

## Unit 4: Independent Research Project

### Infrastructure of Dissent.

### An Analysis on How the Art Field Respond to the Cultural Policy of Fidesz in Hungary Between 2010 and 2020

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Course title: Mres Art: Exhibition Studies

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22 June 2020

Word count: 16,228

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Eszter Óze for the idea and guidance of writing on such a timely topic of populism, and its connection to the cultural field in Hungary.

Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude to the many key members of this cultural field whom I had the chance to meet along the research process. Virág Lődi, József Mélyi, Gergely Nagy, Kristóf Nagy, Eszter Szakács, Márton Szarvas, Katalin Székely, helped in the reconstruction of this tangled network by sacrificing invaluable time and shared their incredibly useful knowledge in forms of interviews.

Last but not least, I am grateful to tranzit.hu (Dóra Hegyi and Eszter Szakács) for letting me research the Archive and therefore giving an opportunity to gather information on *action day*.

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## Introduction

Neoliberalism is the tendency which drives today's socio-economical establishment on a global scale. This tendency is a result of the elimination of liberal democratic values: popular sovereignty and the defence of equality.<sup>1</sup> Withdrawal from popular sovereignty brought about the fact that the inclusion of people into the political sphere happens only on the level of elections. In a socio-economic context, deficiency in the defence of equality has led to major inequalities among citizens of today's societies. According to Chantal Mouffe, the dominant tendency of today's politics is the result of a shift in capitalist regulation.<sup>2</sup> In parallel to technological developments, several amendments, including the austerity policies after the 2008 crisis, contributed to the precarisation of working class and middle class of several societies. With the implementation of neoliberalist policies many European countries paved the way to neoliberal hegemonies, with "truly 'oligarchic' regimes".<sup>3</sup> Against this backdrop, many right-wing populist parties are taking over social democratic party politics.

In recent years the leading political attitude has been dominated by *populism* in many countries of America and Europe. It is happening not only on the level of oppositional parties, to exist as marginal, but also on the level of ruling governments. Think of Jair Bolsonaro, elected in 2019 for the president of Brazil; Donald Trump elected three years ago as president of the United States; or Victor Orbán, president of Hungary since 2010. All represent a nationalist, conservative, and right-wing ideology. At the same time, they all apply a populist attitude in their politics, with which they had earned the majority of their nations' votes.

To comprehend the notions of Orbán, the thesis takes Chantal Mouffe's views as a basis for analytical research. Based on Ernesto Laclau's definition for populism, Chantal Mouffe applies his views on recent years' political transformation with the focus on Western and European regimes.<sup>4</sup> Instead of being a blurred umbrella term for politics driven by nationalistic ideologies or a tool for political tactics, Laclau claims that populism is a "way of constructing the political".<sup>5,6</sup> The notion defines the operations of global as well as national politics, giving an overall concerning picture of recent trends in governing. Danger within populism is that it is used by only the above-mentioned right-wing politicians. Drawing a frontier between the ruling

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<sup>1</sup> Chantal Mouffe, "The Populist Moment," in *A New Fascism?*, ed. Susanna Pfeffer (London: Koenig Books, 2018), 25.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 21-27.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*. (London-New York: Verso, 2005), 3.

elite and the people, they are the only group of politicians who articulate the oligarchy as a deficiency of society, and claim that they would give the power back to the people.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, they successfully mobilize (mostly) the working class against the ruling hegemony. Albeit often categorised as ‘neo-fascist’, this is the primary reason the populist Fidesz party has also been able to maintain its regime for 10 years in Hungary.

Cultural policy has long been an asset of state politics financially and ideologically. Both aspects reflect the persistent relationship between culture and politics, a bond which characteristically shapes countries’ societies under different hegemonies. The notion of the ‘New Labour’ in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2004 policy document ‘Culture at the Heart of Regeneration’ is a great example for this.<sup>8</sup> They treated cultural policy as an active cohort in the transformation of the society in order to elevate living conditions, and therefore, to enhance economics and production in the UK.

Similarities have been taken place in Hungary, with a stronger emphasis on the ideological claims of governments on culture. During the socialism it was a firmly top-down policy, the ‘Három T’ (‘Three Ts’, an abbreviation for Hungarian words *tilt, tűr, támogat* – prohibit, tolerate, support). Artistic practice in the form of socialist propaganda was supported; art with a neutral connotation was tolerated; every production of art or culture that advocated capitalism, or articulated action against socialism, was strictly banned. This is somewhat similar to the Thatcher government, in which a stronger political notion was implemented to the cultural policy through the Arts Council of Great Britain by the appointment of “politically aligned chairmen”<sup>9</sup>.

