



NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY
HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

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CITY AND AGE-FRIENDLY
REGIONAL NETWORK: CASE OF
TUymAZY AND REPUBLIC OF
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FEDERATION**

BASIC RESEARCH PROGRAM

WORKING PAPERS

SERIES: PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

WP BRP 12/PA/2014

This Working Paper is an output of a research project implemented at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE). Any opinions or claims contained in this Working Paper do not necessarily reflect the views of HSE.

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**FROM AGE-FRIENDLY RESEARCH TO AGE-FRIENDLY CITY AND
AGE-FRIENDLY REGIONAL NETWORK: CASE OF TUymAZY AND
REPUBLIC OF BASHKORTOSTAN, RUSSIAN FEDERATION**²

This paper discusses the strategy and success factors of development of age-friendly programs in the City of Tuymazy and Republic of Bashkortostan, Russian Federation, as a part of the Global Age-Friendly Project of World Health Organization. A research followed by a small grass root initiative led to development of a large regional program with 21 municipalities involved. The key success factors included: creating an agency to trigger, promote and implement age-friendly practices; establishing partnerships with government and other organizations in the area; building and maintaining media and public relations; building on culture; expanding and encouraging civic engagement; starting small; providing recognition and credit. Building awareness and partnerships is vital for advancing age-friendly programs. With multiple stakeholders involved it is important to maintain regular communications conduct information sessions and stick to the planning and reporting schedule. For continuity and sustainability of a large scale project it is essential to hire paid staff.

JEL Classification: H750, I310

Keywords: Age-friendly Cities, Ageing Policies, Nongovernmental Organizations, Community Development, Social Policies, Nonprofit-Government Partnerships, Municipalities, Quality of Life, Welfare, Russia.

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² I deeply appreciate help, guidance and editorial support from: Louise Plouffe, whose approval and trust made it possible to conduct the research in Tuymazy which later led to the development of age-friendly cities in Bashkortostan, Harry Boyte, who helped me to work through the framework of developing age-friendly cities in Bashkortostan after the initial research, Jan Hively, who has become a role model and a source of encouragement and inspiration to continue my work on ageing and community building.

Introduction

Ageing has become the world wide phenomena. Evidently, the advantage of long life is one of the greatest achievements of the human kind, however, global population ageing is often considered a big challenge by economists and policy makers all over the world. Concepts of active ageing, productive ageing, and successful ageing have been introduced both in order to change attitudes towards ageing and improve quality of life of older people.

In particular, active ageing has been promoted by World Health Organization since adoption of the Madrid Plan of Action in 2002. According to WHO “Active ageing is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age” (WHO, 2002, p.12).

In 2005 WHO started developing a new framework which would facilitate implementing active ageing ideas. The framework was called age-friendly cities and was based on the following assumptions:1) population is ageing and this process is global and universal; 2) urbanization is a global trend and cities are the leading points which are the first to adopt progressive ideas and they have the potential to spread them to other places; bottom up (participatory) approach should be used both in policy formulation and its implementation, which means that older people should take active part at all stages of the process.

The first phase of the WHO Global Age-friendly Cities Project was conducted in 2005-2007 and included focus groups research according to the unified methodology in 33 countries. Results of the research data analysis were summarized in the WHO guidelines on age-friendly cities³. From 2007 cities started implementing the guidelines and creating their own action plans. From 2009 the WHO Age-friendly Cities Network was initiated by the Ageing and Life course Division of WHO.

The procedure of becoming a member is quite simple. A city mayor needs to sign a commitment to become an age-friendly city and send an application letter to the WHO Ageing and life course Division Director. Then a city should evaluate the city and develop an action plan for 5 years. A city which complies with the requirements receives a status of the network member. It will retain the status if its 5 years commitments are fulfilled. The status indicates that the city is “on the way” to becoming age-friendly. The WHO’s position is that no city may be 100% age-friendly, it may only be aiming to become such as the standards and conditions are constantly changing.

³ World Health Organization (2007). Global Age-friendly Cities: a Guide. 82 p.

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Starting point: conditions that preceded the age-friendly cities program

This section contains descriptive information about the area ⁴ along with summarized findings from the focus group research conducted in 2006 in accordance with the WHO Vancouver Research Protocol (*in italics*). ⁵

The municipality consisted of the City of Tuymazy and the Municipal Region of Tuymazy with total population of about 120,000 people. It was a typical industrial post Soviet city surrounded by villages and rural communities in the municipal region. The municipality was located in the Republic of Bashkortostan in the Russian Federation. Bashkortostan was an administrative-territorial unit of a sub-national division. It was one of over 70 so called “subjects” of the Russian Federation. Among 66,300 residents of the *city*, the population over 60 included 9,346 people (14% of city population). Within this cohort three thousand six hundred fifteen (5%) were over 75 years old (2006). Life expectancy at the time was 59 for men, and 72 for women.⁶ Official retirement age, when a person became eligible to start receiving a pension (which was provided by the Government), was 55 for women and 60 for men⁷. The retirement age did not imply mandatory retirement.⁸ Also, employees, having worked certain amount of years at particular jobs (such as military, secondary school teachers, coal miners, and quite a few others) are entitled to early retirement benefits provided by the government. Persons receiving retirement benefits may continue working and therefore be receiving salaries at the same time if they wish so.

Average income had been growing compared to the economic transition time of the 1990’s; however, the average pension was still quite low. The average pension for people between 60 and 80 years old was 2700 rubles (about USD 100), which was just above the

⁴ The community profile data is based on Gareyev A.M., Gataullin R.F., Mukhametshina L.M., Geography and ecology of Tuymazinskiy region. 2005, 174 p. or as provided in interviews by the city government employees.

⁵ The focus group research was conducted in full accordance with *Vancouver Research Protocol*. Available online at http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20AFC_Vancouver_protocol.pdf. Accessed 19.09.2013. In total 11 focus group interviews were conducted in August- November 2006. There were eight groups with older persons (four groups with persons 60-74 years old, and four groups with persons of 75 and older); two groups with caregivers; and a series of three focus groups conducted with service providers. These data have limitations drawn from the nature of the process as well as from the research circumstances. The research was sponsored by the Government of Canada.

⁶ Life expectancy increased to 64 for men and 76 for women in 2012.

