“European cooperation gives us a lot of ideas to solve our local issues”

an interview with ENCC member A Vértes Agorája

During our Travelling Academy in Romania last November, we met with Pal Szenasi (Community Developer and Foreign Affairs Officer) and Tibor Pap (Event Management and Group Leader) who work for ENCC member A Vértes Agorája (Tatabánya, Hungary). They shared their perspective about integrating culture and art in their community and the importance of European cooperation for their local activities.

Pal (left) and Tibor (right), A Vértes Agorája

Photo credit: Clémence Garnier (ENCC)

ENCC: A Vértes Agorája joined the ENCC community in 2017 and we are very happy to get the chance to meet you during this Travelling Academy. Could you please first present your organisation in a few words?

Pal Szenasi: We are also glad to be here! A Vértes Agorája is based in Tatabánya, Hungary. It’s a multifunctional cultural organisation dealing with community development and also organising sport and family events, with a special attention to minority groups and young people. We do talent recognition, too.

ENCC: Could you tell us more about your city and the diversity you were referring to?

Pal Szenasi: Tatabánya is a city of 65,000 inhabitants at the foot of the Gerecse Mountains in the northwest of Hungary. In term of diversity, we have German, Slovakian and Greek as well as Roma communities.
**ENCC:** Why is it important to give access to culture and art in your community in Tatabánya? How do your activities work towards that goal?

**Pal Szenasi:** Tatabánya is an industrial city, with a short history, and a lot of minority groups as well as immigrants from other parts of Hungary. The immigrants who come to work in Tatabánya don’t have family and friends here when they arrive. Only a good job. But maybe at some point a good job is not enough to give a sense of belonging to a place. They can’t really build a life just around their work environment. They need more. And I think culture is a great way to help them develop the feeling of belonging somewhere. Through culture and art, we give them opportunity to express themselves as they like. Entertaining people through cultural events is not just about having fun, but also about bringing them together. They can meet up, make connections, meet new friends ... And when somebody has good memory about a place or an event, they feel more like they belong to this place. Through cultural and community development events, we also help them to know their own city better as well as their surroundings. In this case, if they have a better understanding of the history of Tatabánya, as well as of their own background and future, through getting to know their new community, they can have the feeling of belonging to the city, too. So, we don’t only develop events but also long-term solutions for our community.

**ENCC:** In this local context, why is it important for your organisation to be in contact with other European organisations, through the ENCC for instance?

**Pal Szenasi:** One of the fundamental mission statements of our organisation is continuous development, basically. That means: always looking for modern and creative solutions in order to develop our community. I think the best way to refresh our way of thinking and our methods is to open up and see which other solutions exist, and so to regularly meet up with other organisations working in the same field in other countries in Europe. Like right here [in Timisoara during ENCC Travelling Academy], within one day, I talked to three or four people who had problems similar to ours, but who overcame them whereas we are still struggling with them. So, European cooperation gives us a lot of ideas to solve our local issues. Indeed, when we are thinking in an international perspective, we are also thinking at the same time about the local level, and how to use that perspective for our communities.

**ENCC:** Do you also organise European activities for the people of your community?

**Pal Szenasi:** Yes, since 2016 we have participated in an Erasmus project. In this project, we focus more on young people by organising youth exchanges, international voluntary experiences such as EVS [editor’s note: European Volunteer Service]. But now, with the ENCC, we would like to extend the focus to other age groups as well, such as adults, elderly people, families,... We now have more opportunities, through the ENCC, to find new solutions and develop international programs for these other age groups. It’s very useful to be part of a network. It’s so much easier to meet new partners while drinking a coffee at an ENCC event, and getting to know five people in five minutes...
Tibor Pap: And our cultural organisation doesn’t only offer programmes and activities to the people of our city only, but also to the people living in the smaller villages around us. We try to build good relationships with them and help them organise their own events and improve their own communities. So, it’s not like we go to these villages, do the activities and go back home. We also give trainings to the cultural leaders based there, so that they can develop their own events without our help. It’s not occasional, it’s a long-term way of thinking. And in our trainings we also share our experiences in European cooperation activities. So that knowledge benefits not only our communities in Tatabánya, but also the whole surrounding territory.

Read more about A Vértes Agorája

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