Nowadays in most Western countries, thus in the UK as well, private and corporate funded cultural systems are predominant, being almost entirely subjugated to market interests. Although, with the regime change, the global market could burst into the country, from 2010 onwards, a resemblance from an ideological viewpoint can be seen on current cultural political notions to the top-down cultural policy applied in socialism.

This thesis specifically focuses on the cultural political aims of populist Hungarian regime. Deeply embedded in the wider, global context of neoliberalism and populism, it gives a specific example of how art initiatives operate under a populist regime in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An

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<sup>7</sup> Mouffe, “The Populist Moment,” 25.

<sup>8</sup> Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, “Introduction,” in *Conflict, Community, Culture*, ed. Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt (Published on the occasion of UK City of Culture, 2013), 3, [https://shiftparadigms.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/conflict\\_community\\_culture\\_a4.pdf](https://shiftparadigms.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/conflict_community_culture_a4.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, *To Defend the Revolution Is to Defend Culture. The Cultural Policy of the Cuban Revolution* (Oakland (US): PM Press, 2015) 22.

insight in the operation of a post-socialist country, it also serves as good example of how European countries with similar history deal with increasing populism in their own states.

For the analysis, a good understanding of the political sphere and specifically of the Fidesz cultural policy is essential. In this respect, the first chapter deals with the topic in detail. To apprehend the socio-economic context on a national scale, the chapter heavily relies on a study published by Márton Szarvas and Kristóf Nagy ‘Dynamic Power. Cultural Production and Politics in Hungary after 2010’.<sup>10</sup>

As the research focuses on the cultural sector, its aim is to contextualize the current situation by critically debating on contemporary theories on the political currents. Mapping the network of art workers and intellectuals of Hungary, the second chapter articulates the process of critical tendencies, their purpose and their aims.

Infrastructure of dissent, the title of this thesis is art historian, Hajnalka Somogyi’s phrase for the aspiration to create a framework on which initiatives can confidently rely on. This is to foster the feeling of constant uncertainty rooted in the austerity amendments made by Fidesz to eliminate state funding for initiatives. There are, indeed, many attempts to build such an infrastructure of dissent. Non-government funded and socially engaged institutions and projects respond to the cultural crisis directly, and by giving alternatives to the ‘official’ cultural political operations of the regime, these serve as excellent case studies. In this sense, my research will focus on three initiatives.

The Studio of Young Artists’ Association (FKSE), was established as a government funded institution in 1958, but gained a non-profit legal framework in 1990. It continues to operate as a civil foundation with international connections. Their annual group exhibition ‘STUDIO ’18 – SALON’ held in 2018 can be considered a good starting point for analysis on their recurring issues on funding and identity.

Tranzit.hu, established in 2005, is a research centre in Hungary, an affiliate within the tranzit network based in Austria, Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, and Romania. The research will review with particular attention on one of their projects held in 2013-14 called *action day*. The series of forum sessions held in a direct democratic manner are examined in the wider context of protests held in the same years in the country.

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<sup>10</sup> Emília Barna, Mária Madár, Kristóf Nagy and Márton Szarvas, “Dinamikus hatalom. Kulturális termelés és politika Magyarországon 2020 után,” *Fordulat* 26, no. 2 (Autumn 2019): 229, [http://fordulat.net/pdf/26/FORDULAT26\\_BARNA\\_MADAR\\_NAGY\\_SZARVAS\\_DINAMIKUS\\_HATALOM\\_KULTURALIS\\_TERMELES\\_ES\\_POLITIKA\\_MAGYARORSZAGON\\_2010\\_UTAN.pdf](http://fordulat.net/pdf/26/FORDULAT26_BARNA_MADAR_NAGY_SZARVAS_DINAMIKUS_HATALOM_KULTURALIS_TERMELES_ES_POLITIKA_MAGYARORSZAGON_2010_UTAN.pdf) [Dynamic Power. Cultural Production and Politics in Hungary after 2010. translation of the author]

Founded in 2015, OFF-Biennale Budapest is a non-government funded biennial having topics on the contribution of art in the development of civil society, democratic education, climate crisis. Their way of operation is new to the Hungarian art scene, with connections to prefigurative politics, and with a strong emphasis on private funding.

By analysing the three initiatives, the research sheds light on theoretical tendencies, on which their responses rely on along with possible connections between the three. Providing an analytical research of the example of Hungarian initiatives, it would correspond to other countries' cultural political notions under populist regimes.