⁷ There is ongoing political discussion about increasing retirement age, however this idea is strongly opposed by the public and has been kept the same as of 2013.

⁸ Government employees were required to retire at the retirement age until 2011.

poverty line (2439 rubles (USD 90) for pensioners. However, WWII veterans were entitled to a pension three times higher.⁹ The average Russian replacement ratio in 2006 was 27%.¹⁰

Housing in the lives of older adults was one of the greatest benefits inherited from the Soviet Union. With rare exceptions, almost all older people owned their apartments. As a rule, utilities constituted the biggest expense in housing. In fact, the bill for utilities could equal or exceed the size of the governmental pension. The city had both apartment buildings and single family homes. Apartment buildings had been built, maintained and belonged to the Government during the Soviet times. After the collapse of the Soviet system all registered residents were allowed to transfer the apartments into their ownership for free. Living in single family houses or apartment buildings did not mean though any substantial difference in income. Housing maintenance services were provided by government. There was usually one maintenance office for a block of apartment buildings. The burden of maintenance was entirely on residents in case of single family homes, which became quite difficult for people when they got older.

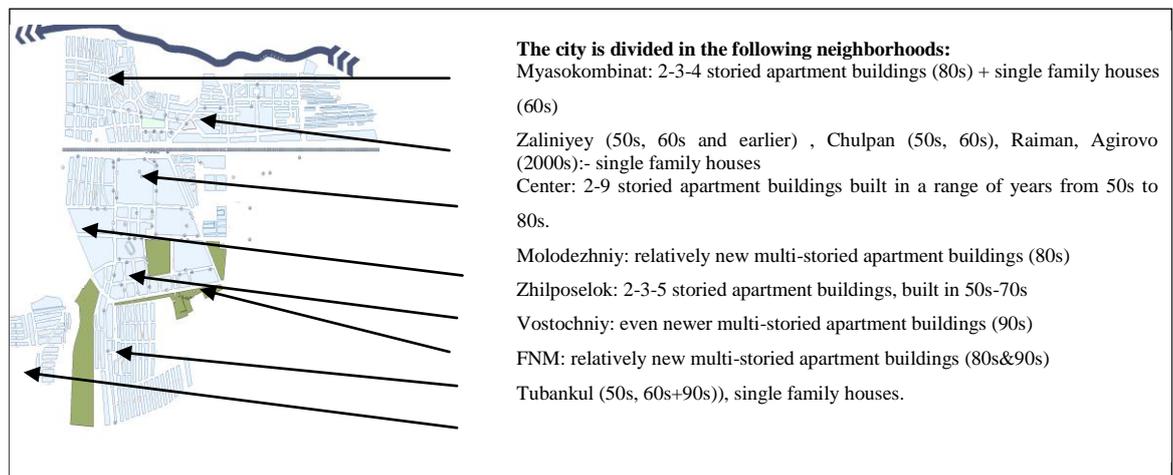


Figure 1. Map of the city of Tuymazy

➤ *Both housing and transportation were perceived to be good, but the cost and disability accommodation were a concern in both cases. Establishing some kind of committee to monitor transportation and construction of new housing seemed to be a common, widely supported suggestion.*

➤ *Overall, the physical environment of the city was satisfactory for an older person, and was being improved. However, the evident weakness was an open negligence of the needs of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, some problems of the physical space arose from the*

⁹ Minimum (or so called “social”) pension which is provided by the government to every person who has achieved retirement age (55 for women and 60 for men) increased to about 230 USD in 2012. Also, the so called “three pillar” pension system based on solidarity system plus personal and employer contributions was enforced. Thus some retirees today receive much higher pensions than the minimal one.

¹⁰ Monitoring. Newspaper "Commerzant" №8, 24.01.2007, p. 2. Available online at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/736448>

unsolved social dilemmas. For instance, community benches were occupied by youth gangs, because they had nowhere else to gather.

Recreation and entertainment in the city and the region were provided by 40 “culture and recreation” centers. There were also a museum of local history, the Tatar State Theater of Drama, a movie theater, recently renovated, 47 local libraries, and a Sports and Recreation Center. The museum and libraries were free and open to the public, other services were available at a subsidized rate.

Most social services including healthcare, education, legal counselling, libraries and services of social workers was free and provided by the government. There were 12 hospitals in the region, 61 primary care rooms, 2 polyclinics for adults, one for children and one dentist clinic. Corruption and unlawful extortion of payments were common in the city health care, as well as generally throughout the country. Even though officially most of the services were free, but many doctors unlawfully demanded cash payments from the patients and refused to perform operations or other treatment otherwise. As a rule, unofficial and advance “thank you” would also substantially improve the quality of service.

➤ *The topic of community support and health services was the most emotional and fraught of all. Even though health care was free, with many services available, most of the group participants did not know anything about them. Moreover, the topic of infringements and mistreatment in healthcare dominated discussions in most groups, with the exception of the public service provider group. Suggested solutions included introducing separate appointment lines and services open only to older persons, and the creation of a community senior center with all kinds of services.*

Culture and religion presented a twisted and complicated mix of the Soviet mentality, Russian (Slavic, 23.2% of population), Bashkir (33.4%) and Tatar (37.6%) customs and Russian Orthodox and Islamic (native to the area) traditions. As most republics within the Russian Federation, Bashkortostan had been created as an area with the dominance of one ethnic group (*Bashkort* or *Bashkir*) which historically had been populating this land. The Bashkort people initially became a part of the Russian empire over 450 years ago, and had stayed with it ever since. Almost all city residents, from all ethnic groups, spoke Russian. As a rule those, who belonged to other ethnic groups were bilingual. Due to the policy of absolute equality of different ethnicities in the Soviet times there were no evident differences between the lifestyles or social-economic status of the city residents from different ethnic groups. After the collapse of the Soviet Union cultural traditions of the ethnic group of the Bashkort had been actively restored and preserved.

Religion was vastly denied in the soviet times, however, it had been having its renaissance since 1991. Both Orthodox and Islamic religious traditions had been carefully revitalized in the population. Many young and old had turned back to religion for spiritual growth and advice. Most older people had been brought up in atheism and used to believe in the communist future of the country. However, many of them had readily embraced the renaissance of religion and cultural traditions of their ancestors, either Christian or Muslim. Nevertheless religious functions had not become the center for older persons' major engagement or participation as it happens in other cultures where religion plays a role in lives of citizens. Moreover, participation and social inclusion was reported to be one of the most difficult problems identified by participants in the focus group research.

