

The background of the entire image is a dense, close-up photograph of autumn leaves. The leaves are in various stages of decay, showing a range of colors from deep reds and oranges to yellows and browns. Some leaves are still green, indicating they have recently fallen. The texture of the leaves is visible, with veins and small holes from insects. The overall tone is warm and somewhat somber, fitting the theme of the book.

Pál Korom

Civils at the ends of Hungary

HONOURABLE FUNERAL

Acknowledgement

In the past few months many people contributed to this book. Dear Reader, without their help you would not be holding this volume in hand. Some of them are named in the book here or there, but most of them are not.

I had early readers who gave me all good advice, and I listened to them.

I had someone to polish my style, others corrected my typos. I had someone to help me with the computer software challenges. A small team worked on creating and inserting the plans, collecting and carefully selecting the photos, reviewing the sources and external links. Publication and distribution have also been an extensive team effort.

I would like to thank everyone who helped me publish this book with this content and in this format.



"houses, places where dead silence replaces the merry noise of children"

*I'm not a magician by nature,
I can't make miracles
(János Bródy: What Could I Do for You)*

Dear Reader,

I am Pál Korom, a responsible man, someone who leads, feels and thinks. I invite you to follow this story with me. I'd like you to understand and feel the tragedy that was caused by the furious destruction of party politics, doing harm to the youth of Szentes, offending democracy and the entire community. Although I present it to you, this is not just my story: the characters and victims are many kids, girls and boys, young and not that young people, villagers from Magyartés and people from Transylvania, from France or Italy, officers of Szentes, politicians. And there are houses, places where dead silence replaces the merry noise of children.

In the twenty years between 1995 and 2015 the teenage youth in the Hungarian town of Szentes had a unique opportunity to learn and live a democratic public life. The framework was called the SZIDÖK Project, founded upon a wide local collaboration. The City Council of Szentes supported the development of the public participation of teenagers not only morally, but also financially, and by establishing public partnership with the youth. The SZIDÖK Project was formed as the result of a partnership of the Szentes City Council and the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA. It included the establishment of two youth community venues: the Camp and Training Centre of Magyartés and the Student Cellar in Szentes.

The main outcome of the project was the birth of the Szentes Youth and Student Council (Szentesi Ifjúsági és Diák Önkormányzat, SZIDÖK). In spite of many obstacles, this teenager self-government had a great history of 20 years, and it was about to enter a new era of its life at the end of 2015, when the City Council abruptly terminated the SZIDÖK Project without any justification. They withdrew all support from teenager public life, from SZIDÖK, and reclaimed all the basis of its operation.

This book is an honourable funeral of the SZIDÖK Project and SZIDÖK, meant for whoever has eyes to see and ears to hear.

Korom Pál



"whoever has eyes to see"



"had a unique opportunity to learn and live a democratic public life"

PÁL KOROM

CIVILS AT THE ENDS OF HUNGARY

VOLUME 2

HONOURABLE FUNERAL

English translation by Zoltán Kertész

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Prologue of Someone Affected

[beginning]

It was the summer of 1994 or 1995, I had taken part in VE-GA stuff at Szentes for a few years by then, we were in some school or in a dorm, and Pali told us about a house at Magyartés that we could build into a camp. My romantic ideas about camping vanished into the air when the old dirty shabby white bus of Tisza Volán rolled in to Stand #5 in Szentes, we boarded, the whole thing was shaking, it stank and the puke colored curtains just made it even worse in the burning hot of summer streets. No matter how happy we were singing, eating sweetbread and dancing.

We were worn off when we finally got to Tés. It was as simple as a farm and I, a lad from the city, had to demolish some stalls. Or stables. Or something. We picked up truckloads of brick debris and knocked down half-collapsed buildings. Then we built the fence in the backyard. There was much dirt and it was extremely hot. But we did it together and it was good to do. Someone was cooking in a cauldron. We carried the toilets in. A TV company was moving in Budapest and Petya got the furniture and boards and cabinets and all, and we hauled them in Pest at Fehérvári út and then again in Tés.

It must have been autumn when we planted trees on the hillside that was full of sheep shit (but free of building coop). To have some shade twenty years later, when we put up our tents here. We imagined it recalling cosy Austrian camping sites and the ones at Balaton, our feet popping out of the tents, the endless Puszta in front, and the thick green canopy of large trees above.

We imagined many things. Twenty years rushed by. The trees grew big, we took good care of them for twenty years. I still hate sleeping in a tent. And now I have nowhere to put up mine.

Before you get on, Dear Reader, let me share a few thoughts here from one of the characters in this book.

Honourable Funeral is a book with many faces. It can be read as a documentary novel, as a diary or as a tragedy. I remembered that Medieval Christian theologians knew four different readings of a text: the literal, the typological, the moral and the anagogical interpretation. Even literal reading will lead you through a story of over twenty years, storms of Hungarian public life, you will see how classic democracy becomes the victim of non-classic politics. This text with all the cited

(*A palm tree grows under burden)

Palma sub pondere crescit *

(Latin proverb)

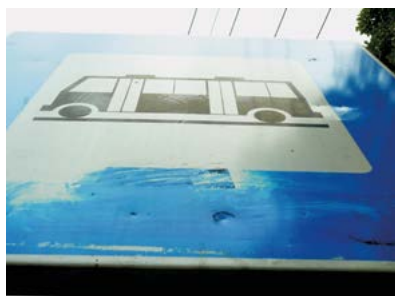


"we planted trees on the hillside that was full of sheep shit (but free of building coop)"



"the puke colored curtains just made it even worse in the burning hot of summer streets"

"reality is condensed in
a simple story"



"the old dirty shabby
white bus of Tisza Volán
rolled in to Stand"

documents will tell the literal readers what the tragedy and the funeral are about. However, it invites you to approach its deeper, allegorical or moral meaning. To see who or what is being buried. And by whom. And to understand what is honourable, respectful or deserved. To see if there is anyone to appraise the deceased. And to see what a funeral means in the life of a community. I won't continue here, Dear Reader. Please think.

For me, the true meaning of Korom's book is this: you strive to remain a good man in your deeds even in the hardest situations, and in the meantime you wish to see the Whole and the single Man in it – the complexity of reality is condensed in a simple story. It is the story of the man who got the destiny of world history. As Korom puts it: *"people have to win their own validity in their own communities. This is how they can create a new, organic, adequate culture, traditions and values."*

Why hasn't Pál Korom written a whole library of books, like his companions, say Popper? Saint Thomas Aquinas asks a question in his *Summa Theologiae* (Third Part, Quaestio 42): *"Should Christ have committed His doctrine to writing?"* He answers that *"It was fitting that Christ should not commit His doctrine to writing. First, on account of His dignity: for the more excellent the teacher is, the more excellent his manner of teaching should be. Consequently, it was fitting that Christ, as the most excellent of teachers, should adopt that manner of teaching whereby His doctrine is imprinted on the hearts of His hearers."* Korom is a great teacher, and to be honest, he enjoys talking and he can speak well. On the other hand, his deeds and his writings, too, are governed by the principle of Care. He speaks to the individual person: most of his written words are in long letters, handwritten in his characteristic, energetic style.



"we built the fence in
the backyard"

Dear Reader, Korom's principle of Care will help you, too. He guides your attention, interprets and explains, provides context and structure.

This is a funeral, so let's now read it with sympathy and hope.

Zoltán Kertész
April 2017

*We heard the word. Its sound reverberated
On high and in the deep. For but a moment
The mighty universe had ceased rotating.
Then all fell silent, lull before the storm.
(Mihály Vörösmarty: Prologue)*

INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader,

This story takes place in Central Europe, in a small country called Hungary, in a southern small town. One of the main characters is a small but rough NGO named after the star Vega, the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA, or shortly VE-GA. I am the founder and have been the leader of this NGO since 1978. Our NGO is part of a civil group called Kultúrkör (Cultural Circle). The annual prize of Kultúrkör is called Society Development Award, and in 2014 my wife Anikó and I were awarded the prize. The ceremony took place in Szentés, where the headquarters of VE-GA is, in our Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés. The event led to many discussions, we remembered a lot from the past decades. I was asked to record for a year how I live my everyday life as the leader of a civil NGO.

I avoid searching for the cause of our problems in others, so in the book I decided to concentrate on our good and bad times among ourselves. The book was planned to have one volume under the title *Among Ourselves*.

I would have stopped there if a sad and incomprehensible tragedy had not taken place in Szentés, which prompted me for this second volume. I was morally obliged to record and share this tragedy, and to confront the offenders with what they had done.

The tragic hero is the youth self-government of the town which flourished for twenty years, supported throughout by VE-GA. This story takes place against the background of constant party-



"the endless Puszta in front"



"the thick green canopy of large trees above"



"had to demolish some stalls"



"each drop has something from the huge ocean"



"and Pali told us"

political warfare. Ever since the right conservative fraction got the majority in the local council after 20 years, they have been waging an uncompromising war against the socialist mayor of the town. The teenage youth council of Szentes is just an accidental victim of this fight.

You may never have experienced any similar story. Maybe you are not interested in civil groups or NGOs, you may never have had any civil affairs. And most likely, you have never had anything to do with youth participation in the public life of a city or a youth council – the Szentes Youth and Student Council (SZIDÖK) is best of breed in this matter. Nevertheless, each drop has something from the huge ocean – in our globalized world each individual story has something from the destiny of the all mankind.

I hope you can devote the effort to read this book and to understand and feel why it was a disaster that happened to the SZIDÖK Project and SZIDÖK at the end of 2015.

The cobbler should stick to his last! I got this feedback in so many matters... I am a professional Water Engineer and I retired as a Senior Civil Administration Councillor. But I never cared. This is my first book, though, and writing is a profession in its own right. But I have no choice. I just cannot allow so much good and nice things, so much work and so many values to vanish unnoticed. So I write, even if it is not read by anyone. Writing is my duty, reading is not.

I do not need to write about the situation in Hungary at the time of the third Orbán government. Anyone can read about it on the internet. It is also easy to check what it is like to be a member or a leader of a civil organization here these days. However, I would not like to blame the Orbán government for all civil problems, but it is safe to state that this government has very firm ideas about the existence and support of civilians: it supports civil cooperation with them, it tolerates autonomous operation. It prohibits *unclear* operation in the strict legal framework, and it also prohibits political activity of NGOs. The only really problematic one above is the last one: political activity is a normal state of operations for civil organizations of citizens. It is not normal if an NGO behaves as a political party.

The expression *Ends* has a special meaning in Hungary: in historic times when Hungarians were defending Europe against the Turkish Empire, this defence system was based on a chain of castles at the *Ends*: fighting in small castles, completely alone, without any external help. Whatever happened to them and amongst them resembled everything that the *Leaders* did in the royal courts.

The *Ends* today mean the Hungarian countryside. *Countryside* existence means being far away from Budapest or the developed cities of Western Hungary.

Look up Szentes in a map: it is near the rivers Tisza and Hármas-Körös. This small town is where the events of our story take place, it is our hometown.

The publication order of the two volumes changed because this second one is more relevant here and now. Why did I choose the title *Honourable Funeral*?

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries we tend to leave many things behind, but I suggest rediscovering the Kyrgyz author Aitmatov.



"small but rough"

One of his ingenious books is *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*. This day is the day of the funeral of a simple Man. It is also a poetic and realistic description of an *honourable funeral*: assessing and arranging everything that was given by the deceased during his life, all that he created with some success or semi-success, through tragedies and many shared problems, joy – and mostly through hard work. It is about recalling the things that help the survivors live a better, more honourable life. It could empower us to become better persons. It could give strength for a fresh start.

The honourable funeral of the SZIDÖK Project will contain its history and the recollection of its tragedy. It is also meant to systematically organize and review all the values that it created through the inspired work of many people, teenagers and adults. And finally, it will have to outline the path forward.

Most of the history of SZIDÖK is already written in official mails, newspaper articles and the documents of decision making at the City Council. The story in the book is therefore largely built around these publicly available documents. On the other hand, I narrate the events as I struggled in them, making decisions and leading activities until the very date I finished this book around 30th November 2016.

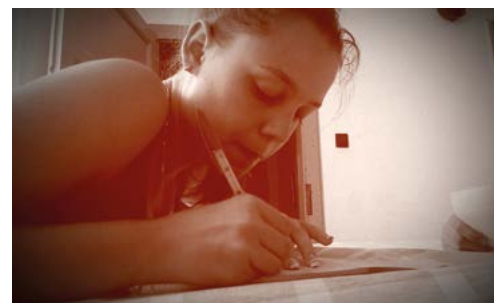
At the eve of an eventful life that I spent mostly at the *opposition* side, I have no doubts that this book will stir up emotions. (It is to be noted at this point that it is now three years ago that three young men were *politically* hired to beat me up. Of course they were not from Szentes since I am known here to do martial arts. I settled that case in my way, but the desire to have me beaten will still linger around. It can be anything from character assassination to organized mobbing.) There are, however, far worse options than getting beaten, which is based on the grim fact that the Council cast a *unanimous* vote in the case of SZIDÖK and the SZIDÖK Project. And this book could eventually make me a public enemy in Szentes.

This book has three chapters.

In the first chapter I focus on two things: I outline the environment where first the SZIDÖK Project and then the Szentes Youth and Student Council was formed. After that I describe what values they created and accumulated and how.



"each individual story has something from the destiny of the all mankind"



"So I write, even if it is not read by anyone."

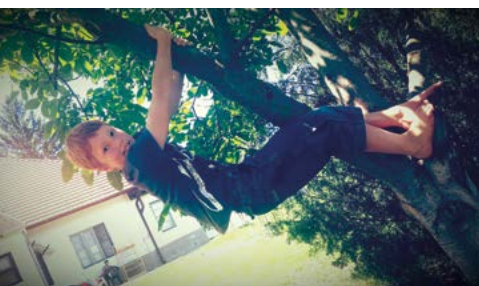


"understand and feel"

"outline the path
forward"



"completely alone"



"to create a balanced
state of our human
relationships in this
case"

In the second chapter I use the form of a tragedy to present and comment the documents that contain the shocking and complete destruction of all these values.

In the closing part I present two processes: first, the way how the City Council tries to take control of the series of events they caused (so far unsuccessfully), while completely neglecting SZIDÖK itself. Second, I outline our unique way of providing an honourable funeral while searching for and entering the path of revival.

Let me now quote a sentence from the book. It could easily become the motto: *Our goal is to create a balanced state of our human relationships in this case – to re-establish peace even if it takes place after a tragic loss of values.*

Dear Reader, I know I must make your reading easier. I mark the official documents typographically and separate them from my comments. I also insert my recollection of memories, dilemmas that I or my team had, and entries from my diary. These quotations will either clarify something or just provide insight into my state of mind when I was in a certain situation. [I asked my translator to cut the official texts shorter since their insensitive dullness cannot be properly reflected in English. Since not all bodies and position names in the Szentes city administration have proper English equivalents, I agreed with my translator to use the terminology of the Vienna City Council as at www.vienna.at.]

Now I'm asking for your patience and attention to reading the documents in this book, however incomprehensible and dull they may be. As a set, they talk for themselves. They explain every little moment in the story, but they do not answer the most important question of why all this happened.



*For one who flies above, this land is merely a map
(Miklós Radnóti: I cannot know...)*

SZENTES YOUTH AND STUDENT COUNCIL AND THE SZIDÖK PROJECT

The Scene

Szentes is a beautiful, warm small town, an ideal place to live at. Just click and you can find all relevant information about her online.

I am an experienced water engineer – also called civil engineer – and as such I know the downtown and the extensive surrounding areas very deeply, because I have been responsible for various development activities here for the last 25 years. As a Senior Civil Administration Councillor I was responsible for electricity development, for the development of public lighting, for providing electricity to remote farms. I was also responsible for the safety of flood and inland water protection, for water services developments. Even as a pensioner I am the responsible expert to advise on drinking water quality improvement projects, on the completion and launch of the new waste water treatment facility and for the appropriate operation of the LED street lighting system.

But here and now my focus is on the aspects of the town of Szentes that are relevant for our story: for example, it is much more the town of the youth than it is the case with other similar towns, since it has five secondary schools, with a student population of 2400 in the 12–18-year-old age group. Many of them are from the surrounding area, but around 120 youngsters are from other parts of the country. Adolescent age groups also attend the 5 elementary schools, there are about 900 12–14-year-old kids. Two of the high schools (where the brightest students go) provide good basic education in arts, their students mostly go on to study in other cities, because Szentes has no higher education institute.. By the time they grow up, most of them leave the town. This is one of the reasons why the population of Szentes fell from 35,000 to 28,000 in 30 years, despite a relatively good local job market

Ever since the change of regime, it has been an evolving problem that kind of “walls” have gone up around and in between the schools. In the last 10 years the City Council has lost control and ownership of all schools. New solutions would have been needed for the town to revitalize youth life, and not to lose the students as adults. Developing these new local solutions is largely hindered by the digital revolution, by the Earth becoming a global village, and also by limitless pluralism. However, these may create new opportunities as well if we can seize them.

Theoretically, the Szentes City Council is fully aware of this.

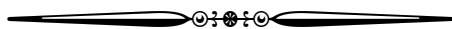


"hindered by the digital revolution"

"run their own affairs"

The Szentes Youth and Student Council (SZIDÖK) was formed to lead the development of teenager youth public engagement as part of the SZIDÖK Project. **It was formed to help the young to influence the happenings in their town. Primarily, to help them run their own affairs. Secondly, to have the opportunity to influence public life in their matters, to enable their political participation. Without these, this town can never become their hometown.**

What should we know about the ideological and political attitude of the Hungarian society, and particularly about the local community of Szentes? When I use the term *political* I do not mean political parties, just the participation in the common affairs of everyday matters, the participation in public life. In terms of democracy assessment, I will study the characteristics of everyday lifestyles of local societies, especially those of Szentes.



*I already withdrew just as millions
Did, but all talk differently and want something
Else. One wants capital and prosperity,
Heavens, the other wants happiness on Earth
(VE-GA Rock Group: VE-GA Peace Rock Play)*

Notes on the Society of Szentes

Before 1989 I was one of the few *democratic opposition* Hungarians. I got some attention only because a significant number of young people surrounded me, even though I had no political goals with them. I did, however, support them to become autonomous! To make them aware of their common values and interests, and also to get them co-operate with each other so that they could represent these values at their schools or wherever they live.

These young people did not know my philosophy, which can probably be best described as a truly *Christian socialism*. As I was a sober engineer, too, who had deep learning in economics, I was a kind of *interesting opposition*. I did not want capitalism (neoliberalism), which very few opposition people understood. For me it was clear that in Hungary it is impossible to have mature capitalism and social democracy. In this sense, I was the opposition of both the conservative and the liberal opposition. At the same time, I never viewed the soft dictatorship of Kádár as socialism. Still less as communism. I wanted true, that is plural and democratic socialism, without the influence of foreign forces. This made me an opposition to the members of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party in the Kádár era.

I have been observing social-political processes from these viewpoints. With the above in mind, it is important to understand the social and ideological forces that drove the City Council to terminate the SZIDÖK Project after 20 years of successful operation.

The society of Hungarian feudal-capitalism was a society of nobility and peasantry. The most developed parts of the society, that were turning into a civil society were Jewish and German nationalities, forming kind of enclosures in Budapest and in some larger cities. The entire Hungarian society was religious Christian conservative. The definitive social organizational force was nationalism.

In the era of state capitalism – called socialism – nothing changed indeed. Marxism, made into a practical religion was used for actual political purposes. Soviet-led internationalism was part of it, as the will of the dictatorship to organize the society. This is well proven by the fact that when the soft dictatorship of state capitalism was ousted, the original conditions mostly restored. Rural society has a basic conservative Christian attitude, though no longer deeply religious. The definitive social organizational force is again historicizing nationalism.

Has liberal democracy ever had a chance in Hungary and in Szentes? Capitalism and democracy in Hungary were not won by bottom-up national movements. These changes were viewed by the majority of Hungarian society as if an *audience* looked at a performance. They had no clue about capitalism, and Hungary could not turn into a democratic society from one day to another. In these circumstances, it seemed to be a basic mission of the state to consciously help these disadvantages disappear in a few decades. To achieve this, the state could have taken meaningful actions to improve its own operations as well as the management of the school system by way of a firm support of the civil society.

However, it was not only the new state that had such a mission, but municipal councils, local administrations, institutions (including local schools), NGOs and other bodies had similar tasks. In Szentes, too. However, it was not in the interest of the small group of political party leaders and the newly rich, who had led the state for 24 years.

Only very few schools focussed on education for participation in democratic public life. Even nowadays universities dump young professionals into economic life without teaching them anything about important items such as stock markets.

Until 2010 municipal councils played an important role in all areas of local public life. They had real opportunities to locally manage the development of social democracy, mostly among themselves and in the world of local youth.

The town of Szentes had an excellent opportunity, because for 20 years it had a strong and dedicated youth professional partner, and the SZIDÖK Project and SZIDÖK itself was full of vitality.

To better understand the political profile of Szentes, let me compare it with the neighbouring town of Hódmezővásárhely.

The political profile of Hódmezővásárhely has been defined by the texture of wealthy and self-conscious peasant-civil families which formed in the first half of the 20th century. This social environment is well represented in the characters of *Eszter Égető*, a novel by László Németh (1948). In Hódmezővásárhely, political conservatism and its extremities have always been strong, which resulted in more powerful social controversies, and led to a more active public and political life. Nevertheless, no leftist political initiative could ever win in Hódmezővásárhely, not even in the times of the new capitalism.

In Szentes there was no peasant-civil society, but there were proportionately more poor peasants, agricultural proletarians and farmers. They could not be disregarded, but as politics was pursued by the intellectuals, they were only indirectly represented in public life. Even the social conflicts of Szentes were a lot lighter than in Hódmezővásárhely. Various strong leftist ideas have been present in the subconscious of the society. Here, any leftist political party had a real chance to win, even in the era of new capitalism. And they did win, for 20 consecutive years, even though the major politicians were known before the change of regime as communists.

In 2014 the voters of Szentes “made a fatal error”. They re-elected the socialist Mayor who had been in office for 20 years, but at the same time they elected a City Council with right-sided majority. The result was a time of political party battles. In this warfare both political sides looked on me as their opposition. Exactly as it was the case in the late 1980s.

Local and municipal councils enable the local group of voters directly and through the elected local Councils to manage their local public affairs independently and democratically. (Wikipedia)

City Officials in the Story

Until the regulations of the second Orbán Cabinet, there was only one major actor in the political public scene of the town: the Szentes City Council, led by the socialists. All other participants – including schools – belonged to this municipal council. When the state district administrative offices were set up in 2011, the roles and responsibilities of city councils were significantly reduced. Through these Offices the state appeared as a direct local authority. From the same year schools and other tasks have also been reallocated from City Councils. The majority of the society was not against this and the minority did not want to speak up either, since in multi-party democracies the winning party can execute power as it wishes, the other side would therefore turn away in such situations.

Voters are obviously often referred to for legitimization. In Szentes, the leader of the majority fraction stated that they had a *stronger mandate* because they were elected *directly*, while others got a seat from party list votes. He thinks they are responsible for their voters, while others are responsible for their party. The truth is that they cast an unanimous vote in all key matters with full party discipline, while they fiercely fight against the Mayor who was directly elected with a healthy majority of voters.

Let me examine the councils of Szentes from my own viewpoint: what kind of personalities the members have, how peculiar they are as representatives. The town was lucky to have two great individuals as Mayors. In the actual council there were 3 or 4 personalities that were outstanding members of the local community. In the current, much smaller council there are two such persons and one who could be like that.

Another aspect is the ability to think strategically, which became even more important after joining the EU. In the former councils, there were 3–4 councillors with this skill, but they are not always the same extraordinary individuals that I mentioned before. In the current council there are two strategic thinkers besides the Mayor.

It is important to understand how much influence the headquarters of political parties (and their local fractions) have over their representatives. It is all right when council members as representatives of a political party align with the decisions or the strategy of the party. However, it is unacceptable when a local city council's fraction is directly hand managed from above, and they just bluntly follow orders.

I would also like to analyse the relationship between the City Council and the City Administration. The key indicator is if the work of the Civil Administration Professionals is valued, their professional knowledge and human dignity is respected. After joining the EU, the workload of Civil Administration Professionals sky rocketed, many tasks were added that did not even belong to civil administration. Meanwhile, base pay of local Civil Administration Professionals did not increase for 9 years. The uncompetitive salaries that Szentes traditionally offers to her Administration Professionals make things even worse. This leads to adverse selection then.

All the above is not applicable for youth affairs: the Town of Szentes has never actually employed any Civil Administration Professionals who would be experienced in managing youth affairs.

A non-governmental organization (NGO) is a not-for-profit organization that is independent from states and international governmental organizations. They are usually funded by donations but some avoid formal funding altogether and are run primarily by volunteers. (Wikipedia)



"the young started to call her Mom"

Civilians in the Story: The Union of VE-GA

The main civil character in our story is the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA. This NGO was born in Szentes in the last decade of the soft state-socialist dictatorship. It's spread across the country; the headquarters is still in Szentes. You may read all details about VE-GA at www.ve-ga.hu. However, for this story it is essential to get to know me and my wife, Anikó.

I have been studying yoga and karate since I was a teenager. I learned both by myself, but got a very deep understanding, alike many other things that were not taught to me by teachers.

At the end of 1977 we moved to Szentes with my wife Anikó. Soon news has gone around about a young man doing karate trainings in the Széchenyi Park. This attracted boys and girls aged 16–19. The group later called VE-GA was founded on 26th September 1978 as *Karate Based Self-Defence Sport Group*. Besides martial arts, we did many hikes and talked a lot. Anikó was the one to create an organized form for all these activities in her thorough and strict ways. At the same time, she began to take care of the younger kids hanging around us. She was under 28 when the young started to call her *Mom* for all this care. These teenagers had no idea that I am deeply interested in understanding the processes of economy and society. They did not think that I wrote about these, and often got in serious, but secret conflicts with important people about my ideas.

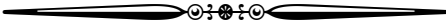
Later more and more young people contacted me to share their ideas and problems. The only thing that the people in power sensed from all this was that the Korom couple was surrounded by an increasing number of young people. The Koroms "operate an opposition group at home". We started to face incomprehensible attacks and punishments, and we really *opposed* them. This then had the effect that even more unsatisfied youngsters came to meet us, and the various groups who met at our place even began mixing up. These groups then formed into our official civil organization on 26th September 1984, whose mission at this point was to help the development of the autonomy of young people through a special interpretation of *peace work*.

So, we lived our lives with happy moments and struggles, and the only serious victim of this was our career in the water engineering profession.

By the time the hopes for liberal democracy and capitalism won in around 1991, VE-GA had grown into a nationwide civil organization with 2000 members across the country, while the centre remained in Szentes.

In the forming NGO sector VE-GA was one of the dozen or so teenager and youth organizations in the Cultural Circle (Kultúrkör) that had a strong intellectual background. It was also a founder and active member of the National Council of Hungarian Youth Organizations and later of the National Children and Youth Parliament.

In all three groups, there were discussions about the following: we would need a way to create a local forum for the youth in each town, and to enable local representation of youth interests in local public life. Anikó made a practical proposal how to solve this in 1991, but at that time it was not considered. As we later found out, it somehow got to the first Mayor of Szentes. Dr József Rébeli-Szabó approached VE-GA in the autumn of 1993 with a proposal to realize Anikó's ideas in partnership. He offered the unused village municipal office building at Magyartés (a small village in the municipality of Szentes) to use as a camping site, and a cellar in the town's main street (Kossuth Street) to use as a youth club. In the next few months we discussed it in detail. In the spring of 1994 we decided to agree to his proposal, despite the high financial cost involved.



*'Cos you need a place where all spirits appear,
'Cos you need a place where all voices you hear
(Gábor Presser – Dusan Sztevanovity: The Attic)*

Community Spaces of Szentes

VE-GA has members from a diversity of social status, political view, profession or vocation. In 1994 only very few of them were adults with a settled life. We teamed up with a broader circle of relatives and parents, as well as with friends and professional allies at companies.

We could realistically size the investment need of the youth public life development that the Mayor wanted. Anikó and I as engineers were well aware how much work it meant to convert the two hundred-year-old ruins of the City Council into acceptable youth community spaces.



"convert ... ruins ...
into acceptable youth
community spaces"

However, VE-GA members had very different attitude towards these two sites. To understand this, I need to model VE-GA from three different aspects. First, we need to differentiate those with and without roots in Szentes. Second, VE-GA is a chain of independent (overlapping) communities, the majority of which are not from Szentes. Third, VE-GA can be pictured as an open sphere. Each segment has its point in the conscious centre of the organization. The outer, loose layer does not even have a firm identifiable affiliation with VE-GA.

The Magyartés Camp Centre got a consensus in VE-GA, because its groups in Budapest and Eastern Hungary were already looking for an own site. They already assessed two sites, but none of them had a larger room which would be needed for the characteristic activities of VE-GA. The former village council house at Szentes-Magyartés has a large room of 100 square meters with a 33 square meter stage in it. The building itself was not in any worse condition than the other two candidates – so it was in awful shape. The 2500 square metre territory around the building was in even worse condition with unused stalls and other outbuildings (picture 1, 2, 3). However, being a youth NGO far away from Budapest, we knew that we could only have a ruin to make our own, with the investment of a vast amount of work. The majority of our organization decided to go for it (picture 4, 5, 6, 7).

The situation was quite different in case of the other City Council property, which was planned to be the Student Cellar. It had a bad start upfront. In 1988 VE-GA got a cellar from the Town, which we turned into our own space with a lot of work. The members of VE-GA, who at that time were mostly from Szentes anyway, regarded that site as their own. The growing organization somehow inherited the affectionate relationship to this cellar. The Mayor provided a new cellar because he took back *our* cellar with short notice, for reasons that later turned out to be irrelevant. But he caused a big stirrup.

The majority of VE-GA therefore did not want this new cellar and viewed this to be the local affair of the town of Szentes. The compromise was that the Mayor offered to provide toilet facilities on the ground floor at their cost. The renovation of the cellar was undertaken by VE-GA members from Szentes and Debrecen, who were strongly engaged in democratic youth movements (picture 15, 16, 17, 18). In contrast to the real estate at Magyartés, fully managed by us, the Student Cellar has never been completed through fault of the City Council: technical emergency situations prevailed that blocked the provision of acceptable conditions.

I have four reasons for spending more time on these two properties, both of which have remained City Council properties along the journey. First, I believe that the value of civil youth investment in them is outstanding even at European level. Second, both sites hosted thriving youth life for twenty years and only very few places can compare to this. Third, these youth spaces could provide acceptable home conditions for many youth groups and for the prospering Szentes Youth and Student Council. And the fourth reason is that the Szentes City Council withdrew them both from youth public use without justification, and with an aggressively short notice.

Magyartés Camp and Training Centre

All works at this property were physically done and fully funded by VE-GA. I asked the costing specialist of the City Council to prepare a detailed budget plan for any planned work. This was the baseline of the rental agreement for the property.

REAL ESTATE LEASE AGREEMENT

This Lease Agreement is signed on 24th June 1994 by and between the Szentes City Council ("Landlord"), represented hereunder by Dr. József Rébeli-Szabó, Mayor, and the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA ("Tenant"), represented hereunder by Pál Korom, President. The parties agree as follows:

1. Landlord leases to Tenant the Council public property of 5230 sq m registered as Council House and the Council public property of 4 ha 2339 sq m registered as gardens. The lease begins on 1st July 1994 and is created for an indefinite period. Tenant shall create a camp and creative centre for children and youth on the premises.
2. Tenant undertakes the obligation to fully restore and renew the building within 5 years from the signing of this Agreement, concluding all internal works in line with the purpose of this Lease Agreement.
3. Tenant is obliged to maintain and preserve the estate in good condition, including the proper management of the area in this Agreement.
4. Landlord is not charging the Tenant any Rental of Lease Fee, with regard to the obligations of Tenant listed in Section 2 and 3 on renewal and property maintenance, in the approximate total value of 4 million forints.
5. Tenant undertakes the obligation to establish, after the renewal of the estate, a national children and youth creative and camp centre is created on site, enabling local children from the area to participate in the camps.
6. Landlord and Tenant agree that the Tenant may use the leased properties as long as there is need for it, unless Landlord terminates the Agreement for a public interest.
7. [...]
8. [...]
9. Landlord and Tenant agree to indemnify one another in case of the termination of this Agreement, provided the termination of this Agreement takes place after 5 years from its original start date.
10. Landlord and Tenant agree that, due to the reasons detailed in Section 4, Tenant will not pay any Rental or Lease Fee, but Tenant is responsible for all property related costs (e.g. utilities, services fees), with the exception of the operational costs of the Doctor's Offices located in the main building of the former Council House.
11. [...]
12. [...]

This Agreement is concluded after reading and understanding all provisions herein, in accordance with the will of both parties. [...]

Szentes, 24th June 1994

Pál Korom
President, Union of VE-GA

dr. József Rébeli Sz.
Mayor

In 2005, the roof was damaged by hail and it cost VE-GA 3.5 million forints to replace and repair, which was funded via a successful application, but **not paid for by the City Council**.

In 2011, the ceiling and the roof of the Nurse's Room almost fell down. To repair them, VE-GA spent 2 million forints on materials and workforce, which was **not paid for by the City Council either**. **Overall, VE-GA spent 9.5 million forints on the camp site – without inflation mark-up –, while the City Council did not pay for any maintenance or repair.**

The Camp and Training Centre could cater for 35 people in summer, and it hosted over 10,000 young people in 20 years. A special attention must be paid to the training camps organized by SZIDÖK and its partners. Each summer there were two such camps, one for the 10–14-year-old, the other for the 14–19-year-old age group. Camp leaders and adult assistants would always work there as volunteers.



"to prevent anyone from being left alone"

To understand our story, it is important to know that the house and its environment were kept low-key, very simple but they fully met the requirements of our special training camps (pictures 8, 9) they had been planned for. As the site was not suitable for receiving children for "summer holiday" camps. We had to create unique programmes for 18 hours of the day thus making our camps attractive. Camp councillors had to have a method to prevent anyone from being left alone. So, we had small groups with more adults and peer councillors in the consecutive camps (pictures 10, 11, 12, 13, 14). **To provide the manpower to operate this camp site, you needed a civil organization such as VE-GA. And this is the only way it can function successfully in the future, too.**



"the house and its environment were kept low-key, very simple"

The Student Cellar

The 19th century building at 8 Kossuth Street in Szentes had an eventful life. There are rented shops on the ground floor. Upstairs there used to be a hospital. From these times, the area to the left of the entrance to the cellar was temporarily used to store dead bodies. Before we moved in, there had been a school upstairs for mentally disabled children. Until the school closed, the temporary corpse storage room was used to store coal. The other side of the entrance was converted to a small gym. Doors and windows of the cellar almost fell apart. Except for the gym part, there was no heating. There was an old gas furnace in the middle of the cellar that was used to heat the entire building – an old, ill-designed system in horrible condition.

Memory 1

We thought that the real slave labour would be to mine and hand carry out the 110 m3 of solidified coal. It became worse as we got close to the level of the hard earth floor. The coal stuck together so hard that even the point of picks could not break it. That room was finally left to have a lower height, taller people need to take care even today. But working inwards we found the pool of the corpse wash room, made of hard concrete. We also found the brick wall of the temporary corpse storage room that was still standing. Demolishing them seemed to be the craziest work ever. We wrote a work-song “Oh the Corpse-Washers Oh” – this made the other workers laugh a lot.

The cellar below had to be connected to the toilets on the ground floor. We had to chisel away a 70-cm wide brick wall by hand to get it done. Once we got there we found out that the corridor is 1.5 meters shorter somehow. Knocking on the end wall I realized there is a cavity behind it. Everyone started to guess what valuable things (or maybe dead bodies) we might find there. So, I began destroying the wall. After an hour of hard labour, the brick wall gave way, and I immediately ordered that everyone leave the cellar. I am experienced in waste water management, but this was disgusting for me too. Fully rotten into a stinky mass, all sorts of hospital waste were left here at the time of the second world war.

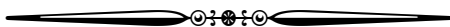
All works were suspended. The site manager ordered a dangerous waste delivery container. We put on chemical hazard protection suits to mine this disgusting thing out. Once completed, we disinfected the entire cellar, only after this could we continue chiselling through the 70cm thick wall. No need to share more details here.

It is kind of tragicomic however, that a visitor today would see the state where we got at that time, the only difference is probably that the walls are not so nicely whitewashed.

At the time when we moved in, the 2nd floor was taken over by the Land Registry Office. From this point on, the troublesome real estate had become a shared property. The common horse is worst shod, as the old saying has it. In property management, a very awkward setup was born, which still prevails today. The City Council retained ownership of the building part with the shops on the ground floor, of the roof and the utilities servicing the building. The ownership of the second floor and the side wing was transferred to the Land Registry Office. This setup yielded many disputes but there were no real solutions in twenty years. The main sufferer of this had been the Student Cellar. One example is the water pipe system, built in the early 20th century, which frequently broke and got gummed up, and all “liquids” found their way into the cellar. Even rain water broke into the Student Cellar during heavy rainfall.

Despite all these, generations of young people in Szentes made the Student Cellar their home base, they regarded it as their own. This became the community space of SZIDÖK, of the TÖRÖDÉS (CARE) Foundation, of the Alternative Playhouse and many other groups of teenagers and young adults (pictures 19, 20, 21).

I must be grateful to the Divine Providence for one thing, though. For weeks, dozens of high school students, university students and young adults worked on these sites relentlessly, in horrible circumstances. I never had to goad them, they initiated things themselves, volunteered for new tasks. As I became tired, they became more independent. I only prayed to avoid accidents – there were thousands of dangerous situations. After a time, it was not in our hands any longer. Not as if this heroic, epic achievement could have been ruined by an ugly accident or injury. The thing was that I was responsible for all of them in every sense, and I felt it. All this was happening because of me. I made it possible for them to work here, to work like this. In the last days of our investment my heart began to fail, I could not breathe. I quietly hid away in case I needed to go – but I was given some more time.



*I want no brotherhood nor equality,
All I want from you is a chance
(Fészbuk Dzsenerésön: The Last Seal)*

About SZIDÖK

There were debates about the word *student* in the name of the Szentes Youth and Student Council (SZIDÖK) why it was not only *youth*. Why were representatives not elected in the same way you would elect a local government? But the most question was why to have a mentor organization for SZIDÖK. (Not as if a local government could exist without civil administration professionals.) In this context, the *mentor organization* VE-GA provided SZIDÖK with all operational conditions that required external help. These naturally included management of administrative items with the authorities, writing applications and handling funds, organizing research activities and programs. Personal mentoring was also often required to help SZIDÖK members overcome some difficulties.

I could insert here the Rules of Procedure and the Allocation of Competencies in SZIDÖK, its Election Procedures document, or its Book of Decrees. But this volume has another purpose: to highlight why and how SZIDÖK could work so exceptionally well, why it had more effect on the youth of the town than the adult City Council had on the adults of the town. I will first share some thoughts about the participants of

SZIDÖK. Then I share its abridged story, which is basically the story of all the things they realized in twenty years.

Representatives and delegates in SZIDÖK were elected or delegated by youth NGOs and student councils of elementary and secondary schools. However, there have always been people who joined in without being elected or delegated. These young people found us –SZIDÖK – for themselves. Most of the elected members did not become more than someone in office – so their cooperation was mostly “official”, doing their duty either seriously or just formally. A smaller group, however, built long lasting personal relationships. They had their own meetings in the Student Cellar on Fridays, they were the core team of SZIDÖK, a group of 15–25 people. It is obvious that their primary motivation was not to live public life here. They did a lot of things because we asked them to do it, and because they could do it together. We taught this and they learned this – together with us.

I am often asked how come that I know young people so well, even if I am old. How do I come to know about forming groups of great values or about the deviant ones?

