

## **Lifelong Learning in Public Community Culture in Hungary**

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### **Abstract:**

**Introduction:** The importance of non-formal and informal learning is gaining increasing prominence in academic research (Chernenko, 2023; Corrales-Herrero & Rodríguez-Padro, 2018; Juhász, 2018). This study explores the appearance of lifelong learning (LLL) in the legal framework of Hungary's cultural sector, examining how various pieces of legislation interact to regulate the field.

**Methods:** Based on Hungarian legal regulations, researchers analysed empirical data from the 2023 cultural statistics in order to explore the role a segment of the cultural sector can play in lifelong learning activities.

**Results:** The article highlights the success of institutional providers, with over 700,000 participants in popular science lectures and more than 22,000 in training.

**Discussion:** Employees with specialised higher education play a key role in LLL.

**Limitations:** The scope of the study was limited to the year of 2023.

**Conclusions:** Our study concludes that public community culture is an indispensable factor in expanding knowledge among Hungarians, making it a key factor of lifelong learning in small communities.

**Key words:** community culture, cultural learning, lifelong learning, lifewide learning.

### **Introduction**

The role of lifelong learning (LLL) has become increasingly important these days, as it is expected to solve challenges generated by the aging of society, the drastic decrease in the birth rate, or the lack of skilled labour (Chernenko, 2023). Nowadays, there is an increasing emphasis not only on formal learning in the

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school system, but also on learning in the non-formal and informal dimensions when it comes to capital accumulation, so the acceptance of the view that these types of learning activities can also be considered as means of strengthening and developing human capital is growing. (Chernenko, 2023; Corrales-Herrero & Rodríguez-Padro, 2018; Juhász, 2018).

*Közművelődés* (hereinafter: public community culture) – a unique cultural system of Hungary and the Carpathian Basin –, as an institutionalized field, provides the opportunity for every individual to participate in the process, in addition to the institutional system of adult education and vocational training. The learning activity implemented in this way is called cultural learning, which is a process that takes place in the aforementioned non-formal and informal dimensions and utilizes the tools and system of culture (Juhász & Szabó, 2016; Juhász, 2017; Juhász & Kenyeres, 2018).

The aim of our study is to examine how public community culture and LLL are linked in Hungarian legal regulation, and to outline the numerical results of the area's activities in this field by re-analysing public community culture's statistical data from 2023. This information helps to strengthen and develop the adult education activities of public community culture (Simándi, 2023), moreover, research in adult education and vocational training are supplemented with information related to lifelong learning in the cultural sector, thus making research on participation rates in adult education more complex.

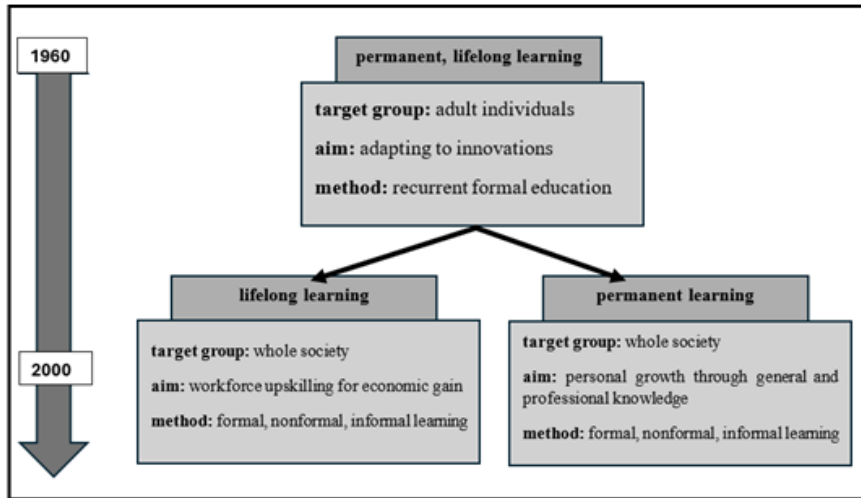
## **1 Changes in the concept and meaning of lifelong learning**