➤ *Even though overall, public attitudes towards older age were negative, older participants reported unconditional respect from their close neighbors or relatives. Moreover, people's awareness about the presence of senior citizens was heightened during the two major holidays that commemorated older persons' deeds, however it remained dormant at other times. Opportunities to get involved and participate in social life were very limited. Suggestions for remedy included creating subsidized coffee shops for older persons as well as more open clubs and organizing intergenerational and educational opportunities.*

The voluntary sector was quite small and mostly oriented towards organizing of leisure and social activities. There were a few clubs for children (5-10), 2 clubs for older people, 2 hobby based membership associations, a few sports clubs, an association for persons with disabilities and for the blind, and veterans' organizations. The veterans' councils were largely supported by the government enjoyed benefits such as free rent of premises, some financial support and participation in government's activities. Veterans there meant broadly any person retired from military service or from any other work. Automatically any person, who reached retirement age became a member of a veterans' council in his or her region. No membership fees were required but no benefits for members were provided either. The veterans' councils were often dysfunctional, inherited from the Soviet times, had kept the bureaucratic routine of that time, government sponsored and were routinely organized at every factory and apartment building complexes.

➤ *Opportunities for civic engagement and employment were extremely limited either by exclusive nature of the older persons' clubs, often only open to a small number of people, or by open discrimination at workplaces.*

➤ *Gardening at small suburban plots once provided both socializing, hobby opportunities and possibilities for additional "in-kind" income, but had become very unsafe;*

visitors there were frequently robbed. Suggested solutions included organizing patrols for the gardens, providing additional education, and offering jobs with flexible schedules.

Communication and information channels included newspaper, television and radio. Internet as a communication channel was starting to gain popularity but not among older adults, and access was still quite costly.

➤ *Communication and information definitely constituted a problem in the city. Even though the mass media was relatively readily available, costs were growing. Moreover, there was clearly not enough effort to communicate relevant information with appropriate content for older persons.*

Solutions proposed in the focus groups ranged from national solutions, such as raising pensions, to local people's collective efforts such as organizing tree planting projects. Evidently, some of the problems required action at a governmental level, such as the amount of pension allowance. However, many were potentially possible to be addressed at the city level. Moreover, citizens could potentially be organized to contribute to the solution of the problem. Some suggestions could be implemented by existing non-profit organizations or by a new agency dedicated to senior citizen interests and organizing.

Building the foundation: considerations and ideas for consistent work

After the focus group research and evaluation phase was completed in 2007, the most important task was to identify next steps. The analysis of the focus groups data, culture and political situation as well as considerations of public policy and civic engagement practices generated a few important suggestions which helped us to start action and not halt halfway.¹¹

Create an agency

Championing the idea. Analysis of the finding from the focus group research revealed that suggestions made by participants referred to the issues and problems which should be dealt at difference levels of governance. For example, such an important issue as health care, which at the moment was a very painful subject, could be solved mainly by the city authorities through enforcing regulations, establishing monitoring and control systems, and preventing corrupt practices. A nonprofit organization dedicated to senior citizen civic engagement could possibly have some considerable successes in lobbying and advocacy at the local level, depending on its skill and political agility, but would not be able to change the system completely.

¹¹ It is worth mentioning here that, unless it is stated otherwise in the text, the work described below was fulfilled on volunteer basis with the in kind support by some organizations (see text) and volunteer contributions of the people.

Almost all suggestions called for participation of several actors: municipality, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, etc. However, with some issues, such as social participation, inclusion and civic engagement, even under conditions where a nonprofit did not have substantial funding, volunteers could help to carry out intergenerational programs and programs on involving older persons in educating younger generation in hobby groups or during in class presentations. Peer volunteers could also provide education for older persons, help in creating more clubs oriented on specific interests and hobbies; taking older persons in the countryside, organizing third age universities, organizing birthday and anniversary celebrations; organizing weekly events for older persons or families with food, music, karaoke or accordion. The events could entail co-sponsorship by service providers or/and city authorities that would build new public relationships among different actors concerning senior citizen politics. That would require civic engagement that does not depend on altruistic “good deeds,” but rather on the practical, if flexible self-interests of diverse actors, finding common ground and developing collective, expanding power.

With the considerations discussed above it was clear that creating an agency, or an association would be a very important step to promote and develop age-friendly ideas in Tuymazy Municipality. A nonprofit nongovernmental organization created to be a “people’s organization” could change the roles nonprofits had traditionally played in the city for more significant, effective, respected ones. Moreover, such an agency would be the one to **champion** age-friendly ideas in the city. It could be an organizer, advocate, and voice for senior citizens. Therefore a decision was made to create a nonprofit nongovernmental organization. The team that conducted the first, research phase of the AFC project consisted of only the team leader (the author), the local project coordinator and a few volunteers. However, this committed team was able to legally register a nonprofit nongovernmental organization and unite more interested parties and volunteers.

Incorporating the value and resourcefulness of older age into the name and mission of the organization was very important. The name had to be recognizable and **emphasize the value and resourcefulness of older people**. After a few rounds of consultations with all the alliances we had gained by that time it was decided to name the organization *Координационно – ресурсный центр для пенсионеров «Мои года – мое богатство»*, which literally translates into English as “*Center for coordinating resources off/for retired persons “My years are my treasure”*”. We believe that this name allowed more seniors to identify themselves as a target

audience of our organization. The legal name in English was chosen to be *Organization of Retired Persons “Wisdom Ripening” (ORP WR)*.¹²

Building credibility. Nonprofits in Russia generally are still not trusted by the population. Therefore the issue of **credibility** became very important from the first steps. Our strategy of building the credibility consisted of the following consistent strategies.

- “Borrowing” the credibility of a well known and highly respected body: World Health Organization (WHO). The authority of WHO and becoming a part of an international project based on its research and framework was an important factor which helped potential partners to take us seriously and decide to lend their support.

- Becoming “official”, i.e. becoming a legal body in accordance with the Russian nonprofit law. When initial contacts were made with potential partners and members the first question we were asked was about the legal status of the organization. It was important for the city administration, other nonprofit and for-profit organizations as well as people who were willing to join the effort or participate in any kind of activities.