Of course I do! They keep talking! All I do is sitting down and listening to them. If something catches my attention, I try to steer the flow of their endless discussion a little bit. Nobody is more at home in their affairs, happiness and problems than they themselves. For some time, their numbers went down, but I know them better – we easily understand one another. And we use the internet, especially Facebook, with all its good and bad effects. I have also become wiser, and I need less information to understand something. And in the meantime, some other great animators grew up by our side.

When somebody is interested and comes to me for the story, they usually understand this all. What they cannot really comprehend is this: how come that the people of SZIDÖK can articulate surprisingly mature ideas and suggestions about local, national, European or global issues?



”great animators grew up by our side”

”built long lasting personal relationships”





"they think more strategically"



"more interested, cleverer, more informed"

In everyday chatter, something basic appears very subtly: **during the years, a kind of public thinking culture has developed in SZIDÖK, which is subconsciously passed on to the new generations** – similarly to how it is done in the society. In this heritage one can no longer differentiate the cultural elements of other partner councils, other youth NGOs. So even though participants of SZIDÖK keep changing within 3 years, they do not have to start everything all over each time. And the exchange is less sequential, but rather continuous.

The young people who joined SZIDÖK are different from the members of VE-GA. SZIDÖK has always been the meeting place for the elite of students and young people, who are more interested, cleverer, more informed. Compared to the average young people they think more strategically, they formulate their opinions better – that is why they were delegated to SZIDÖK. If they are interested in something, they would initiate discussions, trainings, research, meetings, even conferences. I will enlist some of these soon – let me only mention here the two youth strategy documents of the City Council.

However, it is very important to understand that these young people are normal teenagers. There is some adolescent element even in the best of their results, sometimes they were rather messy. Let me share a story about this.

Memory 2

The second Orbán government was fresh in office. However, the State Secretariat for Education immediately began to "rationalize" the education system.

One of their experienced staff called me in early September about it. He asked if I could recommend a group of teenagers who would be willing to give an assessment of the proposed changes. I said that SZIDÖK and its mentors might be suited to the task.

The following day I shared this with 23 SZIDÖK members and their 6 young adult assistants. I wasn't very popular, they had already been really annoyed about it. We agreed that I would tell them what they needed to know as background information at our next meeting. (It had always been my responsibility to translate legal and professional things to the language of clever teenagers.)

One afternoon there were surprisingly many people in the Student Cellar – some of the boys with a hangover. They ran into a debate (fight) about the points of the educational reform almost immediately. I said I would take notes, but they apparently did not even hear that. I did take notes, and I sent them, almost word by word, to the State Secretariat. The government officials were really surprised, and of course they had no idea what to make of it, but SZIDÖK only got more fame. And the boys were angry with me for weeks because I sent what they did not mean to be sent. (There was a representative among them whom we haven't seen since then. By the way he was the loudest guy in hangover.)

Let's have another look at the facts now. The story of SZIDÖK can easily be narrated as a success story. But the facts have another side to them. In the early years youth public life was short lived in Szentes. At that time the development of youth public life meant its continuous rebuilding. The young get engaged only if they feel the need to act in a situation that relates to their interests. Alongside these public issues there can be deeper common goals or ideas that reinforce the publicity of the issue.

We can speak about youth public life of a town only if provides a guideline for democratic thoughts and fields of activity of young people. Furthering the participation of young people in public life means trying to professionally assist this process.

It is a fact however that in the early years not even the elite of the youth of Szentes was interested in or capable of democratic public life. As a result, the baseline of our development activities was the principle that anything we offered should meet their (personal) needs and coincide with their problems. It was along these activities that participants got involved in the management of public affairs. At the beginning, they agreed to arrange these affairs democratically – alongside a well-defined framework of certain activities.

One could probably say that we manipulated them on purpose. This was how we achieved that they worked on something that was not even a demand of their own. The truth is that we use pedagogically structured socialization schemes in which this kind of development is an explicitly articulated pedagogical goal. However, we never force anything on anyone, not even if we could. On the contrary, we had to pay the cost for the huge efforts in the planning, preparation, and organization work. Let me share an example from the high times:



"public thinking culture"



"these young people are normal teenagers"



"articulate surprisingly mature ideas and suggestions about local, national, European or global issues"

Memory 3

The Complex Student Camp in 1995 brought a high level of excitement and euphoria for the participants, who not only enjoyed the camp itself, but planned for their 1996 camp as well, with some minimal professional help. You could believe that after all this, we had an easy job to organize the camp of 1996. Well, we had to do “only” the following to get it done:

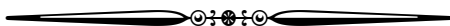
- Mention had to be made about the camp at each of our meetings in the year (almost weekly)*
- Mention had to be made about it at four major events (three times in details)*
- We had to send a written memo to all school principals and organization leaders (to student council assistant teachers and to each student council separately)*
- We had six pieces of news about it in the local radio and in local papers*
- We set it as a separate item on the agenda of the School Principals’ Council meeting.*

After all this, by the deadline we had received only five registrations out of the twelve GYIKA (Szentes Children and Youth Roundtable) groups, and there had not been any registration from school student councils.

The following step was to send out 56 invitation letters, including detailed information and a new set of registration forms. That time we received one application, the sender of which failed to turn up at the camp. So, I had no option but to pick up the phone and make 152 calls. Only after all these did we have enough participants enrolled in the camp.

It is unnecessary to say that the summer camp of 1996, too, ended in tearful goodbye hugs, longing to extend the camp for another week...

After so many years, setting up the camps involves a lot less effort today, but we still need to send hundreds of Facebook messages when organizing them (a large portion of which being sent by the participants to one another).



*They are not ‘tales – the father chides the boy
(János Arany: Family Circle)*

An Abridged History of SZIDÖK

Working conditions for SZIDÖK changed continuously, so did the character of the teenagers. Until the early 2000’s, their change was measurable in 3–4-year periods, but afterwards it accelerated. This defined the eras of SZIDÖK.

The Era of Szentes Children and Youth Roundtable – 1995 to 1998

The Szentes Children and Youth Roundtable (GYIKA) was the roundtable of teenager NGOs, student councils and other young people showing interest in public life. It was primarily a forum for coordination, it organized events and applied for funding.

Parallel to GYIKA, the student magazine of the town called *Aszpirin* was born, its issues were a true success in Szentes. All issues of *Aszpirin* are available in the town’s e-library. The activity of GYIKA is truly reflected in these magazines.

GYIKA was not only a forum for public life, but also an information and advisory hub, helping the young in issues related to application for funds, advising on compulsory military and on civil service. It announced competitions for funding for organizations, young people and students. It had many trainings, including democratic leadership trainings. It organized important events of the town such as *Stuff Exchange* to collect for poor kids and *Christmas Playhouse*.

Let us have a look at two characteristic pieces from *Aszpirin* here.

Scratch on a School Bench

Write more
Don't be soft, write
Verbs
Write verbs of existence
Why? (Who gets it now?)
Carry on & cry till alive
And look, look two hands
Are looking through you
Selected by Fate

Do I exist at all?!

I am crazy. But I can't help it. I've tried to think seriously since mom sat down with me again. I'm listening to her, but after the second minute my face is like it's cast in plastic, as if it wasn't my face. As if I wasn't even myself. I just listen, as if she wasn't talking to me.
- Honey, you are in 4th grade. Latest in November you'll be asked where you want to go on. What will you say? Really, what do you want?
"What do I want?" That's just one thing that I want. I wish I could sing and dance! But I'd rather shut up about it otherwise they'd look at me as if I was an alien.
And what choices have I anyway? I'm quite good at literature, at biology. So, I must become a teacher. Me – a teacher?! Gosh... I need to have a look around what else is out there.
Anyway, it's only October. It'll sort itself out somehow. I wish I knew how!

The Era of SZIDÖK Conferences – 1998 to 2002

In three years, the role of secondary school student council representatives in SZIDÖK became much greater. Most of them were aspiring students with good results. They wanted to have a more council-like form of operation. In 1997, it was known that the next national election would be won by FIDESZ. And we got authentic early information that FIDESZ would support the local youth self-governments. Therefore it was decided to establish the Szentes Youth and Student Council (SZIDÖK) on the grounds of GYIKA. The final decision was made at the National Public Life Conference (Szentes, spring of 1998), co-organized by GYIKA. This conference was supported by both party political blocks and their local representatives.

The newly formed SZIDÖK became a co-organizer of the *Youth Mental Hygiene and Drug Prevention Conference*, held in Szentes in November 1999. In October 2000 SZIDÖK hosted the *Youth Lifestyles Conference – Lifestyle Culture Against Drugs* in Szeged-Újszentiván.

The last one in the series was a scholarly-professional meeting in 2001, called *Drug Problems, Youth Problems, Ethical Problems*. Its findings were summarized at the *Conference of Teenager Peer Animators* (Magyartés, spring of 2002), independently organized by SZIDÖK.



"as if it wasn't my face"



"my face is like it's cast in plastic"



"What does a teenager spend time on?"

All these conferences were well reported in the special editions of *Aszpirin*, focusing on the five topics that were the most interesting for the youth. The titles of the sections of the 2002 conference at Újszentiván duly reflect this:

- Drink & Smoke & What You Need
- Sports + Health
- What Does a Teenager Spend Time On?
- Bad Effects of Media
- Youth Initiatives and the Role of Adult Assistants
- Our Role in Public Life. Is there any Youth Politics?
- Deviancies
- Problems in Self-esteem

These are evergreen teenager topics anywhere.

The conferences listed above proved to be of high quality and had considerable influence, which was reflected in the two unexampled decisions made by the Local Government of Szentes about SZIDÖK. One of the decisions was unprecedented in Europe, and it was to acknowledge SZIDÖK as a **minority local council with derived legal personality. SZIDÖK was incorporated into the Rules of Procedure and the Allocation of Competencies in the City Administration.** Let me attach here the relevant sections, which are, by the way, in legal effect even today.

Excerpt from the Rules of Procedure and the Allocation of Competencies of the Szentes City Council (Decree 1/2015.(II.).

Chapter 10

Szentes Youth and Student Council

- 59.§. /1/ In the Town of Szentes there functions a democratically elected youth and student council.
- /2/ The City Council and its Committees and Officers support the activity of the youth and student council.
- /3/ In all matters pertaining to the youth and students, the youth and student council is invited to attend the meetings of the City Council, and its Committees on City Management and Development, Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sport Affairs. The youth and student council has the right to express its opinion and ask questions at these meetings.
- /4/ The annual budget decree of the City Council shall define the subsidy amount allocated for the youth and student council.

The other decision of the City Council was to conclude a public benefit support contract with VE-GA in 2001 to support the SZIDÖK Project in the value of 860k HUF. In its amendment in 2006 this support was increased to 1.31M HUF.

This funding was in fact needed because FIDESZ acted on their promise: each year there were applications opening for city councils for the development of their local youth public life activities. These demanded a growing level of professionalism: each council had to develop a youth strategy and related action plans. Besides developing the youth government, a Youth Affairs Professional had to be employed for the increasing tasks. There had to be a dialogue between the adult and the youth council, and a set of research programs and events had to be delivered. However, it soon turned out that the City Council and the City Administration thought that all these would have to be done by SZIDÖK and VE-GA in exchange for the subsidy funding. But this was not the deal! VE-GA has arrived at a decisive point: we either reject the proposal and concentrate on our own programs in Szentes, or we take on this huge workload. If we didn't take it on, the SZIDÖK project would lose its development funding and would eventually lose the local government's support, too. If we took it, our own activities in Szentes would suffer. At this point the SZIDÖK project and SZIDÖK had such an advanced level of activity that VE-GA had no real choice but to undertake the extra tasks – to become the mentor of SZIDÖK.

There was another increasing problem that the teenager groups of VE-GA in Szentes were not differentiated from other groups of the SZIDÖK Project or from SZIDÖK itself. To clarify the relationships, VE-GA began to let its teenage groups run out – so outgoing secondary school students were not backfilled by new recruits. Those who stayed joined other groups of the SZIDÖK Project. After this point, the only activity of VE-GA in Szentes was to operate the SZIDÖK Project (primarily the Student Cellar and the Magyartés Camp and Training Centre) and to mentor SZIDÖK.

At the peak of this era the Town of Szentes was awarded the prize of *Youth Friendly City Council of the Year*.

The Era of Formal Council Work – 2002 to 2005

The IFJ applications that VE-GA compiled on behalf of the City Council provided a reliable and significant financial background for the SZIDÖK Project for many years. At the same time, it also meant a set of expectations that the City Council automatically delegated to SZIDÖK and VE-GA. For example, a Youth Strategy Document and Action Plan had to be created for the City Council, youth research had to be done, and numerous youth programmes had to be organized, too. We had to prove that there was a continuous dialogue between the City Council and SZIDÖK – which in fact was not always a real and continuous one. For some time, SZIDÖK was partner to this game. With my assistance, they also followed the work of the Council and the City Administration. They themselves started to function in a formal, council-like way, preparing motions and making documented decisions for themselves. But after some time it was apparent that they did not like it, and the young people of the early 2000s were also different.



"Sports + Health"



"some adolescent element ..., sometimes ... rather messy"

The research conducted by SZIDÖK in 2005 clearly showed the change in activities. At schools there was a significant increase in the amount of curriculum. The impulses on young persons became much stronger in a world rushing like crazy. As a completely new phenomenon, we observed a strong change in values. The values of Generation Y became increasingly apparent at secondary schools. For example, the struggle for a good future career appeared as a principal value. *Smartass* students, whom everyone had hated before, actually became role models. SZIDÖK turned out to be *unnecessary* both for them and the deviant *losers* dropping behind. At the same time, the number of secondary school students in SZIDÖK started to go down. However, as we offered more community events and programs, there was an increase in the number of elementary school pupils joining us.

One may feel that consecutive SZIDÖK research projects were some fake, elite-focussed things. The way they were done in fact is very typically adolescent, which can be highlighted by the following story.



"evergreen teenager topics"



"two boys kept on"

Memory 4

Each of these research projects had an interesting and concrete purpose, and research itself was often only a secondary priority, a tool. This was especially true for the repeated research on drug use and lifestyle focussing, in some way or another, on student drinking habits.

The same applied to the research carried out in 2004. And when they decided about it, I was worried because this again raised a lot of problems. First, this topic always made those revelling teenagers angry who had already been hostile to SZIDÖK for that reason. On the other hand, this topic made various adult groups feel uncomfortable, too, since the drinking habits of youngsters over 16 was tolerated by SZIDÖK so as not to completely alienate them from the organization.

When it turned out that SZIDÖK started polling in the four pubs frequented by secondary school students, I was immediately summoned to the meeting of the School Principals' Board. They had problems with the student researchers making deep interviews and filling in questionnaires while drinking beer. But their main objection was that SZIDÖK did not openly oppose drinking above the age of 16. As usual, I was made responsible for this as a leader.

Again, I had to tell them that I was not the leader of SZIDÖK. I also suggested that they should visit these places as teachers to get first-hand experience and to talk to students above 16, just like a guest talks to another guest in a pub. Well, some actually did it. And the next day he called the ones he had seen there to his office, no matter what they did or drank there. Of course, the hardcore pub-goers were angry at SZIDÖK (for this too). One result was a scum where all the completed poll sheets ended up in the mud and got destroyed. The next day the researchers met like a defeated army and decided to abort the entire thing. But two boys kept on: they went to each secondary school and talked to the student councils. They weren't welcome everywhere, but two weeks later they delivered the necessary number of questionnaires, all in good quality. So finally, this one was also completed in this typically adolescent fashion.

The Era of Community Development – 2005 to 2008

We needed more older assistants to work with the increasing number of early teenagers and community programs. We could solve it in two ways: first, through targeted requests and delegations, we involved old SZIDÖK members who still frequented the Student Cellar. They knew this world very well, and the majority chose a youth related subject in higher education, too. We also addressed some careerists among secondary school students, who were receptive to learn special skills. This led to several internal trainings, research programs, but also to courses on management, non-profit financing and accounting.

At the same time the collaboration between SZIDÖK and the Council became formal in all matters not directly related to the 12–18-year-old age group.

In this period, the Student Cellar was the host site for the events of sixteen different groups, organizations, music bands, workshops. The most regular and the most popular of these were the ones offered by SZIDÖK, and the Alternative Playhouse. These programs included all sorts of rehearsals, crafts workshops, sports trainings, individual exhibitions and projects, while for almost three years the Student Cellar hosted the Youth Information Point of Szentes, including an internet connection point.



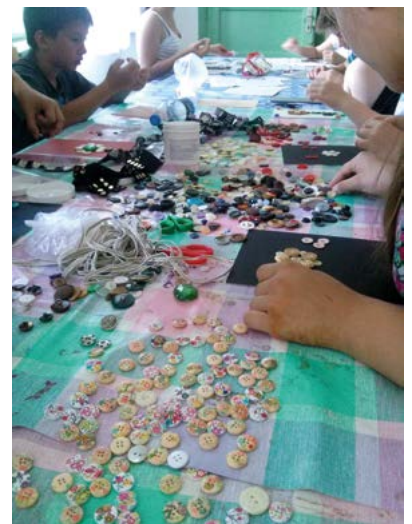
"all the completed poll sheets ended up in the mud and got destroyed"

Memory 5

One of the groups that used the Student Cellar for years was the Drums Workshop.

You should imagine the boys putting together two dozen of different barrels, paint pots and a shabby but real drum set. They also obtained and self-made some drumsticks. After some prep, they started to hit some base rhythm, which later broke out to different branches but remained in harmony. This was real joy music that you just couldn't stop making. Paint pots and drumsticks got worn away quickly but who cared... a new one was picked up.

Later, this merged with the Halloween parties that we were the first in Szentes to celebrate. Rarely, there were open air performances as well – which were not a hot success at the beginning.



"crafts workshops"

After 2008, there were more and more problems that hit the teenagers badly, causing purposeless changes. These called for a continuous need for adaptation, which was successfully converted into renewals in the end.

The Era of Ongoing Changes – 2008 to 2013

The Student Cellar indeed became a youth community space of SZIDÖK and various other groups. They liked it as their own, it became an essential component of their feeling secure. They could keep their stuff there, almost everyone had a private corner – some had a box under the mobile stage. This did not change when the maintenance issues of the cellar got worse. Heating was bad. Either the water or the sewage pipes leaked. Rainwater broke in after heavy storms. These resulted in a very bad outlook of the Cellar, but this never changed the home feeling of the youngsters. **So, it was a shock in the late autumn of 2008 that the Land Register Office simply cut off the heating of the Student Cellar, stating they could not agree with the City Council.** The entire Student Cellar was thus unusable, because the bad electric network did not support electric heating. (Later next spring, without our knowledge, a very expensive gas furnace powered heating system was installed, with a defective furnace.)

The school year of 2009–2010 was dedicated to revitalizing the life in the Student Cellar. However, many groups did not survive the closing.

Starting in the summer of 2011, a new project hit the youth: the refurbishment of the roof and the facade was delayed to autumn, and dragged on till the middle of spring. At its peak the roof of the cellar entrance collapsed. I was lucky to have had the expensive technical equipment moved out before this. Even the farthest corners of the cellar were covered with a thick layer of dust. Participants of the SZIDÖK Day, which happened to take place at that time, had the bitter experience of all this as a body blow: the students of two schools who did their best to make the event successful never returned to the Cellar. **The next hit was that the EU funded (surface) refurbishment of the cellar did not begin at the end of the school year in 2012, but only in the first weeks of school in autumn. Thus the Student Cellar could not be used until the middle of spring, making another school year of work impossible.**

All the challenges above were hard to survive. But there were other annoying problems that occurred, too.

Since SZIDÖK became a successful formal council, it had the unwanted side effect that the adult City Council had noted its existence. SZIDÖK submitted a series of proposals, questions and even motions. Through VE-GA, who was operating the Cellar, it had officially registered a complaint about the calamities around the facility management of the Student Cellar. SZIDÖK had a notable presence in the City Council Committee meetings. It had a lot of visibility in all town events, and it organized town level programs itself (pictures 23, 24, 25).

There were very strange debates at the City Council Committee meetings, where SZIDÖK was addressed, for example, to join the political dispute of the adult councillors, which by the way was often going on in an unacceptable style. These disputes got hostile in Szentes too, as the Őszöd Speech led to a national political warfare. This was further worsened by the financial and economic crisis of 2008 and its consequences. The representatives of VE-GA had to step in between the City Council and SZIDÖK. From late 2008, I became the delegated representative of SZIDÖK in disputes to which we could not expose the juvenile representatives of SZIDÖK. This attitude led to even more disputes among City Council members. On the one hand, the mentoring activity of VE-GA was recognized, which was proved, for example by the honorary *Recognition Medal for Szentes*, awarded by the City Council to the organization. On the other hand, seven months later an article was published in *Szentesi Élet* with the title *Why Exactly VE-GA? – to be discussed later*.

Starting in 2007, country level initiatives were targeting the professional management of youth affairs, the intention was to accept a National Youth Strategy. VE-GA was invited to this work, making use of the expertise it had gained in the SZIDÖK Project and when mentoring SZIDÖK. One of the core subjects of this strategy document was to define the professional content of youth animation, and to create a system for youth animator training. After many debates, VE-GA took a minority position in these, which then meant that its expertise (including the experience of SZIDÖK) was completely omitted



"in search of lost time".

from the professional materials. This did not have a good effect on the leaders and mentors of SZIDÖK. The National Youth Strategy was accepted by the Parliament in a majority vote before the second Orbán government took over. Since then it has been just a sheet of paper. Nothing came true of the centralized training system for youth professionals.



Because of the above, after the election in 2010 SZIDÖK was entitled to do less and less in the local governmental space. Instead, more attention was paid to other types of civil and self-governmental activities. After 2011, the generation Z appeared in secondary schools, bringing along a new set of skills and needs, even as compared to generation Y.

SZIDÖK built new connections, formed new partnerships with many organizations, including the Youth Council of Budapest District 16, the Association of Children and Youth Councils and the Student Coordination Council of Marosvásárhely. The focus for SZIDÖK was now on summer camps organized either for themselves or for its partners. SZIDÖK members also worked in the camps of other NGOs. All that happened strengthened the need for trainings. Training series for 12–20 people became regular, and these merged into traditional community programs.

Disputes in VE-GA on the sustainability of the SZIDÖK Project:

Well, there were no real disputes on this because there could not be any dispute: VE-GA members got so much emotional bond with this project and especially with the camp site at Magyartés. So, any rational argument repelled off them.

In the spring of 2014 this led to a point where I made a very articulated proposal, when even my wife Anikó turned against me.

What was it then?

Intermezzo 1

On 26th May 2006, just a month after he was elected, Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány (MSZP) admitted at a closed-doors meeting that they had made basic mistakes – this was the infamous Őszöd Speech. He also admitted that they had lied. “We have obviously lied throughout the past one and a half – two years.”

As the speech leaked, a national political crisis broke out. The Hungarian Socialist Party and the entire left political side is still under its shock. This also caused overpower for the newly elected FIDESZ-KDNP coalition, which still does, and likely will, dominate politics in the future, too.

It cost a lot of money to maintain the two real estates, both over 100 years old. Many building works had to be done without any delay. We already spent millions on them, and further millions should have been spent again. From what?!

In these operative problems, VE-GA was completely alone. The unfortunate City Council investment (of EU funds) in the renovation of the Student Cellar clearly showed that the bodies of the City Council were almost hostile to us.

The number and monetary value of application funding (mostly in post-financing setup) would have required a more definite commitment from the part of the City Council. But there was no chance to get it.

So, the condition of the two estates rapidly got worse (including the partially refurbished Student Cellar).

The NGOs and schools got into worse situation too, and the city council should have stood out a lot stronger – for example when defining the conditions of various subsidies it gave. However, this did not improve. Furthermore, the new education reform ordered that all students must be in the school until 4 pm. They were not even let out for SZIDÖK meetings on Friday afternoons unless they were a lot more vocal and decisive. As this never happened, the young teenagers could not participate in the life of SZIDÖK the same way as they had previously been involved in it.

My neglected proposal was this:

VE-GA should terminate the non-profit subsidy agreement. It should hand over all SZIDÖK related administrative tasks to the coordinator of youth affairs in the City Administration, or to some other body of the City Council – just as it is arranged in many other places. And we could then continue the professional youth work under another agreement.

We should also hand over the technical operation of the Student Cellar to the City Council, who were responsible for it anyway as it was refurbished on EU funding. Let's just be one of the users there. And as for the Camp Centre at Magyartés, let's handle it as a classic tenant would treat a rented place.

My proposals were, however, rejected and I had to accept it. After that my worries became more and more serious. I knew we could solve the human side of this, but I saw no way out of the technical and financial problems.

After so many successful years, youth public participation in Szentes reached its worst point.

The education reform of 2013 not only made it mandatory for elementary school kids to stay in the school until 4 p.m., but it also restructured their time at school. It moved real workload to the afternoon hours, including Friday afternoon hours. This also took up their Saturdays, as many races, competitions, trainings, extra classes and programs moved over to Saturdays. This made their participation in the city's youth public life almost impossible. The only open question was if we could find a way out of this for the youth of Szentes.

With a professional approach in mind, we identified two paths:

1) We decided to explore the current teenage youth of the town as much as we could, so we created three research programs which (as usual) had a much broader scope than this. Beyond the immediate research objectives, there was also a goal to build a bridge between the adult assistants of SZIDÖK and the teachers who assisted student councils at schools. These programs intended to make it obvious that participation in the projects of SZIDÖK could be a help in the student life of overloaded schools for many students could collaborate in SZIDÖK as school representatives.

*This enabled the assistants of SZIDÖK to connect with teachers and their students in another way. A way that resembled a true relationship that a true *paida-gogos* would want in a world where the world of schools is degrading pedagogically.*

The three research programs were the following:

2014: In Search of Lost Time

2015: NET-WORLD – Virtual Life in the Daily Life of Teenagers

2015: Role/Model/Value (Documentation completed in 2016)

2) We heavily relied on the experienced adult assistants and a group of 12–16 SZIDÖK representatives who were engaged in this area since their childhood.

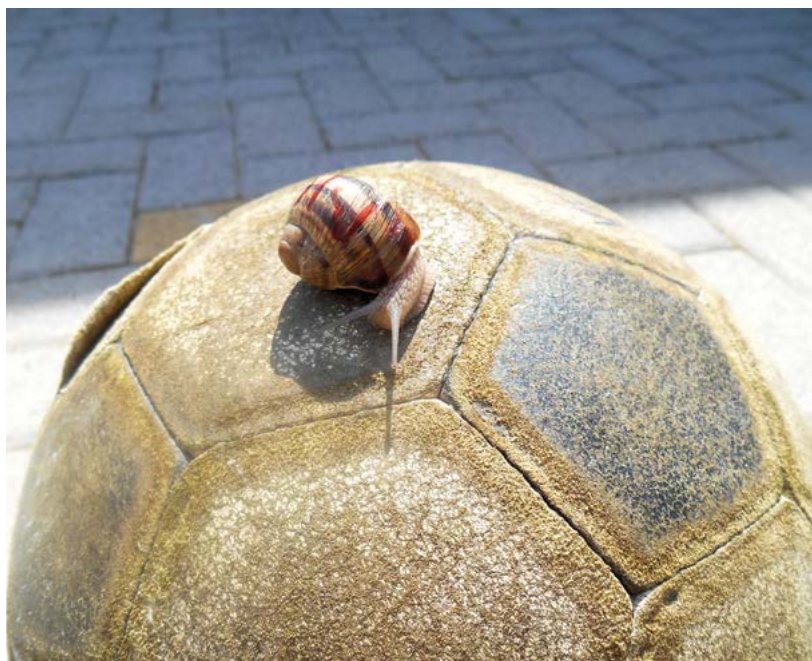
Beyond a variety of trainings there was a new kind of program series, based on various World Days. The main emphasis, however, was on building personal relationships within SZIDÖK and along its new boundaries. We also improved the quality of external relationships and conditions for the camps.

In preparation for these camps we made a summary of participation in SZIDÖK till date: in 20 years, almost 1000 teenagers were involved in public participation. 156 representatives and delegates only had a one-time adventure. 214 representatives or delegates spent years in these public activities. We had 14 Youth Mayors and Vice Mayors, and 68 other position holders.

A New Era of SZIDÖK – from Spring 2015

I had another abdominal operation in early spring and this time it was hard for me to fully recover. I spent a lot of time on sick leave. I also had some mental problems, showing early signs of dementia, but with some due attention I managed to spare the time to talk to everybody about everything, and to think over everything. I also went ahead of the unclarified findings of our latest research. The summer camps of 2015 were led by others this time, and they were a kind of trial for the new working style of SZIDÖK; a trial for a set of methodologies that were organically built on the findings of the research projects and which fully utilized the human network that surrounded them.

Our trainings and World Day events had to meet the following criteria: to be interesting, charismatic and of high-standard – and to be very rapid, fast paced. Every 7–10 minutes had to bring surprise, a good sentence or a minigame, otherwise the attention of Generation Y started to lessen. We also had to accept that it was natural that their smartphones got notifications frequently which had to be checked immediately. It was also natural that they should have small side discussions, often about the things that happened to them – or about



"had ... to be interesting,
charismatic and of high-
standard – and ... very
rapid, fast paced"



"conscious, mutual animator networks"

something completely different. However, if these side talks brought up an idea that fit in with the main topic, we tried to deal with it immediately, either by letting it become part of the discussion or by clarifying why it was not suitable to include. Both their smartphone interactions and their local standalone position were inherent parts of the personal care for them, so they had to find their way into our current activities. Only this environment could make it possible for them to get a community experience with these factors in one unity. The totally accepting environment of this group is what makes it worthwhile for them to come here and to deal with serious things, even though they never have the time or energy for anything.

Another aspect of this is that, besides all the above, they badly need very deeply personal relationships. Their interactions via smartphones (primarily their use of Messenger) are like a whirl of joining, commenting, liking stuff. This is augmented and re-founded by the short time of face to face meetings, the instinctive, emotional order of various casual contacts – often hasty touches, almost in a ceremonial manner.

In this way a completely a completely new kind of network of young people can be formed. If you are inside them, it is easy to help the development of conscious, mutual animator networks. For the adults who love the youth as they are, it is more of a joy than a problem to connect to this world. At the same time, it is a significant commitment: the teenagers do not like the idea of sharing the adults who care for them personally – they are selfish in this (too). So, we need many small, collaborative groups of animators, where the network of animators to be formed must have wise personalities (only) at the endpoints. This came about by late 2015 when a new era for SZIDÖK began.



"totally accepting environment of this group"

The Assembly of Delegates of SZIDÖK was held on 20th November 2015. Participants arrived in small groups, with their own animators, and were greeted by the group of animators who were responsible for the event. At the end of the chain of animators there were the adult mentors of schools and organizations. Secondary school and even elementary school pupils also had tasks in running the event, organized together as one common action sprint. The Assembly itself was very impressive (a projector was used throughout), and it was indeed a series of interesting but short information sessions, a chain of questions and answers (decisions). The event itself was part of a larger set of various programs and events.

Since this was strategically important, I attach the somewhat dull agenda of the day here:

[Agenda of the Assembly of Delegates of SZIDÖK, 20th November 2015]

8:30 Arrivals, registration

Put coats down, visit the registration desk.

9:00 Simple group games

- *Bumm csiki bumm* – to ease the tension at the beginning

- Two concentric circles, players to list 3 items: name, favourite movie, favourite colour (or the colour of their toothbrushes). If pairs are done, the circles move on to a different direction. Game ends when the player arrives back to the first pair. This game is to stand in for introduction in large group – that would take too much time.
- *Take a chair!* Game
- If time allows: *Nád a házam teteje* (folksong with gestures)

9:30 Assembly of Delegates of SZIDÖK

- Chairperson's opening. He gives a summary of activities in summer, in September and in October.
- Ádám is to share experiences of the MACI Meeting (Szeged)
- Levi is to give a presentation on 2016 summer camps
- Fanni and Bogi are to share their experience at the meeting in Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș)
- Anikó is to announce that the 20-year-old CARE Foundation will have an introduction presentation at noon. Many volunteers of CARE are known to the SZIDÖK delegates. She mentions the related exhibition and handouts as well.
- Alíz and Pali are to outline the status of recent and ongoing SZIDÖK research projects. Those who have not filled in the poll sheets can do it now.
- Motions and Decisions
- Items of the next period, plans, to-dos (e.g. any other application open?)
- Handover of Recognition Certificates to those who have worked in SZIDÖK for years and will graduate this year
- Presentation and discussion of the group results of the World Day of Children's Rights program

10:45 World Day of Children's Rights

Create two groups, elementary and secondary school students.

Elementary school pupils to work on the game *Bunnies' Rights*. The game begins with listing the items a little bunny needs to be healthy and happy. Then they discuss the same for children. They also discuss if these can be called rights. At the end they discuss the declaration of the Rights of the Child.

Secondary school students to play the game *Children's Rights*. First, discuss the Declaration. Then the teenagers get the 9 rights and they need to arrange them in a diamond shape (one most important, two important, three medium important, two less important and one least important). Finally, we discover the differences and discuss how difficult it was to reach consensus.

Both groups need a separate room and the game takes about 45 minutes. If they are ready, we get together again as an Assembly and each group presents their work, what they learned and how they felt about it. It is then time for questions and arguments, discussing any minority opinion.

11:45 – Awards Ceremony of the Folktale Application for Elementary School Pupils

12:15 – Introduction of TÖRÓDÉS (CARE) Children and Youth Foundation

12:30 – Surprise: cakes and favourite songs of the team

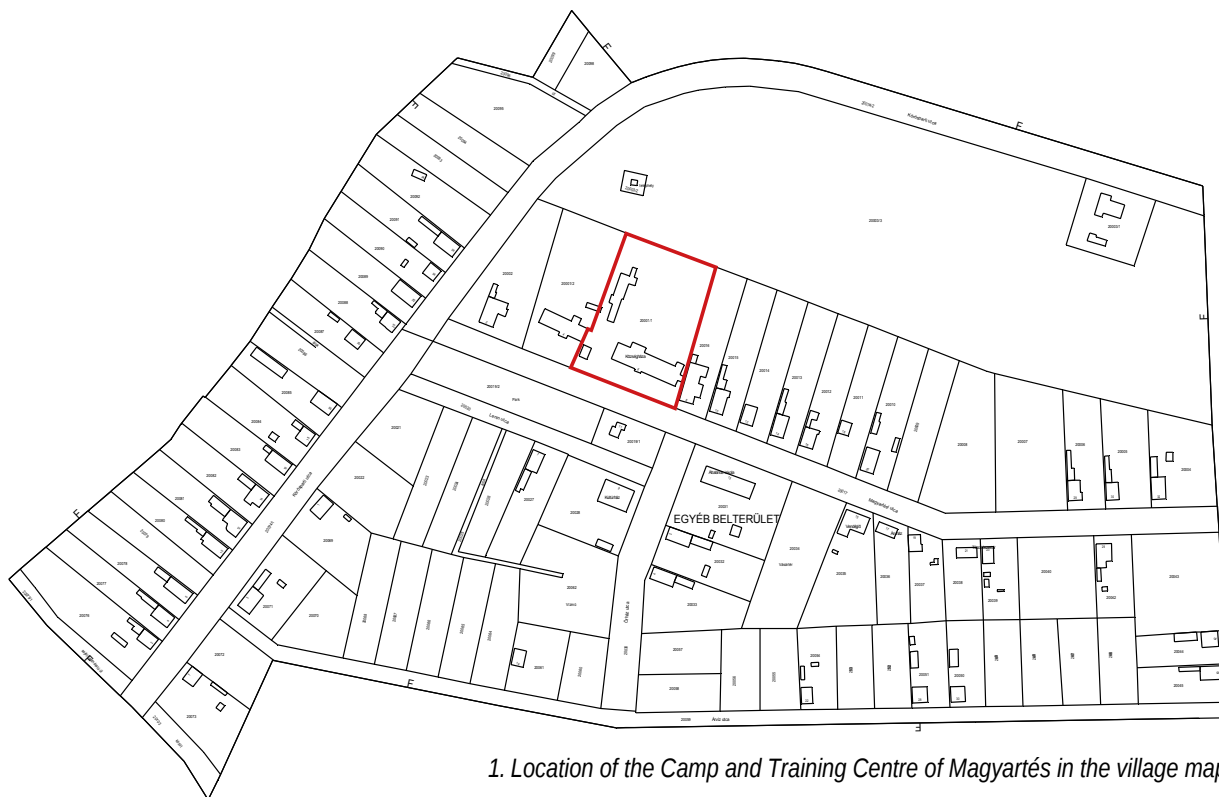
Afterwards optional programs, free discussions, being open for any follow-on activity that the participants want to do together or in smaller groups.

To this event we invited the Mayor, the Chief Executive Director of the City Administration and János Kovács, Chairman of the Youth Committee of the Szentes City Council. It is fair to say that SZIDÖK had a successful and fully public entry in its new and promising era on 20th November 2015, on the Day of the Right of the Child.

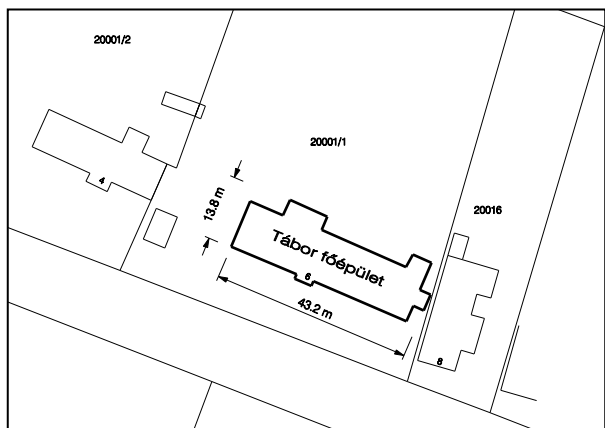
Less than a month later, on 18th December 2015 the Szentes City Council made a unilateral decision to terminate the town's youth participation programme, the SZIDÖK Project. They terminated their moral and financial support and the public partnership. They terminated the cooperation with VE-GA, operator of the SZIDÖK Project and mentor of SZIDÖK. They reclaimed both City Council properties, the Camp and Training Centre of Magyartés and the Student Cellar. The last section of their decision was to terminate support of SZIDÖK after 1st January 2016.

