



SOLINSA
Support of Learning and Innovation
Networks for Sustainable Agriculture

Agricultural Knowledge Systems In Transition :
Towards a more effective and efficient support of Learning
and Innovation Networks for Sustainable Agriculture

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G7 (GÖDÖLLŐ LOCAL FOOD COUNCIL), HUNGARY

LINSA Case Study Report: Hungary

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1 SUMMARY

G7 is an informal network of local organisations, entrepreneurs and citizens in Gödöllő, a major city of the Budapest agglomeration, hosting the largest agricultural university of Hungary (a brother town of Wageningen). The main objective of the organisation is to achieve a more sustainable and healthy food system for the town. They intend to realise this through: (1) acting as information brokers – organising events, disseminating information and building databases, connecting producers, customers, organisations, entrepreneurs who want to support food sovereignty and sustainability; (2) acting in the political domain, building social support and negotiating with local authorities for a local sustainable food strategy.

G7 is an informal, voluntary partnership, a Network of Practice, uniting local actors committed to establish a more sustainable and healthy local food system in Gödöllő, a major city of the Budapest agglomeration.

During SOLINSA we applied standard tools of qualitative sociology and action research (semi structured interviews, informal conversations, focus group meetings, participant observation, workshops with G7 members and other local stakeholders. Detailed minutes of meetings were made in Hungarian and shared with members of the organisation. Field log was kept, research meetings were held after workshops to discuss the possibilities related to 'second layer learning'. We had 7 workshops altogether in 2012-13, the last follow up workshop is scheduled for October 2013.

G7 consists of basically three kinds of members:

(1) *Action based organisations (Communities of Practice)*

These are local activists (in formal associations) effectively working for local sustainability, (organising events, markets, shops, applied research, etc.) normally also making their living with this;

(2) *AKIS based organisations (Communities of Scientific Practice)*

These are members of the local or the national formal AKIS (established research institutes, university or a connected company) who normally do research and theoretical or support work and seek to make practical use of the knowledge they gather as part of the AKIS;

(3) *Committed individuals*

These are local people (entrepreneur, retired vet, mothers) interested in the topic for personal motivations.

Different members of G7 have different values, aims and objectives, thus seek different roles for G7. Group (1) wants first of all an "umbrella organisation" that unites forces, helps networking, etc. Group (2) and (3) also wants to implement projects, thus besides an "umbrella" they also want an "action organisation". The two kinds, of course, should not be exclusive, however, they require quite different kinds of management, decision making, organisational structure, etc. By the time of SOLINSA entering the process the lack of G7's decision about the appropriate model resulted in problems, such as: unclear objectives and

value system; insufficient funding; weak project management; internal tensions between members; failing external communication, etc.

Innovation initiated by G7 is fundamentally incremental, and its history can be divided in two phases. First phase activities aimed to (1) raise awareness of the local population about food sustainability and (2) connect local producers to customers (through events, providing information, building databases, etc.). This boundary work produced interactions and objects that can one by one be seen as novelties, but come together nicely as a more or less comprehensive niche. They clearly contribute to first order change, becoming part of the regime, connecting AKIS and society and enhancing local sustainability.

The second phase is the current process of developing the "Local sustainable food strategy" for the city. This is still incremental innovation, based on examples and existing knowledge. It is also supported and partly initiated by the mayor and his deputy - principal depositories of the ruling overall regime. They intend to change the local food system to fit better the overall landscape of Gödöllő becoming an ecological city, thus the process at first sight it is likely to remain a first order change. However, to succeed, local leaders need to overcome well established local economic and political interests (forming part of the local AKIS, mainly in public catering and retail) opposing regime change. G7 as an umbrella NGO with strong connections to both local civil society and the AKIS represent an ideal alliance for this. Already the process of developing the food strategy have initiated significant changes of the regime, such as: (1) bringing together important stakeholders in a neutral communicative space; (2) introducing a new style and tools (workshops, facilitation, neutral communicative space,) to social and political discussion. If the "local sustainable food strategy" is ever completed and fully implemented, the local food system is likely to change significantly entailing at least some characteristics of second order change too.

SOLINSA started to co-operate with G7 in a critical moment, when it already demonstrated its effectiveness and became an important local actor, however, some major projects revealed the internal limits and difficulties of the organisation and G7 was in a process of searching for functional ways of operation. To successfully complete the challenge of developing a sustainable food strategy in partnership with the City G7 needed some assistance. SOLINSA arrived in the right time with the right offer to create new dynamism and bring some impetus into G7's work at a critical point of its organisational development. Otherwise, SOLINSA was providing three kind of soft support:

- (1) Definition of organisational problems followed by organisational development (we have reached good results, but G7 would probably need more of this kind of assistance);
- (2) Coaching throughout the development of a sustainable local food strategy (with special regard to working out the process of how to involve local stakeholders efficiently);
- (3) Facilitation on meetings and events, and capacity building (introducing workshop methods, mediation, conflict resolution, etc.)

We suggest that such kind of soft support for building capacities, skills,

communication and reinforcing the identity and functioning of the organisation is, in general, one of the most important assistance that LINSAs can receive from external sources. G7 has made considerable progress during our co-operation, and if the overall circumstances (political support, "landscape") does not change, they have a good chance to further develop. However, we also suggest that at least occasional coaching and externally facilitated organisational development workshops at least once a year would be very beneficial for their work in the future.