- Action before asking for anything. Before we asked for any help from the city administration we followed up with the report on the research phase and a developed plan of the next steps. It proved that our intentions were serious and we were not going to back off.

- Being consistent. Every step in the plan we discussed was implemented and a report was given back to every person participating in organizing the activity.

Creating so called “free spaces” to encourage civic engagement was essential for success of the organization. Older people received a “space” where they could gather together for a purpose of studying, celebrating, realizing smaller or bigger projects or just discussing everyday questions and friendly chats. “Free spaces” provide for the “governance [which]... is a political but nonpartisan process of negotiating diverse interests and views to solve public problems and create public value. Politics is citizen centered, productive and pluralist (Boyte, 2005). In order to empower older adults, we had to find out their self-interests in taking some action and create free spaces. Historically in Russia village communities and even residential buildings constructed during the Soviets had free spaces to discuss village issues and undertake collective problem solving (Boyte, 2005). Free public spaces and self organized networks that develop citizen skills, that create connections beyond intimate ties, and that build citizen confidence that things can be better, are the core of citizenry (Gazley, Chang, & Bingham, 2006). In Minnesota the Vital Aging Network (VAN) served as a model for both organized networking and providing public forums. They were engaging senior citizens and they were

¹² We are grateful to Jan Hively who suggested this title “Wisdom Ripening”

adept to civic activities. The prevention for indignity and its many far-ranging consequences is recognition" (Gazley, Chang, & Bingham, 2006). As it could be seen from the focus group data and literature review, contributing to others and therefore belonging to the society was of major importance for Russian older adults. They were discouraged that they were not recognized in the society. But they also felt discouraged about not being able to contribute to the society. There are many routes to engagement. One of our projects was to organize older people to provide recognition for other older people and engage them in organizing youth to participate in the same process as well.

With these considerations and already running projects in 2008 our nonprofit organization named "Wisdom Ripening" was registered in the legal form of an association. We believe that membership allowed older people to feel more engaged and interested in the work of the organization. This added credibility to the organization as well as assisted with the tasks of engaging older persons, providing volunteer opportunities, recognition and participation. The first meetings of members were held either in classrooms of College of Law, which became a host for the first steps of the organization or in the apartment of the founder. Later the organization was given an office large enough to hold group meetings and some classes of the Third Age University started by the organization.

Establish partnerships with government and other organizations in the area.

City administration. Two major challenges in establishing relations with the city government were generally suspicious attitudes towards nonprofits in Russia and the fact that ageing was not on the governmental agenda at the time. Relationships between nonprofits and the government represent a complicated and uncertain issue in Russia. The relations required "nurturing" and individual negotiations. We considered this one of the most important steps in our planning and it did appear to be one of the key factors for success. We sought the support of city officials and established productive connections with them, based on mutual self-interests in productive public problem solving. The process of establishing relationships started when the first phase of the AFC project was under way. As it was expected, political support of different officials was easily received by manipulating their lust to be "popular". When the team leader and the project coordinator met with the deputy mayor on social issues it became clear that the name of the World Health Organisation behind the project was very important and was very helpful in securing her support of the research and later of the work of the organization. Due to that, the team also had the support of the governmentally sponsored veterans' councils. The deputy mayor demonstrated being an innovative leader, as well as productive problem solver in the local community. After the first success of the organization and its popularity among older adults the city administration officials stated numerous times that they had supported the

initiative from the very beginning, and that it was started “with their help and their participation”. This kind of “ownership” by the city authorities definitely helped the organization to secure more connections with other organizations and access to their nonmonetary resources, but did not lead us to obtaining any monetary funding.

Political considerations. In Russia there is just one strong party and any competitors are being suppressed. The strong party members are at power at all levels of administration and are strongly opposed to any competition. Even though this consideration made us always make very clear our nonpolitical position we witnessed why it was so needed. One of the organization’s members on her own initiative was working for (and was paid by) another party before local elections in 2009. As this member was on one of the organization’s committees and was quite a public figure, well known by the administration, they immediately noted her activities and were outraged. There were even talks on stopping the support of the organization. Since then we have always emphasized that our mission was independent of any political agenda and was only targeting benefits of people, no matter what political views they had.

Other organizations. There were also a few organizations that could potentially be used and relatively available for cooperation in the city. The network of the veterans’ councils had members and premises throughout the city. Anyone is automatically enrolled as soon as they reach the retirement age. Most of councils had an office that could be used. There were also a few clubs, and recreational centers which could cooperate for organizing events, intergenerational activities or allowing to use their premises as “free spaces” (Boyte, 1986).

The competitive reality may make the preexisting organizations oppose the new ones. However, as Alinsky points out (Alinsky, 1946), if the leaders make an effort to learn more about the other organizations and their leaders, discovering their self-interests through organizing methods like “one on one interviews,” it is often possible to change attitudes and policies. Therefore, recruiting veterans councils as allies, involving their members and telling other organizations and people about themselves was an intentional objective of a new organization, using proven organizing techniques, concepts, and methods that were known internationally (in particular, the public work approach) (Boyte, 2004, Boyte, 2006).

Build media and public relations

The role of the media is difficult to overlook in the modern world, yet, according to the data from the literature review nonprofit organizations in Russia were mostly invisible [CRCSNS, 2011]. It was most likely because of their neglect and absence of finance to represent themselves in the media. At the turn of the century an internet search would return just a few results about nonprofits in Russia. Often websites returned would be “static” filled out once long ago, with outdated information. Setting up a website with basic information about the

organization was one of the first practical steps and it helped to improve the visibility as well as simply allowed conveying information about the ORP WR in a consistent and structured way. In order to maintain a positive image it was necessary to make the successes and purposes of the project or organization visible (N.Kari, personal communication, 2007). We have a more developed and better maintained, more often updated website for our in country followers, in Russian (www.moigoda.org) and a much shorter version in English for our international partners (www.wisdomripening.org). The website with clearly identified mission, history, comprehensively structured description of activities and contact information allows the media representatives as well as any other interested party to quickly find essential information about the organization, confirm its validity and trustworthiness. It saves our time and allows the media to have easy access to all essential information about our organization.