Regarding resources, the thesis relies mostly on online materials. This is partly due to the lack of state fund for such contingencies, but also partly because of its prevailing topic. Opportunities for professional offline publications are hindered by unfavourable cultural policy processes. Notwithstanding such circumstances, the subject matter of the dissertation is so current, that the debates can only be found online accordingly.

A brief fieldwork done in the form of a series of interviews and a research placement at tranzit.hu helps greatly in order to comprehend the tangled network of initiatives and theories, and therefore situating the topic in a clearer context. The seven interviews serve as a tool of ethnographical approach, increasing the authenticity of the research. Summaries of each interviews can be read in the Appendix.

Some of the phrases used in this thesis need to have clear definitions. In this thesis the word 'opposition' is being used in a specific sense to refer to the pool of politically engaged academic individuals and art workers, who articulate their opinion towards the current cultural policy actively and publicly. The 'political elite' in this context are the academic and political cadres of the Fidesz regime. Similarly, clarifying the use of the term 'culture' is important. Following the terminology of the aforementioned publication 'Dynamic Power', the anthropological term of culture by Clifford Gertz and Raymond Williams is implemented here. According to this, culture is considered to be a collective and public value, rather than an exclusive and aesthetically pleasing product for the few. As such, the thesis examines Hungarian culture as integral part of contemporary society of Hungary, and analyses its aspects in similar manner.

## CHAPTER 1: CULTURAL POLICY BETWEEN 2010-2020

The following chapter serves as a cultural political context for the institutions examined in Chapter 3. Cultural politics of the current government, along with the notions behind legislative amendments, are essential to understand in order to comprehend the purpose of motivation in initiatives' operational systems.

Even though publications of the opposition emphasise that government operations fit into, and most of the time correspond to global tendencies, the dissertation focuses on local issues, as a corollary to the former. The last ten years of Hungarian culture was dominated by state politics of the Fidesz party. The condition of cultural operation has gone through major modifications compared to those of prior hegemonies. Therefore, the first part is dedicated to the examination of the cultural politics of Fidesz. The chapter tries to gather proof on the perpetual transformation made by the government induced by nationalistic ideology and (global) market interests.

The aim is to summarize the series of illiberal actions have led to the current standpoint of Fidesz in relation to the contemporary cultural scene. Demolition of the autonomy of cultural institutions; unequal and non-transparent distribution of resources to the cultural sector, and the contemporary arts scene are aspects this chapter strives to unfold.

### Ideological Hegemony of Fidesz

In 2010 the political circumstances changed as the conservative party, Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz), won the elections in coalition with the christian party, Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP). This brought about a series of cultural political amendments, with which this subchapter primarily engages with.

On the level of cultural political operation, the leading party has two characteristics based on which the government navigates. In Adorno's view, culture, in certain cases, can be a product, in others it has a primarily symbolic and even ideological nature.<sup>11</sup> This theory is applied from a sociological viewpoint in the study titled 'Dynamic Power. Cultural Production

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<sup>11</sup> Complex in analysis, the study shows a bigger picture on the entanglement of political notions, cultural production, and interests of individuals. It is the reason my analysis relies on their viewpoint on a great extent. Ibid. 228.



and Politics on Hungary after 2010'. The publication also gave a new perspective on the cultural political power structure. A rare and exhaustive analysis written by Emília Barna, Mária Madár, Kristóf Nagy, Márton Szarvas in the periodical *Fordulat*, is a thorough investigation of the wider context of current socio-economic and political power dynamics of Hungary in terms of cultural production.

Fidesz treats certain areas of culture ideologically efficient tools to serve the government normative (e.g. fine arts).<sup>12</sup> Based on the aforementioned definition, culture can be transformed in order to serve ideologies, and therefore, be integrated in the everyday life of the public. As museums are major contributors of such culture, Fidesz treats these institutions similarly.

As the dissertation engages with fine art institutions, the following analysis focuses on the *ideological*, and unfolds the aspects which proves to be part of this cultural operation applied by the Fidesz.

A comprehensive written testament on Hungarian cultural policy is hard to find, which could otherwise serve as a guide on the notions of operation. Only a speech from 2009, held by Orbán, serves as a basis for the government's tendency and it is part of the constitution of the state. Its main characteristic is its inferior, normative role.<sup>13</sup> In his speech, he emphasises that he prefers national, traditional values over modern cultural trends, and therefore sets out an ideal path for artists and art workers. This notion dominates debates of the political elite since then, and anything in the cultural sector that alters or more open to multiculturalism/ has a negative critique on contemporary politics, is neglected, and is deprived of state support.