2 INTRODUCTION

G7 (Gödöllő Local Food Council) is a voluntary partnership organised in Gödöllő, a medium size city in the agglomeration of Budapest, considered to be the headquarters of agricultural education in Hungary. The organisation aims to unite local actors in the region of Gödöllő (NGOs, entrepreneurs, individuals, and politicians), who are committed to establish a more sustainable and healthy local food system. The members of the organisation are typically successful, middle-class, middle-aged¹, married intellectuals with children, working in various fields². G7 wants to achieve the above aim along operative objectives in three different target groups through various activities:

Table 1

| Target group | Operative aim | Activities |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Local residents in general | Improve food culture, consumer consciousness, responsibility | Raising public awareness by different events and campaigns |
| Local producers and consumers | To shorten the food chain, channelling high-quality, safe locally produced food at a fair price directly into local food supply (catering services, private customers) | Research, establish and manage databases, campaigns (e.g. eco-market) |
| Local politics, 'stakeholders' | Involving a wide range of local stakeholders, work out a sustainable food strategy approved and implemented by the municipality | Strategy building, lobbying, events, communication, etc. |

G7 is therefore an informal umbrella organisation (coordinating actors and uniting efforts) on one hand, and an 'action organisation' (implementing concrete

¹ Among members there is a retired veterinarian too

² University lecturer, researcher, entrepreneur, mother on maternity leave

projects) on the other. Through its member organisations³, G7 is organically linked to the local AKIS and enjoys the support of the local government that improves professional credibility and make G7 a legitimate entity. G7 identifies itself as an organisation that helps in processes, renders advisory services, and transfers knowledge. Through events and campaigns G7 provides local stakeholders with a neutral communicative space, enhancing communication between different (sometimes conflicting) actors and value systems: (1) non-governmental organisations, entrepreneurs, private individuals, (2) consumers-producers, (3) local politicians, business interests, institutions (4) practice and theory. It provides all stakeholders an opportunity to start creative dialogues, builds community, and channels the knowledge and resources available within the organisation along these lines. Consequently (although they do not express it so clearly) G7 acts as an 'information broker' and 'boundary spanner' between formal AKIS and the local society.

At present, the main innovation originating and developing from the organisation's activities is creating a local (urban level) sustainable food strategy. The actions G7 so far performed can be split into two phases: In the first (1. Community building) phase, the activities did not need significant external support to achieve the organisation's goals (although the conflicts deriving from unclear operation model became more and more intensive). The second (2. Strategy building) phase clearly showed the limits the organisation could not surpass and without external contribution especially in the fields of organisational development and process support.

SOLINSA entered the process in that very phase and offered support in the following fields:

- (1) Explore G7's operational problems, develop the organisation, conflict management within the organisation, build a common vision, set of aims, and operational model;
- (2) Develop the process of building a food strategy that can be embedded in local politics, approved and supported by main local actors. Broaden social base, assistance in process-related interaction and communication strategy;
- (3) Facilitation, mediation, organising and facilitating internal and external meetings, establish a neutral communicative space;
- (4) Capacity building, introduce workshop methodology in the functioning of the organisation.

The main goals of this study are:

- To explore what are (were) those internal and external barriers that hindered G7 to be more efficient in achieving its set objectives;
- To highlight and analyse those answers given by the organisation to the

³ Almost half the current members are full-time local AKIS representatives, see, annex: Links to AKIS

problems, including the assistance given by the SOLINSA project and the observed learning process;

- To explore possible scenarios and the kind of assistance (learning, capacity building) that can help the work of the organisation in the future.

3 METHODS

During the course of the research standard tools of qualitative sociology and action research were applied, namely semi structured interviews (15), informal conversations, focus group meetings, participant observation in G7 events, workshops with G7 members and other local stakeholders interested in establishing a sustainable food system. Detailed minutes of meetings were made in Hungarian and shared with members of the organisation. Field log was kept, research meetings were held after workshops to discuss the possibilities related to 'second layer learning'.

In the course of G7-SOLINSA co-operation the following meetings were held:

Table 2

| | Date | Aim | Venue | Number of people present | |
|----|----------------|---|--|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. | 24.05.2012. | Initial meeting with LINSNA members | Gödöllő | 5 G7 members | |
| 2. | 21.06.2012. | Workshop to lay the foundations for (SOLINSA – G7) work | Gödöllő | 6 G7 members | |
| 3. | 23-24.11.2012. | A day and a half workshop on organisational development | Sarlóspuszta | 7 G7 members | |
| 4. | 19.02.2013. | STRATEGY BUILDING | "G7 and friends" preparation of workshop (identify aims, programme, tasks) | Gödöllő | 6 G7 members |
| 5. | 12.03.2013. | | "G7 and friends" (workshop for preparing strategy among G7 allies) | Gödöllő | 15 (6 G7 members) |
| 6. | 29.04.2013. | | Consultation prior to workshop with the local government (identify aims, programme, tasks) | Budapest | 3 G7 members (leaders) |
| 7. | 11.05.2013. | | First consultation with the local government (first step of strategy building and final step of preparatory phase) | Gödöllő | 27 (7 G7 members) |

During the workshops a number of different methods were applied, including the followings:

- Brainstorming
- facilitated discussions
- moving sociometrics
- informal presentation
- visioning
- visualisation
- plenary
- statue, sociometrics
- formal presentation
- work in small groups
- role play
- world café
- icebreakers, workshop exercises
- timeline
- strategy building
- energiser

4 RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

4.1 The constraints and opportunities for LINSAs within their particular context and the support needs for successful LINSAs

4.1.1 Financial resources

G7 functions mainly on the resources made available by its members on a voluntary basis. This is often complemented by small external public funding, however, since normally all funding is post-financed, resources are always made available by members at the beginning. This system provides considerable independence (G7 normally does not participate in funding competitions, is not officially connected to any organization, thus they do not have to spend significant time and energy on administration, reports, etc.). On the other hand, it means significant uncertainty and vulnerability to the current preferences and possibilities of its members. Uncertainty in funding so far has not caused any crisis in the organisation, since the projects, events given in the annual work plan were approved at some members' individual proposals, and most probably have been implemented under the guidance of the project master. However, the stated objectives require significant resources (important events and communication campaigns, influencing local political players cost money) the success is hard to imagine without transforming the basic strategy of the LINSAs and getting significant (and more or less stable) resources for management and undertaking *projects*.

4.1.2 Lines and breaks of force

The network structure is relatively simple, with some nodes around particular members.

Two important organisations (GAK, ESSRG) also forming part of the local AKIS and an entrepreneur (owner of a local restaurant - Solier - often used as a venue for G7 meetings) function as nodes in the network. Representatives of GreenDependent Society and Research Institute dealing with sustainability and

of an organic school kitchen are also dominant members. In this central nod, however, there are major differences in interpreting the function of the organisation, resulting in conflicts already identified within the organisation.⁴ We can identify three kinds of members with differing values, resources and objectives.

(1) Action based organisations (Communities of Practice)

These are local activists who work 'full time' in other non-governmental organisations implementing projects to support sustainable development. They see G7 as an **umbrella organisation**, primarily as "**arena for communication/interaction**" with local society and politics. For them G7's basic function is to co-ordinate the work of various **organisations** founded for supporting sustainable food economy in the region of Gödöllő. It presents an opportunity to unite, build network, synchronise interests, and lobby. In this sense, basically the organisation is made legitimate through the member organisations' individual activities and the co-ordination provided by G7.

(2) AKIS based organisations (Communities of Scientific Practice)

These are members of the local or the national formal AKIS (established research institutes, university or a connected company). They do or support research or/and teaching and their everyday work normally does not include implementing concrete projects on sustainability. However, they search for possibilities to make practical use of the knowledge they gather as part of the AKIS, thus they see G7 also as an "**arena for action**", that besides being an umbrella, should have its **own goals and projects** on its own right. In their view, the organisation implements its own series of actions to improve sustainability of food economy and these activities legitimize the organisation.

(3) Committed individuals

These are local people (entrepreneur, retired vet, mothers, etc.) interested in the topic of sustainable food for personal motivations. They bring in considerable knowledge and resources and normally also opt for action and projects done by G7.

Different members of G7 have different values, aims and objectives, thus seek different roles for G7. Group (1) wants first of all an "**umbrella organisation**" that unites forces, helps networking, etc. Group (2) and (3) also wants to implement projects, thus besides an "umbrella" they also want an "**action organisation**". The two kinds, of course, should not be exclusive, however, they require quite different kinds of management, decision making, organisational structure, etc. By the time of SOLINSA entering the process the lack of G7's decision about the appropriate model resulted in problems, such as: unclear objectives and value system; insufficient funding; weak project management; internal tensions between members; failing external communication, etc.

⁴ Recently, as a result of organisational development with SOLINSA a G7 executive management body was formed, the members are the representatives of ESSRG, Solier, and GAK.

4.1.3 LINSA and its social environment

The culture of local politics, decision making, volunteer work and the embeddedness of LINSA members in local affairs and structures significantly define (enhance and/or limit) the possibilities for action. The main objective of G7 is the development of a sustainable local food-system. To achieve this, G7 has to engage and sometimes struggle with significant local economic and political interests and succeed on multiple fronts at the same time – at political level, and among the local public opinion. In the current political and institutional environment, this requires a complex and well thought out strategy, targeting both to influence public policy via political involvement and shaping public opinion through organising events, knowledge transfer and other actions. For this G7 may need to rethink and reinforce its internal structure and funding strategy. Our contribution through SOLINSA did initiate this process, however, further work should be done and probably further assistance is also needed.

4.1.4 Opportunities

Whether the organisation is perceived as umbrella or action organisation, strongly affects its opportunities (and consequently the support/assistance needed). The table below summarizes the duties and challenges that G7 has to face in the two different scenarios:

Table 3

| Umbrella organisation scenario | Action organisation scenario |
|---|---|
| Democratic operation may benefit from the current informal structure and the loose network of participating organisations and individuals | Would require more financial resources and determined project management, which is likely to require a more formal structure (formal association) |
| Need to clarify decision-making system and competencies | A clear management and decision structure is required, maybe parallel with the financial contribution and responsibility taken |
| The goal is to 'broaden', that is to involve potential local organisations and alliances, and establish clear organisational framework and a mechanism for management and decision-making. Primarily members are organisations, and individuals may replace easily. | The goal is to 'deepen', that is to enhance efficiency, make current members improve cooperation, manage common projects and applications. Primarily members are individuals, and possibly each organisation is represented by the same person. |

Should either scenario come true, G7's current activities and composition of members carry the following opportunities:

Community building, strengthen networking

In addition to the organisation's success in community building among consumers, there is a good chance for building a similar network among producers. There has not been sufficient results achieved yet in this field, obviously the relevant strategy needs reconsideration. If this happen, a

functional producer-consumer network could be established for the region.