Media has an astonishing power, it was still controlled mostly by the Government at the time. However, it was possible to find a space in modern communications to position the organization. The important piece that was missing in Russia as well as in the US media was that many media outlets were dedicated to simply making money, not delivering usable information. Indeed, excitement in general was something that modern people were very often missing. In Russia people were mostly disappointed by the reality, but also they had been taught to be excited about getting more money and consumer goods then, not about justice, human rights, or public involvement and public life. The insights in Socialist propaganda, for all its deceptions and problems -- “If ever compassion replaces greed as a human motive, fairness will prevail and all will be well” – was entirely abandoned in the Post soviet climate. We needed to strike a balance between socialism and capitalism, and also find media professionals who could see it as in their self-interests to convey stories of civic engagement and older citizens, not simply to see products with short term gain in mind (Register, 2000).

The media and public relations has been a success story for us. The local newspaper as well as the local television has always been readily available to publish our stories and milestone events. We were very fortunate to have been picked for a federal level news channel right in the first year of the existence of the organization and have continued developing our media relations since then.

Build on culture

The importance of culture is central to effective public action of this kind. Walton and Rao demonstrate with extensive case studies that success of developmental campaigns depends on understanding, respecting, and engaging cultural values and local traditions and mentalities (Rao&Walton, 2003).

The culture of older generations in Russia was shaped by the experiences of the USSR during the socialist period. This outlook was clearly seen in our focus groups. Most older people espoused what might be called “Soviet” values, mixed a little with traditions of ethnic or religious groups (although these were greatly weakened by the Soviet period). “Pride in the past, connection to the present and a positive view of the future” (Abd-Allah, 2004) was something that Russia needed very badly then, and mostly could not find. It was very difficult to connect future and past, if the past had only been criticized and demonized. There were multiple attempts to build on a foreign, capitalist, democratic model, but in fact there are rich traditions of Russian populism and community life (Pomata, 1986), as well as more recent Soviet experiences with respect for public work and responsible citizenship, still seen in the old movies.

The results of focus groups research suggested (and our everyday practice confirms) that there is a big gap between the cultures of the younger and older generations, especially between those who retired at the beginning of the reforms and the teenagers. For youth culture is mostly pop culture, inspired by the American television and new capitalist society. “How can we sew them together?” would be the key question to answer. Suggestions from the focus groups, and interviews the author conducted in Minnesota ¹³ brought us to the conclusion that both more communications and more cooperative activities together were needed. Older persons were often bitter, noticing that the youngest ones did not listen to them, did not understand, and seemed to be immoral. However, participants already active in some of the organized activities acknowledged that teenagers appreciated their story telling in schools, and applauded for the chorus. So there were intimations of rapport, when the opportunities for interactions were actually in place. In our organization we specifically created opportunities for young students to interact with older ones. Over the course of two years about 30 college students and 10 high school students became volunteer tutors for older learners of computer skills. As our survey showed, after a course (12 classes during 3 months) 30 to 50% of the students changed their opinions about older persons and gained a better view on older people. Some realized that “older people were active, they wanted and were able to learn and develop”. Some older adults also realized that “the youngsters were not gangsters, they could be very patient and attentive”.

Strategies for learning more about the culture and using the knowledge may include: interviewing people for their life stories, sharing them in groups, presenting the stories publicly, and new forms of public collection, such as oral history libraries. One of the venues could be to ask older people “What are the lessons that we need to learn that you have already learned?” (J.Barbee, personal communication, 2007). Discussion of such questions together with younger

¹³ Interviews were conducted during the author’s coursework on the “Civic Engagement” class taught by Harry Boyte in 2007 at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota.

groups could be really revealing in the light of all the historic events that have been experienced by the country. Cultural celebrations, music and folktales shared with the younger generations could also be a bridge between generations. It would be important to emphasize the significance of not only ethnic culture, but positive features of the culture of the USSR such as the values of collective work and public contribution. Even these best values are often disapproved of now, which is intimidating for older persons (J.Barbee, personal communication, 2007).

The easiest way to start appeared to use some culturally familiar form with a new content. The form chosen was so called “People’s university”. This form of continuing education was widely used in the Soviet Union, thus it looked familiar and trustworthy for both older persons and the city administration. The city administration official granted their approval of the initiative and connected us with the management of the local college. All activities had to be free for older persons because of low income of older adults. The team could offer the organizers’ volunteer effort, but needed in-kind resources: auditoriums for classes and volunteer teachers. The initial agreement with the college was achieved and the program started.

Start small

One of key elements in the “everyday politics of public work” framework is “starting small” (N.Kari, personal communication, 2007) with a project which would be easy to do and therefore would develop more collective trust and confidence. As the projects get done, the people will want to do more, believe they can do more, and take on larger tasks. We started with a small project: 2 classes a week with 20 to 40 older adults participating in these classes. At first there was just the author and a teacher of the local Law College who volunteered to teach. A survey was conducted in order to better understand interests in learning, strategic directions for further development of lifelong learning programs were determined. Some of the programs most wanted by older adults included foreign languages, computer skills, healthy life style and sports, and religious studies. By the end of the school year 2008 the program had grown to about 70 older students, about 15 adult teaching volunteers and over 10 different subjects taught in the program. Later other volunteers joined, the project grew into a long term program with over 200 older students annually. Most of our teachers older adults and volunteers, they first joined the association as members and later became interested in a more active role in the organization. Successful implementation of that first small project was also very important for our partners. That proved for them that we were capable and prepared to run the program. When the first classes went well in Law College they supported extending the program to other educational institutions. In summer 2008 the organization was officially registered by the Russian Federal Authorities, by the fall of 2009 the organization had grown to several programs including TV

Studio “50+” with regular broadcasting of a show created by older adults on local television, a travel club, an eco-tourism club, a choir, a theatre group and a volunteer club.

Recognize and give credit

Recognizing and giving credit for every effort invested in our organization has become an inherent part of our everyday work. Acknowledging contributions allows contributors to see that their efforts were needed and appreciated. It empowers and encourages them to continue and do more. Sharing the credit for success with partners is essential for keeping good relationships. Sharing the credit with our members is vital for their engagement, feeling of belonging and inclusion. We value every initiative our members start and always acknowledge them during annual meetings, on the website, etc. Recognition is “the preventive for indignity and its many far-ranging consequences” (Fuller 2004). That really matters when we talk about senior citizens in Russia. They are discouraged that they are not being recognized in the society. But they also feel discouraged because they are not able to contribute to the society. “Supply for recognition is unlimited”, says Fuller and we do our best to follow this rule (Fuller 2004).