Clarifying the concept of LLL is not an easy task, as the meaning continues to change alongside with the development of our world. Maróti (2015) points out that the idea that learning should not end by finishing school emerged two centuries ago in France in the 1790s, but the first use of the term *lifelong learning* dates back only to 1929, introduced by Basil A. Yeaxlee (Smith, 1996; 2001; Clark, 2005; Hursen, 2016). The meaning associated with the concepts of lifelong learning – and lifelong education – has undergone a great change since the beginning of the 20th century (Németh, 2001). The issue of definition has occupied researchers for decades, given the lack of a general scientific definition (Bardócz, 1999; Harangi, 2009; Flick-Takács, 2021). This may be caused by the fact that the actual meaning has always been somewhat modified by the term currently in use (Csoma, 2011).

One of the most significant milestones in our present interpretation of LLL can be considered the UNESCO World Conference on Adult Education in Montreal, where in 1960 the inevitability of continuous learning was declared, and the term "*lifelong, permanent learning*" was chosen to describe it (Csoma, 2011). As a

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result of the development of different views, the concept of “lifelong, permanent learning” gradually separated by the end of the 20th century, with its elements carrying different meanings. The transformation has been summarized in Figure 1 to help understanding.



*Figure 1.* Changes in the concept and meaning of lifelong learning between 1960 and 2000 (own editing based on Csoma, 2011).

The economic focus “sticking” to LLL is also supported by the Memorandum (2000), which defined two basic pillars as the goal of the process: the promotion of active citizenship and employability, which is clearly of economic importance. In line with this, the possession of the skills required for LLL is now considered a fundamental condition for maintaining work capacity (Seevaratnam et al., 2023).

The need for LLL became a leading idea in the 2000s, thanks to which the Commission of the European Communities created the strategic document entitled *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (2000). The work also introduces the concept of life wide learning (hereinafter LWL), which is often used as a synonym for LLL (Kuthy-Megyesi & Takács-Miklósi, 2018).

Grouping learning forms according to LWL, formal learning is understood as processes that take place in school-based institutions. The results of these are

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recognized with a certificate or professional qualification, while non-formal learning takes place outside of school-based education and training systems with the aim of acquiring new knowledge. This form of learning is usually not recognized with a formal qualification. The common characteristic of the two learning forms is that the individual consciously participates in the process of increasing his or her knowledge. When learning is a natural addition to our everyday lives, and often the individual participating in the process is not even aware that he or she is gaining new knowledge, we speak of the informal learning form (Commission of the European Communities, 2000; Clark, 2005; Forray & Juhász, 2009). Clark (2005) points out that the main difference between informal and formal/non-formal learning processes is not that the individual does not want to learn while doing it informally, but that the individual does not participate in the given activity with the primary aim of learning. It should be emphasized that individual learning activities cannot be classified into just one dimension. The concept of the hidden curriculum emphasizes that at the same time with conscious learning, unplanned effects also affect students (e.g. the behaviour of the teacher), from which the student can also learn (Szabó, 2022). In this sense, whether formal or non-formal learning occurs, the informal dimension is always present, it continuously affects the individual.

In accordance with the above, in our study we use and accept the interpretation of the LLL paradigm according to which it includes all activities during which an individual acquires knowledge from birth to death, in formal, non-formal and informal learning settings.

## **2 The theoretical role of public community culture in lifelong learning**

### *2.1 The cultural dimension of lifelong learning: Cultural learning*

The clarification of the concept of cultural learning and the phenomenon it describes is particularly important for our study. In different disciplines, the same term is sometimes used to describe different content. An example of this is the term “*social learning*”, which is not interpreted in the same way by psychology and education and therefore is not used to describe the same phenomenon (Kozma, 2019). We mentioned this particular example because the psychological concept of cultural learning often appears in association with Bandura’s theories on social learning, which are mostly used in psychology and represent learning based on imitation. Following this, Tomasello et al. (1993)

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examined the concepts of social and cultural learning. They believe that there are 3 types of cultural learning: imitative, instructed and collaborative learning, which is related to the distinction between human and animal characteristics. In contrast, in Hungarian education and cultural studies, the concept of cultural learning is interpreted as a non-formal and informal form of learning that occurs through the utilization of the cultural institutional and tool system (Juhász & Szabó, 2016; Juhász, 2017; Juhász & Kenyeres, 2018). Therefore, one should be careful not to confuse the two concepts consisting of the same word combination, because although they look the same, their meaning is completely different.