Strategy building

In strategy building process, LINSAs faces threefold opportunities:

- (1) it would raise its recognition and strengthen its position at local level (resulting in new challenges and opportunities);
- (2) local strategy would serve as model for other settlements to follow, carrying the possibility of national recognition;
- (3) among those involved in strategy building significant social learning, considered important by G7, is likely to occur.

4.1.5 Support needs

In order to be able to develop the intrinsic opportunities, G7 needs support in the following areas:

- strategy building process (both in the fields of organisation and food strategy building)
- management
- internal communication, conflict management, sharing of tasks
- organisational development
- impact assessment of actions

4.2 Mechanisms of network development, learning and innovation processes and connections with the formal AKS systems

4.2.1 Mechanisms of network development

G7 was established in 2010 based on personal connections and a shared interest of a local restaurant owner (Solier) and a researcher of ESSRG. They decided to take action in order to seek good quality, locally produced food. As a first step they initiated a partnership to connect people with similar interests and values concerning healthy nutrition, quality food and sustainability in general. The first meeting was attended by 12 people, representing 7 organizations (that was the origin of the name G7). Some people and organisations joined in latter, others left or in some cases the organisation stayed, but the person representing it in G7 was changed. Besides organisations some everyday people (women on maternity leave with a special interest in healthy food, a retired vet having a good network amongst local producers, etc.) also joined the organization. This all went on a voluntary basis, without any kind of formalisation, written or even verbally agreed rules, that did cause some ambiguities and tensions concerning membership issues. (Being a member practically meant that one was put on the mailing list...)

In our understanding the history of G7 can be broken down into two main periods:

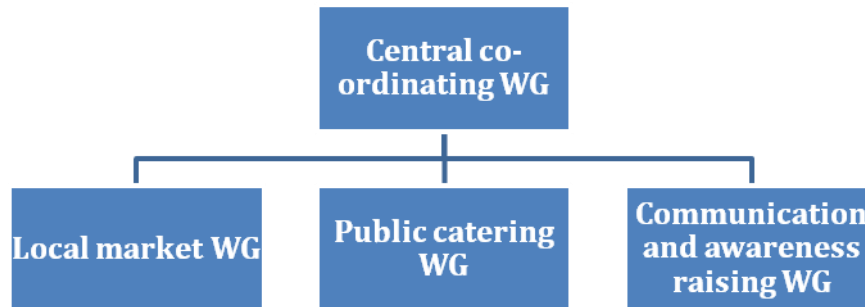
- (1) During the period of the initial momentum members invested significant

energy in starting up the network. In the “G7 community” they found people with similar goals, values and approaches. Cooperation promised information, knowledge, feedback and substantial joint resources in order to achieve the common objectives. Thus, G7 almost imperceptibly became an important local actor, able to organise and market significant local actions (harvest-festival, surveys, science-cafe, a significant online presence, etc.). The first results did show that the G7 could impact at the local level, achieving significant results. The main objectives of the Organization thus became: to influence the functioning and improve the life circumstances of the local community through the structural development of a sustainable local food-system.

- (2) The first major projects, however, revealed the internal limits of the organisation and the difficulties they caused in operation. Thus, the recent period can be seen as a search for functional ways of operation. Members became increasingly aware of the tension between the strictly voluntary participation, the current internal structure, the lack of a clear decision-making mechanism and the stated objective of the organization – seeking to influence local society. Important questions, such as who can decide in significant questions, who can represent G7 to the outside world, what does membership entail, etc. were undecided and there were no established ways of making decisions either. The tension increased with the invitation from the local authority to work out a sustainable food strategy for the city, and that was when the SOLINSA team entered the story.

During the co-operation with SOLINSA significant changes could be encountered in the functioning of G7. As a result of exploring organisational and management problems and initiating processes to solve them, G7 started to proceed towards a slightly more formal and better managed functioning and now they can use their own resources somewhat more efficiently. On the other hand, as part of the process of building a sustainable food strategy they significantly widened their network amongst local and national level environmental NGOs. Last but not least, they built strong connections with the local political elite and managed to start a discussion even with those economic stakeholders with conflicting values and objectives compared to the "G7 worldview". On the last city level workshop (held on 11. May) a number of working groups (WGs) were established gathering the most important stakeholders (and led by G7 membes) to find solutions to principal problems.

Figure 1



Three of these, in spite of the summer already started working.

4.2.2 Learning processes

In case of G7, three types of learning were investigated:

- (1) Individual learning
- (2) Organisational learning
- (3) Social learning

Individual learning:

According to the interviews, this learning level, namely individual improvement of organisation members, is the most typical outcome/form of operation. In practice, learning is implemented through discussion and clashing different views in the subject (local food system) mainly in G7 meetings and e-mail list. In addition to goals of general nature, one can say the individual improvement objectives and learning needs are loosely linked to G7's own goals. In this case, it is important to note that experience earned within G7 may become basis for individual learning only if processed and responded by the individuals. Since such goals are often hidden and are linked only to some members, G7 does not facilitate to process them, which leaves plenty of learning potential unexploited.