Moving forward: from one age-friendly municipality of Tuymazy to 21 age-friendly cities in the regional program in Bashkortostan

Policy structure

In 2010 the head of Administration Tuymazy Municipality signed the application letter to become a part of the AFC Network. Even though the city mayor was very supportive of the program, ORP “Wisdom Ripening” was expected to play the major role in implementing age-friendly ideas. That would include taking the leadership and fulfilling all the required procedures to develop the project. The city watched the start of the AFC Network in the Republic before adopting a bylaw regulating AFC in Tuymazy. The structure of the regulating body was suggested by the ORPWR and accepted by the City Administration. It is based on the WHO domains and involves both city administration and older persons – members of “Wisdom Ripening”. Specific bylaws have been created to legitimize the policy structure and make it more capable of solving the issues. Unfortunately, securing funding for paid staff turned out to be an impossible task. As a result all work relies on volunteer efforts. Naturally, that leads to some instability in the work flow.



Figure 2. Structure of the AFC program in Tuymazy Municipality

In 2011 the President of the Republic of Bashkortostan approved participation of the Republic in the WHO Global AFC Network. The initiative was strongly supported by the President’s Administration and the responsibility of administering the program was delegated onto the Association of Municipalities. The approach to the project here was “ top-down”, which is typical for many large scale initiatives in the Russian Federation. In fact, municipalities were required to sign the application letters and strong support by the government definitely facilitated the first steps of the regional program.

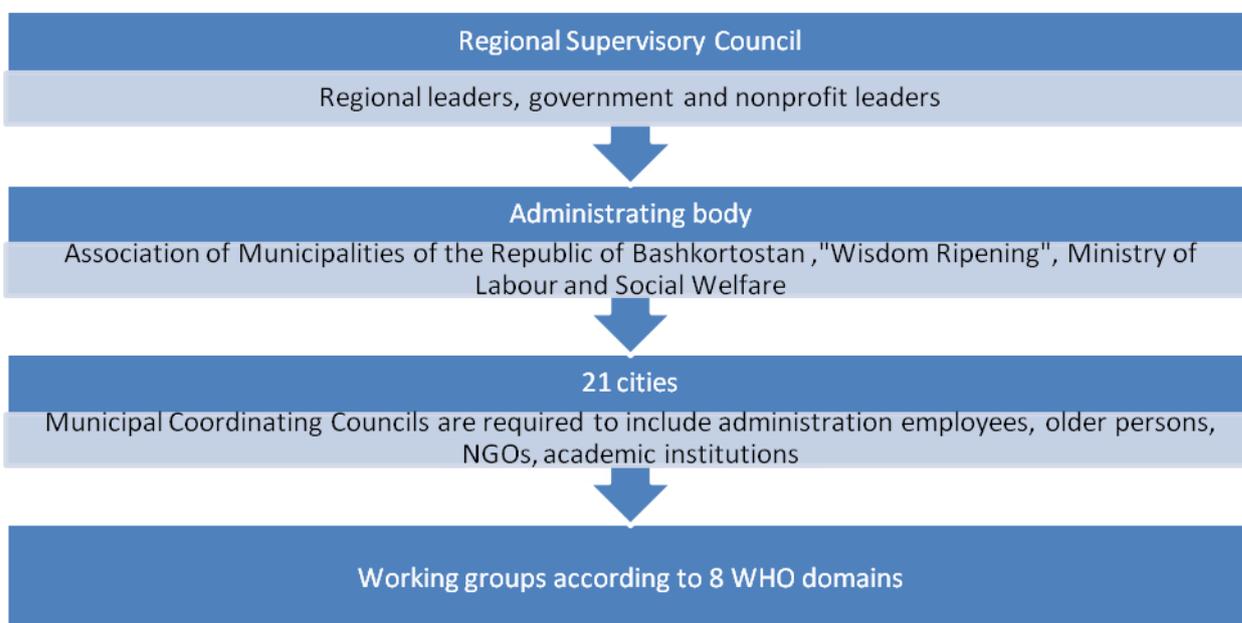


Figure 3. The Structure of the Republic of Bashkortostan Regional AFC Program

The program gained political support and was championed by the President’s administration but received no funded staff or executive body. Therefore the implementation of the program’s procedures largely relied on the volunteer efforts of Association of Municipalities staff, Ministry of Labour or ORP WR, all already overloaded with other tasks. Naturally, that leads to some instability in work flow. A paid executive/administrative body is essential for developing and sustaining the program.

Planning and reporting normally play an important role in motivating the process. As required by the WHO recommendations Bashkortostan’s participants have gone through the process of evaluation, planning and reporting on the initiatives in their respective cities. Schedule

was planned so that cities would have to collect information and assemble reports during the time when normally they do not have other pertinent engagements. The schedule was made quite flexible to accommodate the needs of city partners. However, human resources shortages make it almost impossible to fully use the reporting system for control and improvement of city programs.

Building awareness

Developing the program required building awareness and educating all potential participants. On the one hand, age-friendly ideas are not a novelty in Russia. Old age has always been respected and older people have always been supposed to be entitled to care and support from the younger generations. They also have always been considered family patriarchs, playing the most important role at home through their extended families. In the 1970s and 1980s, the older persons were those who won the World War II and therefore enjoyed even greater respect. In the Soviet times when most incomes were controlled by the government, older persons' pensions were generally enough to maintain a decent lifestyle.

Everything changed drastically after the economic and political changes which followed the collapse of 1991. All of a sudden older people became the only reminder of the previous epoch and became living embodiments of all its disadvantages and disappointments. It was also quite difficult for many of them to get used to the new economic reality with the new rules, less security and more freedom. Many of them were left out of the new social order and became foreigners in their own country. It made younger generations think that the older ones were not able to contribute and play a role in the greater community any more. Because of inflation their pensions became so insignificant that many older people could hardly survive. Public policies at the time focused on providing for basic needs and fighting poverty. The perceptions that older persons were the poorest, the most vulnerable and the least apt for the new social order turned out to be difficult to change. Twenty years after the collapse most political leaders and social authorities still were thinking of the older people as care recipients and a social burden. Transmitting the idea of older people being a resource took quite some time to settle in their heads, and attending conferences, events and exhibitions helped to change mindsets.