PICTURES

(documentary pictures, drawings)



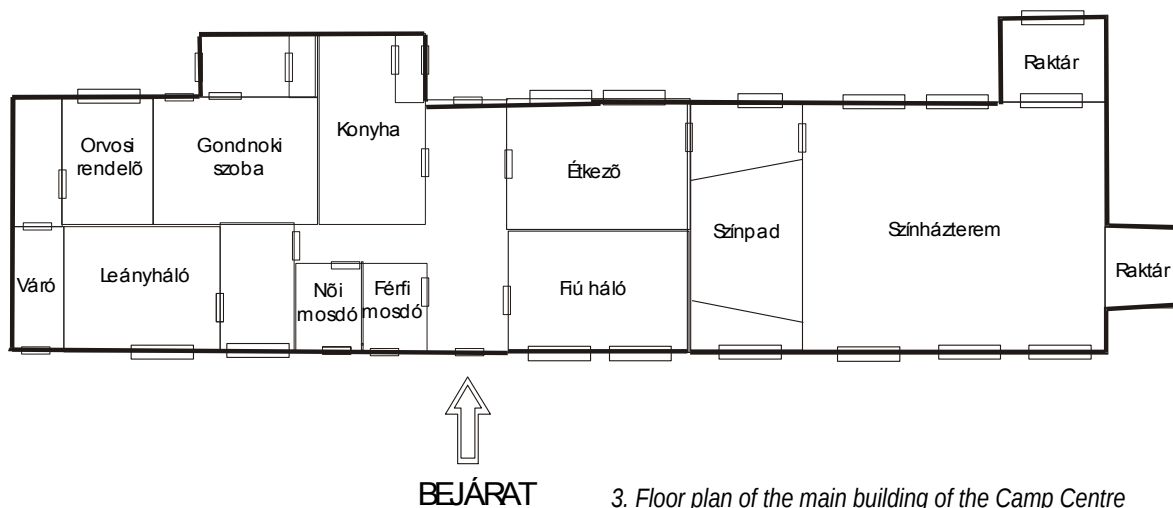
1. Location of the Camp and Training Centre of Magyartés in the village map



2. Outlines of the main building of the Camp Centre



4. Main entrance of the Camp Centre before the reconstruction (1994)



3. Floor plan of the main building of the Camp Centre



5. Main entrance of the Camp Centre after the reconstruction (2003)



6. Rear facade of the Camp Centre before the reconstruction (1994))



7. Rear facade of the Camp Centre after the reconstruction (2012)



8. Works in the gardens of the Camp Centre (1994)



9. Gardens of the Camp Centre after 20 years (2014)



10. Group game in the Theatre Room



11. Lecture in the student camp



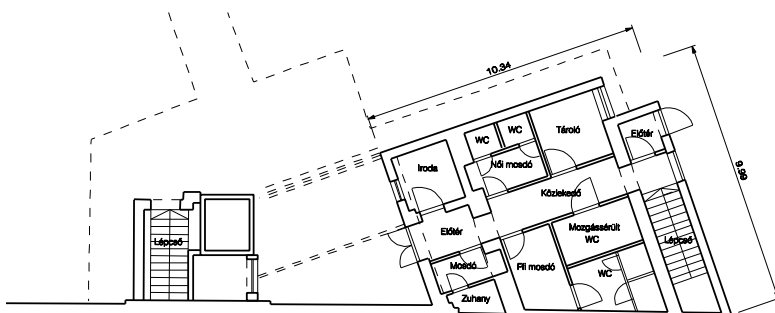
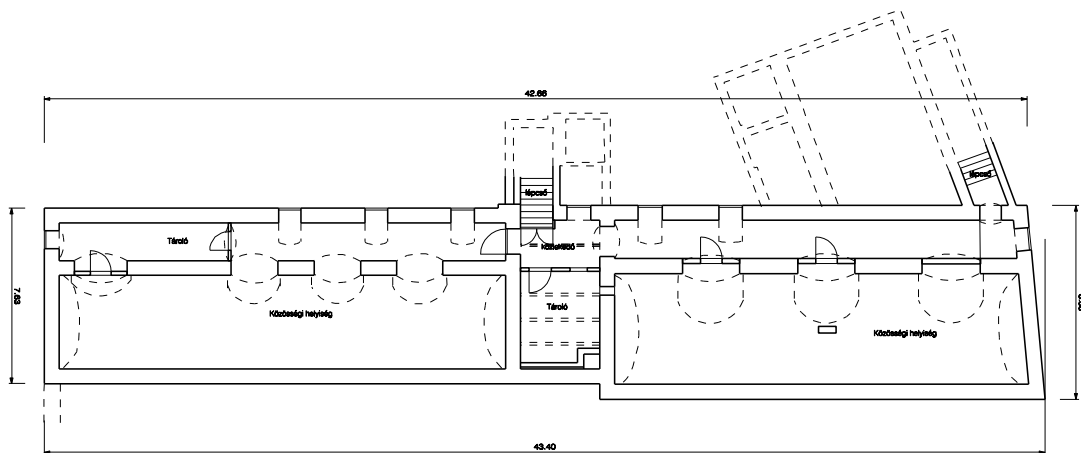
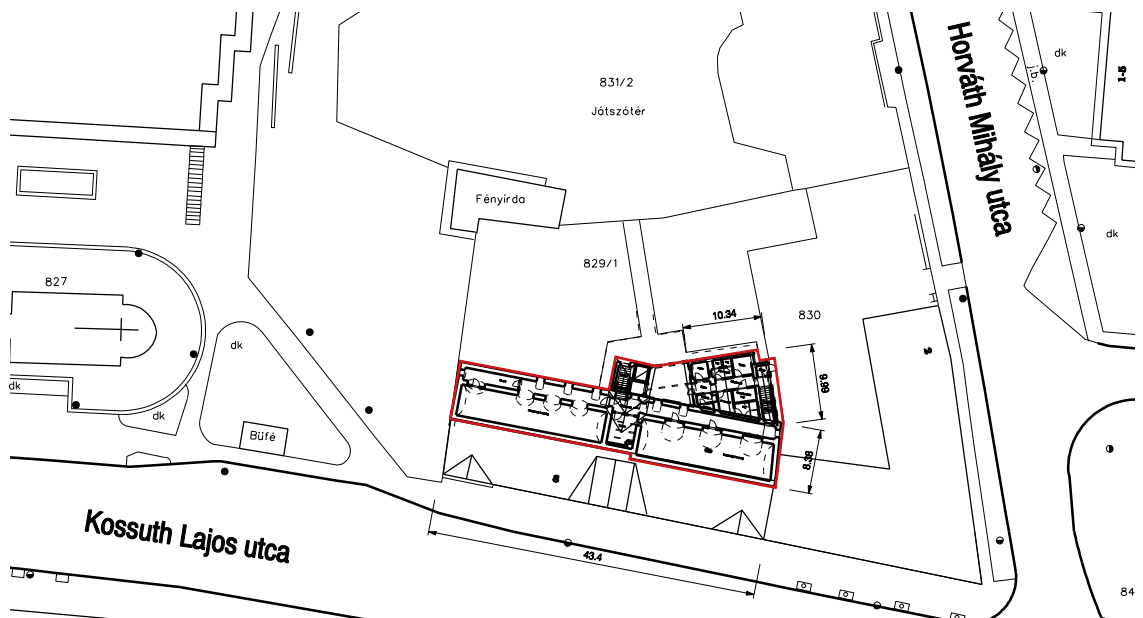
12. Group exercise in the theatre room



13. Free time, hangout in the terrace



14. Stage performance in the theatre room of Magyartrés





19. Group exercise at the Assembly of Delegates of SZIDÖK, winners of the graffiti tender in the background (2009)



20. Self-esteem workshop in the Alternative Playhouse (2010)



21. Group discussion in the Alternative Playhouse (2012)



22. Meeting of animators in the Student Cellar (2015)



23. Assembly of Delegates of SZIDÖK in the Student Cellar (2015)



24. Assembly of Delegates of SZIDÖK in the Ceremonial Room of the Szentes City Hall (2011)



25. Assembly of Delegates of SZIDÖK in the Ceremonial Room of the Szentes City Hall (2013)

*There was no future and there won't be like this
You just can't sell this to me like that
(Fészbuk Dzsenerésön: The Last Seal*

What is Youth – A Resource or a Source of Problems?

It is common knowledge today that childhood is a separate life period – but it only became apparent only in the 19th century, and only in the developed world. However, it only got a legal form when the rights of children were codified. *Revolutionary youth, rebellious youth, angry youth* – these are artistic, cultural, political or at the very best sociological concepts. The youth has only become an important, independent social actor in the developed economies, first in the USA as a new, independent cluster of consumers.

At the same time a trend emerged whereby everyone wants to stay young if possible, at any cost. In sociology, it is called juvenilization. More and more middle-aged and older people convince themselves that they are able to stay young and, as a result of this, they can understand young people and feel like them.

But I am not that stupid. I'm annoyed, and not only by this, but I really would like to know for example the exact age group definition of youth.

The National Youth Strategy of 2009 defined the starting point at the age of 14, which meant that it was the upper age limit of childhood age. At the same time the upper the upper age limit of 'youth' was set at 35 years, which I believe is rather middle-age than youth. However, this age group definition amalgamates completely different needs and problems, which is practically unmanageable. There is another problem which is caused by the many professions, legal areas and budget chapters that have youth related tasks and missions. This complexity clearly indicates that youth related tasks do not form one independent cluster, but are spread out over many sectors.

It is a frequent question if there are any specific youth related tasks or issues that cannot be enlisted under any other sector. And if so, how to define them professionally, legally and economically. We are pretty much alone these days to state that youth-related professional tasks and issues do exist outside the world of schools. These cannot be enlisted under any other sector's responsibility. One of these tasks is the complex development of teenager youth participation in public life. However, this is not in line with the official age group definition of youth, specified from completely different aspects and meant for other purposes. Indeed, the **political socialization of children begins before the age of 14, at the cognitive threshold (at around the age of 12), and is largely formed by the family and other patterns. By the age of 18, young people become fully capable citizens, legally adults, and completely new possibilities for participation or engagement in politics open up for them.** Young people usually only



"revolutionary youth, rebellious youth, angry youth"



"everyone wants to stay young if possible, at any cost"

become capable of running an independent life later, at around the age of 22–23. So, for the development of teenager youth participation in public life, this is where we identify the upper age limit of youth.

As for SZIDÖK, we always regarded it to be a teenage council. However, the adult local government never accepted this. For the municipal councils, the management and financing of youth affairs have always been an intangible item. In the related sections of the Municipality Law though mention is made about “Sports and Youth Affairs as a mandatory task, no financing is allocated from the central budget for “Youth Affairs”, nor is there any designated funding available via applications for that purpose.

So long as there was funding, local governments regarded the local youth (at least verbally) as the custodians of the future of their city, as a resource for development. And this was a general local governmental and political viewpoint as well.

However, today no partners are needed in management or development, so there is no need for the development of local teenager youth participation. The opportunity that we created together and maintained for twenty years was now killed off by our own City Council. It has returned to the traditional order of things.

Today these age groups are again considered much more of a challenge and a source for many problems. In Szentes several articles published in local newspapers show evidence of this (to be cited later).

It can eventually be said that for local governments, *youth affairs* in a narrow sense existed only in exceptional circumstances. This also contributed to the tragic decisions made about SZIDÖK. However, these general trends cannot absolve the Szentes City Council from responsibility since their basic strategic goal was to keep the youth in the town once they became adults.

Their tragic decisions were also caused by the uncertain attitude of the establishment of the town towards the youth of the town and to the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA. This being a civil group, it had been labelled as a political, opposition organization since the early 1980s. City leaders were always aware of the fact that kids and adolescents are not interested in party politics. They always looked at me to measure the political orientation of VE-GA. However, I was openly against both state socialist dictatorship *and* the locally available version of capitalism. The leaders of the city could not digest it. And the non-leaders, the middle class of the town, teachers or parents did not even understand these occasional political battles, and were afraid to see the local conflicts of VE-GA.

According to the laws of social psychology, I was to blame for these conflicts being “peaceless” and “opposition to everything”. Another scapegoat was VE-GA. In the mid-1980s (1983 to 1989) this was stuck in the subconscious of the town. People became careful with any initiative of VE-GA. Another disturbing factor was (quote) that even in the mid-1980s VE-GA was “too big for our small town”. By the end of the 1980s it had grown into a strong national civil organization with thousands of members – so it became a political entity in the town.



”a new, independent cluster of consumers”



”easily bug you off”

It happened in the early 1990s that one of the spiritual and political leaders of the liberals firmly addressed to me the following (which I can't quote word by word after so many years): *"There are two halves in the political arena, in desperate opposition to each other. It just cannot be that a bunch of kids run across the field under your leadership. They can't easily bug you off since you are too strong for that already. You have to choose between them, otherwise they both will eventually turn against you and destroy you."* This person proved to be a prophet.

When the disputes about SZIDÖK started to become fierce, and we first made them public in the spring of 2009, I the leaders of the two dominant political parties in person. I had known them previously and I had almost friendly personal contacts with them. They knew about VE-GA and were quite familiar with SZIDÖK as well. Quite shockingly, they both said the same thing. I remembered the advice I mentioned above. The guy from MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party) told me that their members see us as FIDESZ supporters, who have a dangerous effect on the young. My friend from FIDESZ said exactly the same thing, the only difference was that for their members we were "leftists", we were friends of the socialist Mayor and befriended the MSZP. As a matter of fact, both large parties considered me, VE-GA and logically also SZIDÖK as their natural opposition.

Let me add a few facts in here. In twenty years, the only officials who showed interest to SZIDÖK in person were the two Mayors, nobody else. Beside them, except for the opening ceremony, there was only one prospective local government member who ever visited the Magyartés Training and Camp Centre whose doors were open to anybody at any time. The Student Cellar was visited by, apart from the above two Mayors, a Vice Mayor and one councillor, who paid a next-to-the-last minute visit to the place.

Despite the many applications and reports and the two Youth Strategy documents we wrote, the five Youth Action Plans we made, the numerous motions we put forward, the non-profit subsidy agreements we took part in for 14 years, SZIDÖK was never dealt with or put on the agenda at the meetings of the Szentes City Council. There were two occasions where VE-GA formally requested the responsible City Council Committee to discuss SZIDÖK. In the first instance the Committee granted a written support for the SZIDÖK Project without any question or dispute. In the second instance an



"you have to choose between them"



"much more of a challenge and a source for many problems"



"The opportunity that we created together and maintained for twenty years"



"we lived our lives with happy moments and struggles"

unfinished dispute broke out about SZIDÖK and the mentor role of VE-GA – followed up by a series of mails, but never formally closed. In this discussion, many questions were asked that had already been answered in the documents of the previous 12 years. However, the disputes seemed to be settled as the City Council awarded VE-GA the Recognition Award Medal "For Szentes Town" in 2008. Seven months later, the local newspaper *Szentesi Élet* published an article with the title *Why Exactly VE-GA?* I quote it here in full, followed by our answer. (As much as we could, we tried to be politically sensitive in our response in order to protect the interests of children and youth.)

Why Exactly VE-GA? Young People Must Also Be Asked

Szentesi Élet, 26th June 2009

The Youth Strategy document of the Szentes Area Municipal Association was negotiated at the City Council meeting at the end of May. Ms Olga Virág mentioned in her opening speech that the document is targeted at children and young people (aged 0 to 30). She also mentioned that in the area there are twice as many young people above 18 than under 18. She stated that there is no Youth Law at present and the National Youth Strategy is also not final either, so there are no central documents to which local strategies or action plans could be adjusted. The only basis is the basic research that

was done in the region.

Mr Balázs Tibor Antal wanted to know how many representatives of student councils participated in the preparation of the document and how active they were. The answer explained that it was the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA, mentor of the Szentes Youth and Student Council who was subcontracted by the Regional Authority to perform the basic research.

Dr. Márta Bácskainé Fazekas, Chairperson of the Committee of Culture and Education highlighted that the Strategy does not contain the wishes

and ideas of young people that could help them change their own lives. Youth initiatives are not apparent in the program.

"It would be best if young people could speak about their future" she said. "I already told the President of the Union of VE-GA that he should give a lot more room to SZIDÖK, because a mentor organization could support youth work, but youth organizations should decide about their future independently. So we await the bottom-up initiatives. The committee for culture recommends creating a position for a youth affairs professional to perform these tasks."

Mr János Kozák, Chairman of the Committee of Finance stated that he believes that it is a wrong practice if adults want to find out what is good for the youth. "Without the opinion of the youth, we just simply cannot get this strategy right, despite our best efforts. We definitely need the contribution of young people. Maybe they have bad experience with us..." Then he asked "Why exactly VE-GA did this research? Couldn't we have chosen another NGO? I'm afraid they highlight the problems of the youth from their own viewpoint."

Mr István Földvári Nagy was surprised to see the figures of population decline. In the microregion population decline rate is double of the county's and five times as high as the national decline rate. As he said, young people should explain why they leave and what could keep them here. The strategy does not contain this.

Dr Tamás Rébeli Szabó, Chairman of the Committee of Youth and Sports Affairs also agreed that the opinion

of the young people should somehow be solicited. He said they had invited the Youth Major to the Committee Meeting but he didn't show up. So the question arises: what do young people want? Do they want to be apart, or they simply have no opinion?

Mr József Móra, Chairman of the Committee for Agriculture, Tourism and Trade called attention to a peculiar problem. He said that the Strategy should include a goal to have the youth prepare for the European citizenship to understand the youth of Europe. This requires language skills. There are a lot of young people who cannot get a graduate degree for lack of a language exam. Language teaching in grammar schools should conclude in an intermediate level language exam. This is when tricky solutions come up with young people taking exams in Esperanto and Lovari. And then they are not and will not be understood in Europe.

"I have seen the birth of many youth strategies, and the debates are still around the same things: we should ask young people about their opinions and they do not answer. Maybe we don't ask well enough? Or don't they want to respond?" - summarized Mayor Imre Szirbik in his response. Then he answered the question of why exactly VE -GA: it is the only nationwide youth organization with a headquarter in Szentes. It has trained a lot of youth experts. It is the only organization not related to schools that can reach many young people in the area of Szentes.

József Lovas

As this article contained many untruth and misinformation, the Board of VE-GA had the following response published.

Why Still VE-GA? Response to Our Article

Szentesi Élet, 3rd July 2009

In the 26th June 2009 issue of *Szentesi Élet* an article was published with the title *Why Exactly VE-GA?* (subtitle *You Must Also Ask the Youth*).

The answer to this question can be found in the issue of 7th November last year. The answer was in fact provided by the Szentes City Council by awarding the honorary Recognition Medal for Szentes to them.

In the public life and administrative background of the town there has been a debate for years, because SZIDÖK has reached a level of development where further actions have to be taken about them. And one part of this debate is why still VE-GA has to fulfil the hard and expensive task of mentoring SZIDÖK.

Since the beginning the goal was that, apart from VE-GA, there should be other adult mentors to SZIDÖK, the majority of which were underage children. [...] However, this position has only been represented by VE-GA so far.

Since SZIDÖK was established 11 years ago, it was only the Mayor, the Vice Mayor and the Chief Executive Director and his Deputy from the City Administration who participated at any SZIDÖK

meeting.

Nobody else has ever sought VE-GA or the independent adult mentors to get information about these issues or to make a recommendation. No proposal was actually made this time either.

Of course, members of the local government also have the opportunity to contact the young people who live in their area and ask them about their needs and problems.

Youth research programs conducted by VE-GA, by CARE Foundation together with their partners as well as by SZIDÖK are free of charge and are led by professional sociologist researchers. This latter prevents any "influence" on the results by VE-GA. Findings of the research programs of the last few years can all be found at the Office of Culture. Any interested citizen can get access to them – in fact, they are very interesting.

It is also important to note that the opinions published in the newspaper were all expressed during a debate about regional youth strategy. However, SZIDÖK has nothing to do with a regional youth strategy since it is not a regional youth council. So its

representative did not need to be present.

The town's youth strategy was negotiated in Spring, SZIDÖK had a timely input to the preparation and discussion, and its representative was present at the council meeting when it was negotiated.

Whoever is going to be a future mentor to SZIDÖK, they will have a great responsibility since SZIDÖK has mostly teenage members.

One aspect of this responsibility is that these teenagers must not be exposed to hard political debates of the adult local government.

Another aspect is to ensure that SZIDÖK is a truly democratic local council.

From a youth professional standpoint it is not acceptable that the City Administrative Office or their delegate should invite SZIDÖK once a month to the House of Youth and that their activity should be limited only to organizing attractive youth events.

No such old-fashioned solutions are acceptable for the Union of VE-GA since they contradict the basic idea of self-government.

**Board of Governors of the
Union of VE-GA**

A separate chapter could easily be devoted to the issues related to the technical facility management of the Student Cellar. The new local government that was elected in 1994 did not regard the promise of the previous one as an obligation: it never had the water, sewage and rainwater network of the Student Cellar repaired, though it was 80 years old and was in a very bad condition. Neither was the problem of heating and ventilation ever solved. It was weird that I continually reported these problems, nobody did anything, and they were even angry with me: because I worked for the City Engineering Office, so why didn't I do anything?

So, honestly, they wanted Pál Korom, Civil Administration Professional at the Engineering Office to settle all problems of the Student Cellar with Pál Korom, President of VE-GA and parton for SZIDÖK. In the end it was VE-GA who finally invested in repair and maintenance. For twenty long years. There were some cases that I still can't understand. For example, the new central gas heating was installed without us, and they selected a defective type of gas furnace. Once put to work, it was good to have a full month without any failure. It was obvious for them that all subsequent repairs had to be done and paid for by VE-GA. The refurbishment of the roof and the facade started with half a year of delay, without notice, immediately after the school year began.

The EU funded refurbishment of the Student Cellar turned out to be a tragicomedy: they failed to include the replacement of the old and failing utilities that caused major problems. To solve this impossible trap, I asked for help at the local water company Szentes-Víz Kft., the City Facilities Institution and at some private entrepreneurs. This way we managed to repair most of the utilities, as a private initiative outside the EU funded project.



Another important group of institutions that play a key role in youth affairs are the schools. Now after the events, some teachers came to see us because they did not understand what had happened. We talked about many things, in some cases they blamed themselves. They all agreed that there was one thing that the school principals had always missed: never during the two decades did the City Council publicly speak up for or acknowledge the SZIDÖK Project or SZIDÖK. At the very best the schools thought that let SZIDÖK do what they want to do anyway, and VE-GA should help them somehow. It is none



"in order to protect the interests of children and youth"

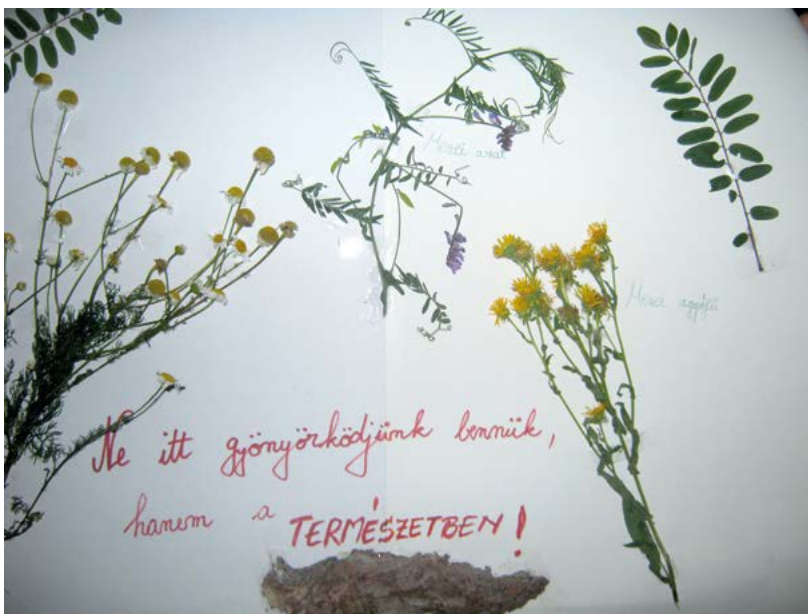
"seemed to be settled"

of their business. In times of disputes however, council leaders and councillors often said things that made the school leaders and teachers cautious. Most of them had their own private memories from the “troublesome” “opposition” past of VE-GA anyway. During certain SZIDÖK programs there were also cases that they didn’t like in the activities of SZIDÖK or VE-GA. However, in these cases they never entered a discussion but rather retreated.

All these facts can easily hide the important message that I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter: **the motivation behind all this was not active malice or hostility – but rather it was the fact that, for the time being, there was no place for either youth affairs or youth profession in public thinking (especially as regarded the development of youth participation). Nor was any place for youth NGOs. It was an uncharted territory, impossible for them to manage, without any significance for them. It was not worth running into conflicts or making decisions about youth affairs when they had much more important things at hand.** As long as VE-GA and SZIDÖK solved their own problems, and the SZIDÖK Project did not drive any significant workload for the City Council, they went unnoticed. They could work freely, with some easy-to-give moral and some very limited financial support. If, however, a serious problem arose it immediately triggered fierce disputes and rejections.

There are two further questions that we must explore, the two questions are closely interconnected: **how was it possible that they were so surprisingly ignorant of the SZIDÖK Project and also about the two extremely valuable City Council properties involved? The lack of understanding and the ignorance is**

”a result of collective wisdom”



apparent in the motions, minutes of discussions and decisions. How and why could politicians make an unanimous decision to terminate the SZIDÖK Project when they otherwise ruthlessly fought each other everywhere?



Dear Reader, It is highly unlikely that you understand how municipal governments work in Hungary. Even less you know about how a motion for the local government meetings is prepared, being a basis for their decision making. (You should probably know some of it, since your local government is likely to make over one hundred decisions each year to manage the place where you live.)

The following two motion documents were written by a young mother, a young professional in the area at the beginning of her career. I really don't want anyone to believe that the first motions were "wrongly written" by her. The fact is that she had to write them up originally, but she had to do it without any prior experience in motion writing, without any insight or knowledge in the youth profession or in facility management. However, each Council Division and Office and each City Council Body

should approve it or can modify it. Only after these check-points are they submitted to the Chief Executive Director of the City Administration and to the Mayor. Once approved, they are sent to all representatives and committee members, and they are published on the Internet, too. The Committees are responsible to submit a proposal for decision making only after addressing all related issues, including the ones not formally included in the motion document. So any motion that the City Council finally negotiates is a result of the collective wisdom of the town. If they are bad, it is a problem, because the collective wisdom of the town doesn't work. This should never happen, especially not in succession. So if it happens anyway, it is important to discover how it could have happened. Motion documents have to be very clearly articulated, transparent, easy to understand, even for a witty teenager, if it is related to them.

As regards our affairs, there were six motions, minutes of council meetings and decisions about them. I am not going to quote them fully, the formal clauses, technical or legal details are not interesting here. I mark the omissions, and in all cases I refer to the place where the full original document is accessible in Hungarian. Before citing them, I highlight the key points that the document contains or fails to contain.

We need to organize, we must have order at home!

(Szörényi – Bródy: King Stephen)

THE TRAGEDY OF SZIDÖK

Tragedy – Act I

Scene I – From First Warning to Draft Agreement

It happened on 26th January 2015 that I was informed by some people that the new majority of FIDESZ-KDNP fraction wants to deviate from the valid non-profit subsidy agreement and plans to eliminate the funding of SZIDÖK from the budget plan. This was then officially confirmed on 28th January. Following a brief discussion with our Board, I sent the following mail to Mr Balázs Tibor Antal, fraction leader on the very same day:

[e-mail]

Dear Balázs,

I was officially notified this afternoon that the fraction of FIDESZ-MPSZ and KDNP in the Szentes City Council will not support that the contractually due public utility subsidy is paid to the Szentes Youth and Student Council and its mentor organization, the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA for the year of 2015.

I immediately notified our Board since this would significantly impact our agenda for 2015, partly because the national headquarters of the Union of VE-GA is in Szentes, and because two of our Hungarian master projects (including the SZIDÖK Project) and an international project are connected to the town of Szentes and its region.

I need to emphasise that these activities have a deeper layer that cannot be considered as children's affairs, and this is something that has always been really important for local governments, thus for the Szentes City Council, too.

I asked the Board for a mandate to represent them in this case, I hope you will give me the opportunity for a personal meeting. I have just received the formal authorization from them.

The 37-year-old Children and Youth Union of VE-GA is committed to its local activities in Szentes, co-financed by the Council, as well as to its master projects. However, these drive a total annual financial loss of approximately 2 million forints.

In case the local government wishes to terminate these projects, we will not insist on them, because we alone cannot bear the costs of items that the Council took upon itself in its successful application. The maintenance of the Student Cellar (renovated from EU funding) with the programs in it and the development of another model project are such Council commitments, where the realization of them is continuously monitored.

Our organization would like to avoid being blamed for not disclosing the potential consequences properly once we are forced to stop these activities.

[...]

Please acknowledge receipt of this message since I need to inform the Board.

Since I got no response, our friends at FIDESZ suggested that I send a new, more detailed letter to the fraction leader. I never got a response, there was no discussion that I asked for, but the fraction withdrew its proposal. As a result, the SZIDÖK Project was given its contractual subsidy funding for 2015.

Following this incident, we paid a lot more attention to providing accurate information on the SZIDÖK Project for the City Council. At this point I want to make it clear that the homepage of VE-GA and its hosted site for SZIDÖK was linked from the town's own website, and it did contain all information in detail.

The following report on SZIDÖK and the SZIDÖK Project was sent to each City Council member with a cover letter and two attachments, one on research projects and one on summer camps.

**Report on the Activities of
The Children and Youth Union of VE-GA and its mentee
The Szentes Youth and Student Council (SZIDÖK)
1 September 2014 – 31 August 2015**

This Report is especially important since the co-operation agreement between the Szentes City Council and the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA expires at the end of 2015, and its extension is to be negotiated.

Since 1992, the City Council and the Union of VE-GA have co-operated in the establishment and operation of the Student Cellar and the Magyartés Training and Camp Centre, and also in the foundation and professional mentoring of the Szentes Youth and Student Council. Facility management and functional operation of both sites as well as the management of SZIDÖK is carried out by VE-GA using its own resources and funds.

Since 1995 there has been an increase in the tasks imposed upon VE-GA. As the Student Cellar was partially refurbished in the framework of DAOP City Centre Rehabilitation Project. The Council undertook to maintain and operate the property and the youth public activity in it for a five-year period. At present this obligation is performed by the Union of VE-GA, which increases its burdens significantly. [...]

The Student Cellar is actively used by SZIDÖK and nine other organizations or groups, which means 50–70 participants in a week. Since its utilization is much lower during the three summer months, the Student Cellar was visited by a total of 1840 members.

In SZIDÖK there are 12 representatives and 42 delegates at present.

SZIDÖK has changed recently, the number of representatives and delegates decreased, and their average age also decreased. This new setup got stabilized, but there is a new challenge with three secondary schools having been moved to new operators.

These factors impact the way of operation and the activities. At the same time, they become more interested in youth related affairs, primarily through digital media. This triggered the latest online research of SZIDÖK, which was done with professional help, and the findings of which are attached in Annex 2.

The life of SZIDÖK is properly documented and can be followed at its home page, linked from the home page of the City Council.

The media presence of SZIDÖK in the period covered by this Report included 5 articles in Szentesi Élet, pieces of news in Szentesi Gyors and a report on the research in the regional paper Délmagyarország.

Supported by the Council, the delegation of SZIDÖK is planning a study tour to Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș), where a presentation will be given to the Student Council of Bolyai Farkas High School. This will be shown on Transylvanian Hungarian Television, too.

The seasonally operated Magyartés Training and Camp Centre can host 35 people. In the period dealt with in this Report a total of 435 people were camping there. Three of the camps were run by SZIDÖK and its partners. A summary report on one of these camps is attached in Annex 1.

The Union of VE-GA and SZIDÖK act as the patrons of the Youth Council of Budapest District 16, the Szolnok Student Council and the Student Coordination Council of Marosvásárhely.

SZIDÖK has recently given a presentation on the Szentes Model (Program for the Development of Youth Participation in Szentes) in the new youth club of Klebersberg Community House in Szeged.

Szentes, 21st September 2015

One basic item in the forming crisis was the non-profit public subsidy agreement of SZIDÖK, which expired on 31st December 2015. This had to be extended.

With the previous information in mind, VE-GA was hesitant to submit the cooperation proposal since we knew that they wanted to vote against it. For the very few people who knew the real situation, it was already known that VE-GA was not able to sustain the project financially. Despite my attempts, the City Council never discussed the question of increasing the amount of its subsidy. It was no longer enough that the City Council paid for the utility costs and provided a fund of 1.31M HUF in a year.

We had a more severe moral issue. For me it was highly unethical that VE-GA should operate the SZIDÖK Project act as mentor to SZIDÖK beyond or against the City Council. We had to submit the proposal to extend the subsidy agreement just to get an ethical clarity in this matter.

Our submitted proposal was basically identical to the contract of 2011. Before the motion was submitted, I sent the following letter to the Mayor:

[letter]

Dear Mr Mayor, Dear Imre,

The motion about the contract between the City Council and VE-GA has been completed. There are, however, some representatives who still talk about Vega Club, who are uninterested and uninformed in this matter, so it can easily happen that the Assembly would eventually reject the proposal.

At 9:00 on Friday there will be a General Assembly for the Delegates of SZIDÖK, which will be accompanied by the 20th anniversary celebrations of the CARE Foundation. I have also assembled the Board of VE-GA and our Professional College.

The real question for us is to understand what would happen in case the local governments rejected the contract proposal – nothing has been discussed about this scenario yet.

VE-GA has a different relationship to the two real estates and the activities in them.

1/ VE-GA has basically viewed the Student Cellar and the SZIDÖK Project as a matter of the town of Szentes and of the Koroms. It has long been debated why VE GA should spend over a million on it each year. In case the Council withdraws its support or drastically reduces it, VE-GA is ready to abandon the project as early as of 1st January 2016.

The handover would certainly be well organized and would include both technical operational items and the tasks related to the activities in the community space.

To accomplish this, we need to have the successor named. The new operator will have significant costs from the time of the takeover.

It is also important to note that the technical operation of the Cellar includes weekly routine tasks that should be attended to, otherwise the new operator would put both itself and the Council and itself in an absurd situation.

The human system should also be taken over as soon as possible, otherwise it will disintegrate fast. The new operator will need to reorganize it completely, since they will not have our methodology and network at their disposal.

2/ VE-GA has a completely different relationship with the Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés as they had spent an incredible amount of investment on it, including countless hours of volunteer work.

If the subsidy agreement is not approved, the only acceptable solution for VE-GA will be to get it for free use, without any financial compensation, otherwise VE-GA will have to enter legal procedures because this scenario would negatively impact many of its obligations and commitments.

This would mean heavy losses and other damage to all parties, without any benefit to anyone.

Motion 22 for the City Council Assembly on 27th November 2015 is quoted below. **Dear Reader, the most interesting in this is that the word SZIDÖK is not even mentioned in the motion or the decision sections of the document, even though the subsidy agreement is explicitly for the SZIDÖK Project and SZIDÖK.**

[motion]

Dear Members of Assembly,

The contract between the Szentes City Council and the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA will expire on 31st December 2015, and the Union of VE-GA has submitted a proposal to renew the contract (Annex 4).

The Agreement is about the continuing subsidy of public utility activities for developing youth and student participation in public life in the town of Szentes. Public properties in the Agreement:

Student Cellar of Szentes [...], unalienable public property of the City Council

Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés [...], unalienable public property of the City Council

The Children and Youth Union of VE-GA [...] has been operating the above two properties for many years. Since 1994/1995 the Union of VE-GA has invested approximately 10 million forints in the two real estates

The Student Cellar was renovated in the framework of DAOP-5.1.2./A-09-2f-2011-0004 project named City Centre Rehabilitation Program of the Szentes City Council and Its Partners. The commitments and obligations related to the Student Cellar are listed on pages 149-151 of the Final Plan for Action Area of Szentes Town City Centre, Round II (Annex 3). The project closed in 2014, and the City Council has an obligation for maintenance for 5 years and this commitment includes operating the Student Cellar as a community venue.

[...]

Based on the information above, I hereby ask the City Council to negotiate and approve the proposal to reach an Agreement about the Continuing Subsidy of Public Utility Activities with the Union of VE-GA. [...]

D E C I S I O N P R O P O S A L

The Szentes City Council has negotiated the proposal on Agreement about the Continuing Subsidy of Public Utility Activities with the Union of VE-GA, and adjudicated as follows:

The City Council approved and agreed to conclude the contract as put forth in Annex 4 of the Decree and authorises the Mayor to execute the Agreement in question. [...]

Szentes, 2015. november [...]

Annex 3: [...]

T2 Refurbishment and Accessibility of the Student Cellar

Based on the needs assessment [...] conducted among the inhabitants and users of the city centre, the refurbishment and accessibility of the [...] Student Cellar is a project element supported by the inhabitants.

The Student Cellar was created and is operated by a 31-year-old nongovernmental organization of public utility, the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA [...].

The objectives of the organization are to help the forming of civil life, to establish social peace, to protect the environment, and to create a sustainable, harmonious environment. It aims to protect the interests of young people who contact them, to help the development of youth public life in cooperation with civil organizations, city councils and government agencies. VE-GA has the professional and institutional conditions to perform youth public life development, to operate local discussion forums and to develop youth services. [...]

Three groups of users of the Student Cellar can be distinguished. There are organizations who permanently use the Student Cellar. These include the adult and peer mentors of the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA as operator, which

means 15-20 people. Another permanent user is the Szentes Youth and Student Council (SZIDÖK) and its committees, which means 20-60 people each time.

The Cellar also hosts the headquarters of the CARE Children and Youth Foundation, receiving 3-12 visitors at a time. The Szentes Youth Information Point (SZIIP) is operated by them. [...]

It is the home of the Alternative Playhouse which has its own activities and groups. [...] In recent years there have been 15 groups who participated in playhouse events taking place with a weekly, monthly or quarterly regularity. The groups numbered 8 to 22 people at a time. [...]

The standard program schedule includes events by SZIDÖK, CARE and SZIIP, which are open to all.

1. **Handicrafts Workshop** (12-24 people per occasion)
Activities included jewellery making, clay pottery, leatherwork (2010) and teabag montage, felt sewing, origami (2011).
2. **Image and Media Workshop** (4-12 people)
3. **Marionette and Drama Workshop** (15-28 people)
4. **Research** (8-116 people)
2010: making preliminary suggestions for the public education law
2011: evaluating the draft of the public education law and participating in a related sociological research program
5. **Training Workshop** (11-18 people) [...]

It is essential to refurbish the Student Cellar so as to be able to manage and extend the activities listed above, organically connected to the renewal of the City Centre. VE-GA is unable to satisfy the needs of all users of the Student Cellar, since their number far exceeds the current capacity of the community space (its nominal capacity is 30 people for trainings and 50-70 people for other community events). As the action area development is expected to boost the popularity of the Student Cellar, meaning more community events and youth programmes, it is essential to create the technical conditions for the proper operation of the site.

The number of young visitors to the Student Cellar is likely to be increased by the improved conditions from present-day 70 to 85-100 people in a week.

Annex 4

AGREEMENT ABOUT THE CONTINUING SUBSIDY OF PUBLIC UTILITY ACTIVITIES

(draft)

This Agreement is signed between the Szentes City Council [...] as Permanent Sponsor, and the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA [...] as Subsidized, with the terms and conditions set forth hereunder.

1. The subject of this Agreement is the permanent subsidy of public utility activities to help the development of youth and student participation in public life [...].
3. The Szentes City Council as Permanent Sponsor provides the Union of VE-GA as Subsidized with a monetary donation of an annual sum of 860,000 HUF as set forth in the annual budget. [...]
4. VE-GA will utilize the monetary donation for its public utility objectives and for the related material and personal expenses. It cooperates with the Council in line with its Charter, to realize and develop the "Szentes Modell" and the Szentes Youth and Student Council (SZIDÖK) in particular. Because of this cooperation, the Council undertook non-mandatory youth tasks that are the same as the public utility goals of VE-GA. VE-GA will fulfil the professional and mentoring tasks by adding the related tasks to the job description of its employee.

5. The Szentes City Council will subsidize the operation of the Szentes Youth and Student Council (SZIDÖK) with an annual sum of 450,000 HUF [...].
6. For the objectives outlined above, the Szentes City Council will ensure that the Union of VE-GA can utilize the properties of the City Council at 6 Magyartési utca and at 8 Kossuth utca as youth community spaces free of charge.
At the real estate at 6 Magyartési utca the Union of VE-GA operates a Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés at its own costs. The utility costs will be covered by the City Council.
At 8 Kossuth utca the Union of VE-GA operates the Student Cellar community space. All programme costs are paid by the Union of VE-GA. The utility costs will be covered by the City Council.
The cellar that hosts the Student Cellar was partly refurbished in the framework of the city centre rehabilitation program of the Szentes City Council and its Partners. Under this Agreement, the Union of VE-GA undertakes the mandatory operation of the refurbished cellar [...]
7. Parties agree to conclude this Permanent Subsidy Agreement for a minimum of five years. [...]

I was deeply involved in this and all other related motions, committee documents and decisions. So I will take the viewpoint of a civil administration professional here to analyse them one by one, and then as a whole.