Organisational learning:

Organisational learning can be interpreted at two different levels: on the level of (1) G7 and of the (2) participating organisations. Certainly, situations, successes, and problems emerging during normal operation and joint projects help G7 and member organisations gain various forms of organisational learning. On the other hand, organisational learning is neither a declared nor a preferred goal; furthermore due to different understandings of G7's vision and function and difficulties in operation it is hard to identify learning and creation of knowledge at organisational level.

Each member and member organisation within the network has extensive and extremely diverse knowledge. Sharing such knowledge within the organisation (organisational learning) could be a legitimate goal, but is hardly realized in practice, which limits the availability of knowledge for members on account of

the following reasons:

- it is not codified (put in writing, systematized);
- lack of appropriate level of trust among organizations;
- there have been no appropriate structure, rules, and systems are in place in the organisation for knowledge sharing, that has started to change with the work in SOLINSA, but further improvement is needed.

Social learning:

One of the goals declared in G7's vision is to change the local community's approach, mediate information and knowledge, organize social networks at a wider scale, in other words to encourage social learning. Primarily these activities, especially joint projects, have an impact on the close social environment (Gödöllő). However, there is very limited information available on the scale of effect and the results of efforts due to lack of impact study and valuable feedback. Unfortunately, this practice significantly prevents further development of strategy and practical activities too.

G7's vision promotes social learning in local sustainable food system. Activities in practice, however, rather result in development and learning of the individual member. Members' approach to learning is greatly dependant on their approach to the goals and function of the organisation.

4.2.3 Innovation processes

In case of G7 we can only talk about incremental (and no radical) innovation. The practices described below are not unique in Hungary, some of them (like thematic festivals) have long been present even in Gödöllő itself in other topics than food sustainability. We identified two kinds of incremental innovation amongst the activities of G7.

The first kind was aimed at capacity building, awareness raising, community building, achieving social learning within the local society and consisted of the following actions:

- Science Café: a special way of awareness raising where scientific presentations are combined with a dinner and held in a restaurant;
- Developing new information channels and connecting important stakeholders with each other, providing a neutral communicative space (producers-customers, theory-practice, different economic and political interests, etc.) in the field of a local sustainable food system;
- A well cultivated blog, newsletters, information material, etc.
- Programmes in local schools: e.g. "SchoolPantry" - in which children could learn about healthy nutrition through a playful competition;
- Thematic local festivals aimed at local food.

These actions represent the boundary work of G7 and produced a number of boundary interactions and boundary objects. One by one they can be seen as novelties, and they come together nicely as a more or less comprehensive

niche, that is however not to over through the regime. It is more likely to become part of it, filling gaps and contributing to first order change towards a somewhat more conscious local society and a more sustainable future.

The second kind of innovation is the current process of developing the "Local sustainable food strategy" for the city. This should still be seen still as incremental innovation, as it is based on domestic and international examples and long existing knowledge. At first sight it is inducing first order change, since it is supported and partly initiated by important local political leaders (the mayor and his deputy) who are the principal depositories of the ruling regime. Nevertheless, this process could also be seen as aimed at second order change on two ways. On the one hand, already the process of creating the strategy introduces significant changes into the regime:

- it brings together important stakeholders who never talked to each other before;
- introduces a new style and tools (workshops, facilitation, neutral communicative space,) to social and political discussion;
- aims to change a long established structure of economic and political interests in the local context;

On the other hand, if the "local sustainable food strategy" is ever completed and implemented, as it is intended today, the local food system is likely to change on a very significant, structural way. Thus, it is difficult to decide that exactly what kind of change are we witnessing at the moment. Our research suggests that the process has the following elements:

The local elite (mayor) would like to change the current regime of food sustainability, in order to make it better comply with the overall local political landscape/image - "Gödöllő as an ecological city". Strong local stakeholders, economic and political interests (in public catering, local market, etc.) are at the same time opposed to these changes and try to maintain the old regime. Political leaders then made alliance with civil society to reinforce their position, create a mass base and enhance change. If all works out, the regime change is likely to happen, however, we suggest that it is still likely to remain a first order change with some strong structural elements. G7 as an informal organisation with good connections to the local AKIS, to local NGOs and to the local authority, already working as an umbrella organisation in this subject is a perfect partner for the mayor in this process. It is an organisation connecting a number of spheres and social groups, it is informal, co-operative, not strong enough to represent a threat, carries very significant human resources and potential, etc.

4.2.4 Connections with the formal AKIS system

G7 is not linked to AKIS as an independent organisation, only through its member organizations, several of which are indeed important actors of AKIS themselves. (see annex, Links to AKIS) In practice G7 acts as "information broker" between AKIS and people showing interest in sustainable food system. The current informal structure of G7 reduces the chance of the organisation linking to formal AKIS. Furthermore, differences in opinion, tensions, and inefficient operation within the organisation, which among other things, make

external communication more difficult, are other factors that hinder closer cooperation with the formal AKIS. At the same time, however, member organisations are linked not only to Hungarian, but also international AKIS systems as well. Projects and information coming through international relations are channelled into G7 to the extent individual members are willing to transfer. Most major events (harvester's festival, Science Café) implemented under G7 and sponsored by GAK, ESSRG, or even the Ministry of Rural Development, came to life in partnership with AKIS. The organisations perform "boundary spanning" and "information brokering" activities in those events and other events organized by member organisations.