The strategy of expanding awareness included organizing special age-friendly events as well as facilitating participation of interested parties in the events promoting age-friendly policies. Participation in external, high ranking events helped to show a bigger picture and helped to demonstrate that ageing was fast becoming an important item on the international and national policy agenda. We made special efforts to involve all the key political figures in our events. We were also fortunate to have a new Minister of Social Welfare truly dedicated to improving lives of older citizens. Activities included: 1) At the national level: "50 plus Forum in

Moscow”; 2) At the regional level: “Conference 50 plus: All Positives of Ageing” in Ufa; 3) Seminars for deputy heads of municipalities on social issues; 4) Locally: World Cafes in some municipalities (Minnigaleeva, 2011).

Programs established

The whole idea of age-friendly cities is an overarching concept which may incorporate thousands of different solutions for particular areas all targeting the same goal of making cities more livable and more enjoyable for people at any age.

Programs in the city of Tuymazy are largely based on the projects which were championed by ORPWR. For example, there are two third age universities (as of 2013), which developed from the first experiences of ORPWR. The Law college started running their own third age university programs and ORP WR continued running its own. ORP WR organizes courses on the basis of demand and interests of members. Each year we conduct a survey and plan courses and events based on its results. Whenever a class group is too large to accommodate it in our office we negotiate using of facilities of the local educational institutions (schools and colleges). They allow us to use their classrooms when they are not occupied by students free of charge. We are convinced that such strategy is beneficial for young students as it allows them to observe and incorporate active ageing.

An interesting project which was significant to raising awareness and spreading age-friendly ideas was TV Studio “50+”. It was started on volunteer basis by Elena Kornilova, the chief editor of the local television company, with our support in 2007 and has become a very helpful tool in communicating ideas important for older persons. Ms Kornilova trains older students and helps them to produce shows. Every month TV Studio members prepare and air one or two shows. The shows mainly target older population, but quite often raise issues of significant public concern, such as environmental problems or community life. More information is available at the website of ORPWR www.wisdomripening.org.

Since civic engagement was made a corner stone in the foundation of the ORP WR most projects are based on volunteer efforts of members. The project “Grandmothers for children” invites older women to work with children with disabilities or from disadvantaged families, which otherwise would not be able to provide enough care and attention to their children. Grandmothers volunteer to help children (6-10 years) to study, read, draw, and just spend time with them and play. They are provided with professional support of psychologists or social workers if needed. “Grandmothers for grandmothers” is another project which is based on volunteer practices by AgeConcern Ukraine. Older women visit other people who are yet older, who live alone and not healthy enough to go outside or become a member of our organization. These visits do not require funds, but rather time and dedication from older volunteers. Travel

club for senior people is an idea which is difficult to believe for many in Russia because of the image of passive and poor older people (Minnigaleeva, Zulkarnaev, Demina, Khizhnikov, Sabitova (Jusupova), L., 2012). However, WR members started organizing trips, negotiated discounts with travel companies. Their trips range from just out of the city to routes to Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

When there are dedicated and interested individuals (like current Minister of Labour Lenara Ivanova) in the government, they learn, and they follow and they find ways to provide government funding for similar programs. For example, two very popular regional programs for older adults were adopted directly based on the practices of ORPWR. *People's Universities of Third Age* is a regional initiative, sponsored by the Government of the Republic of Bashkortostan. It provides funding for schools and colleges to establish programs for older adults. It provides limited funding to cover basic administrative costs, and covers salaries for teachers to teach older adults 13 subjects identified in the program. The subjects were defined in accordance with the data from surveys of older people in different cities. In 2011-2013 19.6 million rubles were allocated to finance the program Republic wide, more than 40 thousand of retired persons took courses through the program¹⁴. *Social tourism* programs provide older people with opportunities for travelling within Russian Federation with a significant discount. While travelling in Bashkortostan 70% of the cost is paid by the regional government. While travelling in Russia 30% of the cost is covered. According to the information on the official program's website, 2988 older persons and persons with disabilities participated in the program¹⁵. Some municipalities (for example city of Tuymazy) follow suit and provide local matching funding for local programs of social tourism. Other regional programs in the age-friendly domain include: 1) *Barrier-free environments*, 2) *Provision of dental and certain other healthy services*, which are otherwise not readily available through the state healthcare system because of additional cost, or because of waiting lines, 3) *Local municipalities' initiatives*. *Barrier free environment program* is a federal level program, but each region develops its own implementation plan and reports results to Moscow. The primary goal of the program of barrier free environment is improving the cities physical environment in order to accommodate better people with disabilities. It also fully suits AFC recommendations and therefore has been incorporated in the framework.

The most important piece in the picture of age-friendly programs is, perhaps, the one showing initiatives of local municipalities. These are projects and programs which were started in the cities independently, are in accordance with the age-friendly framework and have the

¹⁴ The Program of People's Universities of the Third Age and analytical data is available online at http://mintrudrb.ru/retiree_university

¹⁵ Information is available online at the Social tourism program's website: <http://xn--90alcrhmdckk5a.xn--p1ai/about.php>

potential to be adopted by others. For example, in the city of Ufa (capital of Bashkortostan) learners of the Third Age University were thrilled with the idea of organizing *a service center*, where cloth making or cloth repair services, hair styling could be provided for older adults by older adults on a free basis or at a discount. Naturally, with some lobbying efforts on their side, some negotiations and planning, a service center was opened backed by the government funding. Another promising idea which was implemented in the city of Ufa is a *Third Age University Alumni Association*. In a large city like Ufa (with population over one million) and third age universities running programs in every district, an alumni network may serve as a basis for a new projects and more engagement of older people. However, for our programs in Tuymazy it hardly may have the same significance, because in ORP WR there is no graduation. Students attend classes as long as they want to, and the unifying umbrella is OR PWR. A beautiful project in the area of intergenerational solidarity and connectedness has been practiced in the city of Sibay. Here they run a “*Family Tree*” (“*Shezherai*”) project, for which young and old together have to research their history and origins, draw a family tree and then talk about it at a city wide celebration. The celebration involves traditional dances, traditional food and clothes. Such events indeed help to connect the generations and celebrate culture and rich heritage of the region.

