

Imola Balla

“Swing Ticket” Programme – Establishing a Community Playground

1. Best practice selection criteria

The Swing Ticket programme of Téka Foundation is a success story that can be an example to be followed in the whole Carpathian Basin. The Hungarian Language Theoretical Grammar School in Gherla was inaugurated in 2016 and the Swing Ticket programme aimed at establishing a playground in the schoolyard. The most modern and at the same time safest playground and workout park in town was built as a result of community cooperation.

2. Organization(s) / person(s) the best practice can be related to

Gherla (Szamosújvár) is situated in Cluj County, 45 km north of Cluj Napoca, in Transylvania. Téka Foundation was established in Gherla in 1993. Our objective is to help diaspora Hungarians living in the Transylvanian Plain; assist and develop local community culture, education, youth and other communities. As an acknowledgement of our activities, our organization has been awarded among others the “Könczei Ádám”, “Ipolyi Arnold” and “For Minorities” Awards, as well as the silver memorial medal of the Hungarian Parliament. Téka Foundation is one of the “Institutions of National Significance” of the Hungarian government. Throughout history, Hungarians in the Transylvanian Plain have suffered considerably, while they have contributed to the Hungarian national heritage by significant cultural and historical values. Raising awareness of this fact, we have been making progress step by step since the political change in Romania, by interpreting the diaspora situation not as a disadvantage but as a challenge. We are challenged to build strongholds to protect the borders of Hungarian language and culture in our region.

Our Institutions:

- Téka Centre for Diaspora Culture,
- Téka Diaspora Boarding School of the Transylvanian Plain
- Transylvanian Plain Camp Centre of Laku
- Heritage House Museum and Community Centre of Laku
- Community House of Sanmartin
- Transylvanian Plain School Centre for the Disapora
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IV. Public education and culture programme for the diaspora

The regular activities offered based on a weekly timetable schedule at Téka Cultural Centre are attended by over 600 persons. A major objective of our larger-scale events is to (re)occupy the room we deserve at the cultural level.

In 2018 the following large-scale events are organized:

- 22nd International Folk Dance Festival
- 18th Local History Summer Camp
- 22nd Kaláka Camp in Laku
- 19th Autumn Festival
- 22nd Transylvanian Plain Folk Music and Folk Dance Festival
- 13th Mother Tongue Contest
- 18th Meeting of Nativity Players
- 10th Handicraft Camp
- 5th Literary Camp
- 3rd Music Camp

VII. Education programme for the diaspora in the Transylvanian plain

The Education Programme for the Diaspora in the Transylvanian Plain ensures education in the mother tongue for the Hungarian diaspora in the Transylvanian Plain in a coordinated and purposeful way, in the long run. Within the framework of the programme our organization undertook to set up and run a boarding school as well as build a centre for diaspora education in the Transylvanian Plain.

Téka Diaspora Boarding School of the Transylvanian Plain was established in 2001. Students from classes 5-12 attend from villages in the Transylvanian Plain and Kallós Boarding School in Rascruci (Válaszút). In the academic year 2017-18 we had 120 attending students.

We inaugurated the Hungarian Education Centre of the Transylvanian Plain in 2016. The reason underlying the project is that the only way to attain significant advance in controlling assimilation is by providing a higher-level and better equipped educational institution with better background conditions than the average schools of the majority population.

VIII. Lake region development programme

Our programme aims to support the modernization efforts of villages in the lake region. The major objectives of the Lake Region Programme are to set up “action groups” with the cooperation of persons responsible for the community life of respective settlements; map local material and intellectual resources; establish a heritage house at each diaspora settlement of considerable size; establish and equip multifunctional community spaces; popularize the settlements joining the programme from the point of view of tourism (by making websites, tourism advertising materials, creating cultural routes); present the local cultural offer in a quality system.

3. Stakeholders and beneficiaries of the best practice

The beneficiaries of the best practice are the 470 students attending the Hungarian Language Theoretical Grammar School in Gherla. The playground was designed for students of the ages of 6-12; the workout park for those above 12 years of age, while the zip line is popular with every student as well as the teachers teaching at the school.