Local AKIS is therefore important in many aspects in reaching their objectives:

- (1) Background knowledge – raising public awareness, network building, community building, legitimisation
- (2) financial resources
- (3) soft supports (e.g. SOLINSA) received under various research projects to achieve their goals, which may be significant in identifying the milestones, problems, difficulties, and capacities toward their goals

In terms of spheres of interest, it is quite clear that other knowledge systems could also be relevant to the work of G7 (e.g. health prevention, education science, ecological farming, marketing, public relations, etc.). G7 is important for the local formal AKIS, since it helps to channel accumulated knowledge into local society. The benefit is mutual, since having the AKIS as a background, gives prestige and scientific credibility to the LINSAs.

4.2.5 The learning approaches, methods and tools used in LINSAs

G7's vision promotes social learning in local sustainable food system. This should involve transfer of existing and available knowledge, creation of new knowledge and development of approach, knowledge, and level of organisation of the local society through various actions, or in broader terms, the improvement of the social environment. Instead, activities in current practice rather result in development and learning of the individual members. Members' approach to learning is greatly dependant on their approach to the organisation's objectives. Those who interpret G7 as an umbrella organisation tend to experience individual learning and knowledge transfer in their own independent organisation and perceive G7 merely as an arena for communication and source of information. On the other hand, others who see G7 also as their main arena for actions for sustainability attach more importance to the organisation as a learning space.

Due to the size and basic operating mechanisms of G7, learning and creation of knowledge is hardly formalized and seldom proceeds in a regulated way. In the course of work the organisation's declared vision and common scale of values function as reference, but specific themes and projects are often incidental and emerging opportunities instead of conscious strategy govern joint learning. Usually the learning process in G7 channels existing and available knowledge earned from various sources and adapted to local conditions by the organisation

into the co-operation with local communities during different projects (blog, science café, larder in school, harvest feast, etc.). Exploratory creation of knowledge with focus on innovation is not typical.

Since individual learning and improvement are important factors keeping G7 alive, basically individual spheres of interest and motivations drive G7's future learning and creation of knowledge. Only subjects that leading members deem important and are able/ready to manage get on the agenda of operation. The organisation uses these subjects to draft (and eventually implement) the annual work plan. Basically learning in the course of G7's operation is rather implicit, hidden, and tends to take place in the minds of the organisation members. In general, only a small fraction of created/transferred knowledge is codified:

- Minutes are taken in G7 meetings and some issues are discussed by e-mail, as they are put in writing and recorded automatically. These records, however, are far from being categorized, processed knowledge and therefore are limited and difficult to use and retrieve. Knowledge created that way is difficult to transfer and convey to the local community and only those concerned attach meaning to it by recalling personal memories.
- Some projects aim to improve local society's approach to sustainability. To this end, project members make documents and other materials of various kinds, which translate as codified knowledge.
- Some projects particularly aim to create and transfer codified knowledge (e.g. create database of local producers). However, such projects mostly run in campaign-like and often irregularly and can hardly show significant results. Due to its campaign-like nature, codified knowledge becomes obsolete and depreciates over time.

G7 provides fundamental framework and channels (e-mail list, meetings, projects, blogs, etc.) for individual and organisational learning, while actions and community events function as arena for knowledge transfer and social learning. However, the scope of operation is not declared clearly, since there are no widely adopted rules, policies, processes, and decision competencies in place. A nice example is that there has been an ongoing debate causing several severe internal conflicts regarding the copyright and use of intellectual properties (databases, etc.) created by G7 since the organisation was founded. To rearrange these practices was one of the main aims of the organisational development with the assistance of SOLINSA. G7 now has self-created codified rules for authorship and usage of common knowledge, however, it is still to be seen that how these rules will function in practice.

4.3 Tasks, roles and emerging quality needs for the knowledge and skills of actors and institutions

At present the local government of Gödöllő invited G7 to co-operate in planning a new, sustainable local food strategy. To perform this task successfully, not only organisational structure and communication, but also learning, knowledge

transfer, and creation of knowledge need considerable improvement within the organisation. Organisational development (learning) shall be a priority in the following areas:

- Stabilize internal management, procedures, communication, and decision-making process;
- Co-operate effectively both with other NGOs, and the local government, and improve communication, negotiation strategy, local social and political embeddedness, etc.

G7 incorporates high professional skills and extensive knowledge, members come from various backgrounds and are all competent and successful in their own fields. Most members, however, should improve in project management as well as in social, mediation, facilitation, co-operation and communication skills that are so vital to run volunteer organisations.

Sustainable food strategy is the key subject of the learning process identified in the SOLINSA co-operation project. The importance of organisational learning as a precondition for success has been realised, and many improvements achieved. Nevertheless, probably more assistance (especially in facilitation and capacity development) would be needed in the future.