In Hungary, public community cultural institutions, museums and libraries, performing arts venues (theatres, cinemas, etc.), sports organisations and the media are seen as mediators of cultural learning, where the participant can be a passive recipient (e.g. theatre performance, listening to the radio, etc.) or an active actor (e.g. membership in an amateur art group, learning traditional dance, etc.) (Juhász & Szabó, 2016). However, in many settlements, the cultural institutional system is represented as the sole cultural mediator by the community spaces of public community culture, which is therefore the only space where every individual could participate in cultural learning (Hunyadi, 2004). In settlements where the formal educational system (e.g. kindergarten or primary school) is partially or completely non-existent, the cultural area may be of increased importance, although the compensatory function of non-formal learning is not always measurable (Engler & Márkus, 2016).

*2.2 LLL and public community culture in Hungarian legislation*

Like all processes, the process of learning and education has a beginning both in time and space. The primary environment of these are communities such as family and friends, and then the individual enters the institutionalized world of learning, which is defined by rights and obligations. In this chapter, we analyse the main legal and regulatory background of the Hungarian legislation, which provides the theoretical possibility of the role of public community culture in the process of LLL. The analysis is based on the following four laws currently in force:

- Constitution of Hungary (April 25, 2011) (hereinafter referred to as the Constitution),
- Act CXL of 1997 on museums, public library services and public community culture (hereinafter referred to as Cult. L.),

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- 20/2018. (VII. 9.) EMMI Decree on basic public cultural services, as well as the requirements of public cultural institutions and community venues (hereinafter referred to as EMMI Decree),
- 15/2019. (XII. 7.) PM Decree on the classification of government functions and public finance sectors (hereinafter PM Decree).

In order for anyone to participate in the LLL process, the necessary conditions must be granted. The opportunity to learn must be made accessible for people, as they are not motivated to do so if, for example, it is not available locally or financially (Memorandum, 2000). However, according to the national legislation conditions, access is guaranteed for everyone.

Looking at the Constitution, we consider Articles X., XI. and XII. to be relevant to the issue. According to Article X.: *“Hungary ensures the freedom of scientific research and artistic creation, and – in order to acquire the highest possible level of knowledge – the freedom of learning and, within the framework specified by law, the freedom of teaching.”* According to this, anyone can freely decide to study and even to educate themselves at the highest level, but this does not make participation in the process accessible and permissible for everyone. Article XI. of the Constitution guarantees the right to education to every citizen as follows: *“by expanding and making public community culture universal, by providing free and compulsory primary education, free and accessible secondary education, and higher education accessible to everyone on the basis of their abilities, and by providing financial support to those receiving education as specified by law.”* Articles X. and XI. guarantee the freedom of learning for everyone, while obliging citizens to participate in primary education. From the point of view of our research, it is important to emphasize that it designates public community culture as a suitable space for learning processes. Article XII. declares the right to work and includes that: *“Everyone is obliged to contribute to the growth of the community by working according to their abilities and possibilities.”* This passage resonates with the economic aspect of the concept of LLL – which we have already discussed – i.e. that the utilization of continuous self-development is not only the individual’s own, but also the interest of the community. We can therefore conclude that the Constitution makes participation in learning accessible to everyone in a theoretical and material sense, however, as our own previous research shows, this does not mean that everyone can physically take advantage of the opportunity, since not every settlement has an institutional system of primary education (Gyányi, 2023).

