion and leisure activities.

It is well-documented (among others in the PISA reports) that the Hungarian educational system is one of those that do not provide the children from less educated and poor families with equal chances and access to quality education. Other surveys and the wide market for private lessons services show that this kind of supplementary support services should be accessible also for children from poor family background.

These programs – besides the different background, goals and activities – have a main characteristic in common: in the last years they have operated and succeeded on the periphery of the public education system, not sufficiently recognized and under difficult financial circumstances.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Public Education Act, multiple disadvantaged pupils are pupils whose parents attended only elementary school and the family is eligible for supplementary family allowance.

<sup>3</sup> Proposals for organizing extracurricular study groups (Edited by György Kerényi), Sulinova Kht, Budapest, 2005 (publication of the ministerial institution responsible for the governmental development of extracurricular study groups)

<sup>4</sup> Proposals for organizing extracurricular study groups (Edited by György Kerényi), Sulinova Kht, Budapest, 2005, p. 17.

- To strengthen the cultural identity of the participating pupils.

## Funding

Since 2004 European Union funding is also available for the extracurricular study groups. The same year, the Hungarian Government has published a call for proposals<sup>5</sup>

- to disseminate these programs, primarily in the disadvantaged regions; and on the other hand
- to develop the already existing extracurricular programs.

In the second round of the call for proposals in 2005<sup>6</sup>, the call already impresses the multiple disadvantaged children as target group and aims to increase the number of the operating extracurricular study groups. As a new element among the main goals, the expectation rises that “more and more Roma pupils shall graduate from primary schools and shall continue their studies in secondary schools giving access to higher education”, and “shall have educational success in an integrated public educational background<sup>7</sup>”.

While the call for proposals in 2004 had not contained specific criteria on the age of the target group, the call in 2005 already focused on the pupils enrolled in 5-8th grades of primary schools and on pupils enrolled in secondary schools (giving access to higher education).

The list of compulsory activities emphasizes that the study groups “shall not focus solely on the daily preparation of home-work for the next school-day (...), no program can be supported, that merely intends to promote leisure activities or support cultural identity”. The applicants received an exact list of the requested activities. Besides, it was compulsory for the NGO running the study group to build a partnership with the school/schools of the participating children.

The third round of calls<sup>8</sup> in 2008 strengthened the intention to create a professionally more unified set of extracurricular study groups. The standardization document of the study groups, “Quality assurance tools for extracurricular study groups”<sup>9</sup> had also been attached to this new call. There are three further aspects of differences in this new round of call for proposals:

- target group: not only the multiple disadvantaged and Roma pupils, but also children under state care and migrant pupils are included
- broader age group criteria: migrant pupils of any grade may join; reintegrated children (reintegrated to normal schools, classes with normal curriculum) previously qualified as mentally disabled may join from the first three grades of primary school (including children under ‘continuous monitoring’ on condition that no unanimous decision was brought to confirm the child’s mental disability)

---

<sup>5</sup> “Support of extracurricular study groups model programs in order to foster the educational success of disadvantaged pupils” , call for proposals, Human Resources Development Operational Programme (HEFOP/2004/2.1.4)

<sup>6</sup> „Support for extracurricular study groups”

<sup>7</sup> Call for proposals, June 2005, <http://old.okmt.hu/main.php?folderID=669>

<sup>8</sup> Call for proposals, TÁMOP-3.3.5/A/08/

<sup>9</sup> The documentation of the call for proposals is available here: [www.nfu.hu/doc/1364](http://www.nfu.hu/doc/1364)

- enforces the establishment of new extracurricular study groups focusing the 33 most disadvantaged sub-regions.

The guidance documentation of the call contained the *Extracurricular study group standard* document finalized in 2008, and intended to give a unified operational and professional framework to the study groups. Furthermore, the document also describes the compulsory set of documentation to establish and operate the extracurricular study groups.

There are 9 special, among the currently operating extracurricular study groups, that were established in the framework of the “anti-segregation program in housing”, co-financed with 90 million HUF by the Roma Education Fund<sup>10</sup>. This subgroup of the extracurricular study groups made no restrictions regarding the target group: both children from kindergartens and primary or secondary schools could participate in the programs.