4.4 Support measures which are most effective and cost efficient

In the case of G7 effective (and efficient) support have come from three different sources, representing three characteristically different kind of support:

(1) Financial assistance from public money:

Since G7 does not have a legal entity it can only receive financial support through one of its member organisations. This means that on the one hand G7 does not need to spend money or/and energy on fundraising, project management, reports, etc., and still can implement projects under its name. That practice is very cost-efficient for G7, however, it is not always the most effective, since, as it happened on various occasions, project management can be vague, and/or instead of G7 it is sometimes the implementing member organisation that appears in the forefront of the events. Thus the promotion of the organisation can suffer and internal conflicts could also be encountered as a result.

(2) Assistance by the local authority:

Political support, positive communication and (even if small) financial and practical assistance (e.g. providing the ceremonial hall of the city council for a meeting) by the local authority and the mayor helped on two ways: (1) it brings empowerment, reinforcement of the identity of the organisation internally; and (2) it greatly reinforces the legitimacy and the position of G7 in Gödöllő.

(3) Assistance delivered by the SOLINSA team:

One of the main contributions of SOLINSA to G7's work was that it brought in

some impetus at a critical point of its organisational development. Thus, we arrived in the right time with the right offer to shake things up a bit and create a new kind of dynamism. Otherwise, SOLINSA was providing three kind of soft support:

- Definition of organisational problems followed by organisational development (we have reached good results, but G7 would probably need more of this kind of assistance);
- Coaching throughout the development of a sustainable local food strategy (with special regard to working out the process of how to involve local stakeholders efficiently);
- Facilitation on meetings and events, and capacity building (introducing workshop methods, mediation, conflict resolution, etc.)

4.5 Evaluation criteria used for assessing the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of support measures that are exploited by LINSA

No feasibility studies have been conducted to evaluate the different types of supports so far. The only attempt to such kind of evaluation was done through the SOLINSA reflection methodology template.

4.6 Operational tools that AKS actors could use to improve support for LINSA and to enhance the capacity of involved actors, in order to foster successful LINSAs

For historical reasons, the culture of volunteer work, patronage, private funding is very low in Hungary, thus grassroots initiatives normally have negligible resources of their own. External help/resources normally comes from public sources (EU or domestic). Using public money, at the same time, carries political and bureaucratic burden, requires special kind of thinking, knowledge, capacities that are alien from everyday people and activities. One of the most important functions of LINSAs therefore is filling the gap between the 'central bureaucratic system' (AKIS, policies, public money, advisory system, official bodies and programs, etc.) and the 'local heuristic system' (everyday people and activities, local communities, independent inventors, etc.). LINSAs can make the latter a bit more organized, creating and providing information, learning, contacts and different kinds of capacities within the community and to the outside world. At the same time, LINSAs make the 'local system' visible and turn it into a negotiating partner, eligible for public support, thus they provide a channel for the 'central system' to reach reality, deliver policy, public money, and to gather important ground level information, innovation, etc. In this sense, LINSAs are translating between the two systems. They belong more to the local system (they virtually grow out of it) but ideally have enough capacity to

understand and deal with the ‘central system’ too.

We identified three general ways to help LINSAS in this work:

- (1) Enhancing LINSAs’ capacities for the complex task of translation and local capacity building, providing expert knowledge, coaching, services, etc.;
- (2) Helping LINSAs in adapting to the ‘central requirements’ without losing their energy, identity, objectives (Csalán report, NATURAMA origin and function)
- (3) Initiating and nurturing alternative systems, where private or public resources become available for LINSAs with less political and bureaucratic burden.

According to the Hungarian SWOT analysis, the most important weaknesses for the success of Hungarian LINSAs within the AKS were (1) a general lack of cooperation; (2) high level of bureaucracy, centralization and institutional inflexibility and a lack of stability; (3) the extreme division of politics and its interference in every area of life; (4) negative personal qualities in communities.

Solution type (A) could help LINSAs in problem (1), (2) and (4). Solution type (B) would ease problem (2) and (3). Solution type (C) could mean another way around these problems and there are good, adaptable examples for this in European and international development.

Some concrete possible measures, tools

- To enhance networking and co-operation:
 - *Raising awareness of the importance of networking*
 - *Creating communicative space where networking is possible – internal networking (e.g. all of our LINSAs workshops); external networking, meeting stakeholders;*
 - *Special occasions for LINSAs to meet each-other*
 - *Personalized advice/coaching to LINSAs on how to approach, involve stakeholders (stakeholder management), how to extend horizontal networks, how to develop and maintain a volunteer network for the LINSAs, etc.*
 - *Develop (and fund) cooperation projects that can give body and meaning for cooperation and can serve as a hook/call-word for partners.*
- To enhance communication:
 - *Training and personalized advice on communications skills (e.g.: how to make a press release, how to approach the media, what to put on a website, etc.)*
- To maintain and improve activities
 - *Helping LINSAs with skills development (network and project management, communications, etc.) would help them to work more efficient;*
- To reduce the gap between research and LINSAs

- *Design trans-disciplinary research projects where LINSAs should set the agenda, commission the research institutes and experts, administer the money, etc.;*
- *Design small, flexible trans-disciplinary projects, where LINSAs can get expert help on particular issues;*
- *Binding funding opportunities with an obligation to explore more practical problems (action research, possibilities for researchers to work in agriculture/rural development on a sabbatical,);*
- *Finding ways of building personal connections between interested researchers and practitioners (meetings, projects, conferences, festivals – like the ‘researchers’ night’, etc.)*
-