Challenges and constraints

Challenges of the nonprofit sector

Over the course of the transition of the nineties, the Russian population was taught not to trust any strange, new, or just unfamiliar structure, including nongovernmental organizations. In particular as Korzh points out, in the transition period of the nineties they were widely used as an instrument to establish “political capital” and were often abandoned by politicians as soon as they achieved their own goals. Also, charities and foundations were widely used for making gigantic profits. Due to the lack of control an NGO could work as a purely commercial enterprise and still have tax benefits because of its NGO status. Some of the governmentally sponsored NGOs were notoriously corrupt. For instance, associations of Afghan veterans were closely connected not only to the government, but to the mafia (Korzh, 2007). As shown by the research of the Center for Studies of Civil Society and the Nonprofit Sector *the problem of trust* still persisted in 2011. Almost a quarter of respondents do not think that nongovernmental organizations may be trusted, however, just over a half consider that it may be ok to trust them (CRCSNS, 2011).

The new history of nongovernmental organizations in Russia essentially started after 1991. Since then the nonprofit legislation has been changed several times. And some of the *law*

amendments were quite controversial. For example, amendments of 2005 made it significantly more difficult to register an NGO and also complicated the reporting system. Another amendment introduced in 2012 received a nickname “Law on Foreign Agents”. According to it any NGO receiving funding from abroad is required to declare itself as an entity “pursuing interests of a foreign agent” and register in a special listing. It instigated a number of negative references in the media along with heated discussions on the Internet forums, caused a new wave of distrust from the population and raised a lot of questions along with the Cold War notions.

Obtaining funding for NGOs in Russia is quite complicated. On the one hand, government spending on NGOs has been steadily growing. In 2006 President Putin introduced an annual grant competition for NGOs; grants are provided on a competitive basis. Total grant pool has increased from 1 billion rubles (about 33 million USD) in 2006 to 2.3 billion (about 70 million USD) in 2013. On the other hand, at the same time many international foundations have been squeezed out of the country by new regulations. Another part of this problem is that unlike in the Western European countries and the US, only a tiny part of income of NGOs in Russia comes from individual donations (2% or the respondents reported that they donated money to nonprofit organizations) (CRCSNS, 2011); over 90 % comes from grants of larger institutions. Local authorities very rarely financially support activities of NGOs (Institute of Foundation of Public Opinion, 2001).

Many problems also arise from the fact that often *representatives of the government do not have clear understanding of the nonprofit sector*, its laws and reality, its ways of improving lives of older people (Minnigaleeva, G., 2011). Having said that, we should indicate that 62% of NGOs somehow cooperate with local governmental institutions and city authorities. However, only 26.3% have any relations at the levels of regional governments of the Russian Federation (Baradachev, n.d.).

Lack of civic engagement. Post-Soviet “allergy” towards volunteering

Today the level of civic engagement is strikingly low in Russia. Russians do not believe in serving the public good any more for altruistic reasons. The new economic era has brought individuality and individualistic life styles to the scene. Only about a quarter of population participate in volunteer activities (Mersiyanova, I., Korneyeva I., 2011). In contrast, civic engagement in the Soviet Union was highly appreciated and strongly encouraged. Yet this engagement was not voluntary in the Western meaning of the word. It was mostly “mandatory volunteering”. All people were obliged to participate in the “volunteer” activities. Many “voluntary” activities were, in fact, dedicated to creating good for the people, for example, traditional spring “subbotniks” –volunteer clean ups of a city and recreational areas after the winter. Yet the mandatory nature of those volunteer activities led to a partial or complete

rejection of the value of volunteering and public cooperative work to create public good for communities. Since it was so deeply imbedded in ideology, the collapse of the Soviet Union and chaos in the minds of people devaluated the value of volunteer help and contributions to the society. On the other hand, people still expect that the government should provide public good. In 2002 more than 80 % relied on the government to solve all their problems (Mushtuk, 2003). This included creating civic society! Therefore it is tremendously difficult to develop civic engagement simply as volunteer activity.

Language barrier

All age-friendly documentation is developed and published in English. Most research and age-friendly practices are conducted and published in English. In Russia which was separated from the rest of the world for so long time, it is not very common to speak a foreign language. It especially applies to older generations. That means that all the literature has to be translated into Russian before we can use it for our purposes, which, of course, makes the process longer, more expensive and less efficient. We hope that introduction of the new website for the WHO age-friendly networks (www.agefriendlyworld.org) will help to mitigate the problem with pages for multiple language users and google translation available through the website.

Communications and technology

Older adults are the driving force in the AFC project, however communication technology for many of them (especially those older than 65) still constitutes a challenge in Russia. Russia is lagging behind the Western countries by the use and spread of the Internet and communication technology by several years, though multiple digital services are being actively introduced in all areas nowadays. Accordingly most older people retired from work several years ago without having used computers at work, and are only starting to learn using it for personal reasons now. Therefore we have to provide all the communication and information face to face, via telephone, in print or in public meetings. It makes it more difficult to coordinate their efforts and impedes the processes. At present courses on computer skills have become very popular among older adults and that may improve the situation in the future.

Conclusions

The Global Age-Friendly Project of World Health Organization enriched by civic engagement theory and practice offers a wonderful basis for improvement of situation of older people. As a project of this highly respected international body it brings in the credibility and verified methodology as well as possibilities for international support and exchange, at least at the level of ideas and practices.

In our experience a small grass root initiative supported by a well thought through strategy has led to development of a large regional program. The key suggestions we have followed include: create an agency to trigger, promote and implement age-friendly practices; establish partnerships with government and other organizations in the area; build and maintain media and public relations; build on culture; expand and encourage civic engagement of our members; start small and grow; provide recognition and credit.

It was essential to pay special attention to building and maintaining credibility of the organization; incorporating the value and resourcefulness of older age in our mission, name and all our activities; and creating so called “free spaces” to encourage civic engagement of our members who have become a major driving force and resource for the development of the organization. In order to expand and develop every effort should be made to build awareness of the age-friendly ideas and the WHO global project. It is impossible to achieve without partners who are dedicated and fully embrace the ideas of the society for all ages. With multiple stakeholders involved it is important to maintain regular communications, conduct information sessions and stick to the planning and reporting schedule. For continuity and sustainability of a large scale project it is essential to hire paid staff.

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