## 2. Research – Purpose and Methods

Tárki-Tudok Inc. was commissioned by the Roma Education Fund (REF) to execute the research in cooperation with REF. The research had lasted from March 2008 to September 2008. The aim of the research was to map the operating extracurricular study groups, to get an insight into their practical operation, their conditions, their networking-practice, cooperation with the parents, and to examine the expectations of the participating children. Providing up-to-date data can support the planning of future calls for proposals<sup>11</sup> and to set up efficiency criteria to measure the execution and the results of the program.

The research applies both quantitative and qualitative methods. In the quantitative phase content analysis of the complex documentation of the extracurricular study groups was executed<sup>12</sup>, followed by a questionnaire filled by the managers of the extracurricular study groups. Responses to the questionnaire were provided by 53 study group managers out of the total 66 (despite, the analysis relies on 50 responses only, for the fact that in 3 cases reliability conflicts have been discovered and were therefore dismissed from the research procedure).

The questionnaire investigates four main topics: operational background of the organizations, the development of the number of the participating children, pedagogical work as well as the networking activities of the extracurricular study groups.

During the qualitative analysis<sup>13</sup> (conducted on 8 locations) semi-structured interviews, focus group meetings with pupils and local monitoring of the study group activities were executed.

---

<sup>10</sup> The program was launched by the Ministry of Youth, Family, Social Affairs and Health, 2005, „Housing and integration model program for people living in segregates Roma settlements”

<sup>11</sup> The full report is available on the following website (in Hungarian):

[http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/tanodaelemzes\\_tarki\\_ref\\_08\\_0.pdf](http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/tanodaelemzes_tarki_ref_08_0.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> It was not allowed to use the project documentation (progress reports of the grantees administered by the Fund-managing Directorate of the Ministry for Education and Culture)) for research purposes.

<sup>13</sup> The locations of the qualitative analysis are the following: Pécs, Bonyhád, Kaposfő, Táská, Tiszacsege, Uszka, Szendrőlád, Esztergom

## **Research results**

### **3. Operational characteristics of the extracurricular study groups**

#### **3.1. Types of extracurricular study groups**

According to the date of establishment we can distinguish between 3 types of extracurricular study groups:

- established in 2003 or before, without any significant governmental financial support,
- established between 2004-2005, in the first round of the calls for proposals (in the Human Resources Development Operational Program),
- established in 2006 or later.

According to project lead organization 75% of extracurricular study groups were established by NGOs, almost 20% by local self-governments and 6% by church or other organizations.

Roma minority self-governments as project lead organizations have appeared in the second generation of extracurricular study groups, while the most active organizations establishing extracurricular study groups in the third generation were the Roma NGOs.

Division of study groups according to their main goal of operation (based on the indications of the managers) are as follows

- ‘catch-up’ activities, talent promotion, preparation to the secondary school graduation exam (wide target group, wide scale of activities).
- support the most disadvantaged pupils and pupils with the worst school results – support teaching, catching-up – enhancing educational success.
- talent promotion of disadvantaged pupils, support further education – enhancing educational success.

*Main objectives of the extracurricular study groups (based on the answers of the 5th question of the questionnaire)*

<b>Target activity</b>	<b>Frequency (%)</b>
Support transition to higher education, preparation to secondary school graduation exam	25,6
‘Catch-up’, support teaching	23,3
Enhance school success	18,6
Support integrated forms of education	7,0
Useful leisure activities	7,0
Talent promotion	4,7
Reduce absence from school and drop-out rates	4,7

Close cooperation with disadvantaged families	4,7
Competence-development, support independent learning process	2,3
Development in individual- or small-group environment	2,1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>

### **3.2 Development of the number of the participating children**

#### 3.2.1 Entrance exams in the extracurricular study groups

Basically, the pupils received first information on the existence of the extracurricular study group in 4 ways:

- from their school-teachers
- from the manager or an employee of the extracurricular study group
- from relatives, children already participating in the activities of the study group
- from friends, schoolmates.

At most of the study groups participating in the qualitative research the admission to the study group is tied to conditions. The most important criterion is in general the average of the school grades of the pupil. School grades might be regarded as essential admission element in two aspects: candidate shall be either below the average or above the average, depending on the main objective of the study group (whether it aims at talent promoting or catching-up).

Based on the answers of the questionnaire, 26% of the participating study groups had no official admission procedure. The other study groups indicated some kind of selection process in place, mainly agreement with the parents (14%) or entrance exams (8%). 6% of the study groups trusted the selection process to the schools. In other cases local, individual solutions were executed.