Such notion, the normative perception of culture, is in fact, strongly connects with the strengthening of such a regime. Based on Antonio Gramsci's theory on hegemony, Nagy and Szarvas examines culture as part of state formulation and exercise of power, which are vital to create and maintain hegemony.<sup>14</sup> I believe, it makes sense with the kind of ideological side of culture, which Adorno suggests, although, it is not articulated clearly in their publication. Power of state and its alliance fraction, according to the authors, exists through the process of defining the currently prevailing culture. As such, it always selects from the whole range of the nation's cultural practice.<sup>15</sup> Some of them are incorporated, left out, or, in some cases, even prohibited. Through this process the state can convert its ideology into cultural production.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 226.

<sup>13</sup> Luca Kristóf, "Cultural Policy in an Illiberal State. A Case Study of Hungary after 2010," *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics* 3, no. 3 (September 2017): 129, <https://intersections.tk.mta.hu/index.php/intersections/article/view/328>

<sup>14</sup> Kristóf Nagy, Márton Szarvas, interview with the author, March 2020. Summary in the Appendix.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Culture of traditions, for instance, serves an excellent basis for such right-wing ideologies, as the one of Fidesz, because tradition is in close connection to national identity, the basis of the current hegemony.

Fidesz does not consider culture as an agency, which separately operates from politics, but on the contrary: a tool to serve and popularize the ideology of a strong nation. Lacking in professional and exhaustive conception, centralization and homogenisation with the preference of the political elite, are key notions of the system.<sup>16</sup> In Luca Kristóf's words, with the institutional autonomy the regime enables the small group of this elite clientele to establish a new system for cultural policy.<sup>17</sup> The regime not only serves as a basis for creating elite groups, but with its illiberal exercise, the gap between the minor number of elite and the major percentage of society (or even the smaller portion of professionals of cultural fields) constantly increases.

By means of its power, politics can institutionalise social relationships, and therefore legitimise dominance of ruling classes.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, as part of these classes, culture contributes to the "invention and recreation of the ideal citizen, the one taking a prime role in the maintenance of power and organisation of production."<sup>19</sup> This reasoning is the premise of the urge of Fidesz to control and centralise cultural institutions. With appointments of directors chosen from the political elite, a good ideological operation of public museums is guaranteed.

The governing party made multiple actions in order to centralise cultural infrastructure with appointments of powerful actors of institutional cultural production. By having multiple roles in the cultural sector, László Baán is such a member of the regime's group of elite. He had been director of the Museum of Fine Arts since 2004, when he gained leadership over the Hungarian National Gallery and Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts too, by reason of merging the two institutions during 2012 by the Cultural Ministry. This had put an end to the autonomy of each institutions, making it complicated to successfully operate.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, it also meant that László Baán had gained directorship over three major Hungarian cultural institutions. This further strengthened his position as both a powerful cultural actor within the sector, and as a member of the small community of the elite of party politics.

Additionally, his appointment as ministry commissioner of the Ministry of Human Capacities in 2018 was accompanied by the delegation of "professional, organisational, and

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<sup>16</sup> Kristóf, "Cultural Policy in an Illiberal State," 131.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 129.

<sup>18</sup> Kristóf Nagy, Márton Szarvas, interview with the author, March 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Barna, Madár, Nagy, and Szarvas, "Dynamic Power," 230.

<sup>20</sup> Which action had also happened with the state institutions of education too.

operational renewal” tasks of the Museum of Applied Arts.<sup>21</sup> The extensive refurbishment of the museum sector, and therefore the creation of places of such national self-representation is manifested in *Liget Budapest* project.<sup>22</sup> Also under the management of László Baán, it is an urban development to build a museum quarter for all Budapest based museums.

Another symbolic acts of hegemonic control over the arts happened in 2013. It was the scandal around the new director in Ludwig Museum Budapest. Although, even the Peter und Irene Ludwig Stiftung (establishing Fund of the museum), expressed their opinion on the re-election of Barnabás Bencsik (former director of the institution), the Ministry of Human Capacities appointed Júlia Fabényi. It generated protests primarily among professionals, artists, and members of the staff. *United for Contemporary Art* organisation, together with *Free Artists* and *tranzit.hu*, organised a one-day protest on the Ludwig Museum stairs.