Scene II – The Tragedy of the First Motion

Motion 22 for the City Council Assembly on 27th November 2015 was **fundamentally wrong**. It should have been about approval or denial of a contract extension between the City Council and VE-GA. One of the potential decisions would have been not to extend the contract. The motion should have offered a decision alternative for that, but this part is completely missing, even though the City Council has ongoing obligations related to the Student Cellar. (It is comprehensively detailed in Annex 3 to the motion. Since this part of the city development strategy was frequently discussed, it is hard to understand why the city council members had no idea about the activities in the Student Cellar.) Surprisingly, the motion does not even mention the SZIDÖK Project or SZIDÖK, even though the contract in question is about the SZIDÖK Project. **To present well-founded decision alternatives, the motion document should have contained a brief description of the SZIDÖK Project, the objective of its foundation, its brief history and a summary of the shared results and the problems in common during the past. Nor did it mention that in 2008 the City Council awarded VE-GA for the work done in this field. Had the problems been properly presented, the logical decision alternatives could have included voting for an increase in moral and financial support on the part of the City Council.**

These errors may be explained by the information I got from insiders to the FIDESZ fraction before the Committee meetings, stating that they are not going to vote for the renewal of the contract in any circumstances. This makes the motion quite absurd in the sense that it regards the contract extension as a fact. Why? My informant summarized the opinion of the majority fraction in the following way: “VE-GA managed to operate the SZIDÖK Project till now. If they wish to go on, it should not be a problem for VE-GA to do so without the support of the City Council.” So basically, the FIDESZ-KDNP fraction wanted VE-GA to maintain and carry on with all elements of the SZIDÖK Project at its own cost – if we wanted to. There was no one else who was more involved emotionally in the SZIDÖK Project than me. But it was clear that it would be unethical to approve such a solution.

We could not get the voice recordings or the minutes of the committee meetings that took place before the Council meeting (this doesn't mean that such recordings and minutes don't exist). So all I can publish here is what is summarized in the next motion.

At the first meeting of the Legal Committee (23rd November 2015) I was convinced that my dilemma is true. It also became clear that the council members had many more important problems. The town's youth affairs had no prestige for them, so they were quite uninformed in this matter. For example, they thought that the SZIDÖK Project and SZIDÖK were the same, if they knew anything at all about them. They did not know either that besides SZIDÖK, the SZIDÖK Project also included the operation of both the Camp at Magyartés and the Student Cellar, that it also involved assisting all youth groups in the Student Cellar, as well as the mentoring activity of VE-GA for SZIDÖK. They did not know that the SZIDÖK Project was initiated by the late Mayor Dr. József Rébeli-Szabó, who, by the way, signed the rental agreement with VE-GA for the use of the Camp at Magyartés.

I was feeling miserable all evening and half the night. In the morning, I woke up to see a set of questions from VE-GA asking for a status. Even though I was tired, I dropped a message to Facebook. With a "Freudian typo" I accidentally shared it publicly, so all my friends could see it, not only our restricted group for whom it was meant. Many of my colleagues could read it and the council members, too.

[Facebook post]

I base my strategy in the committees on causing surprise, killing the stupid debates upfront, to clarify our legal standpoint. Yesterday they were shocked in the Legal Committee because they didn't remember that the original agreements were signed in 1994 with Mayor Rébeli, upon his initiative. This had a special feeling since the chairman of the committee, a member of FIDESZ, is his son. I handed over our base agreement, mentioning that the late Mayor Rébeli became an honorary member of VE-GA in 1995, which he shed tears upon, since it is not easy to be a former Mayor in a small town. Today I was in the "Youth" Committee, and based on the "papers" I proved that it was never VE-GA who approached the local governments with expectations, while the local governments left us alone several times, even though we were running youth work as they wished. By the way yesterday I spoke for four minutes, and today I won't be any longer either.

Looking back at it now, I think it had to happen like that. It was very embarrassing for me to be at the office those days. As if there was a bomb explosion, everyone whispered about it. My friend from FIDESZ told me that the City Development Committee was planning to "kill me" at their upcoming meeting – chaired by the leader of the FIDESZ-KDNP fraction himself. They want to take revenge on me for "hurting, humiliating them openly". So, if the whole story had not been about me till then, I was dropped right in the middle of it at this point anyway. Nobody was and have ever been interested in the SZIDÖK Project. At least I had the chance to "technically" prepare for the meeting.

The meeting of the City Development Committee took place on 25th November 2015, led by Mr Balázs Tibor Antal, Fraction Leader, Chairman of the Committee. At the meeting, he raised his voice and blamed me with the following: *He was a council representative for Magyartés for eight years, but had no idea that the camp was a City Council property. We conveniently settled there, took advantage of the ready-to-use infrastructure, and believed it was going to be ours forever.* He asked the colleagues in the tourism department what they knew about the camp and they said they knew nothing. *There are many NGOs in Szentes besides you who can have a try on operating it,* he continued. He asked the presenter how many NGOs there were, and she said 160.

The next speaker was councillor Mr Tamás Bujdosó who stated that the financial management of VE-GA and SZIDÖK are not transparent and are not compliant. He thought that the City Council subsidy had probably been used to pay salaries.

Councillor Ms Edit Hevesi-Tulipán asked if I did not think that my role as President of VE-GA was incompatible with my role as a Civil Administration Officer. Everyone went dreadfully silent. The only representative who tried to add something in a reserved tone was hushed by Mr Antal. He began by saying that his NGO used to cooperate with VE-GA some years ago. He was immediately declared incompatible and was banned from this case.

In my answer I said *I did not understand how the camps at Magyartés are related to the matter. All camps had wide publicity. They are not part of the town's tourism. Anyhow, the campsite built from its ruins by VE-GA, using its own resources. As for the local NGOs, none of them would be able to manage the SZIDÖK Project. VE-GA has accounted for every Forint of subsidy funding, all its balance statements are available at the Cultural Office. In the past twenty years my dual role was never judged to be incompatible by the decision makers. I announced that in case the City Council puts an end to subsidy funding, the SZIDÖK Project will come to an end, too. Therefore, the Union of VE-GA will have to give up on the management of the Student Cellar, because of its high operative costs. I also highlighted that regardless the non-profit subsidy agreement, VE-GA is a contractual tenant of the Camp and Training Centre of Magyartés. I also called their attention to the fact that for 2016 we had already announced our summer camps, and any cancellation would create a stir internationally.*

After this, the Chairman's proposal was accepted: "A new application must be opened for the management of the Student Cellar of Szentes, to give the opportunity for other NGOs. A new application has to be opened for the rental of the clubhouse at Magyartés when the summer camps in 2016 are over."

I must make some comments here to help the correct understanding. **There wasn't even a hint or a mention of the SZIDÖK Project or SZIDÖK. The technical conditions, facility management and human operation of the Student Cellar or the Camp and Training Centre of Magyartés were not discussed, and, what is more, the Chairman admitted that he did not know anything about these items. They did not say a word about that it should have been explored in advance if there was any other NGO that could take over the operational tasks and responsibilities** – in the same details and depth as it was outlined for VE-GA about the Student Cellar in this very document.

Finally, we have to make a correction here: though there is a *clubhouse* at Magyartés, it is not the same property as the Camp. The Chairman was so uninformed that he mixed the two up.

In the corridor, walking away from the meeting, I came across with János Kovács, chairman of the committee for youth affairs and elected FIDESZ representative of Magyartés. *I asked him to help achieve a normal transition in these matters. I asked him to support that our camps could be launched in 2016. He told me he could not promise anything. "Your colour is not good" and "all this is the business of Szirbik and you".* (He repeated these, using almost the same words, in many places, as it had been sometimes recorded.)

Finally, the City Council Assembly postponed the decision for the reason of not having enough information for a well-based decision.

After the Committee meetings and the Assembly, because of the statements made there, VE-GA formally entrusted Mrs Judit Veresné Péter to represent VE-GA in any Szentes related matter. She sent the following letter to the Mayor of Szentes.

[letter]

Dear Mr Mayor,

The Children and Youth Union of VE-GA as mentor of the Szentes Youth and Student Council and as technical operator of the community space of the Szentes Student Cellar, would like to withdraw its application for the extension of the subsidy agreement.

We wish to transfer these activities as of 01 January 2016 to our successors in an organized manner. The justification for our decision is the following.

Neither the Szentes Model nor the SZIDÖK Project was initiated by the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA, and it was not You who initiated them either.

The institution of the Student Cellar in Szentes was an integral part of this project from the beginning, and it was not us who made the related decisions, and we did not select the location either.

The Union of VE-GA has always regarded SZIDÖK and the Student Cellar to be the local affair of the town, and its mentoring and site operating tasks were undertaken by us with this understanding. In technical operation, we have had hardly manageable emergency situations ever since 2007. It was in 2009 when the role of the Union of VE-GA first got into a political crossfire, resulting in a media debate in Szentesi Élet.

Upon request of our NGO, our President Mr Pál Korom officially approached councillor Sándor Farkas with a written briefing and offered to provide more information and to answer any questions that would come up. It did not come to anything, however.

Following this incident, the Union of VE-GA approved the site operating and mentoring commitments from year to year only at the explicit request of the Korom couple.

In early 2015, during the time of the annual budget negotiations at the Council, the role of the Union of VE-GA got into political crossfire again, and the Szentes Model and the SZIDÖK Project almost lost its support in the City Council.

This time our President Pál Korom contacted councillor Balázs Tibor Antal in writing on two occasions, providing more information and offering more details in a face to face meeting, but again it came to nothing. Mr Korom also pointed out that the home page of Szentes had very detailed information on the Union of VE-GA, and that the updated home page of SZIDÖK could be linked from the City's website, too.

Last autumn and this October all councillors received a copy of the Report of the Union of VE-GA and SZIDÖK. The attachment of the latest report this October included a local youth research and the evaluation of one of the SZIDÖK Summer Camps.

At its General Assembly in October, the Union of VE-GA decided to request the Szentes City Council to renew the contract between them.

At the same time, we decided that in case it gets in crossfire of political debates again, or the activity does not get a definite support from the Council, we will abort the mentoring activity and stop the operation of the Student Cellar as of 1st January 2016.

It became clear during the committee meetings that the role of the Union of VE-GA is again politically debated, and there is no effective support for the continuation of these activities. (You are kindly requested to send us the minutes of these committee meetings).

At the committee meetings, there were comments that are hard to understand, and which are legally solicitous.

It was mentioned that the activity of the Union of VE-GA and SZIDÖK are not transparent.

It was mentioned that the use of City Council subsidy is not transparent, that the Union of VE-GA fails to account for it, and that the subsidy was used to cover salary expenses.

There were councillors who were unaware of the fact that the properties were owned by the local government.

President Korom was requested multiple times to hand over our contracts and agreements with our partners.

The Union of VE-GA has always fulfilled all its obligations for the Szentes City Council. It was always acknowledged and accepted, and no question or concern has ever been raised to us.

Since the beginning of the cooperation, all documents related to mentoring SZIDÖK and operating the Student Cellar have been handed over officially.

The Union of VE-GA is the only NGO in its category (national children and youth organization with headquarters not in the capital). It is obliged to submit an annual report both on its activities and its finances, which are audited by a competent authority or by the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Tribunal Court.

Our organization is still represented by the President, Mr Pál Korom. While he tries to be as flexible as he can, please understand that he does not have delegation to make decisions in all matters, so you are asked to submit your requests in writing.

At the end, let me advise the Szentes City Council of another point of view.

The Korom couple will retire in 2016, which means their retiring from all their public commitments as well.

This occasion will be celebrated not only by the Union of VE-GA, but by a much larger group of people. This will take place in Szentes next autumn, since this is the location where they spent 38 devoted years working for the children and young people. These 38 years have yielded unprecedented results and achievements accomplished together with many others.

This event will be attended by many of our former members, who, though they eventually took other paths in life and often joined opposing political sides, jointly support this event.

We would like to ask the Szentes City Council to provide the appropriate circumstances for this celebration.

Upon the issue of the related motion of 18th December 2015, Judit Veresné Péter sent the following letter to the Mayor.

[letter]

Dear Mr Mayor,

The Children and Youth Union of VE-GA has received the motion document for agenda item 10 for the Szentes City Council meeting of 18th December 2015.

Since this situation has caused harmful stress for Anikó Koromné Seri, we have decided that I, Judit Veresné Péter will be the delegated representative of the Union of VE-GA in all Szentes related matters.

Due to family reasons, however, I am unable to attend the meetings of the committees and the body of representatives next week. Since the causes of the matter are not clear here, we do not think my attendance would make any difference.

We have submitted our legal observations to Dr Csaba Sztantics, Chief Executive Director of the City Administration.

The matter itself is getting more and more attention.

Both Hungarian and foreign partners and supporters of the Union of VE-GA are fully aware that these properties were converted from city council properties in useless condition by us, in our own investment, with our own hand labour.

We have built them to fit the purposes of the activities we organize there. All their equipment, furniture, fittings are the property of NGOs.

In the available documents there are no legal, financial or professional arguments that would justify why the Union of VE-GA should not continue its unequalled youth professional activities in these properties. It is not justified why others should into the properties that were created by us to be what they are now and that we have been operating for twenty years by now.

We hereby kindly ask the proposers to give their reasons for this operational and professional change to the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA, to our partners and supporters.

The available documents also prove that you do not have adequate information on the size, complexity, operational conditions and opportunities of the community space and the camp (e.g. licensing, prohibited activities, regular maintenance schedule). We thus suggest that the experienced property operator Szentes Városellátó Kft. does an onsite inspection to obtain further information.

Scene III – Second Motion, Ultimate Form of the Tragedy

Let's now see Motion 10 for the City Council Assembly of 18th December 2015. This is the second motion document in this case.

It is interesting to observe that the document cannot differentiate SZIDÖK from the SZIDÖK Project. This is apparent from both in the debate before the decision and in the decree, too. This is how the termination of the SZIDÖK Project becomes the death sentence for SZIDÖK, even if it is

not even mentioned in the decree. A true mirror of their negligence is that SZIDÖK and the City Council's obligation to support them is still codified in the Rules of Procedure and the Allocation of Competencies of the City.

[motion]

Dear Body of Representatives,

The agreement between the Szentes City Council and the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA expires on 31st December 2015. The Union intended to extend it for another 5 years, so they submitted a proposal for a continuing public utility subsidy contract.

The [...] Committees of the City Council have debated and voted on the motion labelled Approval of the Extension of Continuing Public Utility Subsidy Contract with the Union of VE-GA.

Legal Committee

- Approved the motion for the agenda of the City Council meeting with the following minor amendments [...]

Committee for Urban Planning

- Rental of the Student Cellar must be publicly advertised for applications, providing opportunity for other NGOs
- Rental of the clubhouse at Magyartés must be publicly advertised for applications when camps organized by VE-GA for 2016 are over

Committee for Culture

- Approved the motion for the agenda with the amendment that the Body of Representatives should involve the Committee for Legal, Procedural and Public Procurement Affairs [...]

Committee for Finance

- Recommends that applications for the Student Cellar be opened
- Applications for the Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés should be opened only if VE-GA could meet its obligations for organizing its 2016 summer camps

It can thus be stated that the committees decided for opening applications for rental of the two real estates.

Pál Korom, who represented the Union of VE-GA at the committee meetings stated that VE-GA does not need the Student Cellar any longer, they would like to abort its operation. In their letter dated 1st December 2015, the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA confirmed that they desist from the extension of the subsidy agreement, and that they withdraw their related proposal. At the same time, they already have 9 contracted summer camps booked at the Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés, and they would like to fulfil these obligations.

In the framework of the project [...] City Centre Rehabilitation Program of the Szentes City Council and Its Partners [...] it was committed that the Student Cellar must operate as a youth community site for five consecutive years. Since the public utility subsidy agreement with the Union of VE-GA will expire on 31st December 2015, there are two options to meet the obligation for continuous operation:

1. The City Council extends the current agreement with the Union of VE-GA until the applications are successfully closed.

2. The City Council entrusts the Szentes Family Support Centre to be the temporary operator from 1st January 2016 until the application cycle is closed. This institution, which is managed by the local government, already operates a community space in the town.

When deciding about the Student Cellar, we must also consider the Szentes Youth and Student Council (SZIDÖK). The Rules of Procedure and the Allocation of Competencies of the City Council regulates this organization, who are mentored by the Union of VE-GA since the beginning. The Union intends to stop this activity as well. This automatically means ending the SZIDÖK Project as well, or it can be reallocated to the supervision of the Szentes Family Support Centre.

As Pál Korom stated, the Union of VE-GA would retain the Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés because of its camps that are already being organized. In view of this, the Committee for Urban Development and the Legal Committee recommended that the applications for the rental of the Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés should be concluded in a way that VE-GA was able to fulfil its 2016 summer camp obligations. The contract on the camp will also expire on 31st December, so the Body of Representatives can make two decisions:

1. The Council extends the current contract with VE-GA until the 2016 camp season is over.
2. Like in the case of the Student Cellar, the City Council entrusts the Szentes Family Support Centre to be the temporary operator until the application cycle is closed, ensuring that the 2016 summer camps of VE-GA can be organized there.

DECISION PROPOSAL

The Szentes City Council has negotiated the proposal on the operation of the Student Cellar, the Camp at Magyartés and SZIDÖK, and adjudicated as follows:

1. The City Council requests the Committee for Legal, Procedural and Public Procurement Affairs to conduct the application procedure for the operation of the Student Cellar and the Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés.
2. To fulfil its obligation for continuous operation as a youth community space:

Option A

Until the tender for the operation of the Student Cellar is closed, the Council extends its current contract with the Union of VE-GA.

Option B

From 1st January 2016 until the tender for the operation is closed, the City Council entrusts the Szentes Family Support Centre to be the temporary operator. The necessary budget and headcount will be provided by the City Council.

3. As for the Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés, the City Council adjudicated as follows:

Option A

The Body of Representatives extends its current contract with the Union of VE-GA until the 2016 summer camps are over.

Option B

Until the tender for the operation is closed, the Szentes Family Support Centre will be charged to be the temporary operator on condition that

the 2016 summer camps of VE-GA can be organized there. The necessary budget and headcount will be provided by the City Council.

4. As far as the SZIDÖK Project is concerned, the City Council adjudicated as follows:

Option A

The City Council wishes to terminate the operation of the SZIDÖK Project from 2016. It requests the Chief Executive Director of the City Administration to modify the Rules of Procedure and the Allocation of Competencies document accordingly.

Option B

The City Council appoints the Szentes Family Support Centre to continue the SZIDÖK Project. The necessary budget and headcount will be provided by the City Council.

Szentes, 4th December 2015

Dear Reader, the second motion reflects the fact that during the month that passed neither the presenter nor the representatives gained any further information. **There were no discussions how to support the work of SZIDÖK after the SZIDÖK Project ends**, even though other towns had many different solutions for similar cases. There was no inquiry about which local NGO would be able to take over the operation and animation of the two youth institutions. Is the Family Support Centre suitable for this? This institution was named as a temporary solution, believing they can find another NGO within a short time. They thought it was evident that they who had neither facility management nor youth professional experience could do it. The next eighteen months proved that they were unable to meet the expectations.

There was, however, a recent development, which was also related to VE-GA. In her letter Judit Veresné Péter made a written declaration stating that as of 1st January 2016, VE-GA would finish its mentoring activity for SZIDÖK and would stop operating the Student Cellar, because their activity has become subject of party political fights.

It was, however, not stated in this letter that VE-GA would give up the Camp and Training Centre of Magyartés, since there is a valid rental agreement for that site that has been arbitrarily breached by the Council. Anyway, their contribution was limited to a nominal support, in the value of 300k HUF annually.

VE-GA was not invited to negotiate about the motion. The text assigned to me contains various statements without my consent. I never got the opportunity to correct or modify these since **VE-GA and SZIDÖK were not invited to the Committee meetings nor to the City Council assembly**.

One thing is strategically important to know here. None of the council representatives initiated negotiations with VE-GA or others about the future support of SZIDÖK. This clearly proves undeniably that **they were unable to realize that the work of SZIDÖK was in the interest of the town's youth, the town itself. They simply did not care about SZIDÖK.**

The Council did not make a formal decision on not entering into a new contract for the SZIDÖK Project. They either simply forgot to do so, or they did not want to write up a justification. Anyhow, no justification of either this neglected decision or of any other partial decision was ever heard or recorded.

We have another strategic question here: why did the Mayor propose that *"it is not them [i.e. the City Council] who should operate SZIDÖK"*. As he knew very well that they could not manage the task the question of what exactly had been said may be of some interest. Maybe he thought that the mentoring role should be passed over to someone else.

Finally, a concrete suggestion was made by the Chief Executive Director of the City Administration. His proposal was not about SZIDÖK but about the SZIDÖK Project (!), reasoning that the schools in Szentes no longer belonged to the City Council. He did not realize that this should have been a justifying reason for the town to maintain SZIDÖK and the SZIDÖK Project as a forum for local students.

The last section of the decision (*"The City Council wishes to terminate the operation of the SZIDÖK Project from 2016"*) is logically wrong, because the SZIDÖK Project had already been terminated by the decisions that took back the Student Cellar and the Camp at Magyartés, which ended the mentoring role of VE-GA as well. Therefore Section 4 is not about the SZIDÖK Project but it is about SZIDÖK. The correct wording should have been as follows: *The City Council wishes to terminate the operation of SZIDÖK from 2016.*

The final vote was unanimous. In view of the desperate party-political fights, this is completely inexplicable and calls out for a detailed root cause. This part of the meeting is recorded in the following minutes, closing with Council Decree No. 257/2015 (XII. 18.).

[minutes of meeting]

Item 8: Operation of the Szentés Student Cellar and the Magyartés Camp. Continuation of the SZIDÖK Project

Imre Szirbik:

Attached to the motion there are the comments of the Legal, Procedural and Public Procurement Committee, the Finance and Public Ownership Committee, the Committee for Culture, Youth and Sports, the Committee for Health and Social Welfare and the Committee for Urban Development and Tourism. The letter of the Union of VE-GA is also attached.

Zsuzsanna Vidovicsné Molnár:

She informed the Council that the letter of the Union of VE-GA was received on 15th December 2015, in which they state that the SZIDÖK Project is their intellectual property, and they would not like if it was handed over to the Family Support Centre. They have attached a contract on the Magyartés Camp from 1994, which is still valid.

János Kovács:

Committee for Culture, Youth and Sports have discussed the motion and they recommend Option B in both in Section 2 and 3 of the decision proposal.

Dr. Csaba Sztantics:

[...] He believes that the City Council should not operate the youth council since the city has the task to sustain nursery education only. Primary and secondary education was removed from the City's responsibilities.

Dr. Tamás Rébeli-Szabó:

The Legal Committee recommends that the City Administration should manage the tenders, while the Committee would participate in the tender evaluation.

Mihályné Dömsödi:

She cannot support any version of the decision proposal, she objects against the way the matter is handled. [...]

Imre Szirbik:

He informed the Assembly that according to the City's decision from the year of 1994, the youth basis has been functioning in the building of the former village house at Magyartés for over 20 years. [...] For Section 3 of the Decision Proposal he proposed to include the following year so that the summer camp events could take place. The student council is responsible for educating the young generation to think independently and for adjusting their common matters. The Korom couple have a key role in both initiatives, they connect the two. He thinks that the Student Cellar in Kossuth Street should continue to serve the students of the town. He proposed that [...] the City Council should

provide a framework for the initiatives of the students, but it should not be the operator. [...]

He asked the Council to decide on the Decision Proposal [...]:

Imre Szirbik:

Those who support the initiative in Section 4 of the Decision Proposal, stating that the City Council wishes to terminate the SZIDÖK Project from 2016 should vote now.

The City Council approved Section 4 of the Decision Proposal with 11 Yes and 4 abstinences.

Imre Szirbik:

Those who support the Decision Proposal as modified above should vote now. The City Council approved the Decision Proposal with 15 Yes votes.

DECREE No. 257/2015. (XII.18.)

**Subject: Operation of the Szentes Student Cellar and the Magyartés Camp.
Continuation of the SZIDÖK Project**

The Szentes City Council has negotiated the motion document on the operation of the Szentes Student Cellar and the Magyartés Camp and the continuation of the SZIDÖK Project, and has adjudicated as follows:

1. The City Council requests the City Administration of Szentes to issue tenders for the operation of the Student Cellar and the Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés. The Council requests the Legal, Procedural and Public Procurement Committee to evaluate the applications.
2. To meet its obligation for continuing operation for 5 years as a youth community space, from 1st January 2016 the Council hands the Student Cellar over for operation to the Szentes Family Support Centre, an institution owned by the local government, which is already in charge of operating a community space. The necessary human and financial resources will be provided by the City Council.
3. As regards the Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés the Council makes the following decision:

it is handed over to the Szentes Family Support Centre for provisional operation until the tender for operation concludes, ensuring that VE-GA can have its 2016 summer camps there. The necessary human and financial resources for the Szentes Family Support Centre will be provided by the City Council.

4. The City Council wishes to terminate the operation of the SZIDÖK Project from 2016.

After the decision was made, Judit Veresné Péter sent the following letter to the Council and the Mayor:

[letter]

Dear Mr Mayor,

The decisions of the Szentes City Council that were made on 18th December 2015 have a clear message to the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA. While we cannot accept these decisions [...], we acknowledge them and will respect them. In line with our Charter we are not entitled and do not intend to challenge them.

We would like to support the handover of the Student Cellar with the attached report that was requested by Andrea Labádi-Fébert, Tender Administrator of the Council.

As regards the Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés, it is important to know that there are four major indispensable maintenance and repair works that the Union of VE-GA had on its 2016 agenda, but we can no longer do these. [...]

At the end of this last letter to the City Council, let us clarify something. The termination of the Szentes Youth and Student Council is a result of the discontinuation of the Council's moral and financial support. It is all the more so because until recently it was functioning effectively even on an international scale. It is obvious from all documents, reports and the media coverage of the organization.

Just like everywhere, schools have been moved away from local governments only [...] but they will remain an integral part of the local society.

In this process SZIDÖK and its activity changed: it has become a kind of bridge between the students of the individual schools, and also between students and local NGOs.

All of this was reflected in the diversified activities in the Student Cellar, which was, upon the request of the local government, established by the Union of VE-GA, first of all, as a background for SZIDÖK activities, not only to the benefit of SZIDÖK members of all times, but also to the advantage of their fellow students and friends.

Finally, let us wish a Happy New Year to the Szentes City Council.

Climax of the Tragedy

Dear Reader,

I wish you could open up your heart and feel why it is horrible to liquidate the SZIDÖK Project, why it is a tragedy that SZIDÖK was ruthlessly sentenced to death by their own adult self-government.

It may be easier for you to see what a dirty trick was played on us, the people of VE-GA. We worked hard for twenty years, and the result is taken and cast away without any reason. But the real tragedy is not this. Though VE-GA was emotionally knocked to the ground, it was also saved from burning itself off in an already unsustainable activity. In this sense, VE-GA as a civil group benefitted from the decisions of the local government.

The SZIDÖK Project was an unequalled and valuable product, but municipal youth councils can have many other successful forms. **The real tragedy is the way how the Szentes City Council killed off SZIDÖK, the self-government of the town's own youth.** This proves that they simply do not have any relationship with local teenagers, whom they wish to keep at home as adults, but who are obviously alien to them, more of a problem than a resource. The main reason for this increasing alienation is the fact that the town has lost all its schools.

With one simple decision, the local government terminated everything that SZIDÖK ever used to be, all the values that accumulated during the twenty years. They terminated its function as a forum, which was the only opportunity of local youth for public participation and meetings. They also terminated its function to reveal the joys and sorrows of local teenagers. And the Council took away the opportunity from them in a sense that they could take actions on their own in case there were problems with certain groups.

The betrayal by the local government is against the youth, it has caused and is causing a shocking and irreparable damage to local people and results in a massive loss of values in the town. This is what I call a real tragedy.

I need to correct a few stupid notions that keep popping up. It is a fact that the SZIDÖK Project – but not SZIDÖK(!) – is the intellectual property of VE-GA. So, we were unable to hand it over to somebody else, therefore we could not reject its handover. We did not wish to continue mentoring SZIDÖK because the majority fraction denied supporting the extension of the underlying agreement. **The only logical consequence is that the SZIDÖK Project automatically comes to an end, which does not mean that SZIDÖK itself should be ended, too. In this situation, which was created by the local government itself, they took over the responsibility for the future of SZIDÖK, even if they were, or are not aware of that.** It is nonsense to say that SZIDÖK should have or could have been taken over and operated by the Council after VE-GA's renunciation. However, it is true that, even after destroying the SZIDÖK Project, **the Council should have provided the minimal conditions in order that SZIDÖK could keep on functioning. The decision should have been about delegating some other body to help the continuous operation of SZIDÖK in a simpler setup; for example, the Family Support Centre, which is named in the motion, or, like in many other cases, the Council's Youth Affairs Coordinator, or perhaps some other NGO could have done the job.**

The City Council wishes to terminate the operation of the SZIDÖK Project from 2016 – this unanimous and unwise decision of the local government is the real tragedy.

There was an unparalleled opportunity that survived for twenty years because a great Mayor realized the chance and the necessity that SZIDÖK should be elevated to the status of an important local partner to the City Council, thus making Szentes a town where teenage young people can comment on, influence, and actively do something for the life of their home town, a place where they can connect back even if they live far away. *Twenty years of this opportunity was now turned into this: "The City Council wishes to terminate the operation of the SZIDÖK Project from 2016."*

In fact, the Szentes City Council had one immediate financial benefit from this decision: they saved 1.31M HUF annually – which they immediately passed on to local sport clubs. To avoid any doubts, source of this new funding was labelled as "(VE-GA, SZIDÖK)". Some people were happy to see this.

I wonder if there were others who were not that happy. Maybe there were many, but we only got word from very few, and even less people were heard by the councillors. It is not my task here to answer why.

The only person to make some positive comments was the Mayor. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Csongrád County made the following declaration right before the City Council meeting:

[statement]

To Item 10: Operation of the Szentes Student Cellar and the Magyartés Camp. Continuation of the SZIDÖK Project

We are in a standoff which has been caused by many ill-considered statements, and everyone must draw his or her conclusions about that. We have a hastily written motion document in front of us, it does not even state who undertakes what or, who does what. And, above all, from what budget. A task cannot be forced that easily upon an institution!

Being unbiased, we cannot support any of the decision options, because we do not agree with discussing issues in such a way. We think that the issue on the agenda is handled by the Council in a highly inappropriate way.

We do not support either option of the decision proposal.

All options disclose only one purpose: to destroy an activity that has served as a model until now.

The nationwide political battle among the parties made most of the society in Szentes turn away from politics. People no longer follow up on local matters of the town. There are apparently larger scandals than ours. In the beginning, I was often stopped in the street, people asked what was going on. In fact, nobody seemed to believe that was all. It was much harder to take when the parents of SZIDÖK members came to our home, telling us that they knew how good it was for their kid – but **they would not let them come ever again so as not to get in trouble.**

Time has passed, but even today there are some people who are surprised to learn what has happened to SZIDÖK. Even today there are parents who ask us not to call their children. We haven't called them for a year now. SZIDÖK members, however, do call each other, young people who decided to give SZIDÖK another chance. Of course, this is not the same SZIDÖK, but this one here is self-initiated and organizing itself from below. Maybe they have a chance, even if I am too old to really believe in it. But I have rushed forward. We are not there yet.

Dear Reader, This concludes Part One of this book. In the following part I will examine what actions the City Council took in this awkward situation that they had created themselves. I will try to be short, but the curse of the spoiled “piece” shadows this story as well. It's like a soap opera that can never end.

*You have fun, you sing happily without problems,
But we are in trouble, growing trouble, you should all know
(Tree-Play – A Musical Story by VE-GA)*

Tragedy – Act II

Evaluation Overview of the Situation

Job well done, the majority fraction and the City Council conveniently sat back, thinking they are over this embarrassing situation. So much did they believe it that they immediately forgot their commitments recorded in the decision statement, or maybe they never ever meant it seriously. There was no application opening for the Cellar or for the Camp of Magyartés, they didn't remember to allocate to the Family Support Centre the "human and financial resource" that they had promised. (Months later Mr Antal Gál, Leader of the Centre was paid off by receiving a recognition. For the continuous operation of the Student Cellar. Which was in fact carried out by the surviving SZIDÖK till April...)

As this book shows, the shocking tragedy of kicking up the SZIDÖK Project is just the beginning. Had they known the physical condition of the two properties and the activities that could be done in them, they could have known that nothing would end with the decision. Many of them should have known that VE-GA is not so easy to push down, maybe they thought it was a toothless lion. But most of them knew me very well! They knew that I hate when someone tampers with my stuff. And the youth profession is my territory, if they break in and destroy things, that's a challenge for me. But I couldn't simply believe that they can sentence SZIDÖK to death without a second thought. I didn't want to be the one to provoke it by any means. Therefore, I never made any countermoves openly. I will later explain it in more details, I will explain for example why we didn't give media interviews, even if it was expected.

It is quite sad but at the same time understandable that the whole issue and the council's decision was written up only in one newspaper article. Let me insert it here:

It Is Not Known Who Will Continue the Student Council

Szentes, Délmagyarország, 22nd December 2015

Emese Králik

From January, the student cellar of Szentes and the training centre of Magyartés will be operated by the family support instead of the Union of VE-GA. It is not yet known how the Szentes Youth and Student Council (SZIDÖK) would work. This was on the agenda of the city council last Friday.

The agreement between the Union and the Council expires at the end of the year. VE-GA, founded in

Szentes almost 40 years ago is a nationwide group with various activities: it is a think tank, and organizes youth programs.

They are the mentors of the SZIDÖK Project in the town, where the children can elect a Student Mayor, they can try themselves in self-government and decision making. Since the committees of the city council decided not to support the automatic extension of the contract but to open it up for applica-

tions, the Union doesn't want the town's support under these conditions.

Nevertheless, they think that the project is their intellectual property, they do not want others to operate it. The General Assembly of the Union asked Judit Veresné Péter to send a letter which is attached to the decision proposal in the internet. They state in it that their activity got in political crossfire. The student cellar was refurbished by the Coun-

cil using EU funds, they must maintain it for five years, it must be used so this is why it is given to the family support centre temporarily. VE-GA can have their summer camps next year at Magyartés. It is not known what will happen to the student council that they mentored. It must be given to a civil group, stated Csaba Sztantics, Head of the City Administration. It is for sure that the municipal authority doesn't wish to continue the project.

The article worried about SZIDÖK, a "*student council*". I guess the author understood the heart of the matter here. However, the article does not distinguish between SZIDÖK and the SZIDÖK Project, but somehow it separates the "*student council*" from other elements of the SZIDÖK Project. The Chief Executive Director of the City Administration was interviewed, who also differentiated the "*student council*" and the "*project*". He thinks the first should be "*given to a civil group*", while "*the municipal authority doesn't wish to continue the project*".

The only mistake in the article is a result of the messed-up concepts. Applying for the operation of the *student cellar* and the "*training centre*" meant that the "*town*" doesn't wish to cooperate with the Union of VE-GA, so they withdraw their support from the SZIDÖK Project. And the author of the article states that "*the union [of VE-GA] doesn't want the town's support under these conditions*". But we couldn't "*not want*" anything, because it was the City Council that had already decided to end their support.

I already experienced in the how power affects people. In the first case, what effect it has if power is gained without any transition or previous experience. In the second case, what effect it has if power comes from an external, superior source. And third, what effect it has if people get into or are put into power position, but they don't have the education or culture that is needed to practice power. Where power is practiced by such people, power is oversensitive and revengeful. It is regarded to be a personal assault if someone refuses to subject or openly resists.

My Freudian typo that published my ironic message and the declarations of VE-GA in the letters have upset the majority fraction, a group that was freshly aware of their power, so they became immoderate. They said and did reckless things that they themselves may never have wanted to. What they really wanted was "*to finish me off*". **This prevented them from thinking through that in the given circumstances – after the decision about SZIDÖK – the escalation of their actions did wrong for the town, but saved VE-GA from collapsing under the burden of an unsustainable project.**

However, it became apparent that whatever action we take against them it would only trigger similar reactions, destruction would extend, revenge would escalate. First of all, we had to defend SZIDÖK, SZIDÖK members, local VE-GA members, even my family and myself. We had to gain some time – months – to preserve what was left, to save the accumulated values. We needed time to think through things with a cool mind, and to take over the chain of events. Also, I had to ensure a chance to reflect on this matter at the local government.

In the meantime, VE-GA members became uncontrollably hot-tempered. Only very few tried to remain sensible, even less managed to do so. Many members suggested starting a legal procedure (since many decisions violated the law). Some believed that the Council would realize how stupid they'd been and would reverse the decisions. Fortunately, only a very small minority wanted to beat up people or set the House at Magyartés on fire. They got isolated quickly. Many members thought of starting media initiatives, advertisements, local and not local protests, lighting candles or doing an artful hacker attack. Even in February I had to use all my power to prevent everyone from doing something that the Council could have taken as a measure against them. I could only be successful in doing this because as early as February, I could explain what I had done so far, and I could outline what actions we should take together.

To protect ourselves, we immediately stopped publishing the internal affairs of VE-GA. And I started to take my effective countermeasures using the semi-legal solutions that I learned in the 1980s when I was the enemy of the power of that era.

Actions on the Student Cellar till Today

I don't quite understand why the Legal Committee or the City Administration failed to open an application for the rental rights, as the Council decision mandated. At least it would have become clear early enough that nobody wanted to rent it or use it.

Of course, the decision had errors in it: facility management was temporarily given to the Family Support Centre, so they should have announced the tender for subcontracting its rental. However, the Family Support Centre never realized they were the trustee of the Student Cellar, so based on the council decision, they were waiting for others to act. In the end, nobody undertook the task of opening an application for the rental. There were two annoying factors in the case: first, it became obvious for the Family Support Centre that the Council is not going to provide them financial or human resource to manage this new task. Second, I compiled a document on the technical and human aspects of operating the Student Cellar that finally pulled back fantasies to the ground, even if many people didn't understand it completely.

After realizing the technical condition of the Student Cellar, the Engineering Office had to write up a document to explain "what the hack we had decided about". This was presented in Motion 13 for the City Council Assembly of 25th February 2016.

Dear Reader, This document is of a high standard, in the sense that it tries to be truthful and meet the expectations of the Council that contradicts the truth. What it is worth paying attention to is the fact that EU funding did not bring the results because my judgements as the facility manager of the site were ignored. It was even more painful for the Council to realize several months after their wrong decision what new tasks they actually took over. Tasks that could have been performed by VE-GA endlessly if the Council had approved the related contract. But let's see this new motion document.

[motion]

Dear City Council,

[...] The Engineering Office has completed the status review of the Student Cellar, and reports its findings to the City Council as below.

[...] The partial renovation of the Student Cellar was completed in 2012 with 85% DAOP funding, as part of the City Centre development program. [...]

The goals in the application for the funding of partial refurbishment were to reduce the energy usage parameters, to increase accessibility and to improve its usage conditions. As a result of spending 12.651M HUF on the property of 302 sq m, the project goals were fulfilled, but the technical issues of the Student Cellar in the 100-year-old building could not be fully settled with an average 42,000 HUF per square metre investment. [...]

Despite the existing problems, the Student Cellar can be operated in the five-year mandatory maintenance period, but even this short-term operation needs primary, secondary and regular maintenance works. [...]

DECISION PROPOSAL

The Body of Representatives of the Szentes City Council has negotiated the motion document on the Status Review of the Student Cellar, and has adjudicated as follows:

Option A

1. To ensure safe operation, the Body of Representatives requests [...] the operator of the building at 8 Kossuth Street to order the review, replacement or repair of the jointly owned sewage pipe system in the basement, and to refurbish the sewage system of the yard as needed. [...]

2. To ensure regular usage, the Body of Representatives requests the Engineering Office to have the ventilation of the basement rooms planned and quoted. [...]

Option B

1. To ensure safe operation, the Body of Representatives requests [...] the operator of the building at 8 Kossuth Street to order the review, replacement or repair of the jointly owned sewage pipe system in the basement, and to refurbish the sewage system of the yard as needed. [...]
2. To prepare for the long-term operation of the Student Cellar, the Body of Representatives requests the Engineering Office to contract experts and architects to make plans for underground insulation and automatic ventilation system of the Cellar, and also for the apparent structural problems of the ground floor. [...]