It turned out from the focus group discussions that even if the study groups have an accepted selection policy, the practice sometimes deviates from the written procedures<sup>14</sup>.

#### 3.2.2 Participation and children composition in the study groups

The questionnaire asks about the number of the participating pupils in the 2005-2007 period. It covers 3 school-years, and the question is about the first semesters of each school-year. According to the answers, the average number of the pupils is 31, the average percentage of non-Roma pupils in the study groups is about 5-7%. The earlier the study group was established, the more heterogeneous composition it has shown.

15% of the study groups indicated in the questionnaire that they had no participants at that time (the ongoing school-year), or that they only had pupils in one of the three school-years.

---

<sup>14</sup> For example children not participating in the study group program also come to the organization to use the computers; the study group grants admittance to pupils with a different grade average

On the other hand, the number of participating children was growing continuously in 38% of the study groups.

There is a big difference between the study groups in the number of schools the pupils are coming from. 28% of the study groups maintain relations with only one school, while on the other hand 22% of the study groups have direct relations with four schools.

### 3.3 Pedagogical work

According to the focus group discussions the teachers working at the extracurricular study groups shall be divided into 3 groups:

- teachers of the local school (who teach in the participating children's school)
- professionals, teachers independent from the school/schools of the participating children (mainly in big towns)
- voluntary teachers, university/college students without teaching practice (in many cases from Roma youth).

The qualitative analysis shows that the study groups work with different weekly schedules and frequency. In the reviewed 8 cases the extracurricular study group is at least 3 times per week open to the participating pupils. In one case the study group is accessible to the pupils also on Saturdays, in another case also on Sundays. The opening hours are responsive to the school programs, but the questioned pupils would also request weekend study group activities, as well.

In the study group activities we can find both individual and group activities, priority is given to preparation to school subjects rather than to leisure-time activities. There are two extracurricular study groups that foster the schooling success of the pupils with consciously applied "learning to learn"<sup>15</sup> methodology<sup>16</sup>. As indirect instrument to enhance efficiency handicraft classes (to develop creativity), drama groups (to support the proper use of language), dance groups (to strengthen self-confidence), club activities related to school subjects were mentioned during the interviews.

*The main characteristics of the extracurricular study groups according to the qualitative analysis*

Location	Age group	Individual/group activities	Leisure-time activities	Strengthen identity	Main characteristic
<b>Pécs</b>	From the first year of primary school	Individual- and small-group activities	Clubs (cooking, handicraft, movie clubs)	Community programs	Patronizing (assistance of former study group participants), project days
<b>Táska</b>	From kindergarten	Group activities	Playing together, computer activities	Community programs	Development activities (for pupils with learning difficulties)

<sup>15</sup> To help learners learn more effective

<sup>16</sup> In Szendrőlád and Tiszacsege

<b>Kaposfő</b>	From the fourth grade of primary school	Mainly individual activities	Community programs, playing together	Community programs	Development activities (for pupils with learning difficulties)
<b>Tiszacsege</b>	From the fourth grade of primary school	Mainly individual activities (group activities for pupils in 1-4 grade)	Weaving, drama club	Teaching Romani (lovari) language, dance group	Courses for parents
<b>Bonyhád</b>	From the upper grades of primary school (5-8)	Individual and group activities	Clubs (computer science, media, drama, sport, lifestyle)	Dance group, music group	Mentoring, self-organized groups
<b>Esztergom</b>	From kindergarten	Group activities	Handicraft activities, computer, sport, excursions	Dance group	Weekend programs, individual development documentation
<b>Uszka</b>	From the first grade of primary school	Group activities	Handicraft activities, dance and drama club	Dance group, performances	Temporary closing-up activities for pupils with learning difficulties
<b>Szendrőlád</b>	From the upper grades of primary school (5-8)	Small-group activities	Computer, games	Individual and small-group discussions, self-knowledge groups	Self-development groups, conflict-management, "learning to learn"

The most often used pedagogical methods of the extracurricular study groups in the research are: the teacher – pupil or mentor – pupil one-to-one approach, or support teaching in groups. The common use of differentiating and cooperative learning techniques also refers to the recognition of individual educational needs.