4. Objectives and activities of the best practice

Téka Foundation's Swing Ticket project was launched in autumn 2017; it aimed to establish, as a result of civil cooperation, a playground for the Hungarian school. It was for the second time that Gherla proved that community cooperation was exemplary. The first time they had supported the building of a Hungarian school by buying brick tickets; this time, the community had a playground built without tender applications, by buying swing tickets.

There were bronze, silver, gold and diamond swing tickets available worth RON 10, 50, 100 and 1000. In addition to the students and teachers of our school, more than 150 companies and private persons considered it important that children should spend the breaks, too, under high-quality circumstances. Several of the sponsors are partners of Téka Foundation who had contributed to the maintenance of the diaspora boarding school before and invested in this project this year. Accordingly, RON 56,780 was collected via the swing tickets. The total value of the investment was RON 78,860; the missing RON 22,080 was added by Téka Foundation. When designing and choosing the elements of the playground we made sure that in addition to having the traditional elements, the park should meet the challenges of modern age, too, so that as many generations as possible should be able to use it simultaneously.

All class communities at our school regarded it as important to buy swing tickets from their pocket money for this noble purpose. It is important in everybody's life to be accepted by a community and to feel a member of this community, build a relations network, meet new people and be able to establish new relationships. Cooperation among Hungarians in Gherla was exemplary.

Parents from Gherla, older students and those living at the boarding school performed voluntary work for shaping the terrain on two occasions; they did digging, raking, moved earth and performed plastering work, so much of the work was done without having to pay for it.

The names of those who bought swing tickets displayed on a board near the playground lets know that it is the number that counts.

5. Area(s) affected by the best practice

This best practice made the community in Gherla cooperate; beyond community building we wished to develop the social competence of people living here and taught our students to be unselfish and helpful. The students of the school are proud of this implementation, use the new spaces with joy and handle them with care as if their own.

6. Territorial scope of the best practice

The territorial scope of the Swing Ticket programme is Gherla primarily. We expected it was Hungarians in Gherla primarily who would be open to spending money, time and energy on establishing a playground at our school. It came as a surprise that donations were offered one after the other from all over the world. Numerous persons originally from Gherla and the Transylvanian Plain spent huge amounts on this purpose. Seeing the latter we came up with the idea of organizing a “Meeting of expatriates”, for which we are looking for a suitable time and framework.

7. The conditions (human, financial, technical) required for the best practice

A prerequisite for the success of the Swing Ticket programme was an enthusiastic team of voluntaries who planned, organized, purchased things for and supervised the construction. Being a voluntary in this case in fact meant not getting paid at all; from plastering work to assembling, accounting and advertising on a continuous basis, everything was carried out by the enthusiastic team of voluntaries. Fundraising was first advertised in autumn 2017 and until the inauguration in May 2018, the target amount was collected with the help of continuous advertising. The role of the media should be outlined here: radio and television channels in Cluj County were partner in this project, disseminating information about our programme.

Although we speak of community cooperation, I do think it would not have succeeded if there had not been a foundation in the background that had credit, which was trusted by people knowing that the money would be used for the purpose it was advertised for. The role of Téka Foundation is unquestionable; in addition to supporting the project all the way through, it also had a financial share in it and added the missing amount.

8. Results and short-, mid- and long-term impact of the best practice

The objectives set in the Swing Ticket programme were implemented: as a result of community cooperation, a playground was built in the yard of the Hungarian Language Theoretical Grammar School in Gherla. The playground is used by small students in the breaks between the lessons, while upper primary school and secondary school students build muscles in the outdoor workout park designed for them. They do not only use the workout park in the breaks but also within the framework of the Physical Education lesson. PE teachers design training plans for the students and supervise the training, too.

9. Sustainability of the best practice

The community playground and workout park established as a result of the project are durable; when selecting the attractions, we carefully made sure that the elements should meet the latest EU standards and preferred companies that guaranteed quality in the long run.

We opened the playground for public use 3 months ago; there has been a constant presence of groups of children and we are proud that it still reflects a novel condition.

10. Adaptability of the best practice

Swing Ticket programme can be adapted to any geographical area where there is a civil organization available that undertakes to manage the project. Fundraising must always serve a noble purpose: community interest. Beyond material implementation it has a community building force; the inhabitants of the settlement concerned are proud of their voluntary and charity activity.