5 CONCLUSION

Network and integration

G7 is an informal, voluntary partnership, a Network of Practice, uniting local actors committed to establish a more sustainable and healthy local food system in the region of Gödöllő. It consists of basically three kind of members:

- (1) *Action based organisations (Communities of Practice)*
- (2) *AKIS based organisations (Communities of Scientific Practice)*
- (3) *Committed individuals*

Different members of G7 have different values, aims and objectives, thus seek different roles for G7. *Group (1)* seeks an "umbrella organisation" that unites forces, helps networking, etc. *Group (2)* and (3) also wants to implement projects, thus besides an "umbrella" they also want an "action organisation". The two kinds, of course, should not be exclusive, however, they require quite different kinds of management, decision making, organisational structure, etc. By the time of SOLINSA entering the process the lack of G7's decision about the appropriate model resulted in problems, such as: unclear objectives and value system; insufficient funding; weak project management; internal tensions between members; failing external communication, etc.

Kinds of innovation and activities

Innovation initiated by G7 is fundamentally incremental, and its history can be divided in two phases. First phase activities aimed to (1) raise awareness of the local population about food sustainability and (2) connect local producers to customers (through events, providing information, building databases, etc.). This boundary work produced interactions and objects that can one by one be seen as novelties, but come together nicely as a more or less comprehensive niche. They clearly contribute to first order change, becoming part of the regime, connecting AKIS and society and enhancing local sustainability.

The second phase is the current process of developing the "Local sustainable food strategy" for the city. This is still incremental innovation, based on examples and existing knowledge. It is also supported and partly initiated by the

mayor and his deputy - principal depositories of the ruling overall regime. They intend to change the local food system to fit better the overall landscape of Gödöllő becoming an ecological city, thus the process at first sight it is likely to remain a first order change. However, to succeed, local leaders need to overcome well established local economic and political interests (forming part of the local AKIS, mainly in public catering and retail) opposing regime change. G7 as an umbrella NGO with strong connections to both local civil society and the AKIS represent an ideal alliance for this. Already the process of developing the food strategy have initiated significant changes of the regime, such as: (1) bringing together important stakeholders in a neutral communicative space; (2) introducing a new style and tools (workshops, facilitation, neutral communicative space,) to social and political discussion. If the "local sustainable food strategy" is ever completed and fully implemented, the local food system is likely to change significantly entailing at least some characteristics of second order change too.

Support and its results

SOLINSA started to co-operate with G7 in a critical moment, when it already demonstrated its effectiveness and became an important local actor, however, some major projects revealed the internal limits and difficulties of the organisation and G7 was in a process of searching for functional ways of operation. To successfully complete the challenge of developing a sustainable food strategy in partnership with the City G7 needed some assistance. SOLINSA arrived in the right time with the right offer to create new dynamism and bring some impetus into G7's work at a critical point of its organisational development. Otherwise, SOLINSA was providing three kind of soft support:

- (1) Definition of organisational problems followed by organisational development (we have reached good results, but G7 would probably need more of this kind of assistance);
- (2) Coaching throughout the development of a sustainable local food strategy (with special regard to working out the process of how to involve local stakeholders efficiently);
- (3) Facilitation on meetings and events, and capacity building (introducing workshop methods, mediation, conflict resolution, etc.)

We suggest that such kind of soft support for building capacities, skills, communication and reinforcing the identity and functioning of the organisation is, in general, one of the most important assistance that LINSAs can receive from external sources. G7 has made considerable progress during our co-operation, and if the overall circumstances (political support, "landscape") does not change, they have a good chance to further develop. However, we also suggest that at least occasional coaching and externally facilitated organisational development workshops at least once a year would be very beneficial for their work in the future.

APPENDIX



Agricultural Knowledge Systems In Transition:
Towards a more effective and efficient support of Learning
and Innovation Networks for Sustainable Agriculture

solinsa.net

GÖDÖLLŐ LOCAL FOOD COUNCIL (G7) HUNGARY



01. THE LINSIA

- A. Aim:** More sustainable and healthy local food system in Gödöllő
- B. Membership:** local green NGOs, researchers, entrepreneurs and individuals, committed to the issues dealt with by the organization, working in various fields
- C. Organisation:** G7 is an informal, voluntary partnership, a NOP

02. INTERACTIONS WITH THE SOLINSA PROJECT TEAM OVER THREE YEARS

| Initial meeting with LINSIA, Gödöllő | We lay the foundations for work, Gödöllő | Organisational development in, Szécsény | "G7 & friends" preparation of an, Gödöllő | "G7 & allies" we to build local network and support for food strategy | First stakeholder workshop hosted by the local government of Gödöllő |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|---|---|--|
| 24.05.2012 | 21.06.2012 | 23-24.11.2012 | 19.02.2013 | 12.03.2013 | 11.05.2013 |

03. HOW TO SUPPORT A LINSIA ?

- Organisational development
- Coaching during development of Local Sustainable Food Strategy
- Capacity building in networking, workshop methods and management

04. QUOTATIONS AND PICTURES

G7 is not a „garage band“ any more...

With SOLINSA we stepped out into the public

We have a chance now to unite public, private and civil forces and do something for health and sustainability...