Szentes, 11th February

This motion shocked the Council a little bit, posing the **question what would have happened if they had found out the facts earlier, and had outsourced their tasks to VE-GA**. Proving that they lost the game, the issue was removed from the agenda and was never discussed again. (By the way, nobody noticed or objected when the Student Cellar was accidentally mentioned as VE-GA Cellar.)

The CARE Foundation (official headquarters is registered in the Student Cellar) and SZIDÖK continued to use the Student Cellar as they did before. However, the number of people decreased significantly because teachers and parents advised the teenagers not to come. Partner groups also left the Student Cellar one after the other. VE-GA had to move out all the tools and materials related to its Alternative Playhouse program. In April 2016, the Student Cellar ceased functioning as a community space, and has been closed since then. **With this, the Szentes City Council breached and has been breaching ever since its contractual obligation to continuously operate the Student Cellar for a minimum of 5 years.**

This really embarrassing situation motivated the majority fraction to find a new tenant anyhow. It took them eight months to find one.

At the end of September, Motion 21 was submitted for the City Council Assembly of 22nd September 2016, the decision was registered in Decree 211/2016 (IX.22.). **What you need to see here is that this document details all the tasks that VE-GA should have done in case of a renewed contract. These are items that no entrepreneur would sign up for. These are still open today.**

[motion]

Dear City Council,

In its Decree 257/2015 (XII. 18.) the Szentes City Council had adjudicated that the Student Cellar is to be transferred to the Szentes Family Support Centre for operation from 1st January 2016 until the applications for operation are awarded.

In line with the Decree, VE-GA handed over the property, which was followed by a status review by City Council experts. The review found that the walls of the cellar had a high amount of efflorescence, rainwater seeped in during heavy rainfall, and that the heating system did not operate well. [...] The real solution would be the installation of an automatic ventilation system that covers the entire cellar [...]. These refurbishment works were not carried out due to financial reasons and because of the uncertainty of future utilization.

In the past years the City Council as the owner of the site did not realize any income from the utilization of the Student Cellar. It did not charge a

rental fee, and it covered the utility bills. Also, the City Council provided VE-GA free use of the property and monetary subsidy.

The City Council has won [EU] support in their project City Centre Rehabilitation Program of the Szentes City Council and Its Partners [...] for the refurbishment of the Student Cellar [...] and its utilization as a youth community space. In the application, the Szentes City Council commits itself to operating the Student Cellar for a period of minimum 5 years. [...]

In spring, after the transfer of the Student Cellar, the Szentes Family Support Centre sent a letter to all NGOs in the town who work with children and youth, and offered them the Student Cellar for regular use free of charge, and advised them about the upcoming application opening to be the operators of the site. [...] No NGO wanted to take the opportunity. [...]

The temporary operator then contacted all primary and secondary schools of the town, offering the Student Cellar to host any of their school events [...]. None of them showed interest in this opportunity. [...]

In August 2016 [...] the Managing Director of Sze-Pa Szolg. 2012. Kft. contacted the Family Support Centre [...] stating they intend to apply for the Student Cellar.

Their concept is about operating a catering unit in the Student Cellar on the long term, targeting the students of Szentes, sports club members, youth NGOs and any other organization who works with youth or young adults. They wish to organize occasional events for them, providing them the facility to realize their own community programs at a calm, youthful, civilized site.

They also undertake that in exchange for the value of the rental fee [...] they will invest in the property, e.g. they will build the automatic ventilation system of the Student Cellar and do the most urgent repair works. [...]

DECISION PROPOSAL

The Szentes City Council has negotiated the proposal on the operation of the Student Cellar, and adjudicated as follows:

1. The City Council tasks the Szentes Városi Szolgáltató Kft. (Szentes City Services Ltd.) to be the operator of the real estate at 8 Kossuth Street, Szentes, 6600 Hungary (LRN 829/1/A/3).
2. The City Council agrees to letting out the property named in Section 1 to Sze-Pa Szolg. 2012. Kft. for operation as a Youth Club.
3. The City Council approves the attached rental agreement draft and requests the Managing Director of Szentesi Városi Szolgáltató Kft. to sign it with Sze-Pa Szolg. 2012. Kft.

REAL ESTATE LEASE AGREEMENT

This Lease Agreement is signed on the date below by and between the Szentes Városi Szolgáltató KFT [...] (Landlord) and Sze-Pa Szolg. 2012. Kft. [...] (Tenant). The parties agree as follows:

1. The Student Cellar property, listed in the Szentes Land Registry at LRN 829/1/A/3, located at 8 Kossuth Street, Szentes is the property of the Szentes City Council. [...]
2. Tenant commits to
 - a. Based on the awarded application [...] of the owner that mandates that the youth club should fulfil all its functions until the end of the

maintenance period, at least until 09 December 2020. The Youth Club will provide usage facilities for 85-100 people.

- b. Write a report by 15th December each year as part of the Project Maintenance Report, submit it to the City Development Unit of Szentes Városi Szolgáltató Kft. [...] All evidence (invitations, posters, attendance sheets, photos, media news) that prove that the property is utilized as a youth community space should be attached to the Report. [...]

But why did this company contact the Council? This is explained in the following letter:

[letter]

Dear City Council,

You have contacted us about the utilization of the Student Cellar of Szentes. After meeting Councillor Balázs Tibor Antal and Mr Antal Gál, principal of the Szentes Family Support Centre we indicated our interest in operating the cellar.

We intend to open a catering unit, mainly to cater for students, sportsmen, clubs, but we would like to keep it open for other possibilities, too.

We are aware that the City Council has won funds [...] for the refurbishment of the Student Cellar [...] and to utilize it as a community space. In this application, it was committed that the Cellar would be operated as a community space in the future, for a minimum of 5 years.

We can fulfil the commitment of the City Council, and hereby request that the named property should be made available to us for operation.

Knowing the specific condition and state of the property, should be made available in it, in the value of the rental fee.

So there were background discussions or even agreements between the entrepreneur and the people of the council. This makes the following part of the minutes of the meeting related to the Student Cellar an interesting reading.

[minutes of meeting]

Item 18: Operation of the Student Cellar

[...] **Balázs Tibor Antal:**

He reminded the participants that they recently negotiated about the Student Cellar, which some people wanted to keep for the Union of VE-GA. However, there was a big change, the 2016 budget does not have the subsidy given to the Union of VE-GA. Previously, the cellar club operated in a way that everything was paid for by the town. There is going to be a big change, there will be a new entertainment opportunity for the youth which will not hit the budget of the town. The FIDESZ fraction supports this and will continue to make decisions that do not affect the budget of the town.

József Móra

He was not only worried for the student cellar but also for the student council, because the students do need to practice democracy when preparing for their life. It would be good if the Student Mayor could be present now so that he could give his opinion about the issue. This is how they could learn democracy, so that they can practice it in the future.

János Kovács

He stated that the former SZIDÖK was invited to all committee and council meetings that affected them, but they failed to turn up. He asked his fellow councillor to stop it since he mentioned this for the third time.

Imre Szirbik

He asked that the councillors respect each other and listen to the opinion of their fellow members, and not to instruct one another like this.

I must make a few remarks before I attach the Decision here.

It is again presented to be a great achievement that they saved the 2017 budget the "*subsidy given to the Union of VEGA*" – i.e. 1.31M HUF annually. But this is the usual bullshit. In fact, the funding was not given to VE-GA and especially not for the Student Cellar. It was given for the SZIDÖK Project, and within that for the operation of SZIDÖK. Also, this saving was immediately reallocated to sports teams. While this could have helped SZIDÖK, it was a meaningless amount for the long list of sports clubs. Not to mention the fact that the City Council did not take any share in the cost of maintaining the Student Cellar, which amounted to hundreds of thousands of forints each year.

It is worth mentioning another problem that I tried to avoid before. I don't want to pick on anyone. Even less so since Councillor János Kovács has made a very positive impression on me as a private person. We do not, however, understand how he could become the Chairman of the Committee for Culture, Youth and Sports Affairs. Mr Kovács is a livestock breeding skilled labourer, and a successful livestock farmer. This is his first term as a councillor, so he has no experience in cultural, youth, civil or equal opportunity matters. His characteristic response to Councillor Móra's correct declaration is rather specific. I am almost afraid of him, because he behaves like a voodoo wizard. Here he said that there *is no SZIDÖK*, later in this book he makes interpellations about "*the former VE-GA*". I don't know... maybe if he claims that this book does not exist, will it vanish in thin air?

Contrary to his statement, representatives of SZIDÖK have never been invited to any meeting of his Committee since this Council was formed. Despite this, until the tragedy happened, the representative of SZIDÖK was always present at the meetings, with one or two exceptions. I must note here that this representative could not be a student because all committee meetings were scheduled in school time hours.

Dear Reader, if you go back to the first part of this book, you can see that Mr Kovács was personally invited to the only Assembly of SZIDÖK since he has been in position (20th November 2015). But he failed to attend this event.

The City Council made the following decision with 15 Yes votes:

Subject: Operation of the Student Cellar
211/2016. (IX.22.)

DEGREE

The Szentes City Council has negotiated the motion document on issues concerning the operation of the Student Cellar, and has adjudicated as follows:

1. The City Council tasks the Szentes Városi Szolgáltató Kft. (Szentes City Services Ltd.) to be the operator of the real estate at 8 Kossuth Street, Szentes, 6600 Hungary (LRN 829/1/A/3).
2. The City Council agrees to letting out the property named in Section 1 to Sze-Pa Szolg. 2012. Kft. for operation as a Youth Club.
3. The City Council approves the attached lease agreement draft and requests the Managing Director of Szentes Városi Szolgáltató Kft. to sign it with Sze-Pa Szolg. 2012. Kft.
4. The final Lease Agreement must be reviewed by the Legal Committee before signing it. [...]

The document adequately reflects the fact that the Family Support Centre could not cope with the technical and the human aspects of the operation. Therefore, the corporate decision that generated it was unfounded and wrong. But even this document does not contain a complete list of problems and tasks

related to the Cellar. For example, I miss the remark that in the Cellar **any investment or change to the building must have the approval of the EU Application Management Body**. It doesn't mention either that the Student Cellar is the registered address of the CARE Foundation and is still officially the community space of SZIDÖK.

The entrepreneur signed the rental agreement with this information. He undertook that *"the youth club that operates in the real estate will continue to function as a community venue, providing usage facilities for 85–100 people"*. This sounds fine, but this is not exactly what is included in the commitment of the City Council. First, the contract does not mention the part of the motion that the tenants *"would like to operate a catering unit in the Student Cellar on the long term"*. Second, it is an overstatement that *the place will be usable by 85–100 people*. **The new tenant will create only the possibility, but if it is not utilized, it is not his problem. However, even in the motion it is clearly explained that young people do not need such a possibility for utilization. Maybe they would need it as a new pub, helping the tenant pay for the rental. Of course, we don't know how the entrepreneur wants to turn the Student Cellar into a profitable "catering unit"**.

Today the Student Cellar is empty, its condition is getting worse by the day. The cellar part is not in any better shape than it was before the EU funded investment. The City Council simply neglects its obligation to maintain the place.

Actions on the Camp and Training Centre of Magyartés till Today

I often mentioned that VE-GA and I have personal bonds to this camp, because we have put a lot of work in it. I also noted – in the Freudian Facebook post too – that VE-GA has a valid rental agreement for the camp, so the Family Support Centre is illegally operating it, based on an illegal decision. This was realized by someone on 20th January, and they attempted to have me sign the following Agreement, which is full of misstatements.

[draft agreement]

AGREEMENT

Signed between the Szentes City Council [...] as Landlord and the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA [...] as Tenant on the date hereunder. The Parties agree as follows:

The Parties have concluded a Real Estate Lease Agreement on 24th July 1994 for the rental and use of the youth camp in Szentes. [...]

The Lease Agreement was signed for an undetermined period of time and could be terminated by the Landlord for public interest. In this case the termination period is 3 months.

In its decree 257/2015.(XII.18.) the Szentes City Council has terminated the Lease Agreement of the camp and wishes to operate it through tenders in the future.

The Children and Youth Union of VE-GA accepts the termination, Parties agree to disregard the termination period of 3 months, and Tenant will hand over the Real Estate to the Landlord within 15 days after signing this Agreement. Tenant will not demand placement or reimbursement.

Handover will be recorded in a Registry of Handover document.

Parties agree that the fixed term five-year agreement for the Student Cellar has expired, and the City Council will not extend it. The City Council wishes to operate the Student Cellar, too, through tenders. [...]

Szentes, 20th January 2016

Despite its internal contradiction, this agreement is valuable because it recognizes the rental agreement as a fact. But if the rental agreement is already terminated, why do we need this Agreement? The section on the Student Cellar is misleading since there has never been a rental agreement for the use of that property, so there was nothing to expire. It is also a valuable statement that it acknowledges the fact that the rental agreement can only be terminated by the landlord for a reason of public interest. However, the reason of this public interest is not described here. Furthermore, it was drafted at a time when well-informed people already knew that “public interest” was against taking the Camp Centre away from VE-GA. Maybe this is why they tried to have me sign this document.

Before I attach the next motion, let me clarify two things.

The first one is the fact that VE-GA is fully responsible for everything when it runs a camp for its own members, at its own, authorized campsite. For example, the Public Health Authority cannot mandate anything beyond what is in the operation licence document, they can only phrase recommendations. However, if someone operates a camp as a form of accommodation or provides camp services as a business – as the Family Support Centre would –, much stricter regulations apply, and the authorities will require immediate compliance. I really tried to put this information through many times – I was apparently unsuccessful.

So, when the Family Support Centre took over the camp without a formal handover (and was ordered to host camps there anyhow), I contacted my former counterparts at the authorities, and told them it is time for all their wishes to come true. They didn't hesitate to create a list of requirements that are almost impossible to fulfil.

Let's now see Motion 24 for the City Council Assembly of 31st March 2016.

[motion]

Dear City Council,

In line with City Council Decree 257/2015 (XII. 18.), VE-GA has handed over the Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés to the temporary operator Szentes Family Support Centre, “under the condition that VE-GA can complete its 2016 summer camp program” there. Though the referenced Decree contains provisions the Szentes City Council should provide the necessary human and monetary resource to the Szentes Family Support Centre, these are not yet reflected in the budget plan of the institute (similarly to the resources for operating the Student Cellar). [...]

1. Condition of the Building

An expert from the Engineering Office of the Szentes City Administration was also present at the handover and he enlisted the most urgent mandatory refurbishment works and associated costs as follows:

- a. The condition of the standalone building in the yard that contains toilets and a storage room has deteriorated, [...] dismantling would cost 5.827M HUF and its full replacement would cost 6.114M HUF. [...]
- b. The kitchen in the main building [...] 1.354M HUF
- c. The sewage pit in the garden [...] 200,000 HUF

[...] City Council Decree 257/2015 (XII. 18.) rules about the entire Children and Youth Camp of Magyartés. However, the status of the **detached cottage** on site is not clear. VE-GA has fully refurbished it, and did not hand it over to the Szentes Family Support Centre with reference to an earlier Council decree that transferred it into the possession (into the ownership?) of VE-GA. However, this is not yet reflected in the Land Register, so **it is necessary to clarify its legal status.** [...]

The Fire Department will have their onsite audit on 23rd March, so their findings are not known at this point. The **National Public Health and Medical Officer Service** has concluded their audit and **prescribed the following to be completed to grant a license for the camp** [...]:

- Change the crowded layout of the dormitory rooms
- Separate toilets and showers for each 10 persons, creation of a separated nurse's room [...]
- Replacement and repair of the floor tiles in the kitchen
- Replacement of the glass tiles wall of the kitchen for a window
- Covering the kitchen walls with tiles to appropriate height [...]

Due to the lack of available funds to follow the official instructions and for lack of the time needed for planning and building works [...], it is unlikely that the Union of VE-GA can complete its 2016 summer camps.

2. Furniture and Equipment

Equipment of the building only partially covers the rules of the Public Health Officer Service and many items should be replaced. [...]

A decision must be made on the equipment and furniture of the Union of VE-GA after the handover of the building. We suggest that once the long-term utilization of the building is determined, a negotiation should be started with the organization about the equipment. [...]

Based on the items above, I hereby present the following decision proposal to the City Council and request their decision to support commencement of the activities. [...]

Subject: Operation of the Children and Youth Camp of Magyartés

DECISION PROPOSAL

The Szentes City Council has negotiated the motion document on the operation of the Children and Youth Camp of Magyartés and has adjudicated as follows:

Option A

1. The Szentes City Council does not wish to refurbish the Children and Youth Camp of Magyartés and will therefore offer it for sale in a tender in April. At the same time, for lack of necessary conditions for operation, it suspends the operation of the camp for an undetermined period. [...]

3. The Director of the Szentes Family Support Centre requests the Union of VE-GA to remove their belongings from the building by 20th April 2016 and hand over its keys.

Option B

1. The Szentes City Council does not wish to refurbish the Children and Youth Camp of Magyartés and will therefore offer it for rent in a tender in April. At the same time, for lack of necessary conditions for operation, it suspends the operation of the camp for an undetermined period. [...]
3. As for the furniture and equipment of the Union of VE-GA in the building:
 - a. The City Council does not wish to negotiate with VE-GA, the equipment is not needed. [...]
 - b. The Director of the Family Support Centre is tasked to start negotiations with the Union of VE-GA about the takeover of furniture and equipment that could be used by the local government.

Option C

1. Contradicting its Decree 257/2015 (XII. 18.), the City Council will not open a tender for the utilization of the Children and Youth Camp of Magyartés.
2. The Body of Representatives acknowledges that its current condition does not support risk free and compliant operation as a camp site, so [...] it suspends the operation of the camp for an undetermined period [...], or until the refurbishment works are completed.
3. Based on new costs, a new motion is to be made for the City Council meeting in May where the future utilization of the building [...] and the human and monetary resources for its refurbishment and operation will be decided. [...]
5. As for the furniture and equipment of the Union of VE-GA in the building:
 - a. The City Council does not wish to negotiate with VE-GA, the equipment is not needed. [...]
 - b. The Director of the Family Support Centre is tasked to start negotiations with the Union of VE-GA for the takeover of furniture and equipment could be used by the local government.

This document is again full of errors. Not a complete list, but let me only mention a few. First, I never formally handed over the camp. It is unnecessary to demolish and extensively rebuild the standalone toilet building in the garden, so a detailed expert's report could not be made about it. There is more than one toilet and shower for each sex. The site is compliant with all legal regulations, which is the basis of its operating licence that all authorities approved. Its utilization as a nature school was not a professionally serious idea in the first place.

Here I attach here a section of the Minutes of the City Council Meeting held on 31st March 2016, and the Decision 80/2016.(III.31.).

Item 24: Operation of the Children and Youth Camp of Magyartés

Dr Tamás Rébeli-Szabó:

When can we expect the legal status of the detached cottage to be settled?

Tamás Károly Bujdosó:

If the Council presented the camp to VE-GA for operation, how could they pass it on to other organizations? How come the furniture of other organizations got there?

Mihályné Dömsödi:

What is the attitude of the local people of Magyartés to the building? Do they wish to organize events there, do they have any idea about its utilization or refurbishment? [...]

János Kovács:

The Committee for Cultural Affairs recommends Option C of the decision proposal with the amendment that the Body of Representatives shall request the Engineering Office, the Social Affairs Office and the Szentes Family Support Centre to examine the possibility of using the property as a nature school. [...]

Imre Szirbik:

VE-GA has many international relationships, they have completed lots of projects, they did valuable activity. The budget of the city has its limitations. [...]

He asked the councillors to vote in case they support Option C of the decision proposal with the amendment that the possibility of a nature school should be examined.

The City Council has approved the decision proposal with 15 Yes votes and has adjudicated as follows. [...]

DECREE

1. [...] Despite the ruling of Decree 257/2015 (XII.18.), the Body of Representatives does not intend to open an application for the utilization of the Children and Youth Camp at Magyartés.
2. The Body of Representatives acknowledges that the current technical conditions are not suitable for the [...] operation of the camp, so [...] the operation of the camp is suspended for an indefinite period. [...]
5. The Council will not negotiate with VE-GA about the equipment of the Union of VE-GA and other users of the property, [...] and requests these to be removed from the building by the end of May 2016. [...]
6. The Body of Representatives requests the Engineering Office of the Szentes City Administration [...] to examine the possibility of utilizing the property as a nature school.

The proposal apparently didn't make the job of the councillors any easier. At the same time, it offered the argument that they cannot use the camp because of its bad condition. So the document neglects the fact that the authorities didn't have any issue with the site before 31st December 2015. Discussion and voting in this subject was completed in less than 15 minutes.

Five months after the issue was first dealt with, both the questions and the answers prove that most people were still not aware of the facts, for example the Camp and the Clubhouse (or Cultural Centre) of

Magyartés were often mixed up. Some people even questioned if the camp had a valid permit or if there was a contract to use the building. Another question was what the villagers of Magyartés have to say in the matter, whether they wanted to use the building themselves or not. In the meeting minutes, the answers are part of the question: *“the villagers of Magyartés need the building”*. The proposer answered: *“the locals organize many events there”*. Of course, both the question and the answer are about the Cultural Centre and not the camp site.

The proposer did not mention the furious village assembly of 2015, where the locals explicitly stated that they were happy with the refurbished Cultural Centre, and they did not need the camp of VE-GA.

Councillor Bujdosó who himself volunteered for SZIDÖK for two years happened to ask *“how is it possible that Romanian furniture is stored in the building of the Council?”*. (This was not registered in the official minutes.) The proposer answered that the NGO in Transylvania was “likely” to be a partner of VE-GA, this was why their belongings were. Councillor Móra suggested that a nature school should be established there. Councillor Kovács, who was mute till then, even though he was the chairman of the responsible committee and he himself was the representative of Magyartés, agreed to Mr Móra’s idea. After the discussion, they voted that VE-GA should empty the building by 31st May, then they voted for Decision Option C, which meant there would be no camps there that year.

Both votes were basically **unanimous** again!

Let’s see Motion 19 for the City Council Assembly of 22nd June 2016 and the (so far) last decision in our case, decree 164/2016.(VI.22.). **What is worth paying attention to here is that after the hard facts in the previous motion, it really came in as a shock to them to realize the magnitude of tasks and the associated costs that they irresponsibly took over from VE-GA. Particularly noteworthy were the calculated sums, proving that operating the camp would require a bigger subsidy than the one that was ever given to the whole SZIDÖK Project.**

[motion]

Dear City Council,

1. [...] Cost Estimate of the Refurbishment and Equipment of the Building

Experts of the Engineering Office have compiled a cost estimate about the partial conversion, refurbishment and equipment of the building [...]. **Its gross cost is 17 464 316 HUF. [...]**

It is important to know that this cost estimate [...] **does not contain the installation of a heating system [...]**.

Since the Union of VE-GA has emptied the building with regard to the Council decree, the costs of re-equipping the building with the necessary furniture and tools should also be accounted for. [...]

Total costs of building conversion and equipment:

Planning costs:	254 000 HUF
Conversion, refurbishment:	17 464 316 HUF
Furniture, Equipment:	5 029 735 HUF
Grand Total:	22 748 051 HUF

2. Operation

Once the conversion and refurbishment is complete, the building will be suitable to host children, youth and other groups except for the heating season. [...]

As regards its content, this possibility corresponds to the activities of nature schools, but it cannot legally be considered the same since nature

schools must meet a set of much stricter human and technical requirements and need to get successfully accredited as well. [...]

Expected Annual Operative Costs: 3.136M HUF per year

Planned Income

[...] Presumably the camp cannot be operated without City Council subsidy. [...]

Counting with 6 x 6-day camps for 20 people, the income is planned to be 432,000 HUF in 2017. [...]

3. External Funding Opportunities

[...] It should be examined if the refurbishment of the property at Magyartés can be aligned with the development concept in the CLLD projects. [...]

DECISION PROPOSAL

The Szentes City Council has negotiated the motion document on the items concerning the refurbishment and the operation of the Children and Youth Camp of Magyartés, and has adjudicated as follows:

Option A

1. The City Council wishes to refurbish the Children and Youth Camp of Magyartés in 2016 [...]

Option B

1. The City Council states that the budget does not make it possible to fund the refurbishment. [...]

And finally, this is the decision:

[minutes of meeting]

Item 20: Refurbishment and Operation of the Children and Youth Camp of Magyartés

The City Council has adjudicated as follows with 15 Yes votes:

DECREE

1. [...] The City Council states that the budget does not make it possible to fund the refurbishment. [...]

2. The City Council requests [...] to seek external funding opportunities for the refurbishment. [...]

The cost estimate for building refurbishment is correct, it is in the direction I provided, but many important items are missing. For example, it does not contain the dangerous condition of the fences and some trees, change of the window frames in the theatre room. It also failed to clarify the unsettled status of the detached cottage or the plot itself. **The motion has an interesting point: it calculated that an annual subsidy of 2M HUF is needed for the operation of the camp site. Previously, the whole SZIDÖK Project got only 1.31M HUF support!**

It may be possible to apply for CLLD funds for the building project, FIDESZ will probably use their political influence here since this is quite embarrassing for them. It might sound strange, but this is also in the interest of VE-GA: it would be so bad to see how a place into which we invested so much labour is ruined. And if all is complete, *we would return to our own camp as guests* for the outlined prices – but this time for only two or three camps per year.

It is high time the City Council started to think and act in its true best interest. They should decide if it is indeed a good idea to spend so much money on the investment and operation in a tiny village which is not at all suitable for holidays. Is it worth operating the site, knowing that there is room for only one class of teenagers at a time (but there is not enough room for a formal nature school), and it can only be open in summer, for six or seven camps? I really think that the fact is still that the place can only be well utilized only by an organization like VE-GA, and only if all licences are issued for the operator organization itself.

Today the Magyartés Camp and Training Centre is empty, its condition is getting worse day by day. There is no hope for using it at all, not even for the mandatory repairs.

End-less Afterplay of the City Council

The latest youth strategy of the City Council is in the works, and it is supported by some surveys which are irrelevant from a youth professional perspective. These are meant to discover what young people want in Szentes. The result is obviously "more concerts". And it contradicts the problem that "you can often see a 'march' of 14–15-year-olds going out into the night fully drunk" (*Szentesi Élet*, 1/7/2016, *Youth Strategy Must Be Revised*).

The Mayor sticks to his previous approach which is also mentioned in his interview in *Szentesi Élet* (*Our Goal is to Keep Young People at Home*, 15th July 2016). Let me list a few of his ideas: creating modern new jobs with a good pay, building opportunities, council housing or providing better care for young families with children. And last: it would certainly help if young people had a sense of belonging to the town, their home, their relatives. I decided to list these in this order because we need to stop at this point and think – this is where the real core of the disagreement between us and the local government can be best captured. This *sense of belonging* will not form in adult age. By the end of adolescence, the content of this belonging is mostly formed, or the lack of it becomes apparent.

The baseline of any town level youth strategy is what that town wishes to do with her adolescents and young people aged 12–23. Everything else, including education, sport, culture or health is dealt with in other strategy papers, which have a detailed divisional plan to execute.

From the viewpoint of the youth profession, what can a municipal youth strategy do to keep young people at home? Let me recommend the words of Councillor Móra (*Dialogue Is Needed for a Good Youth Strategy – in: Szentesi Élet*, 29/7/2016,): "the key task is to create the dialogue amongst all affected parties: the youth, NGOs, various civil groups and the institutions". (The only body that I miss here is the "Youth Friendly City Council" – maybe the journalist missed it.) **Indeed, there is need for an institutionalized dialogue, in the form of a dedicated dialogue forum. In our modern world, this is**

how the adolescent generations of the town could become self-conscious mini-generations, through proper representation of their interests. It will enable them to have their own local identity, i.e. a meaningful sense of belonging to the place where they live. Unfortunately, it is apparently possible to decide that a town does not want it. This is exactly what the local government of Szentes did.

There was an article in the local newspaper, published almost as a response to Councillor Móra's ideas, under the title *Problems in the City Centre*. Two city council members declared war against the disorderly conduct of "partying young people and the homeless" (these two, together). This "fight" had a couple of rounds in the media and the councillors are on the win, the benches where partying young people were sitting and the homeless were sleeping are demolished, to prevent wrong-doing in frequented areas. This is summarized in the article *Noisy Place? Solution: Remove the Bench. People of Szentes, Stay Standing!* (in: *Délmagyarország*, 11/17/2016). This bench-fight could eventually find its way into the youth strategy of the City Council.

The fight led to even more serious forms at the council meeting of 22nd September 2016. There were two interpellations and three answers, let me quote only from the answer of the Deputy Director of the City Administration: "You said that our efforts to build a thriving, young, colourful town were not correct. You said it was impotence. I may as well prepare a Council Decree to close pubs at 10 p.m., or to declare that sitting on benches and stairs is an antisocial behaviour. We can be a quiet town of pensioners... please decide."

Overtime Intermezzo

I'm going through what I have written so far, and we have come to the first anniversary of the tragedy. We didn't remember to think about it. However, Committee Chairman Mr Kovács, the representative of Magyartés did remember, and submitted his "anniversary" interpellation: "There was a headboard in front of the building of the former VE-GA, and it is gone. Please check if it was a private property or find out who took it."

We recovered, which is well proven by the fact that we had a funny night trying to answer the interpellation. I was the one to defend my colleague who was ordered to answer. This is the answer finally: "The headboard is the private property of the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA. The word "VE-GA" is engraved in full width of the headboard. When the Union of VE-GA liquidated the building, they removed it and it is now kept in their own community house. In case the headboard is to be reinstalled, both the wooden headboard itself and the metal container for its placement need restoring. The Union of VE-GA does not object to reinstallation but has no resource to fund the cost of mandatory refurbishment works." Some people wish I wrote a letter to Mr K to ask for some money from his budget for that purpose. Perhaps he would be willing to give...

"I live in young hearts on and on"
(Endre Ady: *I Live in Young Hearts*)

MY INTERPRETATION OF THE EVENTS

Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.
(Saint-Exupéry: *The Little Prince*)

A Possible Interpretation

Let me circle back to my original aim that I wish to accomplish with the two volumes of this book: to describe how I lead VE-GA, how I make decisions every day, how I help other people's children to become adult persons.

These questions are important in themselves, and I am fully aware of their importance. First, my role as the leader of VE-GA. I never was (because I could not be) the leader of the SZIDÖK Project or especially of SZIDÖK. The SZIDÖK Project was not our initiative, we were contracted by the Szentes City Council to realize it. While roles and responsibilities were shared, the full responsibility for SZIDÖK has always rested with the local government. Our mission was to assist (mentor) and to help with administrative duties.

I have published two papers on the tasks of a leader and on my view on the methodology of helping others. These are available at the homepage of VE-GA in the section *Letters*. The first one is *Me, Youth Organization Leadership and VE-GA*, the other is *Pali Korom, Youth Development and VE-GA*.

Until this point we looked at the story from the angle of the SZIDÖK Project, but I'm the leader of VE-GA, I am responsible for VE-GA. So we need to review here what the SZIDÖK Project and the related things meant for VE-GA.

Until 1987, VE-GA was an NGO in the district of Szentes town. Most of its participants moved out as they graduated from the secondary school: they continued their studies at universities, they were enrolled in the army, or started to work. Only very few stayed to become animators of the newer teenagers. In the summer of 1986 a new process began, which got stronger from 1987: more young people showed up in VE-GA's activities from other parts of the country, and by 1990 it has grown into a country-wide organization. Along with this change, another process also began: an increasing number of young people stayed with us as university students, as adults. By 1992–1993 this already caused some problems, even I didn't know myself what we could do with adults in VE-GA. At the beginning, the majority insisted that VE-GA is the organization of their own (adult) connections, a place where they can preserve their old contacts, where they can remain free adolescents. They refused any external role or development activity. This would have meant that VE-GA would naturally grow old with its membership and would never become an official NGO. This was an obvious trap, and it could have killed VE-GA. Furthermore, I and my growing partners were not committed to care for only ourselves and the old guys, but to work with teenagers. I understood that VE-GA needed a mission that corresponds to its values, knowledge and expertise. This would have been the only way to survive.

Another option for a way out was that many VE-GA members had an active role in various democratic youth initiatives, but it also brought along problems, because these initiatives took two divergent paths in the late 1980s:

- A. One of the paths was to form student councils in schools and make them strong both in secondary and higher education.
- B. Another group thought that elaborating on student rights and enforcing them is the way to improve democracy.

In the first option it wasn't realistic to have strong student councils at secondary schools. Unlike at universities, only few such student councils could form. The key reason for the failure was the same reason why the 8-year-long struggle for point B) eventually failed: the society of teachers. It was not democratic, it was even antidemocratic in a Prussian way. They hated the tasks related to student councils at schools. They experienced the enforcement of student rights as an action against them (not without foundation).

This all was crowned with the liberal education law of 1995, which was strongly based on (student) rights, but didn't call for developing students' democratic skills as a mandatory pedagogical mission. In my opinion it was an incomprehensible and fatal strategic error.

Anikó's initiative to form youth and student councils in the towns and cities was not heard. Nor did I support the idea then.

Years later, the third notable initiative was to form many local children's and youth councils, with the devoted support of local councils. We thought it was a real opportunity in a village size settlement, but not in towns or cities, because these are too large to hold youth council elections. The other reason was that such a town-level council could not exist without schools and the schools' student councils, since all participant teenagers are students after all. For youth professional reasons, we rejected the idea to have elector age adults form municipal youth councils.

This debate was eventually solved in Szentes by Mayor Dr. József Rébeli-Szabó. He chose Anikó's option from the points above.

Building up the technical and human infrastructure around the SZIDÖK Project was an adult task and activity. But it was not the only thing that saved VE-GA from dying quietly. What happened in fact was that many VE-GA members actively joined similar initiatives elsewhere. Almost at the same time as the SZIDÖK Project launched, they created and then mentored the Student Workshop project in Debrecen. Similar activities launched in Hódmezővásárhely, Szeged, Újszentiván and somewhat later in Szolnok and in many villages.

I also think that VE-GA's new activity in Transylvania was especially important, and the newly formed SZIDÖK got involved in it as a partner (and has remained a partner until today). We had some major initiatives in Temesvár (Timișoara) and Arad (Aiud) but it was the contacts with Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș) and Gernyeszeg (Gornești) that finally proved to be lasting for VE-GA and SZIDÖK.

These activities changed VE-GA, and in a sense they turned the union into adulthood. Alongside with these projects, new teenager groups formed, and from the late 1990s the children of VE-GA families that grew in number also started to participate.

I also need to note that after late 1995, significant groups in VE-GA started to rebel against what was happening. It was a spontaneous rebellion of those who insisted on their own VE-GA, and rejected anything that I describe here as the SZIDÖK Project and the *related things*. Such groups were the "old ones", the "workers' division" and those who firmly engaged in school student councils and student rights movements. This started the so-called long crisis of VE-GA. During the crisis many people left us. Another problem was that during the crisis, VE-GA too strongly identified itself with the SZIDÖK Project and the *related things*. As a result, Szentes and the Camp and Training Centre of Magyartés helped to establish and preserve "VE-GA identity", which remained so even after we terminated our teenager groups in Szentes for ethical reasons.

With all the engagements described in this book, VE-GA became far too defenceless against the local government. I realized it way too late, and when I did see it, I couldn't do anything about it for years. And when tried to take action after 2014, I was already helpless. My only excuse is that I didn't ever think myself that the City Council would end our joint SZIDÖK Project this way, sentencing the Youth and Student Council of the town to death.

I spoke with a well-known personality of the town, and he said that "*none of the council bodies have ever realized this all*". So, he thinks they cannot therefore be faulty. The situation is very similar to the statement that the ignorance of law does not excuse anyone from the legal consequences. Simply stating

that the councils of Szentes did not know what they should have known cannot be an excuse for them. It is all the more so because juveniles should be positively discriminated. And I also believe that one must not make any decision about the children of others without a special sense of responsibility.

VE-GA and the children in VE-GA became vulnerable to the Szentes City Council because we took the contract with them seriously *in an ethical sense, too*. **The Szentes City Council is therefore accountable, logically, legally and ethically responsible for its deeds against the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA. And there can be no excuse whatsoever for this.**

How is VE-GA doing in Szentes today?

After 38 years, the national Children and Youth Union of VE-GA had no choice but to leave its birthplace, Szentes. This has also ended the operation of the two teenager community sites of the town. This put an end to the local activity of VE-GA helping other NGOs, holding trainings, providing consultations, program-level cooperation, joint resource development. Many such programs are mentioned in the annual reports of VE-GA.

VE-GA terminated its local youth professional activity and stopped assisting local organizations, schools and the City Council and Administration. The lack of these activities is best shown in the hard birth and low quality of the new youth strategy.

In these times when civil groups exist in a very tough environment, the local example of SZIDÖK and VE-GA may be a warning to parents, young people and organizations that things can go wrong for them. All this must not pass without consequences, for the negative multiplication effect is imminently sensible. In a few years we will see how the 160(!) local NGOs are doing, especially the local youth groups.

*Upon a branch of nothingness
my heart sits trembling voicelessly,
and watching, watching, numberless,
the mild stars gather round to see.*
(Attila József: *Without Hope*)

Consumed by Problems

The second Orbán government made the operating conditions of NGOs a lot stricter, both legally and financially. In the legal area, each NGO had to reshape itself, VE-GA was also spending months on the transformation. I can't tell how many requests for missing information we sent to the tribunal court, and it took over a year (!) for us to obtain the renewed registration. From a strictly formal legal aspect, this approach could have been justified, since there were a lot of fake NGOs that didn't exist in reality. But there were even more normally operating groups that had to have the formalities of a registered NGO. Hundreds of these groups ceased to exist and are disappearing nowadays, being unable and unwilling to comply with all legal requirements. It is a pity because they were unique, irreplaceable value in our slowly evolving democracy. Many professionally managed but not really *civil* groups can and obviously will be able to continue being a registered civil NGO.

The stricter environment also meant that the opportunity to apply for funds basically vanished, especially for the youth sector. The only available EU applications were not designed for the youth civil world of the Hungarian countryside. As the government-funded mass holiday camp program was launched, no funding was left available for civil special camps. At the same time all meaningful forms of subsidy were cut for local youth councils.

After the local elections in the autumn of 2014, Szentes was one of the very few towns where the socialist mayor could remain in power, with the majority of the council being conservative. When the 2015 budget was compiled, I met the Mayor and told him about the numerous technical problems in the two community spaces owned by the Council, and asked for a significant increase to the subsidy. He told me this was impossible. We should be glad if the majority fraction doesn't terminate our contract. He suggested we find other sources.

One month later we got the news that the FIDESZ fraction wanted to remove the 2015 subsidy from the budget plan. At that time we could defend it, but I couldn't be mistaken what to expect in the fall plan when the 2016 budget was drafted.

At the end of February 2015, the hardest year of my life began. I knew that we would solve the human problems, as we had always solved them before, since this is the core of the youth profession. But financially I saw no way out. Since it accumulated for years, we would have needed millions of forints! We relentlessly kept looking for funding, but we only found a few uncertain EU applications, and none of them were for facility operation or organizing camps. For the first time in my life, I woke up at midnight sweating badly.

These might have contributed to my health changing for the worse: I had to undergo a bilateral operation with a problem that I had had for some time, and which never caused any major trouble for me. This time I had a very slow recovery, and I experienced a few things on myself that I had seen on my father in the years before he died. I lost minutes of my life. I fell out of myself in well-known places and didn't know for a few seconds where I was. I took a shower after deleting the fact that I had already taken a shower.

By autumn I had somewhat recovered. This coincided with the renewal of the SZIDÖK Project and SZIDÖK. But we didn't have a moment to rest as the financial unsustainability of the SZIDÖK Project mounted ahead of us. I was called to the Mayor at the end of October. He told me we had to decide if we wanted to renew the contract for the SZIDÖK Project. If yes, we must submit the related proposal. But

he also confessed that such a proposal would be rejected by the majority fraction. So, if VE-GA wanted to continue the project, the best thing to do would be not even to formally propose it! This way we could avoid the consequences that a political debate in the council would raise.