In contrast, there is no such obstacle in the cultural field. The Cult. L. (Section 76 (4)) stipulates that every settlement is obliged to provide at least the fundamental service of *“promoting the establishment of cultural communities,*

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*supporting their operation, assisting their development, providing a venue for public cultural activities and cultural communities”.* According to this, the field of public community culture is present in every settlement, even where there is no kindergarten and/or school. In addition, the Cult. L. directly states that the field of culture should promote lifelong learning (Section 1 a)). It specifies that the tasks of the cultural institutional system (museum institutions, public library services, public community culture, archives) also include supporting self-development activities for everyone (Section 1 f)). The objectives of the law create the opportunity for cultural learning. It is interesting that the law uses the concept of lifelong learning in the case of museums (37/A. § (4) c)) and libraries (55. § (1) g)) and lifewide learning in the case of public community culture (73. § (3) c)) and designates the provision of its conditions as one of the 7 fundamental public community cultural services. In addition, among the public community culture institutions, the folk high school type is specifically designated as the task of providing the conditions for LWL, regarding the adult age group (78/D. § (1)). According to the law, therefore, supporting LLL/LWL is the duty of the public community culture sector, and moreover, this task must be performed in every settlement. The law (85. § (1) d)) also names the support of lifelong learning among the tasks to be performed beyond settlement borders and at a territorial level. The Constitution and Cult. L. together ensure that no theoretical, material, or physical factors can hinder the individual from realizing their learning intentions.

The manner of performing the tasks is defined in detail in the EMMI Decree. According to Section 7 (1), the conditions for lifelong learning can be ensured by organizing courses outside the school system, training opportunities, self-active, self-training professional circles, clubs, communities, learning opportunities that improve the quality of life and life chances, folk high school programs, free universities, educational opportunities, and by supporting access to digital content and electronic public services. Economic regulation can also be brought into line with this, given that the PM decree also connects the LLL/LWL concept with public community culture, as one of the 4 public community culture functions specified there is named “082093 *Public community culture - lifelong learning, amateur arts*”, which in Annex 2 to the legislation lists almost word for word what belongs to the function: “*self-active, self-training courses, learning opportunities that improve quality of life and life chances, creation of folk high schools, talent development, promotion of the activities of knowledge-seeking, amateur creative and cultural communities, provision of creative cultural communities, art groups, circles, clubs, free universities.*”

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We believe that the details listed above support the fact that the public community culture system of Hungary and the Carpathian Basin, as a unique institutionalized field, provides the opportunity for every individual to participate in the LLL processes – in addition to the formal institutional and tool system of adult education and vocational training – and therefore cultural learning becomes a significant factor in this phenomenon. In conclusion, public community culture is able to support the growth of human capital through numerous activities, in theory.

### **3 Data and method of the research<sup>1</sup>**

Cultural statistics provide a comprehensive picture of public cultural service providers. The tool for collecting public cultural statistical data is the OSAP-1438 report form. Data provision is mandatory under Government Decree 388/2017 (XII.13.), so we have access to the data of the entire population when analysing the database. In the statistical analysis, this gives us the opportunity for a comprehensive data analysis. In accordance with the legislation (Act CXL of 1997), the task providers basically form two clearly distinguishable groups. On the one hand, public cultural institutions (916), which have an independent legal personality, and community venues (2728), which are units related to the local government (they do not have a separate VAT number or director and cannot make contracts on their own). It is also possible to provide cultural services apart from the classical way. Thus, additional 2,758 organizations report their public cultural activities (mainly civil organizations). According to cultural statistics, a total of 6,402 data providers performed public cultural tasks in 2023: this is the basic population.

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<sup>1</sup> The data in this chapter were determined by analysing OSAP 1438 – Public Culture Statistical Data and refer to the year 2023. (Source: <https://kultstat.oszk.hu/> )



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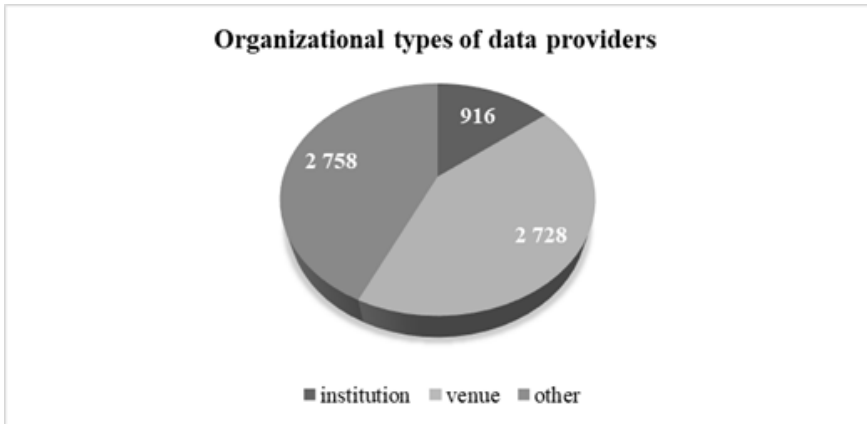


Figure 2. Types of data reporting organizations (own editing based on statistical data of 2023).

