

# COMMUNITY PLANNING OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE CENTRAL BOHEMIA REGION

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**Abstract:** *The community planning of social services (CPSS) method focuses at planning the development of social services at a local and regional level. CPSS ensures the effective functioning of social services and allows for the efficient use of funds. The goal is to provide accessible services at a level of higher-quality, which respond to the current needs of users and are transparent, with funding allotted only to those services which are really needed etc.*

**Keywords:** *Community Planning, Social Services, Central Bohemia Region, Community Planning Method, the Law on Social Services, Development Plan, Planning Process.*

## 1. Introduction

Community planning is becoming one of the necessary techniques or methods of decision making in the 21st century, where the concerned parties are involved in the heart of the decision-making process. Community planning is an instrument which actively engages the public by involving them in the decision-making process for a given location and may pertain to any essential area such as social services, public landscaping, cultural events, social activities, and many others. The process itself naturally has certain methods and procedures which must be followed to achieve the intended outcomes of community planning.

In this article we will primarily examine community planning for social services in the Central Bohemia Region and focus on the process of planning the development of social services.

## 2. History of the community planning method

Community planning in the Czech Republic dates back to the passage of Act no.108/2006 Coll., on social services, as subsequently amended, although prior to this there had already been instances in the Czech Republic of community planning which focused on local problems. A good example of this is the statutory city of Ústí nad Labem, which has been community planning since 1995. Today, the regions are required to plan the development of social services through medium-term plans for the region in cooperation with towns, the providers of social services, and users. The method upon which this process is to be based is the community planning method.

## 3. The law on social services and the community planning method

The community planning method, as it relates to social services, is founded on the following principles: emphasis on the active role of the users of social services and representation of their interests in the planning process; involvement of a wide range of people, emphasis on negotiation, and empowerment of the public to supervise the decision-making process, as well as implementation of the community plan itself.

**Act no. 108/2006 Coll., on social services**, as subsequently amended (*hereinafter the law*) introduces **fundamental obligations with respect to social service development planning**.

As a result of the passage of amendment no. 206/2009 the following changes have been made (effective as of 1.8.2009): in §3 let. h) the basic framework of the medium-term plan is defined, i.e. : ... *the result of the process of actively determining the needs of persons in the specified area and seeking means for meeting these needs using available resources, the content of which is the description of the manner of preparing the plan and analysis of existing resources and needs of the people for whom the social services are intended, including economic assessment, strategies for providing and developing social services, obligations of participating subjects, the manner of monitoring and assessing fulfillment of the plan, and the manner in which changes may be made in the provision of social services.*

The region is required to prepare (pursuant to §95 let. d): ... *a medium-term development plan for social services in cooperation with the municipalities of the region, with the representatives of social service providers, and the representatives of persons to whom social services are provided, and to inform regional municipalities of the results determined in the planning process; to take into account when formulating the regional plan all information provided by the municipalities according to §94 let. e), as well as data entered into the registry according to §85 par. 5. Additionally, it is required to monitor and assess (§95 let. e) ... fulfillment of the development plan for social services with the participation of representatives of social service providers and representatives of persons to whom social services are provided, and municipal representatives. The region ...shall inform the ministry of fulfillment of the social service development plan (§95 let. f) and also ensure access to social services provided within its territory in accordance with the medium-term social services development plan. The following paragraph of the law (§96 let. b) also sets forth the obligations of the ministry, which *prepares a medium-term national social services development plan with the participation of the regions, representatives of social service providers, and representatives of persons for whom the social services are provided.**

An integral component of requests for regional subsidies from the state budget is the medium-term social service development plan appendix (§101, par. 4, let. b), which also contains an economic analysis of the needs identified in the plan and their manner of funding. The subsidy itself is provided for financing standard expenditures associated with the provision of social services in accordance with the prepared medium-term social service development plan (§101, par. 2) and the amount of this subsidy is determined based upon the prepared medium-term social service development plan (§101, par. 5, let. b) which gives a list of the social service providers (§101, par. 3, let. c) for which the subsidy is requested, in accordance with §95 let. g).

**Additionally, in § 2 the law on social services defines the national priorities which social services must meet. These are:**

- to preserve human dignity,
- to be based on individually determined needs,
- to foster independence,
- to foster social integration
- to provide assistance and support of appropriate quality,
- to ensure the preservation of human rights and basic freedoms.

**Czech Government Decree no. 824 of September 1st, 2004** – this government decree regarding the strategy for supporting the availability and quality of public services **requires**

**individual ministries to use the community planning method** when addressing questions of the availability and quality of public services.