The Educational School Integration Program – that fosters the integrated education of multiple disadvantaged pupils - has listed instruments that support teaching and learning activities for a successful integration. Out of these instruments the most preferred by the extracurricular study groups are: the development of individual learning and the development of social competences. In comparison with schools applying integration methods, the extracurricular study groups put more emphasis on self-development and drama pedagogy.

### 3.4 Links and networks of the extracurricular study groups

The partners of extracurricular study groups to meet the most often (4 times a year on average) are the primary school teachers. Meetings with secondary school teachers, local employment authorities, managers from other extracurricular study groups are held two or three times per year. Relations to other partners are less active. These meetings have the

purpose of obtaining information, exchanging experience, cooperation and professional discussions.

Communication with the parents happens mostly through informal discussions. Community programs, consulting hours also involve parents. No formal communication is institutionalized between the organizations and the parents.

Communication with former participants is typical for 85% of the study groups, but the initiative comes mainly from the former participants. The organizations apply no conscious follow-up measures. Considering the educational success of former participants, judgment is only based on the subjective opinion of the study group manager and not on objective indicators.

### **3.5 Efficiency of the extracurricular study groups**

Analyzing the efficiency of the extracurricular study groups, measurability is fundamental. Currently there is no survey on the development of participants' competences measured by objective external instruments and no reliable indicators measuring other educational success factors. So only the subjective judgments are available derived from the responsible managers or from indirect data, such as the change in the number of the participating pupils.

Based on the experience of the site visits, 22% of the extracurricular study groups have already been closed, 24% are only working with reduced scope of activities. The organizations that were founded to retrieve the European Union funding operate in a very unstable economic environment after the funding has ceased.

Besides, those study groups that run a wide social network and several school partnerships, may have 1.5 times more chance for constant operation than the study groups having participants from only a small number of schools<sup>17</sup>. Also, the more the study group activities are based on local needs and the manager is a local person, the more embedded the study group will be in the local community, may become a locally and personally motivated goal resulting in a greater chance to survive.

### **Difficulties, critical aspects**

Based on the document-analysis, the questionnaire, the focus group discussions, interviews, and site visits, the main difficulties regarding the operation of the extracurricular study groups are the following:

- The publicly available list of extracurricular study groups is inadequate, in several cases it was difficult to identify and find some of the organizations that indicated the **lack of transparency** in the program;
- **Lack of continuity in the funding process:** between the several rounds of calls for proposals the organizations had difficulties in financing their operations and staff (in those periods, the majority of the staff may strive to find another employment opportunity therefore it becomes more difficult to start the study group again);

---

<sup>17</sup> This is also affected by the size of the municipality where the study group operates.



- **Lack of continuity in financing:** complicated administrative procedures throughout the funding process, belated grants that might endanger daily operation and management of the organizations. Most of the extracurricular study groups requested loans to finish the EU-funded project;
- There is **no reliable, objective and properly administered data available** on the educational success and transition to higher education of the participant pupils. The efficiency of the extracurricular study groups can be measured mostly by the fact that they are still operating. From the extracurricular study groups involved in the research only more than a half of them are still operating.
- **No complex development strategy** has been approved yet – including employment, healthcare and education – that would target the disadvantaged groups and could embed the several sector-specific development concepts.
- Besides the input standards of the extracurricular study groups, the bureaucratic rules are not combined with a continuous and personal professional control. The standardization can counteract to the locally embedded flexible study group concept.
- The lack of project management competencies (professional and financial) – both on the side of the grantees and the administrative agency.
- Very detailed administrative duties are applied for the grantees. Besides, the grantees shall wait several months for the delayed grant-award contracts. Communication with the administrative agency proved to be erratic and it was hard to identify the relevant administrators because of the frequent changes in staff.

## Recommendations

- **Adopting an inter-sectoral complex development strategy**, that allows a greater scope to the extracurricular study groups. Cooperation between the ministries and Roma and other NGOs regarding the development measures.
- Funding shall be provided in the long run to secure the **continuous and sustainable operation** of the extracurricular study groups. Long term strategies and developments are necessary. Model organizations should be further developed and act as supportive mentors to the new extracurricular study groups.
- Besides the input standards of the extracurricular study groups, a continuous and personal professional control process shall be established.
- **Innovative financing schemes** shall be designed to help the extracurricular study groups to handle their financial problems (delayed payments).
- **Transparency:** competences shall be clearly defined in the administration process, websites shall contain up-to-date information and data about the grantees and the procedures.