In the comprehensive statistical analysis presented in the next chapter, we consider the data of all task providers. In our analysis, based on reviewing legislation and literature, we consider the following activities directly supporting lifelong learning: regular forms of cultural learning, educational lectures, and the fundamental service of “*ensuring the conditions for lifelong learning*”.

### *3.1 The appearance of LLL in cultural statistics*

In this chapter, we examine what quantifiable data is available on LLL activity in public community culture regarding the year 2023. The provision of the seven fundamental public community cultural services defined by Act CXL of 1997 presented as follows in the light of the statistics for the current year:

Table 1

*Number of organizations providing fundamental public cultural services (own editing based on the statistical data of 2023)*

<u>Fundamental public cultural service defined in Act CXL of 1997</u>	<u>Number of organizations providing the fundamental services</u>
a) promoting the establishment of cultural communities, supporting their operation, assisting their development, providing a venue for public cultural activities and cultural communities	3,677

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b) development of community and social participation	2,431
c) <i>ensuring the conditions for lifelong learning</i>	1,103
d) ensuring the conditions for the transmission of traditional community cultural values	2,376
e) ensuring the conditions for amateur creative and performing arts activities	1,580
f) ensuring the conditions for talent development	831
g) cultural-based economic development	608

According to the above-mentioned legislation, the provision of the fundamental service marked “a)” is mandatory in all settlements. There are 3,155 settlements in Hungary, which predicts that the number will be higher. Furthermore, the minimum value is determined by the fact that it is mandatory for the 916 public cultural institutions and the 2,728 community venues to provide it, so this number cannot be lower than 3,644. Given that the number of providers of the first fundamental service is 3,677, this condition is fulfilled.

The most significant fundamental service for our study is the one marked “c)”, which is provided by 1,103 organizations according to the following distribution: 408 institutions, 453 venues and 242 additional types of organizations not belonging to the first two categories. Based on this, it can be said that almost half of the public cultural institutions (44.5%) provide fundamental services especially related to the conditions of LLL.

The data on employees is summarized in Table 2 below. According to the statistics, a total of 24,862 worked in professional positions in the sector in 2023. Of them, 11,817 people have a higher education degree, 13,045 people do not. 31% of employees with a degree have a specialised degree, while this ratio is 31.5% for those with less than a higher education degree, which is almost the same. If we examine only those organizations that provide the fundamental service “c)” related to LLL, we can speak of a total of 7,433 employees in professional positions. Of these, 3,897 people have a degree, while 3,536 have a lower education. 41% of graduates have a specialised education, while 12% of employees have a secondary level specialised education. We can therefore see that in the case of providers of fundamental services related to lifelong learning, the number of graduates with a specialised education is significantly higher than in the case of the general population, but in the case of those with secondary education, the opposite is true: the ratio decreases even more. Analysing the data on employees, the sector is characterized by a nearly 50/50 distribution of employees according to their education level, except for organizations providing LLL, where the number of colleagues with a higher specialised education is approximately 79%. This may be because, according to the law, the provision of

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fundamental services can only be provided with the involvement of a cultural or pedagogical professional with a university degree.

To sum up, it can be said that in organizations that provide LLL as a fundamental service, colleagues with university degrees are the majority, and if we only consider those with specialised degrees, their number is nearly four times as high as of colleagues with secondary level specialised degrees.

