Summary of the first phase of mapping
(March 219)

Ökotárs staff members conducted interviews in 5 counties, two further members of the consortium (Autonómia Foundation and Civil College Foundation) made interviews in 4 other counties, while in the Northeastern region Carpathian Foundation mapped the situation of the attending civil society organizations during a workshop. There are still conversations to be conducted in 9 counties, but most of the interviews have been completed by now, and enough information has been collected to draw some preliminary conclusions. The conversations rather prepare the second phase of the joint work, so our focus was not to get a representative picture, but to have some impressions of the general situation.

We conducted interviews with a total of 58 active organizations, informal groups, individuals until February 21, 2019. The county breakdown is the following:

Bács-Kiskun county	4
Fejér county	10
Győr-Moson-Sopron county	9
Komárom-Esztergom county	7
Tolna county	5
Veszprém county	8
Zala county	12
Vas county	3

Civic activities

In recent years, traditional civil activity geared towards advocacy has decreased. This is due to several factors. On the one hand, the funding system of civil society was restructured, and now it does not necessarily favor such activities, many organizations even become defunct because of the lack of resources. On the other hand, there was a massive government smear campaign directed against the civil society organizations who work with reference to and for the public interest. This message has been effective, the organizations have understood that it is not worth confronting the authorities if they want to continue their operation undisrupted. At the same time to stand by the power, to legitimize it by participating in celebrations and collecting signatures, etc. proved to be particularly rewarding. In many places, the municipality allocates money to the active civil society organizations, which in most cases are organize settlement improvements/beautification, cultural events, sporting activities, and not engage in public affairs and advocacy. Such typical groups are neighborhood watches, voluntary fire brigades, organizations preserving traditions, song circles, sports clubs, etc.

Most of the interviewed organizations are critical of this situation, but they acknowledge it, and do not confront with the authorities. Besides this, they try to exist independently from the parties. Most of them are busy with their own everyday problems, trying to enforce community interests without confrontation. In many cases, they have suitable resources and contacts to do this, but they cannot plan ahead, and exploit their means at a maximum. As a result very few are open to new initiatives because they spend most of their resources on their day-to-day tasks and cannot afford to take up more activities.

Networks of local civil society organizations, experiences of cooperation

Civil society organizations operating in a given region and settlement know each other fairly well, but the willingness to cooperate varies widely among interviewees. The promoters of local cultural and community life are happy to work together with similar groups, they count on the participation of the other cultural players mostly at local events – this cooperation is mutual. However, the opposite is true as well: there were organizations who reported about rivalry among the organizations, and others who thought that ideas, resources, relationships were "stolen" from each other, and that had corrupted collaboration. Politics also entered the scene and divided the previously well-functioning civil sector.

There are also local organizations that "dominate" civil life, they receive all the major local and county funds, and share these with other organizations in the neighborhood through collaboration and as consortium partners. They eventually have a networking function, due to their activities they are cooperating with many, but here we can rather talk about a centralized resource allocation. We met such organizations in Vas and Zala.

Another interesting feature is the size of the settlement: in small settlements it is very typical that there is a large overlap between the civil sector and the local government. In many cases, the leaders of the organizations have had previous positions in local and regional politics, and there may also be members of municipal assemblies in the organizations, so they work together on the issues of the settlement.

Positive experiences, local needs and continuation

Most of the interviewed organizations meet their expectations, find the sources they need for their day-to-day operation, and partners at local level, too. We also found cultural organizations that work on community-building activities in cooperation with – and not depend on – the local government, other local groups, partly financed by EU funds. They employ local people, volunteers, and are open to further cooperation if they had the capacity to do so. In the counties of Fejér and Győr, we met with organizations that reported to be able to cooperate with local companies: they received support from them and participated in their CSR activities. Others said that they complemented the budget required for their operation with providing services: consultancy, writing proposals and other forprofit activities.

Identifying their specific own needs has generally been difficult for the respondents. Naturally, the lack of resources as a key problem has always come up. Some people handle creatively, e.g. by considering to start a social enterprise, and expecting support for this purpose.

Communication skills have also emerged as basic criteria for more efficient operation. The upcoming municipal election was not in the focus of the respondents who try to remain party-neutral and keep themselves out of politics, and activities around the voting is clearly associated with politics.

Most respondents were a bit skeptical about our ideas for networking, training, and knowledge transfer. Among other things, they referred to a lack of capacity and time, and typically many had been involved in similar trainings and forums which usually did not met their expectations. However, we can say that in general the interviewees did not refuse continuation. They are seemingly open, and do not want to miss anything. Fortunately, there are organizations that are willing to take on the role of initiator locally, and to generate a dialogue with the organizations around them. We can start the second phase of the program with them.

Questionnaire survey

During the mapping period we also used an online questionnaire to collect basic information about the organizations, which was filled by 41 respondents between 05.05.2018 and 02.09.2019 including respondents from Békés and Csongrád counties. We interviewed 20 respondents so far, another 21 have not been available for discussion yet.

The main conclusions of the questionnaire are the following:

Two-thirds (65,9%) of the organizations/groups have been operating for more than 10 years, only two are "newbies" among them, who started their activities less than 3 years ago.

A little more than half (24) of the organizations/groups are active in youth and child affairs, and exactly the same number of organizations specified culture and tradition as their field of activity. 23 organizations work on community development and community building, and 18 aim to strengthen socially vulnerable groups. Nearly half of the respondents (19) carry out activities in the fields of sports and leisure. 10 organizations/groups work in the environmental field and the same number of organizations are engaged in health and/or social affairs. 8 organizations/groups specified human

rights and democracy as their field of activity, and four of the respondents chose women and equal opportunities as their main issue. 5 organizations gave individual responses regarding their field of operation, including urbanization, rural development, prevention of stigmatization, and playful education.

More than two-thirds of the respondents are engaged in continuous activities (as opposed to being active just occasionally). The interviewed organizations and groups work with an active core team of 10-20 people on average, but variance in the number of active members is very high, teams with 5-6 and with 25-30 active people are not unusual either.

More than two-thirds (73.2%) of the respondents would need financial resources to make progress, but the demand for human resources also appeared in half of the responses. In addition, more than half of those who filled out the questionnaire would need support in fundraising. This was followed by the need of know-how related to network development (39%), communication (31.7%), and community development (26.8%). 9 organizations/groups would require training in communication and project planning, and one person mentioned knowledge needed to establish social enterprises as means to help to achieve their goals.

More than one-third (39%) of the organizations/groups have the capacity and cooperate with organizations working in the same area, but several of them (29%) would also be willing to exchange information and cooperate, but do not have the time for these due to lack of capacity.

A bit more than the half of the respondents (23) came up with suggestions regarding cooperation, the majority of those who named a topic/issue referred to their own neighborhood, and only a few thought that organizations working in the same region should cooperate in the field of advocacy and common issues.

According to the answers to the question concerning "neglected" issues, we can say environment protection, youth support and dealing with homeless people appeared as unattended problems in some of the regions. Nevertheless, there is also need for education in the field of democracy and active citizenship in several settlements and regions, too.