

The Bokor Movement

| Hungary |



CONVERGE

OVERVIEW

Bokor (in English: Bush) is a faith and community-based movement in Hungary. The Bokor Movement is organically built up of small groups of about 12 people who regularly meet in their small groups but members also participate in regional and national group meetings with people who share similar convictions. The small group meetings take place once or twice a month, and are centred around bible study (typically New Testament) but may include other issues such as personal/relationship dilemmas, current events, environmental issues, etc. There are no formal membership criteria although many members are churchgoers (Roman Catholic). Three basic principles are supported by the group: giving, serving and non-violence.

CONTEXT: THE PERCEIVED PROBLEM

The Bokor (Bush) Movement was started within the Roman Catholic Church in the 1960s, under the Socialist/Communist regime by a Piarist priest, György Bulányi. The most important aim of the initiative was to preserve the Christian faith, its values and lifestyle during the Communist dictatorship. The Movement was considered to be a radical branch within the Catholic Church (although it was open to non-Catholics) with three main focus areas based on the teachings of Christianity, which the members of the Movement try to put into practice in their everyday lives:

- giving and sharing (giving until there is no one poorer than themselves; giving not only from what is superfluous to needs but also from what is needed - which means aiding the poor locally as well as in developing countries);
- serving – or voluntary “smallness” (not taking power or taking office = equality); and
- non-violence (members agree to disavow the use of force, based either on action or verbally, which also means objecting to compulsory military service and, if necessary, going to prison for it).



INITIATIVE SOLUTION AND PROCESS

Bokor aims at building a better, more just society (e.g. through sharing of all resources and alleviation of poverty) through individual behavioural change along the lines of that described and preached by Jesus in the Gospels of the New Testament. Individual behavioural change is facilitated through the regular group meetings and group support. This is key to how Bokor works.

The founder, György Bulányi believed that the larger and global community could be transformed through individual behaviour change. Thus the focus is in fact on transformation of a larger community while the mechanism/process focuses on the individual level.

CONTRACTION AND CONVERGENCE ELEMENTS

CONTRACTION:

It is said in the Bible that humans have stewardship/dominion over the Earth (a question of translation). The Bokor members interviewed for the project interpreted this to mean that humans should take care of the environment. In Bokor’s most important texts no specific mention is made to environmental or ecosystem limits although reference is made to the moral imperative to protect God’s creation. However, the Bokor principles of ‘giving’ and ‘sharing’ fit not only with a convergence perspective but also a contraction perspective as their interpretation places the emphasis on voluntary simplicity and giving to those poorer than themselves. Bokor members regularly give, and not only of their possessions which are superfluous but also from whatever they have. Furthermore, Bokor members believe that individual happiness and life satisfaction is gained through putting one’s religious beliefs into practice, and in doing this they gain wellbeing and happiness through non material, low consumption means; essentially, ‘voluntary simplicity’.

CONVERGENCE:

Based on the teachings of the Bible, Bokor members believe that people should share their resources and possessions with those in need that are poorer than themselves, not only in their own community and country but also with people in the developing world. Thus, members of the Bokor Movement have been voluntarily sending donations to an initiative in India (The Gujarat Education Society run by a Jesuit priest, Cedric Prakash) since Communist times. The aim of the donation has been to help educate poor children so that they can become educated leaders of their villages. Members of Bokor and representatives from the Indian initiative have maintained regular contact.

CURRENT STATUS AND IMPACT

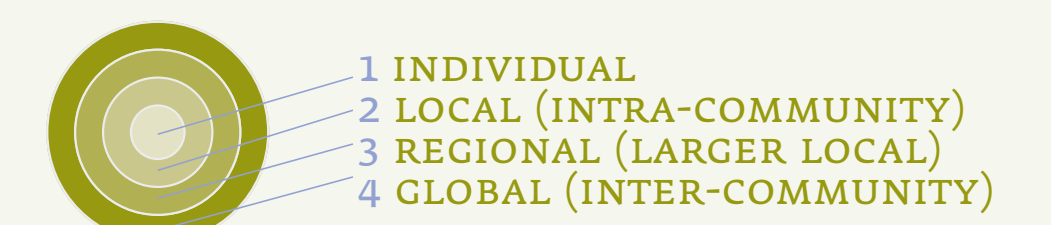
The initiative has somewhat regressed over the years, partly due to the political changes that took place in Hungary in 1990. Some members of the movement have lost their initial focus and motivation and a number of people have left the movement (there are about 1500-2000 members today, but no membership records are kept). Despite this, the initial aims of the movement have not changed at all.

While some of the small groups manage and distribute their donations locally, members of the Bokor Movement also established two foundations that take care of the donations of individual members and groups. One of them manages donations in Hungary and the other one takes care of donations destined for developing countries; now India as well as South America (Peru and Argentina) where one of the Bokor members is engaged in community development work.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Initiative website: <http://www.bokorportal.hu/>
- About the founder, György Bulányi (Hun): <http://www.bulanyi.hu/>
- Hazai Rászorulók Alapítvány (foundation which manages donations in Hungary): <http://www.bokoralap.hu/HRA/rolunk.html>
- Harmadik Világ Alapítvány (foundation which manages donations for developing countries): <http://www.bokoralap.hu/HVA/rolunk.html>

Scale of activities



Primary theme

FAITH