#### **4. The community planning method**

As implied in the name itself, this approach is based on certain communities of persons who are joined together by some particular thing. If we are speaking of community planning at the municipal level, then this will entail all the citizens of the given locality/municipality. We may also define a community based upon the common values, cultural heritage, common interests or shared problems of people. The structure of a community may thus be founded on formal or informal groupings. Perhaps the closest conceptual construct for community planning in the Czech Republic is a community formed based upon the perception of the common good. Community according to this definition is something which can be achieved through the efforts of citizens, not something which is given through geographical conditions. Community thus takes on dimensions no longer represented by mere statistics. Planning in such case means a process, which in fundamental aspects differs from other methods of strategic planning. Community planning is founded on basic principles, where unconditional emphasis is placed on the active participation and role of the users of social services (in the area of social services), on the inclusion of a broad range of people and other professionals who are knowledgeable in the given area, and where the conclusions arrived at during planning must subsequently be tested against the wishes, needs, and interests of citizens. The process itself is accompanied by often lengthy negotiations of all interested parties and public supervision over the decision-making process and subsequent implementation.

Three parties are involved in the decision-making process of community planning for social services (clearly the most widespread area of community planning in the Czech Republic). These are: the public along with the users of social services, the providers of social services, and the contracting authority (representatives of the municipality, region, etc.). All of these parties should be guaranteed equal rights. For this reason, we often speak of the triad.

##### **The community planning process should be broken down into seven basic phases:**

1. preparation for bringing all partners into the community planning process,
2. creation of organizational structures,
3. determination and analysis of needs,
4. definition of goals, priorities, and measures within the scope of the given area,
5. drafting of a final community plan,
6. implementation of the proposed goals in the plan,
7. general and ongoing evaluation.

To maintain the basic principles of community planning, before beginning the community planning itself we must first address the public, as well as the political representatives of the given area. Even in these initial stages we may encounter our first problems. For a community plan to be carried out in practice, it is important to be prepared for skepticism of the process itself. If the process is initiated from below (by the public), then this initial stage often takes considerable time before it gains political support. If the process is instituted from above (from the contracting authority – region, town etc.), then the process is easier. Nevertheless, it is necessary to focus on communication with municipal or regional politicians and explain to them the ways in which the community planning technique is important.

Also important is the proper and effective inclusion of social service providers. It is good to explain to them that participation in the community planning process gives them opportunities to make suggestions for solving the social service challenges in the given area, to support the introduction of new necessary social services, and it puts them inside the process where they can influence political decisions as well as the allocation of the funding which affects them. The community planning process thus ensures the development of necessary social services which react not only to demand, but also the particular local conditions and time constraints, therefore more effectively meeting the needs of current and future users.

Inclusion of active social service users is at the foundation of the community planning process. It is also the most difficult component, along with maintaining the participation of these users over the long term. Here in particular, personal communication with the users of social services is most effective. Users may be addressed directly (telephone surveys, advertising in local papers, internet surveys etc.) or indirectly through the provider (for example people with addictions). It is absolutely essential to use simple language which users will understand. Avoid technical terminology which users, unlike the providers and the contracting authority, will not understand. Also, it is essential to provide users with sufficient information on the community planning process.

The general public may be included through process consultations, information campaigns, the collection of community plan comments or the organization of public meetings together with the providers, etc.

The composition of organizational structures is often different, even though in certain aspects organizational structures are similar. Important differences may be found in the rules for decision making and approval, in the position of the community planning coordinator, and the functioning of the triad. The generally recommended practice is to create work groups for individual groups of users (such as seniors, persons with physical disabilities, etc.) upon whom the community planning process is focused. The work groups should be open and should include representation for the contracting authority, the providers, and the users. In most cases, a steering group is created, often comprised of political representatives. This group processes the comments, suggestions, opinions and proposals from the work groups and works these into a final version to be submitted for comments from the members of the work groups. In the final phase, the steering group submits a final version of the community plan for approval by political representatives.

For the actual planning of specific activities to occur, it is first necessary to map, describe, and analyze current resources for providing social services. One must determine what kind of services are currently offered, at what quality, cost, and to whom. Furthermore, what kind of social situation is perceived by the public or municipal representatives, what kind of plans are envisioned by service providers, and additional information. This information may be obtained through polls, questionnaires, interviews, or telephone surveys. This enables one to obtain an overview of the services provided, details about individual services (e.g. overviews of funding allocated to social services, sources of funding, costs for individual services etc.).

After mapping the current situation, shortcomings, and needs for social services comes the phase where all participants must answer questions: What kind of services do we want to have? What do we want to attain (vision, goals), on what level, for how long (plan, timeline), with the help of what (available resources), by what steps (activities, measures) and who will take these steps (who will carry out the measures, who will be responsible, who will evaluate)?

## **5. Possible pitfalls of community planning**

As is evident from the aforementioned principles, great emphasis is placed on the ability to freely express opinions and the need to ensure a non-discriminatory approach. In practice this may result in friction, conflicts, or additional problems in communication. The needs and goals of the political representatives of the given locale, the providers of social services, and their users all exert pressure on one another. Even if each of these participants has different needs, a clear goal should always remain within view, namely an improved and higher quality life for local inhabitants.