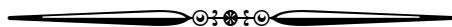
This led to serious disputes in VE-GA and among the animators of SZIDÖK. Anikó always opposed our submitting, because she wanted to keep the SZIDÖK Project at any cost, and she was especially worried (she proved to be right) that we could also lose the camp in Magyartés. The SZIDÖK animators were worried about the political havoc that might also hit SZIDÖK very badly. As it turned out, I didn't evaluate these options correctly, but I was right in estimating the costs.

In 2016, we should have spent 600,000 HUF on the Student Cellar and 1.9M HUF on the House in Magyartés for unavoidable building works. If we had taken over the utility costs, that would have meant at least another 1.4M HUF for 2016, mostly due to the very expensive heating system of the Student Cellar. In 2017, these would have amounted to 2.9M HUF. So, a total of 6.8M HUF in two years, which does not include any program related costs.

BUT FROM WHAT SOURCE SHALL WE PAY IT?

I had another problem of the same magnitude, which I already mentioned before. For me it was evident that it is ethically not correct to run the SZIDÖK Project and mentor SZIDÖK by ourselves. VE-GA, one of many NGOs, would have thereby taken over all the responsibility for SZIDÖK, which solely belonged to the Szentes City Council.

After all, it was my personal decision then to submit the proposal to continue the joint operation of the SZIDÖK Project. The consequences confirmed everything we feared. But the responsibility for these are not mine or ours. Full responsibility for all the consequences lies only with the Szentes City Council.



*Why do you expect everything from me, Sign
And Word?
Aren't there enough people to do it
Who are well paid for this?*

(VE-GA Rock Group: VE-GA Peace Rock Play)

Contradicting Myself

For the first time ever in my conscious life, until the last week of January 2016, I was unable to think normally. Afterwards, to comfort others, I kept saying that I was crying, and was laughing at the same time. But in fact, there was no laughter, it was rather a struggle.

Actually I felt a great sense of relief. VE-GA was beginning to be consumed by being left alone with the SZIDÖK Project, and not only financially. But I felt as a traitor even for this feeling. Inside, I was struggling with a deep sense of shame. The stupidity of the decisions on 18th December caused fits of anger in me, and I had to hide it. I had to smile. Deep inside me, the sober intellectual mind was fighting with the Neanderthal caveman for weeks. One of my egos could even kill, the other would have agreed to any compromise for the sake of children. It was like schizophrenia. I had never experienced anything like that before.

But I had to hold on.

The decisions I made, the letters I wrote and any verbal initiative I had between the end of November and the middle of January were not clear-headed things, but rather so to say ethically based reflexes. Despite the storms inside me, every now and then I had a sentiment that I had to do this or that so that they couldn't make the situation even worse, to build good landing spots for the time when I can consciously take an initiative role.

It is wry humour of destiny that this period also had a positive effect on me. My brain somehow woke up. My dementia disappeared, and the degradation process that started in the spring of 2015 reversed.

The following sections are from my diary entries, recalling what happened to me in November and December 2015.

The council meeting of November 2015 is approaching.

Szirbik called me to his office. First, we discussed some of the strategic projects of the town (solar energy plant, Petőfi Hotel, new wastewater treatment plant etc.). Then he asked *what this SZIDÖK affair would lead to*. I answered that *it would lead to the things I wrote down to him in an e-mail*. "What will VE-GA do?" – he asked.

I told him that *VE-GA would have to let go both SZIDÖK and the SZIDÖK Project if the council withdrew its support, instead of increasing it. The Student Cellar only caused us problems and expenses since not only the local government, but also the City Administration and the SZVSZ Kft. left us alone with it. So we let it go, since VE-GA looked on it as a matter of the town.*

The situation of the House of Magyartés is different – I added. Why? – he asked. Because – I replied – only the walls belong to the local government there. If they take it too, we can even start a lawsuit next autumn. And such a lawsuit will become a political lawsuit. I think that the MSZP reps should consider well for what and how they vote. Because we'd rather sue the majority fraction, if this must happen.

18 November

I found the motion on my desk. Nuts! What a sloppy piece of work it is! Gosh! They had this beginner young woman write it, someone who has no professional knowledge about it! There is not a word about SZIDÖK or the SZIDÖK Project in it, even though the contract is about them. What will come out of it?

Our friend in FIDESZ is telling me that nothing will! This is already decided by the fraction!

23 November

Just back from the meeting of the Legal Committee.

There is confusion all over the place, the majority is hostile towards us in a civilized way.

I tell them that *the SZIDÖK Project can't continue without the support of the Council. The Student Cellar has a growing set of facility problems, and its operation depends on getting at least the same amount of subsidy we got so far. But this will not be enough to survive the entire period of mandatory operation. Nobody looked in my eyes.*

I thought I should lay emphasis on my message by adding the following. *The SZIDÖK Project was launched under the influence of the first Mayor. He was the one to sign the base agreement for the Magyartés project as well.* I was sure they didn't know it. Attorney K looked up with a surprised face. In the end they decided unanimously to recommend a debate on the extension of the contract. After this, another friend from FIDESZ got me in the corridor and pulled me into an office. He told me *whatever I could do the FIDESZ fraction would not support the contract renewal. They decided as early as spring that SZIDÖK must be closed down and both the Student Cellar and the Magyartés Camp must be taken back from VE-GA.* When I asked why, he said that *they thought I was the man of Szirbik, and these were the affairs of the two of us.*

I was denying it, but I was nervous and angry.

I wrote this short note to the *Windmill Fighters* with a sharp pen:

I base my strategy in the committees on causing surprise, killing the stupid debates upfront, to clarify our legal standpoint. Yesterday they were shocked in the Legal Committee because they didn't remember that the original agreements were signed in 1994 with Mayor Rébeli, upon his initiative. This had a special feeling as I was only mentioning dates, not names, since the chairman of the committee, a member of FIDESZ, is his son. I handed over our base agreement, mentioning that the late Mayor Rébeli became an honorary member of VE-GA in 1995, which he shed tears upon, since it is not easy to be a former Mayor in a small town. Today I was in the "Youth" Committee, and based on the "papers" I proved that it was never VE-GA who approached the local governments with expectations, while the local governments let us down several times, even though we were running youth work as they wished. By the way yesterday I spoke for four minutes, and today I won't be any longer either.

25 November



"It felt as if the ceiling
was falling down on me"

I woke up and thought what else could come? I had bad feelings about the afternoon meeting of the City Development Committee.

The Committee meeting couldn't have been worse. If I didn't believe that everything has a cause and that an intelligent person can turn all handicap to his advantage, I would already be KO.

The only thing I can be glad for is that Anikó was not sitting there, she would've been taken by the ambulance for sure.

Things started to go incredibly badly even if I already knew we had no chance.

One hour before the meeting a friend from FIDESZ called me, he was upset, and he told me *there was a scandal because I posted a few lines on my Facebook wall about the committee meeting of the other day.* (The message above, which I thought I had written for the Windmill Fighters group only).

Oh good Lord, how is it possible? "It felt as if the ceiling was falling down on me", as they say. *Now they have an excuse* he said, *and they did a fast casting and scenario how they'd lay me out.*

Am I so stupid to publish it on my public timeline? You know I've always been a star-gazer and I was totally upset anyway. So, I didn't quite understand it, but I did get that it fired them up really badly.

Anyway, I had my phone in voice recording mode in my pocket.

To save the save, coming in before the proposal maker, I said *I am terribly sorry to have made public a message that was meant for a closed group of VE-GA. If someone feels hurt, I apologize. But this issue is not about me, but about many-many children and teenagers, and not only in Hungary. As it is apparent that the majority FIDESZ-KDNP fraction is unwilling to support the SZIDŐK Project, VE-GA will let it go. But as for Magyartés we have a valid base agreement for property rental, and we wish to have our 2016 summer camps there. If we had to cancel these, it would have a very negative message all over the country and abroad.*

Committee Chairman Mr Antal (leader of the majority fraction) was shouting at me and was saying stupid things. *“He was representative of Magyartés for eight years and had no idea that the Camp was owned by the Council. I never invited him, and I never let in anyone from the village. We settled down, made ourselves comfortable in the ready infrastructure, and believed it would remain ours forever.”* Then he asked the colleagues from the city marketing, calling them to account, if we ever contacted them. They said we did not. (A withering look around.) Then he asked the presenter, the Coordinator of Civil and Youth Affairs, how many NGOs there were in Szentes. He answered there were 160(!). Another withering look around, but not at me.

After that Councillor Bujdosó spoke saying that *he thought that our financial statements were not transparent, were not OK, and we could have had salary payments, against the wording of the contract.*

Councillor Edit Hevesi-Tulipán then asked me a question, presuming conflict of interest.

Committee meetings often have an unacceptable style since there is no TV, radio or press present. And the minutes of meeting would only contain what they allow to be recorded there. But this meeting had such an impetus which hit the thirty people present to the ground.

Only one independent councillor lady dared to stand out on our side. She said *that this was about the activity of an organization which often teamed up with her organization successfully.* Antal told her off and told her *to shut up in this case as she was biased.*

As a result of the vote the motion got rejected and was sent back to the Legal Committee.

But the afternoon wasn't over yet. In the corridor I stumbled upon János Kovács, FIDESZ delegate Chairman of the Youth Committee. I approached him stating that *the situation was clear for me.* I asked him *to help*, in his capacity as a committee leader and as the representative of Magyartés, *achieve a normal transition in these matters. I asked him to support us so that we could peacefully run our 2016 summer camps.*

He answered *he could not promise anything. For two reasons: one, “your colour is not good” and “the whole affair is your business with Szirbik”. The other reason was that I didn't let the people of Magyartés in the camps.* I asked who told him that as this was not true. *“The people of Magyartés told me”* – he said, and walked away.

It's Thursday, 26th November.

This morning X came, upon the request of Antal, to my office asking to hand over *the contracts of the 2016 VE-GA summer camps* immediately – in November 2015!

I sent a mail to Tamás Rébeli-Szabó, Chairman of the Legal Committee, and I also called him. I apologized, and reminded him that we signed a contract for the camp centre with his father, and that contract is still valid. I also sent him the list of prearranged camps for 2016.

I was just told that I have to present the motion tomorrow.

Well! I'm writing a kind of farewell speech – I feel it's good, it will be appropriate there. This is what I'm planning to say:

Dear City Council, dear Mayor,

I was planning to make just a brief addition, but in the meantime I received so many questions that I must answer them first.

Let me begin by saying that during this case the national Children and Youth Union of VE-GA often got in situations when its Board or even its General Assembly should have made make immediate decisions. This is obviously impossible, since the members live around the country, and they have their everyday lives and jobs.

However, the Board has made one decision: The Union of VE-GA intends to waive the operation of the Student Cellar as of 1st January 2016, and wishes to hand it over to the selected successor in an organized manner. The key reason behind the decision is that the project has long been an unrealistically high financial burden, even with the City Council subsidy.

This action will mark the end of a 25-year-old cooperation that was about SZIDÖK, the Szentes Youth and Student Council.

Let me now briefly answer some questions.

SZIDÖK enabled over one thousand teenagers to have a taste of participating in public life. 156 representatives or delegates had this experience only once, but 214 young people were involved in these activities for years. We had 14 Youth Mayors and Vice Mayors, and 68 other people in various functions. The record holder is a successful young woman entrepreneur from Szentes who joined us as a child, and she is still available to help the teenagers.

The Children and Youth Union of VE-GA is a lot more severely affected by the issues around the Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés. In 1994 the City Council handed over a house in ruins, it had been standing empty for years. We teamed up with local partners and saved the building. We converted it to a camp centre and we managed it for 20 years. In the house everything was done with our own hands: the light switches, wall plugs, toilet seats, everything. The house hosted over 10,000 kids and youngsters in camps, most of them from Szentes and from our partner groups. We had multinational camps with young people from Italy, France, Germany, Slovakia, Poland, Turkey. The largest foreign group was obviously from Transylvania. These youth exchanges took our members to France, Italy and Germany, and we had regular trips to Transylvania. Our record holder for camp participation is a young man from Transylvania who first came to a Magyartés camp at the age of 11, and then he returned every year for 14 years, later as a camp counsellor.

However, this 25-year-old story is going to be ended - and not only this one. And that also has got something to do with the proposed decision of the local government.

It's now 37 years ago that this organization grew in Szentes around our family. My wife Anikó and I got old, we are tired, and this digital age is not our era as it turned out this week. We are retiring in 2016. However, one of those who aspire to be the next President of VE-GA lives in Szentes and the other two went to school in Szentes. So, I think that the headquarters of VE-GA will remain in Szentes.

Let me finish here by sharing some data.

According to the last register, the Union of VE-GA has 959 members. You need to know that our groups in Transylvania are separate since foreign citizens cannot be members of a Hungarian NGO. On the other hand, VE-GA made two important ethical decisions in the last few years.

First, any child under 14 can only be a registered member if an adult family member is also a member. Second, anyone under 18 must have parental consent for joining us.

It is also important in Szentes that after 2001, when SZIDÖK was elevated to the status of a recognized Minority Council by the Operational rules of the City Council, VE-GA terminated its youth groups in Szentes for ethical and incompatibility reasons.

As for the financial management of the Union of VE-GA, I can share the following:

Most of our groups are operated financially and legally within the framework of local foundations, social co-ops and other organizations. In the balance statement of VE-GA these are not reflected.

In the management of VE-GA volunteer activity and individual contributions play a dominant role, in full compliance with all related regulations. This means that membership fee is to be paid only by a few members and only in a symbolic form, but in a legally structured manner. With this information you can understand the 2014 balance of the Children and Youth Union of VE-GA, where the total income is 3.642M HUF – of which membership fees were 22,000 HUF. Total

expense was 3.916M HUF. Costs of public utility activity were 3.903M HUF, of which personal expenditure was 1.41M HUF.

Since I believe this is the last opportunity for me and Anikó, we would like to express our thanks to all involved families of Szentes, and the teenagers of past and present. We would like to thank all helpful school principals and teachers. We would like to thank both Mayors and all Council Members who treated us as true partners. And finally, we would like to thank all Civil Administration Professionals and Councillors who helped us in the interest of children.

Thank you.

Last time I felt something like this was doing my last exams. But it was all in vein. The legal committee had the motion postponed, and proposed to revisit the subject on account of new pieces of information. It was voted without any further clarification.

So, I couldn't make my contribution. I guess this was one of the purposes why it was eventually postponed.

In the meantime, we have VE-GA brainstorming sessions online because this whole situation implies a never-ending challenge.

J and Z will come tomorrow because we must hand over the management of all affairs related to Szentes to them.

J and Z were here.

It was very hard to remain calm and quiet while Anikó, still being ill, began to cry every now and then, and all our souls were rising in protest. It's not me, it's her who must be removed from the frontline.

This is what we agreed to at the end:

- This way or the other, SZIDÖK Project will be terminated and handed over to someone else to operate.
- With 1st January the Student Cellar will be handed over to the Family Support Centre for temporary operation, and a new application will be opened for management, but our groups can stay there.
- They want to take away the Magyartés house somehow, but for the time being it seems we can have our summer camps there.
- All of us must understand the following: most of them do not understand what they are doing, but they don't even care. They cannot even distinguish the SZIDÖK Project from its leader board SZIDÖK. For them all this is against Pali Korom, a man of Szirbik.
- We must not fire back immediately by any means, since that would give them the opportunity to take further bold moves. It is of crucial importance that VE-GA should not enter any political party warfare behind the back of the teenagers.

According to our principles, everybody should be given the opportunity to withdraw from this without losing face. It was especially true for SZIDÖK itself, and we didn't want to lose our face either.

But I'm not stupid. I started the preparations for a possible set of actions. I made no secret of my firm resolution that I will think it through seriously for two reasons: first, they are in power, and second, I can foresee that this process can escalate rapidly.

Agreements:

- We must have a General Assembly meeting on Sunday where Anikó and I will not participate. The results will be summarized by J in a letter to the local government.
- I will be relieved of my position in all Szentes-related affairs, J will represent VE-GA in Szentes instead of me.
- They will respond to the stupid remarks of the committee meetings, but in a very restrained manner.
- They will demand justification for the expected decisions, since no reason was mentioned so far against the SZIDÖK Project.

Any further action by VE-GA will also be considered from the perspective of a potential lawsuit.

A letter was written and sent by J to the Council on 1st December 2015, based on the points above.



"sense of a just cause
builds inner force"



"Only our substance
survives, if we keep it"

2nd December

Oh God bless the yoga-based techniques! You know sometimes anger gets loose inside me, but this way I manage to exclude it, so I can think somewhat clearly. They cannot see anything on me at work, however hard they are watching. Nobody realized so far that by the end of next year this could hurt many people. By the way, they didn't find any documents about us since almost nothing was formally registered about us in the last twenty years, and even those few documents are missing now.

For example, they are looking for the rental agreement that VE-GA signed with Mayor Rébeli-Szabó, and which was in fact written by himself as a lawyer.

I am now convinced that we must gain some time. We must achieve that nobody takes any action that pulls us into open conflict. If that happened, we could not pretend we are not aware of the volume of damage they are causing, that they contribute to a mass loss of values, in fact to the tragedy of a town. It is also a tragical loss of values for us, a serious material and non-material damage.

I need time to think through what could happen, what is ethical to do and what our legal actions may be. At the same time, we must stop this spirally escalating tragedy. At least SZIDÖK should have a chance to survive somehow.

In the last few days I contacted some friends in and outside VE-GA, people who can interpret and think through our case from a higher perspective, assessing our possibilities and the potential consequences. I asked them to study the case, and to discuss with me the available options. Many of them asked me to summarize the most important things in less than 10 pages. I completed it today and will send it out.

4th December – Today it is finally time to start my vacation.

My vacations are kind of interesting. I was going to work during the two camps of SZIDÖK, but I had to take vacations otherwise I couldn't have taken my annual 36 days (I could never take them all). This August I couldn't even take my usual seven or ten days of vacation since I was asked not to go away because of some important cases were to be arranged one after the other. In fact, this year we did not have a single day of vacation with Anikó, though we are not young (and according to this, not in our right mind either).

6th December

Just to make sure this vacation is not about resting either, I received the motion for the next Council meeting. There is no surprise in it, but it still made Anikó and A. cry.

The local government is putting an end to the SZIDÖK Project!!! What's even more tragic is that the last rites are performed on SZIDÖK by its own adult local government!

I just cannot understand how they can do it! I could cry since it's so obvious: to them SZIDÖK means nothing on earth. Maybe we were wrong to give it to them fully cost free, ready-to-use, therefore it is not appreciated at all. That's life, man is built that way.

The Student Cellar goes to the Family Support Centre for temporary operation, giving them a permanent position and covering the

costs.

As regards the Camp of Magyartés there are two alternatives: it either goes to the Family Support Centre as early as January (with related headcount and funding), or VE-GA can keep it until the end of our summer camps. But the true intention is very transparent, since the motion states that a new application is to be opened for both sites. But this is crazy: if VE-GA can have its preannounced summer camps there, it makes no sense for the City Council to pay for the costs from spring.

12th December

J, our representative sent a letter to the Council on 10th December and another one to the Chief Executive Director of the City Administration. The letter to the local government highlighted that the decision options have no justification whatsoever, and politely mentioned that they don't have enough information, and offered our help. The letter to the Chief Executive Director of the City Administration stated that the SZIDÖK Project is a brand of VE-GA, it cannot be continued by anyone else under the same name. In the name of VE-GA, she offered to support a simplified continuation of the project. She also sent the authentic copies of the rental agreement for Magyartés and pointed out that the contract is still valid.

Since they are still not aware of the costs of operation, I took three steps today.

Anikó, A. and I started to compile an operation manual for the Student Cellar. As the technical operation is a nightmare, this is not an easy task. I wrote to the leader of the Family Support Centre, the prospective operator, to make sure he knows that the costs are far above what he was told. I also contacted the manager of the Szentes City Operations Ltd. (a good partner of ours), warning him that he can easily get lumbered with having to maintain both sites. (He and his colleagues often helped us for payment, so he is aware of the actual amount of the high costs involved.)

It's Tuesday, 15th December.

I had to go to work since there were so many cases piling up. (What will they do if I truly retire?)

I cleaned up my work in four hours. But it was like entering a mental asylum.

My friend from FIDESZ came to me (he knew I would come in and he was waiting specially for me). He was excited to tell me that *for now everything will take a bad course for us, but I should be wise enough not to shoot back immediately. The case will be prepared in a way that if we shoot back, I will be suspended from work, and they will say that "leftist VE-GA attacks its town the same way as MSZP attacks Hungary"*. It was too much for me. And it was not the end.

As I returned to my office, a delegation from Magyartés were waiting for me. What's more, some people who never liked us. They were upset because Kovács was at Magyartés a few times, and he even had a village assembly there. He wanted *the delegates of the village to demand the "VE-GA House" back to themselves,*



"create a new balanced state of our human relationships, peace"



"they can keep their faces, their own beliefs and convictions"



because this way the contract of VE-GA can be terminated, and the village can have its own house back. "What should we do with the house, Pali?" – they asked me desperately. "Some aliens would come here. Or a church. Or the whole thing will collapse in a few years if you guys don't maintain it." (Details of the recording.)

They were very loud. Luckily, there was hardly anyone in the Office... the whole thing was very unpleasant. I rushed home.

I admit I took a shot of drink

"no innocent person can be hurt for this"



"Everything was built by our hands there. We own everything there."

on the way home. At home, another edition of the same awaited me, Anikó shouting at me totally upset, that "You might at last do something!". I called a young VE-GA member from the village. He told me that at their Father Christmas party some things were already heard that he didn't really understand. Then Kovács indeed initiated a village assembly. He thinks there were eight people present, two of them are young underaged persons. Kovács asked if it was true that VE-GA doesn't let the local kids in their camps. They told him that the opposite is true. He asked if we ever helped the locals. They confirmed that we often helped them. A young woman mentioned that we helped them to form their NGO, we handed over to them the collected memorabilia and artefacts of the village, including the materials of the house opening sociodramatic camp, and we gave them tens of thousands as well. On hearing these, Kovács became somewhat nervous, but said it would still be better for the village to reclaim their house and use it. Then they told him that they can't even utilize the refurbished Youth Club. They can't do anything with such a huge house as the VE-GA's. And they cannot run camps as they don't know how to do it. And for them it would be awkward to move in a house where everything was done by us. They agreed on it, and Kovács left furiously.

And it was still not the end of the day.

I tried to take a nap when my mobile rang. It was Dr Waldemár Chomiak, a Council member from FIDESZ, asking for a visit to the Student Cellar before the meeting of the Committee for Social Affairs, where he is the Chairman. I would have liked the idea yesterday, but now it was just a pain in the neck. But at least he came to see the place and he was astonished. He was surprised to see its size and to hear of its huge problems. Actually, he was very conscientious. When he was leaving, I came up the other way, and he didn't know there was another door to the Cellar. I overheard him standing there, talking on his mobile, saying "I'll be there soon. Mr Korom was a true gentleman."

It was the first evening when I couldn't fall asleep for hours. Not another bad day like this ever.



"Everything ... is the fruit of our hard work."

It's 18th December today, the day of the council meeting where the final decision is to be made.

I think the only serious open question is if they change their mind in the last minute, and don't let us hold our summer camps, because that would mean very big trouble. We'd need time anyhow.

Anikó is struggling with doubts. She can't believe that SZIDÖK is thrown up and that they disregard a valid rental agreement. But she already knows that "these" can do anything in group, because they feel they can do anything.

In one moment Anikó wants to attend the council meeting, in the other she doesn't want to. I am also very nervous – after all that happened yesterday – but I hold on.

At the end we agree that I go to the Cellar and attend the Friday afternoon SZIDÖK meeting, which may very well be the last but one. And she would arrange to watch the Council meeting on the local TV.

I went to the Cellar, but I was hysterical, my hands were shaking. I had never felt like that before and I was surprised to see myself like this. I have grown old! And I don't enjoy fighting. But if they don't allow the camps, it would mean an immediate declaration of war, on all fronts.

We kept us to the original schedule and roles, but there was a problem: Anikó couldn't really pay attention to the voting about the camps (she wears hearing aid), and she understood that they would not only take the house from us, but would not allow us to have our summer camps there either. This was the news she brought to the Student Cellar.

I was shocked! Adrenaline rushed throughout me. Then as she slowly told me what she knew I understood that there was no other proposal, and what was finally decided means that we indeed lose the site, but we can have our summer camps there. But after all this I wanted to see this in writing, we wouldn't believe "these" any longer.

My stomach hurt (where is your famous peace, Korom?), and I rather focussed on the details of the council meeting. One of these was indeed important and worth attention: the Chief Executive Director of the City Administration had to justify why the City Council no longer needs SZIDÖK. He happened to say that the schools no longer belong to the Council, so the work of SZIDÖK is not needed either. I can't believe it!

On the way home I threw down a shot of drink again. (And it took a man to resist another one.) On Sunday I told Anikó that we cannot calm down unless we have a paper that we can have the summer camps. I also told her to request in writing that the Chief Executive Director of the City Administration sends us the official recording of that meeting of the City Development Committee. She sent an e-mail to him and then called him on Monday, too.

Anikó had a call from K, a journalist from *Délmagyarország*. She was very interested in the fate of SZIDÖK. She would have liked a statement. *She also participated in the Council meeting, but for her it was not clear what the decision was about.* Anikó told her that *we don't see clear either. Also, the Assembly of VE-GA had a decision: VE-GA will not wage war with the City Council over*



"we stay gentle"

the heads of children of Szentes. So, for the time being we do not consent to giving any interview. After this attempt, it was easier to repel the other two media requests as well.



"with a clean heart, with all of our heart, thus resorting to wisdom"

22nd December – Today is Tuesday, K's article was published in *Délmagyarország*, and it's quite good. The Chief Executive Director of the City Administration also wrote us. We can have our summer camps and we may listen to the recording in his office. Of course, we don't know if we can record it, but at least we can have a peaceful Christmas.

We immerse ourselves in Christmas wishes, greetings, photos of the kids we love. This is why it is worth doing it. It's so good to be loved so much. People pop in from as far as Budapest, even from abroad, ones who we didn't expect because we parted in disagreement years ago. These disputes are always about this: in the name of love we cannot stay silent about important things. We must say what others do not dare to or cannot say, or do not even realize. My brother also called, he is an experienced accountant and auditor. He offered his help in everything. It felt very good because my family was never at peace with my "VE-GA hobby". Just like others, they don't quite get what this is about and what all this is good for.



"We seek the truth based primarily on our belief in the just cause and noble ideas"

28th December – Now, between Christmas and New Year, we can't say we calmed down, but at least we are not that nervous, which is a big achievement. Yesterday there was an idea to have one of our partner NGOs apply for the operation of the MagyarTés Camp (openly or secretly) in partnership with us. But we thought it through. Everything was built by our hands there. We own everything there. Everything beyond the walls is the fruit of our hard work. It just can't be that someone simply moves in to this world. We could never do this!

I went through one of the ethical scenarios that we have: the one based on the Gospel of Matthew.

1. We lost everything, we are finished off, we are deprived of everything we had. Only our substance survives, if we keep it. This is from where we can and should start again.
2. We rebel and cry, while being consoled by others, but we also console others.
3. We overcome the hatred that awakens in us. We are angry not for ourselves, but for the children. The sense of a just cause builds inner force. We do not seek revenge, violence, we stay gentle.
4. We seek the truth based primarily on our belief in the just cause and noble ideas, it cannot be reached any other way. If these cannot be saved otherwise, only then will we turn to the legal and practical aspects of truth. We must take and practice our own responsibility in the first place.
5. We do what we can so that our opponents can find a solution in which they can keep their faces, their own beliefs and convictions.
6. We look at the entire case from an ethical perspective, and we base our decisions on this. We make decisions with a clean

heart, with all of our heart, thus resorting to wisdom.

7. Our basic goal is to create a new balanced state of our human relationships, peace, even if this happens after a tragic loss of values.
8. According to these principles, we must clearly stand out for these issues, even if we are persecuted for it. But no innocent person can be hurt for this.

To begin with the first one: we can't fight for our own things unless we have completed the journey above, or we would lose our substance. Practically, VE-GA can't apply for its own facilities without putting our substance at risk in this case. On the other hand, since they want to finish us off, even though we write the best application on earth, we wouldn't win anyway. (But we must gain time now, so we don't publish this understanding at this point.)

Anikó often bursts into tears unexpectedly. Everything, really everything reminds her of Magyartés.

On New Year's Eve we looked after our youngest grandchild. It's always exhausting, it's always very good, and this time it was a kind of remedy. It withdrew us from the distress. I am mostly able to get myself out of the noise of the "insane piano" (Diderot) of my mind. But Anikó struggles a lot. And it makes me tense. And I know I mustn't hate them since that would poison me and would prevent me from thinking. And thinking is my strength.

On 4th January 2016 I went to work, and almost immediately Zs approached me that the handover of the Cellar and Magyartés to the Family Support Centre must be done. I didn't even mention that VE-GA did not receive any formal notification of the local government's decision, and that the VE-GA Assembly withdrew my delegation in these matters. Then my boss sent me to the archives to search for the Magyartés folder of the Office. Now, this is what I call incompatibility!

Of course, I got quite neurotic about it, how stupid I am!

At home it was the first time that Anikó really jumped on me. "*You caused this all!*" she shouted. And she was quite right.

Yesterday it was Saturday, 9th January. I had a bad nervous stomach. And it grew bad since I had no idea *why*, and *why exactly then* when this crazy scene had been on for almost two months already. I woke up at night with a diarrhoea. I had nausea while doing my exercise. I could hardly push my breakfast down, and I needed to drink a small shot before lunch to stop the bad feeling in my guts. I never had any feeling like this. "These" manage to kill me off eventually! A friend of mine told me on the phone to drink more. But I won't start drinking, no way. Rain is pouring outside.

The SZIDÖK meeting of Friday, 15th January went surprisingly well. We had a discussion that sometimes sped up, sometimes slowed down. There were 20 people attending. Some parents and teachers also popped in. Nobody understood anything, and we could not say anything either. We told them to read *Szentesi Élet*. They have never written so much about us, but now they feel obliged to justify. After VE-GA has discredited a few justifications in writing, the latest reason is that it is only democratic to provide other NGOs of Szentes the chance to operate the Student Cellar and Magyartés.



"while being consoled by others, ... we also console others"



"Everything, really everything reminds her of Magyartés."



"is and will be ours
forever"

Blah blah.

Anikó was afraid that everything collapsed in the Student Cellar, and thought it would only be the three of us with M. So now she is crying happily on my shoulder. The problem is it does not matter why she cries, it makes me upset anyway. Nothing else has ever made me really upset.

16th January – The next day was Saturday, M. went for her usual check of the Cellar, and she discovered that the sewage pipe to one of the shops is dripping, so its external part got jammed

again. She didn't even mention it, just started to clean the pipe, maybe she succeeded, we'll know on Monday. She washed the floor and disinfected the area. She notified the Family Support Centre, the new operator. Let them get used to it.

It's Sunday 17th January today, and the rainwater broke into the Cellar. What else! It found its way on two tiny spots of the freshly made waterproof mortar. It's good that at least it's not flowing in through a larger surface, through many leaks.

18th January – Today I again woke up and felt shitty as I described above, and I couldn't calm down any other way. I'm simply unable to think normally. I get into mental treadwheels one after the other and can't get out.

As for the Cellar, I was only interested in it for the sake of Anikó. In my head there is a theoretical order, I have always regarded SZIDÖK to be the matter of the town. I know it is a tragedy that must bring forth its consequences for the local government. Clear case.

But Magyartés is something else. Me and many others literally worked our asses off to save it and to make it usable. And when we had the two huge storm damages, again we were left alone, we were to do whatever we wanted, the Council couldn't give any money.

I can't believe either that the fraction would approve of the Cottage staying in our possession, when they find out that it is in fact ours. (I also need some conspiracy here not to let them find it out too soon.) At the same time, I'm crazy because if they took it, it would be a real advantage in a court filing for damages, and we don't really need it anyway.

The problem is that I listed the six major works that we planned for this year, and then I recalled all the tremendous amount of work we invested there. And then I see aliens living in a place which is ours, which is and will be ours forever. Well this is fucking hard to stand, to survive. Not to mention the legion of camp participants, almost ten thousand kids! An almost infinite line of faces, memories.

I need to calm down somehow, or else I will go nuts.



"the Cottage staying in
our possession"

As he later understood only a man who could measure his soul against the vastness of the desert could stand face to face with the silent dunes.

(Chingiz Aitmatov: The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years)

BEGINNING OF THE HONOURABLE FUNERAL. STRATEGY OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND BUILDING THE FUTURE

As I said before, I wasn't capable of strategic thinking before late January 2016.

Besides addressing Councillor Kovács in November, I could take only one strategic action, i.e. I succeeded in persuading the FIDESZ fraction to approve of our holding the 2016 summer camps at Magyartés. In case there had been proper discussions, I would have meant it seriously. Even in early January I asked the leader of the Family Support Centre to hide the problems that could jeopardize holding the summer camps. However, the other party did not want to negotiate at all. What's more, at the site visit on 12th January Councillor Kovács ordered the Family Support Centre to have summer camps there. After all these, although I kept fighting consistently for our camps for months after this, in fact I didn't insist on having our camps at Magyartés at all.

I had to go on sick leave, which saved me time to think. Even in the doctor's waiting room I had to face the political echo of our story. The public opinion had already got tired of the havoc caused by the majority fraction. *"Szirbik should retire since all this is doing damage to the town."* They also blame us (me), people think *it is a fact* that I am a man of Szirbik, and VE-GA has always been supported by him. That's all!

By the end of January, I could identify myself with the feeling that the majority fraction saved VE-GA by pushing it out of its Szentes trap, thus opening the opportunity for us to move on, to begin a new era. I could have been happy about it, but we had to face the tragedy of SZIDÖK.

It was time for me to work on my strategy.

I clarified the following 3 strategic goals:

- I. It is a strategic goal to provide the best available conditions for the revival of VE-GA and the alternative survival of SZIDÖK.
- II. At its inverse, it is a strategic goal to make the Council face the consequences of its decisions, as these cause damage to the town.
- III. I had to achieve that the detached Cottage at the Magyartés camp site is legally transferred to the ownership of VE-GA. I had to have this to pacify the hardcore members in VE-GA.

When I use first person singular, it is because I had to take all this on myself, because it was only me who could reach some kind of inner balance by this time. Only I could think through the entire complex case from a distance. At the same time, I didn't want to shock VE-GA members any further, that would have brought further escalation. Online communication was not possible since we found out that our opponents had hackers who broke into our systems.

- I. So it became my strategic goal to provide the best available conditions for the revival of VE-GA and the alternative survival of SZIDÖK.

My focus was to save values, and I defined the following tactical goals.

- I.1. A key goal is to keep the ones who belong to us and their communities.

- I.1.1 We must try to help SZIDÖK survive in a simpler format, managed by others. I have offered to negotiate this many times. One of the important results in this goal was that the young people continued their Friday afternoon meetings for another four months, they completed the *Role/Model/Value* research and sent out its readout. **For various reasons however, the idea of continuing SZIDÖK was rejected by everyone, stating it is not their responsibility.** For ethical reasons I could not start rescuing SZIDÖK members for other programs until this became final, and when it did become un-

ambiguous, parents and teachers got confused and began to worry for the kids and students, they were afraid of us, as it turned out in a few awkward discussions. In such circumstances we could keep about eighteen youngsters engaged in local public life.

I.1.2 We had to keep the two of us in health and unity. It has been very hard. We got sick of all this, but we are recovering slowly. It is a win in itself that I didn't get addicted to drinking or sedatives. I completed the best weight loss diet of my life, even if I never wanted to. We forced ourselves to live healthily, to get regular good sleep, to eat well and to use natural sedatives when it was unavoidable. We continuously discussed our problems. We also shared them with others. We tried to stay calm and systematic.

I.1.3 I paid special attention and actively made steps to avoid hatred poisoning us and the VE-GA members. I took care to ensure that the opinion forming personalities of VE-GA do not get the latest news at the same time and place. I created opportunities to channel the recurring strong emotions into some activities. In the meantime, we had to arrange to vacate the two buildings preserving our dignity. I had to find out the stations of farewell and had to prevent some people from causing havoc in the progress.

I.2 It was urgent to move the prearranged summer camps to a new location and to renew their content with view to the specifics of the new site. I had to concentrate on the two SZIDÖK camps because my focus was to spare time and opportunity to save SZIDÖK in some form for the future. This was one of the activities that helped the most badly affected teenagers and adults concentrate on a meaningful task.

I.3 The purpose of gaining time was to save the intellectual values of SZIDÖK, the SZIDÖK Project and their mentor VE-GA.

We must honestly admit that these would have been lost if the tragedy had not happened. Our busy life would have made it impossible to preserve and organize them. **The immediate liquidation orders threatened with a massive loss of these values.** The documents would have been moved in disorder, or we would have burned them all. It will take at least a few months to survey these documents and to make an inventory list, and we will then need to move them to their final location. These are documents of the era, project documentations, administrative documents, research papers. These must be stored and some of it must be digitalized as well. So, we need to contact the City Archives and the e-Library of the town. We need to work with our experts to load up some of them to Google and YouTube.

I.4 It is an important goal to reorganize our funding.

As a side effect of the Council decisions, the structure of our income, expense and financing will change. Our cooperation with external partners will change as well. We also need to revise our annual funding applications because they all heavily depended on the SZIDÖK Project which is now ended by the Council.

I.5 There was a large quantity of equipment in the Student Cellar and the Magyartés camp: furniture, building equipment, kitchenware, tools, crafts workshop materials worth millions of forints. It has become a tactical goal to save these as the monetary basis of our revival.

The short liquidation deadlines dreadfully threatened these items. With only a few weeks to empty the buildings, we couldn't have taken them safely, let alone in winter. We didn't even know where and how to move. Whatever we had left behind would've been lost forever, or would have got ruined in the hands of the new operator.

I.6 As our conflicts with the City Council developed, it has become a goal in itself to constantly reassess our options and their possible favourable outcomes. Within this, it was important to analyse the events of infringements, to assess the options for filing a lawsuit. Main items in this area are as follows:

I.6.1 The Real Estate Lease Agreement for the Magyartés camp is still in effect today, the City Council never formally terminated it, basically because they do not have a justification. Despite their statement, it has not been handed over to the Family Support Centre who therefore operate it illegally.

I.6.2 The case of the detached cottage at Magyartés took a tragicomical turn as it got stuck in an unlawful, wrong process. (The City Council made a decree in 2012 in which it transferred ownership of the cottage to VE-GA as a partial offset for its investments and works performed on the property. However, this decision has not been executed.)

I.6.3 In all aspects, including the harm caused to the town itself, multiple offence and material damage was done and will be done in the future. It is foreseeable that the Council will breach its obligation to

operate the Student Cellar for five years.

We should somehow keep the control over all parts of the (former) SZIDÖK project, and at the same time we join in to the resumption.

I.6.4 It is specifically unlawful that SZIDÖK is still referred to in a separate chapter of the Rules of Procedures of the City Council, together with a local regulation to provide an annual subsidy for it.

I.7 There is a distinct task we must take on: to hand over the leadership and management roles to our successors. This is already ongoing, mostly in summer camp related topics. At the same time, I need to ascertain my heritage – just as I’m doing it with this very book.

II. The second strategic goal is to make the Council face the consequences of its decisions about SZIDÖK and the SZIDÖK project.

I must do it in a way that their outcry would not destroy us. It is important to understand that originally our opponent was the majority fraction, but in this case the whole Council voted unanimously. Therefore, any critical remark could be interpreted as an attack against the entire town.