Table 2

*Employees and their education in public cultural services (own editing based on the statistical data of 2023)*

	<u>Whole population</u>	<u>Number of employees with specialised qualifications</u>	<u>Number of employees of LLL providing organizations</u>	<u>Number of employees of LLL providing organizations with specialised qualifications</u>
Those <u>without</u> a university degree	13,045 (52%)	4,104 (53%)	3,536 (48%)	425 (21%)
those <u>with</u> a university degree	11,817 (48%)	3,591 (47%)	3,897 (52%)	1,606 (79%)
<i>All</i>	<i>24,862 (100%)</i>	<i>7,695 (100%)</i>	<i>7,433 (100%)</i>	<i>2,031 (100%)</i>

In addition to the provision of fundamental services, we have determined, based on the legislation, the activities that serve as LLL indicators of the area: these are regular cultural activities (cultural communities, folk-art groups, clubs, training) and educational lectures of knowledge. We have collected data regarding that in the following section. Regular cultural activities are distributed as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3

*Participants in regular cultural activities (own editing based on the statistical data of 2023)*

	<u>Total number of groups and communities</u>	<u>Participants</u>	<u>Total number of occasions</u>
<i>All</i>	<i>29,645</i>	<i>580,042</i>	<i>678,048</i>
Data of organizations providing LLL	10,595	201,750	275,201

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We can see that according to the statistical data, one third of the groups and participants participated in the activities at organizations providing LLL related fundamental services.

In the case of training, the data in Table 4 below can be found in the statistics.

Table 4

*Data on training activities (own editing based on the statistical data of 2023)*

	<u>Number of groups</u>	<u>Number of occasions</u>	<u>Number of graduates</u>
<i>Own trainings</i>	2,007	28,513	25,282
<i>of which LLL</i>	713	9,053	9 130
<i>School-based training with a partner</i>	1,818	10,030	60 236
<i>of which LLL</i>	208	4,715	4 122
<i>Out-of-school training with a partner</i>	701	5,042	18,656
<i>of which LLL</i>	330	2,509	8,911
<i>All training (own + partner)</i>	4,526	43,585	104 174
<i>of which LLL</i>	1,251	16,277	22,163

The table shows that although the proportion of own training courses is the highest in terms of the number of groups and occasions, training courses organized jointly with partners are the most significant within the sector in terms of the number of people completing the training courses. If we analyse the data of own training courses, we can conclude that the choice of LLL fundamental service is more significant in this case than in the case of training courses implemented jointly with partners, since the proportions are higher here.

The data on the lecturing activity is summarized in the table below.

Table 5

*Data on knowledge dissemination activities (own editing based on statistical data of 2023)*

	<u>Participants</u>	<u>Occasions</u>
<i>Educational lectures</i>	1,059,755 people	24,950
<i>of which LLL</i>	702,262 people	14,942

In this case, it can be stated that a significant number of individuals participate in educational activities at organizations providing fundamental LLL services.

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If we want to formulate the ideal conditions for public community culture, we can say that institutional operation and the employment of specialists with university degrees can be the basic conditions for this. Considering the figures, 45% of both institutions and such specialists participate in the performance of the fundamental service tasks of “ensuring the conditions for lifelong learning”. When examining the activities, we can see that this is most important in the case of own training and educational lectures.

**Conclusion**

In our study, we presented how LLL appears in the laws regulating the cultural sector of Hungary. It can be stated that the regulation is detailed, but the area can only be examined and understood accurately by interpreting several pieces of legislation together. In the empirical part of our paper, we analysed the activities carried out by the public community cultural system in the field in the light of the cultural statistical data for 2023. Overall, it can be said that the number of employees with specialised higher education degrees among the employees of organizations carrying out LLL activities is remarkably high, and that the service providers who choose institutional operation contribute greatly to the success of the LLL activity in the field with more than 700 thousand participants in popular science lectures and more than 22 thousand training participants annually.

All these results confirm that when summarising Hungary's lifelong learning outcomes, the LLL activity of public community culture is an important, significant growth factor. This activity is particularly decisive in domestic settlements with less than 5,000 inhabitants, which make up a significant part of our urban structure (90%). In these settlements, the presence of classical adult education and vocational training is low, and the population can either travel to larger cities to participate in training, knowledge expansion, or choose to learn in public community cultural organizations operating in each Hungarian settlement. Thus, the LLL activity of public community culture is indispensable in the knowledge expansion of the rural Hungarian population.

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