If we understand community planning to be the ability to involve the public in the decision-making process, we must take into account the fact that just about anyone can put their two cents in regarding important matters, even those with insufficient qualifications and education to address the given matter, or those who are combative. Further, we must not forget that the people who become involved in this process may know each other personally. These personal relations may have both a positive impact, as when exchanging experience, or a negative impact, as when seeking consensus.

For these reasons it is necessary to include additional subjects in the community planning process, people who already have experience in public involvement, project management, economics, and community planning. Such well targeted methodical support may help avoid possible obstacles from the very beginning. During meetings between what is often a very large and diverse number of people, it is important for someone to lead the discussion. A good facilitator or mediator may be a great boon during negotiations and particularly in attaining very important joint consensus.

Another obstacle may be the financial demands of the process. Even if in most cases there are no objections to participation in work groups, the process itself requires considerable funding. The primary cost is the wage for the community planning coordinator, while additional funds are required for contracting various types of analyses to examine the current situation. Here, it is necessary in advance to define what is to be determined. Socio-demographic data can be determined by the organization/office itself (especially if it uses resources such as ČSÚ, MPSV and others), but for benchmarking costs, it is good to get an expert. These analyses can run from one hundred thousand up to a million crowns. For these reasons, it is good to count on the possible use of these analyses for future periods.

## **6. The Central Bohemia region and the social service development planning process**

The Central Bohemia region began the community planning process in 2005. The first medium-term social service development plan was compiled and approved in 2007, and was created for 2008 – 2009. Presently, approval is underway of the 2nd medium-term social service development plan for 2010-2011.

The organizational structure for planning social service development in the Central Bohemia region consists of 6 basic work groups which focus on 6 basic social areas (seniors; families, youth and children; persons with physical disabilities; persons at risk of addiction; persons at risk of social exclusion; persons experiencing temporary crises). These work groups are made up of providers, users, and representatives of KÚ SK (the contracting authority).

Newly created in the organization structure is the professional work group consisting of representatives of towns, the association of towns and microregions in the Central Bohemia

region, who are already using community planning, and the KÚ SK interdisciplinary group which assesses and provides feedback on goals or analyses in individual fields (finance, education, social affairs, and health care) and also actively shares in creating this strategic document.

For the plan itself to be more than just a formal document, political support of the entire process is necessary. For these reasons a Regional Coordination Commission has been created, headed by the councilman for social affairs. This commission is incorporated into the organizational structure of the entire planning process and by its statutes has become a permanent advisory body and initiator for the councilman for social affairs.

The most important step in 2009 was updating the current plan for 2008-2009. Participants in the social service development planning process came together at a meeting with experienced facilitators where they updated the current goals and measures and sought to define the positives and negatives in the Central Bohemia region with respect to the availability and quality of social services. These updated goals and measures were implemented into the updated plan for 2010-2011 and underwent the comment and review process.

The basic concept of the plan along with goals and measures was publicly disclosed on the region's website in July 2009, where participants in the process as well as the general public could submit comments. After considering and incorporating these comments, the plan was submitted to the Committee for Social Affairs (approved on 25.8. 2009), after approval it was submitted to the Regional Board (approved by Ruling no. 075-31/2009/RK of 31.8. 2009) and ultimately it will be submitted to the Regional Assembly for final approval.

The most important activity in updating the current medium-term plan for 2008-2009 was the renewal in work groups of individual goals and measures. Additional activity, especially in the interdisciplinary group, involved the centralization of the individual outputs from the various activities and analyses of the Regional office, which provided important material for this document. Also used were the results and requests from individual towns (level III) which participated in the community planning process. All of the goals set forth in the medium-term social services development plan for 2010-2011 were analyzed with respect to all available municipal community plans. From this analysis it was determined that no fundamental goals for social services were missing from this list.

Practically the entire organizational structure which took part in creating the social service development plan adhered to the established methodology (Methodology for planning social services MPSV 2007) as well as the MPSV criteria for quality social service planning, which was used as a basic framework for the work itself and the compilation of the plan.

## **7. Conclusion**

Community planning is a process which requires a certain amount of courage from local government. During community planning the public gets the chance to actively express itself regarding happenings in the given locality. Nevertheless, community planning can yield great benefits (provided the established goals are achieved in practice).

The community planning of social services (CPSS) method aims at planning the development of social services on the local and regional level. CPSS thus ensures the effective functioning of social services and enables efficient use of funds. The goal is to provide high-quality, accessible services which respond to the current needs of users and are transparent, with funding allotted only to those services which are necessary, etc.

The most salient characteristic of community planning is the emphasis placed on the inclusion all parties affected by the area in question, on partnership, dialogue and negotiations, and on achieving results which are acceptable and supported by the majority of participants. The chief participants in the community planning of social services are municipalities or regions as the contracting authority, the providers and users of social services, and the public.

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