II.1 I had to tackle an immediate goal task (I had only a week to complete it) to prevent that tenants are moved into our two estates. This would have brought along the immediate and humiliating loss of both SZIDÖK and VE-GA. It would have disabled saving the intellectual and material valuables, we couldn’t even have had an honourable farewell. This would have made the escalation unavoidable since VE-GA would have sued the City Council. And this was a bad course to take, even if we could have eventually won the lawsuits.

II.2 As there were no negotiations whatsoever, it became a tactical goal for me to prevent the Council and the City Administration from partially withdrawing some of their tragic decisions. The only exception was for SZIDÖK, where I offered compromise, but this was not heard. Reversing was no longer in the interest of VE-GA at this point, and it would have made our legal positions worse.

II.3 I have set as an aim to ensure that all the missing Council investments are eventually realized, *even if no longer needed*.

II.4 It has become an important long-term goal to create a system for small-scale, primarily communicational feedback. It was important to make sure that when the time of reflections came, no one could say they were unaware of the facts, neither at the Council nor in VE-GA.

II.5 It has become a purpose of Volume 2 of the Book to strongly confront everyone with the tragic story, and to systematically document and save the values of this period.

Intermezzo

It might be disturbing for the reader to feel that I keep repeating the same thoughts, though from a different angle each time, with an enlarging content and an upgrading interpretation. Dear Reader, it is vital that you understand that for me, who was most impacted by this case, writing is a way of psychological self-healing. Reciting the tragic events repeatedly, from slightly different angles each time does soften their shocking emotional content. It helps to digest it and to fit the recent events in the storyline of our personal experience. Self-healing is an open goal of this writing.

I had the following thoughts about my first strategic goal (i.e. to provide the best available conditions for the revival of VE-GA).

I have never been so alone in anything before, at least Anikó was always with me. But she just cannot digest this whole issue. She believes she could only find peace if “*we could bring these guys down*” openly. She is blaming me in any unexpected moment. “*You fell on your knees, but it’s better to die standing!*” “*You shitted yourself ’cos you’re afraid you’d get fired!*” “*You don’t fight because you are old and you’re no longer the man I fell in love with!*” “*You’re a coward!*” And of course, she cries. She cries a lot. Her stress tolerance is zero. The little patience she used to have is now gone.

It is essential to consider the following thoughts about preserving the values of VE-GA.

There have always been characteristic activities in VE-GA like martial arts, the presence of Eastern ideas, hiking, canoe tours, camping, crafts workshops, dramatic plays, all forms of music from folk to hard rock. These are the usual activities of many youth groups. However, there have always been a set of activities that other (youth) civil groups are not engaged in, such as discussions on noble science fiction of Bradbury, Yefremov, Ridley Scott, Tarkovsky and others, and a series of scientific youth research.

In a deeper layer of these, we have analysed the identity of organizations, groups and often individuals from various viewpoints, through distinction of several European forms of consciousness. The base for all this has been a constantly forming ideology that we call **peace ideology**. It has its characteristic adolescent and adult varieties. The so called **vegalogy**, which is best defined as the special approach of VE-GA participants to organizing their lives, is based on this peace ideology.

The essence of VE-GA can be best understood by reading our definition of the concept of peace. **Peace is the balanced, harmonious state of the system of human relationships, from our world within to the global universe. To achieve this, VE-GA aims to reach win-win situations in all aspects of human relationships, to keep individual and community autonomy in harmony. The ethical core of all this are the principles of (benevolent) charity and (personal) care.**

VE-GA has kept its teenager character, and most of its activities still target this generation. Adult VE-GA members across the country naturally give a personal flavour to their activities for teenagers. In the meantime, they build their own networks within VE-GA, with other civils, their co-workers and neighbours. Sometimes this leads to (1) questioning the ideological basis of VE-GA, (2) questioning vegalogy as an approach and (3) sometimes questioning our ways of management and leadership.

1. As for our ideology, local everyday life shows that its deepest layer is leftist, but civilian and Christian. Our philosophy of education, our pedagogical aim is therefore the *alternative wage-worker*.

This also means that most of our adults have conservative Christian ideological roots, just like the majority of Hungarian society in the countryside. Only a small subset of adult VE-GA members are liberals or have a civilian radical attitude. **This led to the consensus that our basic common goal is to help the formation of individual and group autonomy both methodically and practically. There is a working consensus to refrain within ideological and party-political disputes from VE-GA.**

2. Vegalogy (our attitude to things) and our methodology is constantly challenged in all the activities that we do in many locations, many human systems, using a variety of techniques.

It is very hard to explain vegalogy to other civils, to colleagues, neighbours, friends or parents. It is even harder to do so with uncertain knowledge, with bad articulation. VE-GA members do not have to learn these things. I don't think we should force it. What we must strengthen nevertheless is the working and thinking relationships with the development centre of our organization, which I still lead. **We managed to develop and keep VE-GA from the 1990s on because we had a theoretical, methodical and developmental centre that held all VE-GA together. In a physical sense, this was the Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés. Personally, it was the group who operated the camp site, who had trainings and led summer camps there. However, this group was primarily formed to mentor SZIDÖK. And the majority of VE-GA had a critical attitude to this all along, mostly the middle-aged who had different expectations of VE-GA.** For these adults in VE-GA, it was not only the SZIDÖK project that remained alien, but also the rapidly evolving activity around it, as well as the young adults who joined VE-GA along SZIDÖK. This alienation was increased by two other factors as well. On the one hand, the adults I mentioned above were relatively untrained in youth professional matters. On the other hand, the "older" members began building a strongly family-based community, to the detriment of teenager activities. All this led to many forms of mostly passive resistance, and a series of awkward situations.

3. With more and more internal contradictions, some dangerous processes got more intense.

There have always been people who question that the correct (philosophical) attitude to reality is the one that I represent. They may be right, but there is no other suggestion. There are some who think there is no need for such a thing! All you need is to do *valuable* activity in your vocation, and form your

civilian partnerships accordingly. There are others who move away, withdraw from VE-GA activities and form new relationships.

With all that, my replacement or succession is not on the table. One of the reasons is that our development and ideological centre is still in Szentes (despite all conflicts), with Anikó in the senior manager role and myself in the leader role. The other reason is the fact that they love us.

There has formed a serious – and wrong – consensus that the existence of the development centre led by us in Szentes, and the Training and Camp Centre at Magyartés in particular is the vital condition of the existence for VEGA. So while the SZIDÖK project and its elements became unsustainable through fault of the local government, some of these elements became core elements of the identity of VE-GA itself. Therefore, VE-GA and its future became trapped in an unmanageable way.

This trap seemed to be closed by two factors. VE-GA would have been unable to make a decision to abort the SZIDÖK project. It was impossible to decide to hand back the house at Magyartés since that would have meant giving up ourselves in a sense. The other factor was the fact that nobody believed that the cooperation would in fact be terminated by the City Council.

When the City Council eventually ended the cooperation, it saved VE-GA from a trap situation that already threatened its existence. They actually enabled the survival and renewal of VE-GA. However, the same council decision threatened the fundamental values that are inherent in VE-GA's unrivalled ethics: it triggered a wave of anger, negative emotions and even hatred within VE-GA.

For the first time in its history, VE-GA was driven by the deepest human instincts to end peace, and was ready to wage a war at all costs. It is still a threat for VE-GA and its future that it has not yet been clarified how different ideas there are behind the general upheaval. We have not yet truly realized that such an external war would inevitably turn internal, resulting in VE-GA's falling apart, leading to a complete defeat.

Some of my ideas and activities related to tactical goals II.1 to II.5:

- I listed all the institutions, companies, groups and persons who could potentially participate in the takeover of our sites, and I contacted them all. (Within a few days I put over twenty people under pressure.) Using the documents we had, I made them understand in what critically bad technical conditions the facilities were and what expenses that would incur. I also told them that VE-GA and its partners would regard it an unfriendly move if someone else started using our sites.
- I continuously told everyone that the procedures were offensive towards us and there were many breaches of law in their course. It is especially true for the Magyartés camp, where the current setup is still unlawful.
- We keep on asking for the invitations that were supposed to have been sent to VE-GA, and also for the minutes and recordings of council and committee meetings. Of course, they won't give them to us because they are not in sync with what was said, and because so many unacceptable things were told there. (At the same time, they suspect that I also have my recordings.)
- I wanted to prevent the Council from letting the Magyartés camp to someone else hastily. When I decided that we wouldn't have our camps there, I contacted the Public Health Authority. I told them about the conditions of the site that were **completely** unsuitable for **council camp programs**, and asked them to do a site audit immediately.
- In the meantime, the attitude toward our case has become differentiated in some way, as I have earlier referred to it already in another context. There were uncertain indications of the intent to have negotiations, to compensate for the wrong decisions somehow. Even in VE-GA there could have been partners for that. **But the only item I left open to negotiate was that we are ready to be partners in helping the successor of SZIDÖK, but no longer in a formal mentor role.** However, nobody wanted to work on this one item at either side.
- I have listed the numerous mandatory works and their costs, I also put these in writing. I was aware of them of course, but everyone else was badly hit. The estimates got even higher when they tried to calculate the investment of turning the Magyartés camp into a nature school. I also knew that some

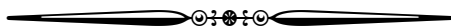
people were simply unwilling to do the extra work of managing the problems of the camp and the Student Cellar. They had become my partners in making the calculations *more accurate*.

All the above strategic and tactical goals are either achieved, or we had made good progress towards them.

I must mention here that relating to Strategic Goal **III**, by September 2016 I had managed to achieve that the ownership of the detached cottage (former Nurse's House) at Magyartés was transferred to the Union of VE-GA. I must admit that this was nothing but an almost comic episode in the story, but for many people, and especially for Anikó it was a true remedy. I wasn't very enthusiastic about the idea in the beginning because we don't really need that building. I was also afraid that our enemies would realize it and that would trigger a new round of stupidity. I later understood that **many people in VE-GA and SZIDÖK needed the building for spiritual reasons**, so that we, myself included, could have a sense of belonging to Magyartés and the people there.

I did the utmost in patience and plotting through building a system of motivations, using emotional arguments and applying placid extortion. It still took me months to make all involved people collaborate with me. Paperwork and financials also took months, but at the end everything was completed.

It was a separate and huge task to avoid escalation, since that would have generated the escalations of problems and conflicts within VE-GA, and would have worked towards our end. First of all, we needed time to come to grips with our feelings, to calm ourselves. I had to concentrate on two things: I had to stop the formation of a critical mass of some 20-30 adult people within the union, who might have been unable to control their anger, which, accompanied by their creativity, could have had a destructive effect on the whole organization. I had to show these people a consoling and meaningful way out, broken down to small specific tasks to be carried out. I separated the strongly emotional ideas from each other, even the ones that were identical in content, and I started to discuss each one separately, one by one, with each person.



We've been waiting for it, and we're together again today
(Ferenc Demjén: *Let There Be Holiday*)

MEETING AT THE STUDENT CELLAR ON 20TH FEBRUARY 2016

Because of the things mentioned before, I didn't want to assemble VE-GA any earlier. I immediately took over control of the meeting. I strictly moderated it throughout, limiting the outlets of strong feelings.

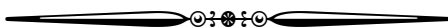
In the morning I detailed what had happened and interpreted the possible root causes, but I emphasized our own errors and responsibility throughout. I did not avoid discussing ideas on penalty and confrontation, but I insisted on discussing these in an organized manner, and I tried to postpone the alternatives for their realization. We explored the possibility and the threats of being involved in lawsuits. I kept saying that it's me who has to undertake the role of the complainant for long years, in my poor health condition.

In the afternoon I steered the discussion to practical items. This was a very effective meeting, having a soothing effect in itself. In the end, we agreed to move our key camps to Tompahát, and to have all the equipment of Magyartés moved to Marosjára (Iara de Mureş). We agreed about the schedule, process, methods and responsible people of saving our values. We agreed on the date of 7th May to move the furniture from Magyartés. I managed to postpone all dangerous farewell ideas to that date, too, and I

hoped that the huge work of emptying the building would make them impossible.

There is another long-term opportunity that I mentioned above, one that may provide us with a positive outcome. It is the unexpected gift that the Council saved VE-GA from the Szentes trap, thus enabled it to move on and start a new course of development. The conflicts that the Council generated make it possible that we build a new type of unity since it demands a joint and coordinated action from us all to save the values and to empty the sites. I carefully boosted this forming unity as a ventilation point, showing them an image of the enemy with a name (to have someone to hate).

As the overweight development centre of VE-GA ceases in Szentes, divisions will be inevitably formed on the basis of regional networks and professional connections. These will have their own leadership. It is no longer my duty to see to it that these form a new, common decision platform, a really and formally democratic organization,, with a new coordinator.



Whatever will be, will be

The future's not ours to see

(Evans Raymond – Jay Livingston: Que sera, sera)

THOUGHTS ON THE COUNCIL MEETING ON THE MAGYARTÉS CAMP

It was important to state early enough that most of the camp equipment at Magyartés was the property of the Culture Centre of Marosvásárhely. They filed a request to the City Council to modify the liquidation deadline, only this could kill the vague ideas to intercept our equipment. The councillors did not understand that the Council must spend at least 8 million forints on the camp to operate it. And you can add another 5 million for the custom-made equipment and furniture that they were foolish enough not to buy from us.

It is interesting that after the Council meeting, two people came to my office. Both are influential people, they have known me for ages. They told me they didn't understand how I could stand the whole affair so well. Both suspected that whatever happened was somehow good for me. I couldn't say I am a good actor, so I admitted it (though my heart was broken for SZIDÖK). One of them was angry, he thought I manipulated the Council. I said I didn't do it, but I like when the things in my cases go my way.

After the council meeting I was approached about the feasibility of establishing a nature school at Magyartés. They knew that such nature schools had been hosted there for ten years. It was a state decision that ended these, and that ended other nature schools throughout Hungary, especially at places like Magyartés. With the current requirements in mind, it would be totally impracticable to undertake the high costs of rebuilding the Magyartés camp into a nature school. Not to mention the fact that it would only make sense if there was demand for it from the part of schools, which would be willing to integrate it in their curriculum.

*It's passing right now,
And I'm letting it go
(Tibor Kiss: It's Passing Right Now)*

EMPTYING THE MAGYARTÉS CENTRE – CLOSING TWO STORIES



"It's passing right now"

It was on Sunday, 8th May 2016 that two eras ended. One of them is a 38-year-long, incredibly exciting era in the life of VE-GA and the two of us, Anikó and I. At the same time this event closed the 22-year-old story of SZIDÖK, too.

The final episode began four weeks earlier, when we went to Magyartés with Péter and his friends and moved all building materials from the attic. (It was stored there to be used for the reconstruction of the toilet building and the extension of the sewage drain system.) A week later the Korom family picked all their books, posters, disks and technical stuff that were openly shared there. These will be used elsewhere. Anikó and A moved 100 kilograms of documentation to the Archives, less than half of the total amount. In the second half of May, we could move a small truckload of camp materials to Derekegyház where the two SZIDÖK camps and a VE-GA Family Camp will be.

A week before the date we disassembled everything and packed it up to be ready to move to Marosjára. It was some eight hours work for Jucó, Nóri and Szerá, teenagers Évi, Dóri and Sára, as well as Péter, Csaba, Szeki, Robi and V. Zoli. Andi and Gábor also helped a lot.

At the end of the day, Nóri and Jucó quietly and beautifully sang the song *The Sun is Setting Now*.

On Friday, 6th May we fully loaded a small truck. The three-hour hard work was done by Jucó, Alíz, Péter, Robi, K. Zoli, M. Zoli, Maya, Matyi, Gergő and Levi, as well as by Gábor and P. Endre. Andi and her team cooked for us in the meantime. At the end of the work, we ate the fruit soup and the spaghetti. We greeted the ones who had a birthday with a cake, Anikó and I also got one. Ten-year-old Mózi rose up to say a farewell speech. He said goodbye to our camp and expressed his wish that our new places would also be good. He just found the right words.

After that we went into the theatre room where we sang together, and at the end Anikó sang the song *It's Passing Right Now*.

Next morning the truck departed. K. Zoli, Mózi, Maya and Robi followed it in a car. They left at 7:10 a.m. and got to the White Horse in Gernyeszeg (Gorneşti) by 5:50 p.m. Sz. Ibolya was waiting for them there, they were the guests of the Marosvásárhely Culture Centre Club. They took a short trip to Marosjára (Iara de Mureş), 6 km away, to see where the furniture would go, and Sz. Előd and Brigitta joined them with all four kids. At dinner tears and joy mixed up.

Next morning the truck went to unload at Marosjára, moving everything in a school building that will stop being a school in 2018. Ten locals helped, accompanied by some Székely beer. As Robi said, "*parts of the school are not in any better shape than the Magyartés house was when we first saw it*". So, the locals and the Hungarian-

Dutch foundation that works there will have a lot to do with it.

One thing is for sure: furniture can be best reassembled by those who took it apart. So, when the call comes, we will go there with screwdrivers, dusters and some paint.

Last week we published the summary CD of the last SZIDÖK research called *Role/Model/Value*. In a follow-up letter we said goodbye to the school principals and teachers, offering the partnership of VE-GA for future programs. At the end of the compilation there is a part that lists and summarizes the various roles of SZIDÖK, up to the point when it was finally disrupted by the Council.

This was the end of the unique and wonderful story of the SZIDÖK project, i.e. the Szentes Youth and Student Council (SZIDÖK), the Student Cellar of Szentes, the Training and Camp Centre of Magyartés and the dedicated operative and mentor team of VE-GA.

Intermezzo 1

It's late night, Friday, 20th May 2016. The motion document about the costs of the Cellar and Magyartés is still not published at the town's website, though it was due to be uploaded yesterday. It is very embarrassing for them that something they could've managed with 1.31 million forints would now cost a lot more, and this is only the beginning. Operation is not yet mentioned, but the investment is always easier to manage than the ongoing operation, which is always the real challenge.

The majority fraction had a desperate proposal at their meeting to seek legal action against VE-GA! Some people were (are) convinced that VE-GA is to be blamed for the bad condition of the two properties.

Intermezzo 2

Today is 27th May 2016. I have 50 days till I retire. But I will only have 16 workdays. At the Office and the institutions everyone keeps saying that "you will stay as an expert". But formally I haven't got any offer so far. I don't know.

Intermezzo 3

Today is 2nd June 2016. A councillor and the responsible civil administration officer asked me the same question: "We are working on the new youth strategy, so I'm asking you Pali, does SZIDÖK still exist?" Oh my God! More than six months have passed, and they still don't understand anything. I told them that SZIDÖK decided to go on existing. They are busy organizing their summer camps. In the meantime, the modification of the city budget was quite explicit about that the subsidy taken from SZIDÖK and VE-GA is to be used to amend the donation of the sports clubs.



"The Sun is Setting Now"

*We're back here, we're back here, we're back here as a team
(János Bródy – Szabolcs Szörényi: We're Back Here)*

SZIDŐK CAMPS AT TOMPAHÁT

As soon as I learned that the Camp Centre would also be taken from VE-GA, I had bad feelings about having our 2016 summer camps there. Once the tragedy took form in December, this feeling only got stronger. I felt it distasteful that aliens host a camp for us at our own place. I also felt (not without any basis) that in the last minute they would eventually torpedo our camps. But I didn't give it up in the first place. I was waiting for serious negotiations to begin in this matter. They never began.

Still in conspiracy, in February we started to move our camps over to Bagoly Szállás (Owls' Home) at Derekegyház-Tompahát.

Feeling at Home at Bagoly Szállás at Tompahát

First of all, I must refer to what I already wrote about before, and that is how deep our sense of belonging to the campsite of Magyartés was. This will help you understand why this *home feeling* is important for us.

Most people cannot even imagine the adventures when over one hundred people built the Magyartés camp with their own hands. Most of the stories about it have moved away from reality and became legends. This was passed on to the children at the campfires, who later (this *later* is still happening today) pass it on as their own.

Even the cracks in the walls and the spiders are ours in that house. The truckload of stuff is still ours, even if they are now at Marosjára (Iara de Mureş). Over a hundred people mowed the 2-acre lawn, pruned the sixty trees, bushes and hedges that we had planted. We watered our trees and flowers even in the 40°C summer heat each day to protect them in the dry soil. Just like around a private house, there was always something to do, the only difference being that there were three buildings on 500 sq m, each over 100 years old.

As soon as the building works began, it was important to make contact with the inhabitants and the young people of Magyartés. We

"Our tears and smiles
will still linger around
when the old walls are
washed away by time
and human stupidity"



could not have done it without them. Camps were not really camps for them (in their own home village), but the kids always joined in to our activities, and we had a special relationship with the older people, too. (The forum for this special relationship was the “library” of the village, i.e. the local pub, till it closed.) This was the background of the many camps, summer schools, meetings, trainings, nature schools. We had over 300 events there. Most of the children and teenagers came to the camps on several occasions, many of them still come to the camps as adult animators or camp councillors.

After all we also moved into the walls there. Our tears and smiles will still linger around when the old walls are washed away by time and human stupidity.

This is how we had to find a new home elsewhere. It had the challenge that however good it may be, we would always compare it with our own place, and nothing will ever compare to it.

But dear Reader, I could not let this stop me. It is a lot more important that we survive the tragedy and that we could continue at another place, some other way, in a way that best fits us.

To make it happen, I listed three key items.

A top priority is to save everything that Magyartés meant for us, to transform these to nice memories that strengthen our sense of identity and that can stay alive for us as a heritage from our past.

But the wounded VE-GA is not yet there. They couldn't and still cannot be partners in it. But I keep trying relentlessly. But for now, it's good like this. At the time of parrying, Magyartés could not become a reference point.

Another priority was to find a place which is completely different, but has similar conditions. It cannot be far since the centre of VE-GA is still in Szentes, SZIDÖK is also here, and the partners of SZIDÖK are still attached to this town. It must be in a small welcoming village, far from the noise of the world. It has to accommodate thirty-some people, and must be a place where we can make ourselves feel at home. We were not yet sure that we would have to leave Magyartés when two young adults in VE-GA told us about such a place, Bagoly Szállás at Derekegyház-Tompahát.

To be honest, this place is more modern and is of a higher standard, which satisfies our needs. It only lacks one thing: a large room for team events. But only 150 metres away there is the refurbished Culture Club with a larger hall.

The third task was to make Bagoly Szállás our new home in five months. We did it in multiple steps.

Three days before the VE-GA meeting on 20th February, we went to Bagoly Szállás to see the place and meet the people. The Vice Mayor gave us a hearty welcome. We didn't only look around in the house, but also went to the Culture Club and met the lady who was later a great help for us. We were fortunate, the weather was sunny and surprisingly warm, it made our mood a lot better. **Of course, we made a comparison, but we still liked the place. We liked the tiny village, the Culture Club, and the people who greeted us, smiled at us, who were friendly towards us.**

On 20th February we decided to have three camps at Bagoly Szállás:



“Even the cracks in the walls and the spiders are ours in that house”



“the old songs were being sung”



"This is how we had to find a new home elsewhere."

the two camps of SZIDÖK will be led by Maya and Annamária, and the Family Camp will be led by Jucó.

Anikó and they had a visit to the camp site on 8th March, meeting the operator of the place, who is the "heart and soul" of the place, just like I was in Magyartés. Then we went to Derekegyház to meet the Mayor. The discussions resulted in a full agreement.

We had a 3-day mini-camp for the leaders 29th April – 1st May, where

12 camp leaders and animators participated. We quickly stepped over the traps of grief and comparisons. Again, we had bright weather that helped a lot. Some of us joined the celebration of the village, too. It turned out to be an excellent introduction to the camps. I could also relax a bit, and honestly, I very much needed that.

In Szentes we had to perish even the thought that VE-GA and I as the President of VE-GA were still around. We certainly didn't want to show that we were planning to move the camps elsewhere. Anything can ruin the delicate and relative balance that we could achieve. And if that happens, we could face unpredictable, extreme reactions again..

Professional Development of SZIDÖK Camps at Tompahát

The backbone and main topics of the two SZIDÖK camps were developed at the meeting of SZIDÖK and its partners at Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureş) in November 2015. I didn't realize earlier how naturally we built these camps around the infrastructure of Magyartés. I didn't consider either that there is a coexistence of the built environment of the village with our human infrastructure within, the fact that Magyartés has become the *home* of this group. It is sadly interesting to see how differently girls (women) and boys (men) experience this, even if the spectrum of their experience is broad (since they relate differently). It can be said that women *are the homes themselves*, while for men home is a maintenance task.

The size of the group who live at a place (*a home*) and who make a building *their home* makes a difference, too. In a larger group, this home being a smaller socialization field, the overall size of this socialization field is also of importance. If a small family changes home, they get over this a lot more easily than a large community. It becomes a tragic burden if they have to move due to some senseless external force. **It becomes tragic because, as mentioned above, such a home is an integral part of the identity helping the emotional self-identification of the larger community. If the community is deprived of their home, their identity gets damaged since it contradicts the spiritual order of "we need a place". Our opponents are unaware of this, but they instinctively feel it, that is why they deprived us of our homes.**

I keep thinking about this because for the time being, we have to organize our camps at an alien place, in exile. These camps were *not meant to happen there*. We have to do without our usual habits, practices and the unconditioned reflexes that made our place a home for twenty years. None of the spontaneous activities that helped us feel secure can be done here. Before, the regeneration phase of a camp only meant that the group quickly felt comfortable at the place, in the planned activities and among themselves. But this time all this has to be done at a place which is not our comfortable home. We will have new, unusual things, places, activities. At a place which is new to us, we are more alienated personally, and not only because we haven't met for a long time. We feel our own selves more alien at a place we do not yet know.

One key item in this unusual regeneration will be how we can make this building our home, as quickly as possible, but quite organically. We won't be able to get separated here as much as we could at Magyartés, since we will have to use the Culture Club of the village, and this will make this process harder. We must have open programs not to remain hostile foreigners in the village. We should even consider involving some young villagers more actively in the camp. Even with the best intentions, it is still an open question if we can preserve the group that formed *at home*—at another place.

There is another aspect of VE-GA where this challenge may turn into a positive outcome. The community of adult personalities can move to a new home much easier than children or adolescents could. However, the latter have stronger bonds among themselves and towards their animators. We usually try to weaken this bond in favour of autonomy, mostly by developing their connections among themselves. We shouldn't stop doing this since this is the primary pedagogical goal of VE-GA. Nonetheless, this time we will need to strengthen the sense of personal attachment of the camp participants to their animators. Small group exercises are good to achieve this. However, this can only be successful if the adult animators work together in an unprecedented harmony and do it without my on-site supervision.

The teenager camps at Tompahát in 2016 were the first ones that were not planned by me. This way I had the opportunity and felt the necessity to write down how I think about these camps in a general and deeper sense, and particularly about the *Image* camp. I liked this task since the tragic story had nothing to do with it. What I share here is important because it reflects my thoughts over a teenager camp. This is why the following parts are meant for (the) adults.

Educational Strategy

The following sections will help you, dear Reader, to have some insight into our pedagogical activity. Nobody could honestly believe that we could host camps for so many years without a deeper educational strategy. I present our methodology along the example of the *Image* camp we had at Tompahát in the summer of 2016.

"Over a hundred people mowed the 2-acre lawn"



I.

This camp is similar to the camp called *Fashion and Advertisement* that we had four years ago. In the meantime, however, the teenager world has changed, and the other difference is that the participants then were mostly 12-year-old kids, this year the campers are a bit older. Last summer, with the same group, we dealt with the effects of the outside world on our bodies. This time our outside, our skin will be the boundary, and we concentrate on the things inside.

In the triangle of Body, Mind (Thought) and Soul we now concentrate on the Body, with two principles in mind.

I. A healthy soul can better develop in a healthy body.

II. Not until I feel comfortable in my body can I deliver good mental performance
(ref. Maslow's pyramid).

The girls already wanted to work on the fashion topic and matters of the soul last year, but we told them we would only elaborate on it the following year, in a concentrated manner, so that it was really about *them*.

First let's have a look at the name of the camp.

The concept of *image* means the look of a person or the form of a thing, but it is also a conception of positive values about someone.

These are the questions to seek answer for:

1. What should this *image* show?

First: it should show me! *My Own Self*, even if I am still a secret for myself. I am a secret as a personality and as an individual (one-ness) – I will explain later.

2. Why should it show that?

To make people love me. Love me for who I am or can be. (Accept me, acknowledge me, respect me, value me, regard me important, care for me!)

3. Who should love me? (This can be a long list or even lists.)

4. Where do I start from in this journey? (From where I am at present as a result of my socialization – but where am I at present?)

5. How do others perceive me now? How do I wish to be perceived for myself and others?

6. What outward features constitute my first *image*? What can be seen, heard, sensed (smell, touch, taste) of the *other side* within me?

7. Out of all these, what is my own? What did I inherit from my family? What did I take on for myself, where did I take them from? (Why did I like them?)

8. Who are the people I belong to and why?

9. Do I already have a characteristic personal style, my own way of relating to others? What is it like?

The key is how I can show the best image of myself without faking it. How to discover my strengths, those that I may not even be aware of? How to hide my (mostly unknown) weaknesses so as to remain attractive but true to My Own Self (whole-ness) and I (my conscious self)? Somehow my interior should meet my environment on my *interfaces* in a way that my best self is *reflected* both to myself and to others, without falsification, not made up to be someone else. I need to understand who I am for my own sake (*through the reflections of others*), and I need to understand who are important to me and what matters for them when they look at me. Both can have their own SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats). It is not an easy task since we are all the complexity of a body, a mind (thoughts) and a soul. Our humanity is the result of our efforts to be conscious beings in this game. We think! This way we can reach the deepest layers of our being where our instincts seek limitless freedom – and limiting them is probably the most significant challenge for our conscious *self*. For a healthy teenager this can lead to depths and struggles that should only be shared with people with whom there is mutual trust. It is best if that person is an ethically established, wise adult.

II.

One's image is built up of three pillars: (1) corporal (2) mental and (3) spiritual capabilities. These should be clearly understood so that I can show my true self to others.

1) Corporal capabilities

Our body - in this context - is primarily a *projecting surface*. What matters here is its outlook, its movements and the signals it transmits. Our visual image as represented by our body is very complex, it is a system of physical characteristics like my shape, my form, the shape or size of my limbs, and especially all component parts of my head. The face, mimics, eye movements and speech are all important factors in this. The body has its own *language*, and my clothes, my makeup, my accessories are also *telling*.

We are also characterised by everything that we use and consume and how we do it.

Most telling of all, however, are what we do and don't do, what we make and don't make, our creations. These all have specialties for boys and girls, that need to be considered.

2) Mental capabilities

We should focus most on the capabilities that are used in the school and school-like activities (study groups, sports, music classes). We are not limited to capabilities that are valued by the formal school system, so we also look at the ones not appreciated by the education system.

Here the central categories are represented by different Qs that are often measured: intelligence, creativity, variational competence, concentrational competence, analogue competencies, intuition or memory. One can fill in millions of tests about them. Some of these competencies are adjacent with spiritual capabilities, and are grouped as emotional competencies. Some *mental* capabilities like talent, aptitude, persistence in observation and analysis are hard to categorize.

Here you will also find different characteristics for girls and boys, but I don't really believe in this, these are rather *thought to be* feminine or masculine.

The environment appreciates if you are not only a know-it-all, not only brilliantly smart, but also intelligently witty. Beyond looking smart, one's intelligence can best be measured on how they can convert a situation that was made against them to be something good for them and others.

3) Spiritual capabilities

The concept of the soul (psyche) is a problematic one to define. Peter Popper, a playfully and tragically wise psychologist only realised at the end of his life that he himself didn't really know what the soul was. (He published this in *Moorland*.)

Even wise psychologists don't often identify the psyche with the soul. The psyche or the soul is best captured in their illnesses. But we are not doctors to cure, so for us it is best to define the soul as the internal world of the personality. This is *My Own Self* that I mentioned above, who is a secret for myself as a personality and as an individual (whole-ness).

We are still in the troublesome complexity of concepts since *personality* has also been defined in many ways by professional writers, filmmakers. In my view the personality has two dual layers.

1. Each personality is *My Own Self* and *I* at the same time

My Own Self is the endless, therefore incomprehensible part, and the *I* is the conscious part. Yoga may be the most effective means of trying to push the boundary of *I* as deep as possible. In yoga however, consciousness is merely a tool to reach the Nirvana. For a European person, it is honest and deep contemplation that can lead to someone's own depth *through the reflections of others*. And in these depths, you must be forgiving. We must handle with peaceful serenity whatever we find there, anything that may appear terrifying at first sight. The more capable we are to morally manage our rough, atavistic instincts the more intelligent we are. And we owe this moral capability much rather to others! And first of all, to teenager souls!

2. The other dual layer of the personality is the fact that it is both social and individual. It is embedded in a culture (cultural tradition) that keeps it from falling apart. At the same time, it is unique. If it cannot realize its own self, then it is not going to be happy. The social personality must always fight its individualistic extremisms to become its own true unique self. It must achieve harmonious

(happy) life in its process of self-realization. It is basically an ethical task both in the social and the individual sense, a task that can be best achieved in the groups of ethical people.

III.

The development systems of VE-GA consider the body only in the sense that a *healthy soul* can better develop in a *healthy body*. (This relationship is not that important later, since a healthy soul can cope with a sick or disabled body.)

The development systems of VE-GA only consider the mind or thought in the sense that people are conscious, creative beings, and their consciousness has an involuntary effect on their body, health and whole-ness, that is on their spiritual life.

The key mission of VE-GA is the development of the personality. Developing the autonomy of the personality means that the personality will become an independent creator of their environment on the one hand, while being able to become an independent creator and moderator of themselves on the other hand.

Pedagogical Goal

Dear Reader, if you're still following me, I will show you around in the deep world of my thinking. There you will find my ongoing struggle with Tarkovsky. (If it gets too tiring, take a rest and skip this part here.)

The philosophy and the film world of Tarkovsky are hard to understand. In their centre there is the conflict between the person and the world, the struggle when the (external) world tries to penetrate the personality, tries to make it its toy, and the personality is striving for its own validity, wants to ensure that its life is determined by its own (internal) world. In this fight the *world* has the weapons of material values, power, politics, many forms of threat and decoy. The personality can use the tradition and the value system (constant human values) in which it grew up, and which is best characterized by the unity of (transcendent) ethical norms at its core. These are the basic ideas of the personality.

Tarkovsky presents the conflict between the person and the world as **an internal conflict within the man, as a conflict between the personality and the (alienated, European) individual**. Some way or the other, it is a kind of schizophrenia. In the background of the individual there is the (external) world, where crumbling traditions (transcendent tradition and values) are at decisive war with modern civilization.

Tarkovsky's seven great films are practically unwatchable for young people today. These movies are fantastic in exploring the problem I have outlined above. It is believed that he wanted to make his own film version of *Hamlet*. Hamlet was one of the first European individuals, driven by the traditions and traditional values: he destroyed, but he did it without creation.

It is probably not by accident that Nordic societies have strong, additive traditions and values, just like the Russians have. While there is a certain democratic element which is inherent in Nordic traditions, Russian traditions are without it. Nordic societies were more developed, more open for civil growth – but more prone to alienation.

Accepting (transcendent) traditions and values can also be destructive if they are no longer harmonious with the new type of man. People must fight for their own validity in their own communities. This is how they can create a new, organic and adequate culture, with new traditions and values.

In Tarkovsky's films there is always a lonesome individual who is struggling for his/her own validity, personality. This is so evident that it's hardly noticeable, and it is completely aligned with Tarkovsky's viewpoint. He thinks that first of all, the individuals must create order within themselves, which means going out from the everyday world in a sense –, and their final task then is to create their own communities. Through his films Tarkovsky came to a conclusion that it is impossible to leave the everyday world, and he realized that people must try to live in both at the same time. In his works he also showed that a new type of culture, tradition and value system must be formed. He could not decide, however, whether **this creation of new culture is only possible with people who materialize a symbiosis of the personality**

with a soul and the individual with a consciousness. The schizophrenia of this duality is unsustainable. Similarly, masses of individuals cannot resist the everyday world. **Only the personalities who administer their soul and mind consciously and who can unite these harmoniously with the selfish individual are capable of becoming autonomous ones, being able to act and to cooperate with others. And this is exactly what the pedagogical goal of VE-GA is.**

Tarkovsky realized that a new culture must be created on an ethical basis. We fully agree to this. It must be a culture that keeps or transforms our connections and our world alive.

In their deepest sense, this is what all our activities, including the camps and the Image camp in particular are about.

Modern Human Personality

The *structure* of modern human personality is just a framework for interpretation, but its knowledge is necessary for someone who wants to be a wise partner of a teenager in developing their personality in a way that fits them. But we just can't know what they were born like. There are three things that matter for us, adults who help. First, we should help them to become their own true self with a chance for happiness, while, at the same time, being able to integrate into the society and its culture, so that they can avoid the danger of alienation. Second, they should become autonomous personalities who are independent creators of their own personalities and their environment. And third, we must make them aware that all these are ethical tasks that can be best fulfilled in the communities of ethical people.

Personality is a standalone thing with its inputs and outputs. In other words, there are effects it is formed by (1) and it has its own effects, too (2).

1. Personality is affected by natural, environmental and social elements.
2. The forms through which a personality *visually* manifests itself are communication, work and creation.

There is a set of needs and necessities (A) through which the personality receives things inwards and communicates signals outwards. This set is organized by the internal motivation system of the personality (B). These together (A+B) are the motivational system of the personality.

The *outward* manifestation of the visible layers of the personality are regulated by factors that are easier to recognize. The key factors here are intelligence (1), temperament (2), character (3) and the European forms of consciousness (4).

1. Intelligence has been defined and measured by many scholars.
2. The concept of temperament has also been under discussion and analysed for a long time.
3. From the concept of the character I'd like to mention here the firmness of the character and the strength of will.
4. European forms of consciousness have a long history. Classical forms are culture, politics, philosophy, law, faith, religion, science, ideology, moral and national identity. These influence our aspiration for a modern personality, but we really must be able to use them wisely. One must not freely surf amongst them.

I only highlight two of them here:

4.1 Moral and its philosophical science, ethics

4.2 Ideology

In case of a mature personality all forms of consciousness are incorporated in the personal *identity*, in which there is the symbiosis of the European personality (soul and mind) and the selfish individual.

Rebellion of Adolescents

It is probably the most characteristic phenomenon of the teenager period, it is commonly called the adolescent rebellion. For the environment it is apparently a series of conflicts, unsociableness. Any normal adolescent is often hard or even impossible to handle, sometimes they can hardly stand themselves. The common explanation is that this is the age when adolescents develop their personality, try to find their place, their purposes and tasks, that is their identity.

Looking somewhat deeper, the rebellious situation starts from a state when the environment hangs a set of characteristics on the child, or the child calls these off from the environment, paired with a set of cultural labelling. Their body is torn by a storm of hormones, their self-consciousness is growing, and these characteristics are beginning not to fit them. As they develop their understanding and abstract thinking, teenagers are starting to push (sometimes explode) the things they find unfit off themselves. In Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point* these things are seen to be flying everywhere for minutes, and you hear the music of the early Pink Floyd. Finally, the forming personality will build his own self from the things that fall back upon him.

There are two conditions one must fulfil here before trying to influence this process. First, the advisor must have a thorough and deep self-knowledge. Second, one must understand what are the things that were hung on the teenagers by their family, their school, their environment. In this latter there are cultural patterns, but these are coloured, weakened or strengthened by the experience of the individual. It must be accepted that along the process there will always be expectations, identifications, labelling that affect the individual. Since they wish to be accepted, appreciated, they wish to be successful, they must fit in, they must form themselves. Their primary goal in this age is to fit in or adapt to their peer groups. As the role of the families is declining nowadays, the importance of peer groups has significantly grown.

But let us not limit all this to the teenagers. Let's have a look at young parents: even if they wanted to bring up their young ones differently, they can't do it against the common traditions, however stupid these may be. We are being shaped by the everyday world of the society, economy and culture. The (external) world is shaping our individual self, even against our personality.

What is there inside me? Who am I as a perfectly unique individual? An individual who has his/her own independent will and character. Who has his/her characteristic temper, and who has a particular set of skills and abilities. An individual with his/her unique likes and dislikes, his/her own instincts, happiness, fears, desires. An individual with an animus, with beliefs, humour and an ability for cathartic purification. These are my characteristics that I mustn't openly share with the (external) world, even if this is who I am! At the same time, I will never get to know these without the reflections of others.

This is the basic process of becoming an adult person. But it is at risk. Our repeated annual research projects show a very strange fact: in a large and growing number of cases the *adolescent rebellion* is missing. There is no revolt in the sense that teenagers simply "push (sometimes explode) the things they find unfit".

Success-oriented students are becoming role models, losers are getting segregated, teenagers and their parents are making consumer deals, and everything is being moved to the social media. As a result, there are no rebellions any longer. The phenomena of drug use, excessive drinking or early promiscuity cannot be regarded to be a rebellion. Probably the most painful of these is the devaluation and prostitution of work as an essential human value. "*Go and find a job, learn what work is, and then you can spend your money on anything you want, you earned it!*" The teenagers get all the bad social patterns about work, learn "what life really is about". And they are a decade away from becoming adults.

The conflict between the (external-) world-driven individual and the disintegrating personality is going on unconsciously within the teenagers. Alienation is sadly proven by the fact that there is no conflict between the individual and the personality, later the symbiosis between these two is not completed - maybe they don't ever meet at all. The revolt of adolescents is either formal or is completely missing. If it happens at all, it is often a commercial offset. The only positive side of this phenomenon is that at least it can be done consciously.

Our Techniques and Roles

What roles could we have, what techniques can we use? Do our efforts yield any result, is that result somehow measurable? We must also know what the purpose of our past and current work is.

Tarkovsky, Popper and others were right in claiming that human soul is the largest secret of the universe. Each individual has their path from infinity to infinity, they themselves are an infinite microcosm. Everyone who works with children can ask the questions above, maybe except for the ones who think people are just workforce, and who educate our children to become workforce. Our effect on children cannot be accurately measured. Thanks God for that, because they are unique, and we want them to become autonomous (and alternative wage-workers). A friend of mine used to say: “life has no purpose, it has a story. Each story is someone’s own, better or worse, beautiful or ugly.” Whatever I do will get a purpose by me experiencing it to be beautiful, good, important or useful. This sense of *doing together* is what makes a difference. With whom we did things together should decide for themselves if, it was more beautiful, better; useful, or it was at least important for them.

Our techniques and roles are hard to enlist.

The methodology, the techniques and the institutional framework that we created and use are unique and quite impressive. They are the backbone of our live socialization field.

Our world is compatible with the everyday world, but it shows the teenagers that there are other ways to live, think and act in this world. And in this world we ourselves are the most important media, with our own personality, each one of us as unique as we are, both as individuals and as members of our communities. We are far from being perfect, but since we are essential to those who we care for, this often becomes so natural that it stays unnoticed. It is not our task to *shape them effectively*. We only give them ourselves for a time, and we follow them along their ways. This gives such a warm feeling in our hearts.

Planning the Image Camp

The *Image* camp arose from the above ideas, translated into program elements.

One of the bases could be the research *Role/Model/Value*, mostly done by A., Anikó and SZIDÖK.

We could also map out the wrong patterns, and discuss how they influence our self-awareness and create a fake image of ourselves. These patterns are either typical of consumerism or its inverse, a kind of demanding pattern (“I would deserve that too”). The teenagers identify with these patterns, and display them on their surfaces as their own.

FAMILIES transmit to the teenagers the mix of vague patterns of selfish one-ness and the consumer individual with a weak identity. They do not educate, they just let the social effects permeate through without any filtering, so after all they have the same socialization effect as the broader social environment.

SCHOOLS socialize young people to become servants (executives who accept everything), and as a result there are many forms of segregation within them.

SOCIETY (MEDIA) presents a system of manipulations that is out of control as well as a set of available identification patterns.

As a result, teenagers who *explode and build themselves* to their new, own personality (which happens rarely and partially in the first place) are prone to do it in a commercial way.

Camp programs will also be influenced by the layers of the personality that I described earlier. This will help to collect and organize the contents and the characteristics of the personality. We can work with the personality traits that we collect, matching them with activities. This is good for not only those who work with themselves, but it is also useful for those who turn their attention towards others.

There are a few things I didn’t mention before. Scents or the odour of our body is one of them. How does it smell when clean, in hot weather or during sweating work? I like the activities exploring the scents of natural materials because these are the best to create our unique scent, a lot better than the artificial scents we put on. Sweating and other physical (and at the same time mental) things can also cause problems.

The autonomy of a personality is to be explored quite differently, and we have a seldom used scenario for that, too.

I would build the camp around two activities that could eventually be interwoven.

One of them is the phase of the Problem Exploration and Management Week (PEMW), where we deal with problem mapping and select the key issues. The other activity involves a dynamic approach to group forming. As usual, during this process there are four groups that can be formed.

Following the problem mapping of the PEMW we could do a sociometrical research, and regroup the teenagers according to the affinity relations in the sociometry.

A repeated sociometry on the last day could lead to discussing what we thought of ourselves and others at the beginning, and how accurate these impressions were. The positive approach and the importance of “I” language must be emphasized throughout!

This could be the framework of activities to achieve self-knowledge and to get to know one another. We could discuss what stereotypes are, and how they prevent true knowledge.

Activities could be done in groups:

1. They can mock their group mates or the other groups
2. We can play criticizing and defending games
3. Girls and boys can separate and talk about girls and boys

We can have an exercise on introducing ourselves (in writing, in speech, on Facebook etc.) or introducing others. We could do it in an interview format (casting game). We could have stylist games with lots of good humour.

For the creative drama play we could use the concept of *fail*. It can be acted out easily, and it can be serious or funny.

Image Camp

The participants of the *Image* camp were aged 10 to 15. Most campers came from our partner group in Transylvania. In the one-week camp they sought the answers for questions such as: How do they see themselves? What characteristics do they show to others, how are they seen by others? How they could positively change the impression they make on others when other people talk to them, play with them or look at them. This is very important since we all desire the attention of others, we want to be loved.

They worked on the following details:

What is our visible form, what is our body like from the top of the head to the toes? Our face itself communicates, so does our facial expression, our eyes and our speech. People see us walk, wear clothes, and we have our characteristic tastes in food and drink, what we like to use etc.

Of course all these can be different for boys and girls.

It is quite important what our strengths are at school, in sports, in other groups and here in the camp.

It is also important how well we can get along with others. What are the subjects we know best, how can we help others? How strong is our will and persistence?

During the camp many teenagers realized what they could and should change about themselves. They achieved this through a lot of games, talking and laughing. Many things were created, including personal business cards, external and internal characteristics were exchanged. The kids could identify their personality with Winnie-the-Pooh or Piglet. There were many crafts workshops and we played a lot of sports, local young people could also join us in these activities. At the end the performances of the mini drama plays were shown.

The kids could flexibly overcome the fact that they are not at the usual site of Magyartés. They started to forget the old *home*. The adults at the camp helped in this, and the new place also did. This camp is called The Owl's Home because real owls nest nearby, many species and pairs, they could be observed.

Elections Camp

The preparation for this camp began back at the meeting in Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureş) in November 2015, where almost all future camp participants were present.

The experienced youth leaders aged 16–19 from Hungary and Transylvania are all worried about the many choices they have to make, the decisions they must make without really understanding the matter. Of course, everyone around them knows very well what *they* should choose. Adults seem to agree about what's good for the teenagers, what they should look like, what they should do. The media tells them what to eat, drink, wear, what devices they should have to be successful. Political parties only add to these in order to get their votes.

Yet there are two things we still don't know:

1. What do teenagers think is good for them, what would they really like, what do they want?
2. What do they specifically dislike? What or who causes problems for them? What would they not like to do, what is that they don't want?

In this camp the goal was to answer these questions, first individually and then in small groups. Those who came to a common understanding formed election groups, built their program offer and nominated a representative. Their goal was to make their nominee win the election.

Not everything can be made fun of, but they enjoyed themselves in the camp, and could after all have humour and irony when discussing these serious topics. All the program elements of the *Image* camp were realized here, too. Performances of the drama plays were of artistic value.

The older kids could not forget Magyartés as easily as the younger ones. Discussions sometimes turned sad, especially at the campfire when the old songs were being sung. They missed the theatre room very much, that was the heart and soul of the old house.

Everyone needs a homeland. A homeland is not something that primitive, loud patriots imagine it to be, it's not the homeland of religions either, some vague taste of an other-worldly homeland. One needs a homeland where soil, work, friendship, rest and spiritual openness create one natural, balanced and organized unity, a unique and universal world. The best definition of a homeland is: the library.
(Péter Esterházy)

SAVING VALUES AT THE E-LIBRARY AND THE CITY ARCHIVES

The Szentes e-Library is operated by the Szentes City Library. This is a digital museum of local history. Its mission is to collect and digitalize the documents of the town and its surroundings. It makes these documents openly accessible for educational, cultural and scientific purposes.

The twenty-two years of the SZIDÖK Project yielded many documents that are also valuable as local history documents. We contacted the operators of the e-Library and they supported that we uploaded these documents here. Huge work commenced to assess and organize the documents so that they could be uploaded. The following materials have been published in the e-Library:

- *Youth Need and Problem Lists in the Szentes Area* – youth research
- *In Search of Lost Time* – youth research
- *NET-WORLD* – youth research
- *Role/Model/Value* – youth research
- *Preparing a Complex Suburban Area Development Strategy for the City of Szentes* – publication of a joint seminar of VE-GA and the University of Szeged

Being prepared for upload:

- Issues of the student magazine *Aszpirin* 1995–2011
- *Rain after Sunshine* – poetry book, illustrated by pictures of a graffiti project of SZIDÖK
- *Methodology of Youth Work* – based on the experience of SZIDÖK and its partners
- *Methodology of Community Development* – based on the experience of SZIDÖK and its partners

We are preparing further documents and we expect to identify more during our work in the Archives.

We had stored the documents of VE-GA and SZIDÖK at four locations in Szentes. Only a small part of it was ever formally registered. As these were registered in different systems, their important cross-connections were not captured. In the short time we had there was no chance for us to create a complete inventory of documents. However, we realized that this mass of documents and even its segments are a standalone unique value in themselves. But I didn't know what to do with these, how to start saving them. I contacted the Szentes branch of the Csongrád County Archives who were willing to help us. They provided information and counsel, and recommended not to discard anything since we did not know what the true value for a researcher could be. They asked us to put everything in boxes and bring them to the Archives where we can later arrange them.

It's hard to express how difficult it was for us at that time, even today. I say difficult, and it was also funny that people at the Archive didn't realize what and how much it was. When Anikó delivered the first boxes, they smiled that it's only this much. Then she took there two truckloads of papers, and it was her turn to smile - that it's *this* much, except for the papers that are in our flat. And these are only the documents that are in Szentes.

It was in October when we could begin the preliminary works in the Archives. We could immediately see that it would last for months. We were a bit afraid to start, but when we (mainly Anikó) started, she began to feel its charm. But this charm doesn't support effective work, you stumble upon papers that you must re-read, that recall memories that were somewhat forgotten. It is important to know that these documents have our story from the early days of VE-GA in Szentes. Documents related to the SZIDÖK project and SZIDÖK only take up a smaller part of the paper mountain.

*Whisper to me what you told me you would tell
All big secrets that a child won't understand
There were so many things we never had time for
A few seconds to turn into past, present and future
(Gábor Berkes – Attila Valla: Campfire)*

SZIDÖK TODAY

It was our strategic goal to defend SZIDÖK members against the consequences of what had happened, as much as we could. There was something that certainly helped: The Family Support Centre who took over the Student Cellar from 1st January 2016 had no idea what to do with it. Since they didn't understand anything either, they originally thought that everything could continue as before. Technically, SZIDÖK could work as if nothing had happened. By late spring there was a core team of secondary school students and young adults who had defined themselves as SZIDÖK. They were supported by the extensive partner network of SZIDÖK within Hungary and abroad in Transylvania. This was one of the main reasons why the summer camps could be successful, even if the camp of the younger had very few SZIDÖK members. In the framework of the former SZIDÖK there was an elite group of students who formed a strong friendship community and who had an extensive, high quality network. This is truly reflected in their program list. As I write this in the autumn of 2016, they feel that they are the custodians of a new opportunity that could develop to be the successor of SZIDÖK in Szentes.

Here is the 2016 agenda of SZIDÖK.

January

15th: *What did SZIDÖK mean to you? What's next?* – guided discussion

22nd: *Holocaust Memorial Day* – interactive workshop

29th: *Take what you like!* – book auction in the Student Cellar

February

5th: Interactive games and crafts workshop

12th: *Who am I? Part I* – test activity

19th: *Who am I? Part II* – test activity

26th: *Images of the future* – inspirational workshop

March

4th: *What's good, what's wrong* – interactive games

11th: *Organization, group, community* – summary and discussion of the 2015 summer camp

18th: *Easter* – crafts workshop

21st: *Spring at the ER Unit* – crafts workshop at the Emergency Department of the local hospital

25th: Egg tree raising at Luther Square

April

1st: *April Fool's Day* – interactive games

15th: *Anime Afternoon in the Student Cellar* – costume party

22nd: *Earth Day* – workshop

29th: Closure of the SZIDÖK research *Role/Model/Value*

May

6th: *Europe Day* – interactive games on the theme of the European Union

June

10th: *Summer Is Here* – crafts workshop

July

Summer camps called *Image* and *Elections* at Bagoly Szállás

September

21st: *Form a Community!* – conference at Hajdúnánás (with a SZIDÖK introduction)

29th: County level workshop for local youth councils, Szeged – with the presentation of SZIDÖK

30th: *Day of Hungarian Folk Tales* – quiz game and moderated discussion titled *Why Are Tales Important?*

October

21st: *World Origami Day* – history of origami – making gift boxes

Participation in the charity campaign of *Délmagyarország*. Collecting donations for the Stroke Department of the SZTE Clinic for Neurology

29th: *A Story from Szentesi: What You Need to Know About SZIDÖK* – youth workshop at Újszentiván

November

11th: Remembering Miklós Radnóti. Laying a wreath at the Library. Discussion about his age.

11th: Candle lights remembering the end of the Great War

18th: *Day of Children's Rights* – interactive games

December

9th: *World Day of Human Rights*

16th: Preparations for Christmas – crafts workshop, making felt decorations

I have again ventured beyond the timeframe of the book. I did that because the remaining SZIDÖK members decided to close the home page of SZIDÖK on 31st December 2016. The following message was posted:

Dear Supporters, Friends, SZIDÖK Members,

Many of you have asked what the current status of SZIDÖK is.

The thing is that on 18th December 2015 the City Council decided as follows:

The City Council wishes to terminate the operation of the SZIDÖK Project from 2016. (Decree 257/2015.(XII.18.)

23 years ago the Council wanted us to be. To enable us, we were given the Student Cellar, the ruined building of the Magyartés Camp Centre and some money each year. They contracted VE-GA to help us. Now, 22 years later they took back the Cellar, the Camp of Magyartés and they ended the agreement with VE-GA. Nobody knows or understands why.

In the summer camps this year we decided to give a chance to our successors from next spring.

Until then, a dozen of us and some adult animators will try to find a new way for SZIDÖK.

After the Council decision in December 2015 we had no idea what to do. This is why we haven't published anything here on the web page since then.

We try to keep you informed about our matters on our Facebook page, but cautiously, without faces for now.

This message will now close our home page.

If you are still interested in us or you want to join, click here:

<https://www.facebook.com/Szentesi-ID%C3%96K-1051478281533467>

Do I really think it is realistic that SZIDÖK will have some kind of successor? Basically, it won't depend on us, nor on the teenagers, so I must say I don't honestly think so. It is a problem since SZIDÖK had and still has its network of teenager partner organizations, groups and similar teenager councils. As SZIDÖK ends, these connections will also fade away, and SZIDÖK will no longer be a reference point for them either. And this can easily lead to a point when the traditional summer camps of SZIDÖK and its partners will be questioned. This is the inherent logic of irresponsible destruction.

*Let me tell you what I am and ain't for you.
Were you expecting me to praise you,
I'm not the one to glorify you,
What else could I be: silence for you.
(Tamás Cseh – Géza Bereményi: I Am Your Silence)*

SZIDÖK MEMBERS ON SZIDÖK

I learned in SZIDÖK that you don't need to meet everyone's expectations, and that I'd rather seek the company of people who accept me to be who I am. What's more, here I could truly be myself amongst them. – 18-year-old

SZIDÖK was important because youngsters who were usually not listened to could voice their opinion here. They could feel that they could influence the things that affected them. How could we expect an 18-year-old young person to vote responsibly in national matters if they do not learn how to make decisions within their own communities?

When I was a teenager I thought it was important to have a place where young people could meet, sit together and discuss important matters in an informal atmosphere, without taboos, a place where they could be themselves. And this belief of mine has got even stronger since then. I learned how to listen to others, how to think, and to accept that there are many other opinions out there beyond my own. – 21-year-old

I think SZIDÖK was important because it was a special colour in the town, it had its own programs (crime prevention, Father Christmas Run, joint events with other local youth councils). Through youth research and formal representation, it worked to find out the true needs and problems of the youth, and made these visible for the City Council and the adult world.

For the participating teenagers it was important because their opinions really mattered here! They could learn what public participation is, and they could try it out without any risk. At the same time, they could freely arrange programs and activities in their own interests, at their own place, the Student Cellar – their home base.

I learned here how to cooperate with others, how to pay attention to the opinions and thoughts of others, how to do community work and how to execute something precisely.

I learned what public life is, what a multicultural environment looks like, what ideologies there are. It helped me in self-awareness and self-definition. It made me feel I was not alone in the world. I had external (☺) and internal motivation to assist at the birth of SZIDÖK.

It was a challenge and great fun to organize the weekly events. It was interesting to track who was interested in what, how elements related to important public life topics could be interwoven in more attractive programs.

I enjoyed the informal discussions in teahouse style, and also the moderated discussions during the trainings where we could get new knowledge, but it was also important to express our own thoughts. I liked the birthday parties, New Year celebrations, folk dance nights in the Student Cellar, but also the extra history classes on Saturday mornings...

It was a framework (SZIDÖK) and a place (the Student Cellar) where interesting people spent valuable time together, in good spirit, building themselves, the present and the future. This is what SZIDÖK meant for me! – 36-year-old, founder participant, later mentor

It was in SZIDÖK where I realized what community I wanted to belong to. My world view was widened by the trainings and I could also get better self-awareness.

It was a community for me where I enjoyed going, which was a lot better than a Friday night party. A place where I was feeling at home. A company where I knew and liked everyone, a place where I felt I could do something for others, and I got help in doing that.

When I first went to the Cellar for the assembly of delegates I was afraid. I thought I would sit down among dull and quiet teenagers and that I needed to vote on agenda items I had no clue about. But when I finally found the entrance and got downstairs to the Cellar, it was something completely different. I saw happy people talking everywhere. They welcomed me openly and as a friend, as if I had always belonged there. I simply enjoyed myself, and I was very sorry I had to leave so early, and I could hardly wait till next Friday to meet. – 20-year-old, participant, later mentor

In SZIDÖK I could get together with my friends, had a lot of fun but we also could write applications, and we discussed everyday topics. We liked it a lot.

I learned here how to stand out for myself, how to use my rights, how not to be fooled, and many other useful things about life. – 18-year-old

It provided a unique opportunity for public life development for the town and the schools.

It provided the youth with an open and integrating community/environment.

Teenagers of different generations and schools could get to know each other, thus enhancing acceptance and understanding. Participants could have an insight into active citizenship topics and how that could be useful.

They could hear and learn about things that were not taught in schools. It taught me life skills.

I think it was in SZIDÖK where I learned the most about myself in my whole life. I learned organization skills, communication, assertiveness. I developed my cooperation skills, I can manage problems differently now. It also influenced my world view. I think I became a richer person with SZIDÖK.

In the school you are often asked what you want to be. I never knew what the good answer was for me, not even after I finished school. But SZIDÖK gave me my answer: I want to work with people, with teenagers, their problems. I want to be with them.

SZIDÖK gave me friends, even a new family. Programs I liked. Smile on my face. A safe place to be: The Student Cellar.

To sum: my identity.

SZIDÖK for me was work that I did heart and soul, with joy and relentless impulse. Even if I never have the same opportunity again, it is a great gift that I could experience all that in SZIDÖK. Thank you! – 31-year-old, youth professional

I learned many useful things here that are not taught elsewhere. For example, I learned how to lead small groups.

It was a place for me where I could truly be myself. – 17-year-old

SZIDÖK was important because it brought the student councils together and coordinated their activities. At last there was a place in the town (the Student Cellar) where teenagers could do sensible things, talk about reasonable topics, make plans together, and nobody was treated as a child. We had nice Friday afternoon programs and events. It created some new communities.

I learned to think and complete tasks independently and together with others. I learned how to overcome my stage fright. I learned how to make fun of my stupid things and how not to be sad about them. I got to know myself, my personality.

It was very important for me because I had been looking for a place to fit in for a long time. I found it in this community. They accepted me as I was, and the others cared for me a lot, so I could hardly await the Friday occasions. I tried myself out as a youth mayor and I liked it a lot.

The training groups! Well, it was hard to get up on Saturday mornings, but the things we learned there helped me look at the world differently, and made me think a lot.

All the camps – I can't highlight my favourite one. – 21-year-old, former Youth Mayor

For me, SZIDÖK was also important from the aspect that here older teenagers learned how to work with children, and how to consciously help other teenagers. Not only in games or in programs, but they often supported one another in personal matters.

I acquired here a community ethic that became the foundation of my personality, and a lot of other things that are now part of my life and I don't even notice. But I learned them here.

I think I can say that I spent my adolescence in this company. These people, the adult mentors helped me become the person who I am today. They coached me in the positive direction both physically and spiritually.

I loved SZIDÖK. It gave me a purpose, an expectation towards myself to become a youth mayor and to be useful in that position. To make everyone proud of me. – 26-year-old, former Youth Mayor

SZIDÖK was also important because it invited applications, and it made schools and their students get acquainted with one another.

It taught me that the life of adults is not easy, but we can make it easier with a little attention. – 19-year-old, former Youth Mayor

SZIDÖK helped me to get to know new people, new groups.

It helped us to look at the important things of life from a new, different perspective.

One can feel to be important here.

I learned how to be at my best in a community.

I learned that everyone is a valuable member of a community (even me).

I learned to look at the world from a different perspective. – 18-year-old

I think that the adult council does not take us seriously, and they don't care about us at all. But in my opinion each settlement needs a youth community where young people can deal with public life issues.

Young people are not really interested in public life either, therefore they need to be constantly reminded about it. It is true that I'm only interested in it since I have specific tasks.

I used to be restrained, I was in the background and I couldn't talk to people. Since I have been active in the youth council, I have contacted many people. Since I became the youth mayor, I had to learn to express myself well. I think SZIDÖK helped me develop my communication skills a lot.

SZIDÖK was a community for me that was independent. I mean it is not political, it is not related to schools or families. SZIDÖK is a fixed point in my life, I can always count on the people here. – 18-year-old

Basically, this is where I got my life goal. Without SZIDÖK I may have had studies and work that I wouldn't like, that I'd hate. – 26-year-old, former Youth Mayor

In SZIDÖK we realize things together, following our own rules. We don't have this opportunity anywhere else. And this is not the only reason why it was worth becoming a SZIDÖK member...

In the meantime, I met hundreds of people, I had a peek into the work of the "grown-ups", and I had fun. Just like any student, I also had times when I felt this was just another burden I had to carry along. But I say it was worth it!

As a Student Mayor you get plenty of opportunities and you meet numerous challenges such as a student camp, a peer mentor conference, a session of the Alternative Playhouse or the opening of a student art exhibition. These are everyday things, but you can learn from them, and they enrich your personality, whatever the outcome is. – 19-year-old, former Student Mayor

It was in SZIDÖK that I first heard people discussing what democracy was and what made a community democratic.

I could only experience in SZIDÖK what it is like to learn how a program is created and then realized, how you work in teams and how social games work. As a result, I got a very complex understanding of democracy.

SZIDÖK gave me a lot: a learning opportunity, a network in other towns or even with the youth of Transylvania, people I couldn't have met otherwise. It gave me impulses from places where youth councils or student organizations work differently. It was a socialization environment where things not appreciated by schools were truly valued. It was a place where knowledge was appreciated, but where it was valued not only in school grades or study contests, and where it could manifest itself in connections and projects. *My best experiences include conferences on mental hygiene and the elections of TOP Students were also great fun. It was good to see how would-be student mayors and vice mayors got better, they learned how to fulfil their positions. I liked the homely feeling at the Student Cellar and the trainings and talks we had there. I liked our shows we gave at the hospital before Christmas. For me it was a flow, a process where something was always moving and forming. This special atmosphere is my favourite memory of SZIDÖK.*
– **30-year-old participant, later mentor**

Any town would need their own SZIDÖK to ensure that whatever they do for the youth is really needed by them. But as I see, nowadays this is not in the interest of city leaders, they rather impose their stuff on the young for whatever reason.

This is important for young people because they think they do not have the chance to influence the things around them and what's happening to them. The adults, the council, the school will decide what they should do. A good youth or student council can provide the opportunity for the youth to present their ideas and needs, and either they themselves or the elected representatives can take these forward and realize them.

It is also a good learning opportunity. For example, participants at an assembly of delegates can have a taste of democracy. What an election or an assembly looks like, how you present your points, how to reach compromise – how good decisions are made.

Shared problems also facilitate forming of friendships. People who work together for something can build true, deep relationships.

I had many opportunities to learn and practice public speaking.

I also had friends there, a place where I could go anytime, people who were always there for me. SZIDÖK took me to several camps at Magyartés and there I made many more friends. – **25-year-old participant, later mentor**

SZIDÖK connected young people and encouraged their (self-)awareness. They participated in the public life of Szentes, which made their relationship with their home town stronger, and it is now more unlikely that they will settle somewhere else. It also helped to build connections between schools.

It was where friendships for life and loves were born. The participants understood democratic principles and practiced them as well. They learned to express their opinion.

They had a safe home base, a place where they could go at any time, where they felt secure. They could belong to a community that was chosen by THEM.

I also learned to stand up for myself and for others. I found out that I enjoy helping others, working in groups and leading the work of a group. This guided me in my career choice.

For example, as the Youth Mayor I had to deliver a speech in front of a large audience. This was an experience I could use later. I learned a lot more about communication in SZIDÖK than later at university. SZIDÖK was an open and receptive environment where I could be myself, I was loved and accepted as I was. It was also an exciting place where any topic could be discussed openly.

My best memory is when I was elected Youth Mayor. To me it was a great success, and everybody was happy for me.

SZIDÖK meant and still means a lot to me. To belong to SZIDÖK is a way of life: to rush, to buzz, to talk, to know you can count on your friends, to help others. Helping others manage their problems, that's a good thing to do. – **27-year-old, former youth mayor**

SZIDÖK was important because there was a body to represent our interests, where teenagers and students could express their opinion, collect ideas and vote for them. Many of these decisions were eventually realized or taken into consideration. At the same time, it is important to highlight the cooperation with youth councils of other cities.

SZIDÖK for me is the same as the Student Cellar. The Cellar was home to many things: events, friendly parties, crafts workshops, trainings. Or it was simply a common point on Fridays to meet my friends. – 26-year-old

When I first went there, I was anxious, didn't know what would happen. When I learned I was nominated to be the vice mayor, I wanted to run out of the world. I was proud to be part of such a thing and to have such an important role. When I was elected, I felt that after this I can do anything in life. I enjoyed the programs, or when we went out to Kossuth Street, filling in poll sheets or distributing stickers.

One of my favourites was when we gave a puppet show for the kids at Santa Claus, and of course the moment when my name was announced at the election. I will never forget how nervous I was, my ears were burning. And I felt to be an organic part of the whole thing after this, which in fact hadn't always been the case... Thank you for the experience and the friends! – 14-year-old

I've learned that a storm isn't always just bad weather, and a fire can be the start of something new. I've found out that there are a lot more shades of gray in this world than I ever knew about. I've learned that sometimes, when you're afraid but you keep on moving forward, that's the biggest kind of courage there is. And finally, I've learned that life isn't really about failure and success. It's about being present, in the moment when big things happen, when everything changes, including yourself.

(Cynthia Hand)

END OF THE STORY AT THE VE-GA MEETING IN OCTOBER 2016

It had been a while since we could get together like we used to. We had a lot to discuss, so it was not only a VE-GA Assembly but also a youth professional seminar. We spent three days there in good mood. The saddest moment was when we heard and discussed the council's proposal on SZIDÖK.

We have listed our long-term problems and to-do items. We talked about the completed summer camps and about the ones we were going to have in 2017. We talked a lot about the significant changes taking place across the country. For us, it is interesting to know that many towns have realized that they do not have any relationship with the representatives of their youth. The most significant changes seem to occur in culture, in public education and in community cultural services in particular. We also agreed that a new digital revolution is already around us. Generation Z is the defining one in the teenager population, but the alphas are also here soon.

We had a heated discussion to identify what the most important task of the day was. I consequently stood out for the following: we would be unable to come up with a unified approach towards the changes and tasks unless we have a deeper and more conscious, common understanding. This was accepted by the participants and it was later confirmed by others, too. It led to a correspondence course that I launched in February 2017. It had the following topics (I also indicate the recommended readings):

1. Global capitalism today (J. Naisbitt: *Megatrends*)
2. The process of socialisation according to VE-GA
3. Eight elements of organizational leadership (W. D. Hitt: *The Leader-Manager*)
4. Individual and group autonomy (Dr. Béla Kozéki: *Independence, Discipline – Autonomy*)
5. Life as an alternative wage-worker
6. The path to the goal of human life, i.e. to happiness – according to VE-GA
7. Conscious community development – the approach of VE-GA (Mária Szatmáriné Balogh – Katalin Járó: *Know and Develop the Group*)
8. The theory of age-ranks
9. The concept and context of culture, intelligence and value
10. The principle of care in the light of the principle of love
11. The moral teaching of Jesus based on the Beatitudes (*The Gospel of Matthew* – Endre Gyökössi: *The Happiness of Growth*)
12. Levels of communication, based on the language games of László Honti
13. Development of human personality (Dr. Béla Buda: *Social Psychology of Personality Development and Education*)
14. A structural outline of human personality (Dr. László Kelemen: *Pedagogical Psychology*)
15. An (at least) adult-rank individual as the symbiosis of ethical personality (persona) and the individual (A. Tarkovsky)
16. Personality types by Eysenck (introvert/extravert and levels of stimulation)
17. Personality types based on *Winnie-the-Pooh* (J. Ranschburg: *Unsettled Kids – Hyperactivity and Aggression in Adolescence*)
18. European forms of consciousness and the question of distinguishing

19. Historical breaks in the Hungarian social economy
20. Ethics of adults helping teenagers
21. Cultural and lingual codes in communication (Bernstein)
22. Stages of change in the value system of Hungarian teenagers in the 21st century
23. Concept and practice of buffer activities
24. The role of regenerative stage in meetings

The list of topics and the number of participants of the correspondence course can be extended and it will be supplemented by face-to-face meetings.

Let's move forward to our future together!

EPILOGUE

This book is an honourable funeral of the SZIDÖK Project and SZIDÖK, meant for whoever has eyes to see and ears to hear.

The honourable funeral is to sum up the heritage that has been given to the town of Szentes by SZIDÖK and the SZIDÖK Project. A heritage that has been built through success, failure, sometimes sadness and also through a sea of common worries and joy but mainly through loads of work. A funeral that offers an opportunity to recall everything that may help our successors and others to live a better, more honourable life.

It may give strength to become a better person, it may give the power to re-start in another way.

Telling their story and recalling their tragedy is part of the funeral; just like enlisting and establishing all the values that have been accumulated during the decades of their existence, created by many people, teenagers and adults. But outlining the path forward, finding a way to survive, renew and carry on is also a part of it.

I tried to meet all these objectives. I also mentioned that this story is just a drop in the global ocean of our days, but this drop reflects the entire ocean.

What I have written is the story of a small town, a tragedy of its youth that went unrecognized. But there are many small towns in the world, and there are many, maybe less evident tragedies. The Szentes City Council is not the only one that is unable to build a partnership with the representatives of its own youth. This local government could not support their youth in consciously expressing themselves as a generation. A generation that is firmly rooted in its homeland,

"whoever has eyes to see"

"the only remaining
Son is responsible
for watering the dry
tree symbolically and
ceremonially"



"It guards over the past, the present and watches over the possibility of future"

that look at the real world from the basis of a genuine identity. A generation that is capable and aspire to *think global and act local*, because they achieved an identity and character at home that is both *local and global* – in this order.

In Tarkovsky's film *The Sacrifice* the only remaining Son is *responsible for watering the dry tree* symbolically and ceremonially. This tree is a wooden grave cross, a totem pole, a tombstone. It guards over the past, the present and watches over the possibility of future. It is a reminder, a warning sign. Do not let all trees die, and plant new trees!

Here and now let me paste a quote as a closing song at the end. It is from the peace rock play of VE-GA entitled *Late!*

*It's gonna be late if there's no agreement!
It's gonna be late without union
You should undertake the life that sprung from you
You should undertake the life you give*

*If you reject your kid you reject all.
Then you bury him, you bury everything.
Can you do this if you've given life?
Can you do this if you've given life?*

*It's gonna be late! Late! Late!
No time to wait! Late! Late!
No time to wait! Late! Late!*



"this drop reflects the entire ocean"

Epilogue of Someone Affected

*There's a time to insist
There's a time to let go
There's a time to cry
There's a time to laugh*
(proverb from Magyartés)

[the end]

It was in the autumn of 2015 when we were last at Tés. We didn't know at that time that it would be the last occasion. It was just the four of us. The Veres family. Dad cut the grass, Mom sorted out the crafts supplies in the cupboard, the girls wandered in the garden, picked the giant grass leaves, rolled in the green softness – we couldn't even see them. They were feeding the goats next door, crafting - cutting, gluing, drawing. We cleaned the plastic chairs, amply watered the porch, and put our clothes on the rope to dry. Just like at home. We walked to the dam, biked around the village. We ate the canned bean stew that we bought in the small local store. In the evening we lit a campfire, and the girls wisely stated that since there is no camp right now, it is a family-fire. We talked a lot about the summer that was just about to end, about the family camp and the kids' camp, about memories, other people, our friends. We agreed that we would come back some other time, just to potter around, do some stuff, to camp out. Because we like to be together peacefully, slowly, in Magyartés-like manner. Far from all the noise, the city, the dirt, the nerve-wracking hustle and bustle. Now we must find a new place – and not only for ourselves. And so we will. Together with you.

"We ... put our clothes on the rope to dry. Just like at home."



Now that you have read or have just skimmed through this book, dear Reader, let me share a few thoughts here from one of the characters in this book.

Honourable Funeral is a book with many faces. It can be read as a *documentary novel*, as a *diary* or as a *tragedy*, and by now it can also be looked at as a picture album.

When I first read the manuscript on 24th September 2017, I could not stop crying. By now I am recovering. I laughed a lot while selecting and editing the pictures.

But the main thing is that *I didn't laugh alone*, like I was not alone when crying either.

Pali's book has become *our book* as many of us were working on it. This is how it is honourable, because it documents the work of us all, and gives faith, strength and hope to move on.

I volunteered to find a good printing editor, and to help maintain the communication with her. As I began working, I was confronted with the text-centred character of the book, and that the pictures chosen for illustration did not balance the flood of letters. I very well remembered the rich photo set of the 2008 SZIDÖK camp, since I was their guest with my one-year-old daughter.

I had an idea that I shared with Pali, who – to be honest – didn't care that much at that point, as he was already occupied by writing the other volume of the book. I was just given the freedom to do *as I pleased*. I asked the people who I knew were familiar with the book, and told them what I was planning. I received the photos of the last thirteen years of SZIDÖK camps, we also found some pictures from 1994–95.

I looked through some 1500 pictures, made notes about them, and memorized them so that I would be able to recall them later. Then I began reading the book. I was looking for quotes from it, and I associated them with the photos in two ways. In some cases, I created a synonymous connection between the text and the picture. In other cases, I paired a quote from the text with a picture in a way that they both got a new meaning. This *free association method* helped create a peculiar atmosphere, running parallel to the text. From the beginning I aimed to show how joyful young people were in SZIDÖK, to show their unique, youthful, creative and clear way of looking at things.

I created a Facebook group where I shared the *text/picture pairs* with the team. This resulted in a shared creative work that helped the process of recovery – I hope not just for me. There were immediate comments and reflections, there was an avalanche of memories, too (*"Look that's Gergő's toe there, I took him to the hospital that year!"*)

There were others who were concerned, *'Isn't it too funny for the theme of the book?'* Honestly, I was thinking about it myself. But I felt I was on the right track. When I reached the second part of the book, I realized that the tragedy described there did not need pictures for illustration. That section is spaced by the attributes of the adult world: motions, minutes of meetings, decrees, mails, newspaper articles. When I got to the third part, I remembered what I learned about the visual language of Ingmar Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander* in the film classes of the Drama School of Szentes. *In the film, we are first in the cosy Christmas world of the large family, which is full of lively, deep, red, warm colours, full of life. In the second part the kids get to the parson's house, where there are no colours, everything is dull, grey, cold, hopeless and cruel. In the third part the kids get back to their family, but by then the colours are more restrained, pastel-like, sadder. They fade away like their childhood.*

The others liked my plan. As a result, the first part of *our book* (the story of SZIDÖK) has pictures that are colourful, lively, diverse, humorous or lyrical – like SZIDÖK members and their photos. There are no photos in the second part (the tragedy), there you can find only the inserted official documents. There are again pictures in the third part (Pali's subjective passion, farewell and a new beginning), but these are black and white photos, less in number, showing a more restrained, lyrical atmosphere. Yet their content is hopeful.

I hope that this book both as a whole and also in its parts will help the emotional healing of those who at first were the characters, but later became victims, and eventually heirs of this story.

Judit Veresné Péter
November 2017

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Sources of the images in the book:

Source of the photographs: photos taken by the participants of the 2008, 2014 and 2015 SZIDŐK summer camps. The images are not firmly related to the contents of the book. They were collected and paired with the quotes from the book through a free association exercise, to give a special atmosphere to the book and in the same time a sample to the reader from the perspective of the participating youth.

Source of the following photos is the VE-GA Archives: "the stage is mine"; "tree-planting" in the Prologue; "Mom"; rental contract; articles from Aspirin; documents and images in the Image Gallery; ; "crop-picture"; "fruit on our hard work"; "old songs at the bonfire"

Sources of the images on the back cover and in the Epilogue: family photos with the agreement of the families

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As news is spreading about the existence of this book, these questions come up more and more often: „Is it worth making an issue out of the elimination of a local youth council? There are so many more important issues in a town!”

I don't agree. The future of a settlement is determined by its teenagers, by its youth. However, it is only true if they get the opportunity to play an active role in the life of their town, if they have a say in topics that affect them. At the same time, it is a general tendency that the local presence of the youth, the students in the public life is decreasing. In Hungary the schools don't even belong to the local governments (representing the local society) any more. Even earlier, student councils did not have a strong role.

It is understandable, but – to me – not acceptable that nobody writes about youth public life, about youth and school councils. It is kind of embarrassing to mention this topic even among friends or family, as they say it is not worth the word, this topic would not receive any attention.

In this book I initiate a debate about and for this. What had been accomplished and lived by a multitude of teenagers, students, teachers, parents, civil activists is a unique treasure. It is unacceptable to let this be demolished without any consequence. It just cannot vanish without a trace.

Throughout this all, I have had my lifelong partner sharing everything with me – my loving wife, Anikó.