The Venice Biennale Office was relocated to Ludwig Museum from the Kunsthalle in 2015. Consequently, Fabényi has also been ministry commissioner of the Hungarian Pavilion on both Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition and International Architecture Exhibition.

Through its nationalistic view, the government is keen to gain full access over major art institutions as these are, as Edit András put it in her article, “museums as privileged places of national self-representation” and therefore locations must be controlled more closely by the regime.<sup>23</sup>

According to the view of authors of ‘Dynamic Power’, such centralisations of fine art institutions can be seen as an act towards the rewriting of the canon.<sup>24</sup> Such attempts are driven by conservative and nationalist viewpoints and considered as ideological control. The attempt of ideological control, however, can be used in high art, as the genre does not produce cultural means that can directly be converted into financial income (in opposition to the film or popular music industries).<sup>25</sup> However, due to its aspect of a platform for abstract expression, art

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<sup>21</sup> The ministry legislation was published in the Official Journal of the country. Hungary, Ministry of Human Capacities, “EMMI utasítás miniszteri biztos kinevezéséről,” 22/2018. (XI.9.) *Official Journal* no. 64 (9 November 2018) accessed June 17, 2020,

<https://magyarkozlony.hu/dokumentumok/b08a24179a6583674653c8714aaf0a4ef0610ae0/megtekintes> [Command of the Minister of Human Capacities for the Ministry Commissioner. translation of the author]

<sup>22</sup> Liget Budapest project website: <https://ligetbudapest.hu/en/liget-project-budapest>

<sup>23</sup> A very important counter-event took place right before the new elections in 2018. As an act against the favoured systematic institutional centralization by the government, MODEM Cultural Centre in Debrecen after 4 years under the maintenance of Déri Museum, regained its independence. This is a key element in a sense that this did not happen in the capital, but in a city very much on the countryside. Thus a major counter-event of the characteristic aspect of cultural centralisation.

Edit András, “Vigorous Flagging in the Heart of Europe: The Hungarian Homeland under the Right-Wing Regime,” *e-flux*, no.57, September 2014, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/57/60438/vigorous-flagging-in-the-heart-of-europe-the-hungarian-homeland-under-the-right-wing-regime/>.

<sup>24</sup> Barna, Madár, Nagy, and Szarvas, “Dynamic Power,” 241.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

institutions are in the focus of the ruling elite. They can transmit their aforementioned ‘transcendent’ knowledge through such facilities of a state, and therefore legitimise their position. Both Fabényi and Baán are good examples being powerful member of the political elite to convey such knowledge, and therefore transform the museums, as “privileged places of national self-representation”, into places as transmitters of the Fidesz canon.

Such actors are in the class of intellectuals of the political elite. As the ‘Dynamic Power’ study states, intellectuals see their existence as a group with transcendent knowledge and values.<sup>26</sup> However, as the rest of society stays on the level of presumption, intellectuals have the power to transmit their knowledge via state and cultural institutional arrangements to society, and by monopolizing this knowledge, legitimize its position.<sup>27</sup> As the elite of a nation and its cultural production is primarily created by such intellectuals like Fabényi or Baán, they have the ability to create and operate arrangements. Thus, giving them legitimacy, while distributing the produced ideology in society. Therefore, it is important to see that the ideology represented in major institutions, does not reflect the ideology of the rest of society as such institutions are governed by a minor group of elite, controlled by the Fidesz regime.

## Disproportionate Cultural Funding

State funding of culture remained only on the grounds that Hungary is still part of the European Union. The downfall of international economic system of 2008, and therefore Hungarian too, led to a radical cut in funding of culture by 2010.<sup>28</sup> Since then, a major part of the funding comes from the European Union. Among others, it is invested in projects of cultural heritage, with the close control of the political elite on financial distribution. These are predominantly two large-scale programs, as part of the Széchenyi 2020.<sup>29</sup> One concerning the Buda Castle, refurbishment of the buildings with the placement of the Minister’s Office there; and a museum quarter building plan, the ‘Liget Budapest’ project.<sup>30</sup> Both represent ideological control and the irresponsible nature of creating cultural policy structures in the last decade.

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<sup>26</sup> It is a general attribute of all classes of society. Definition of intellectuals based on principles of sociology of the intellectual. Ibid. 230.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 231.

<sup>28</sup> Article on Guardian about Hungary’s economic crisis. Zsolt Darvas, “The rise and fall of Hungary,” *The Guardian*, October 29, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/blog/2008/oct/29/hungary-imf>.

<sup>29</sup> Széchenyi 2020 is the Hungarian version of the Europe 2020, which originally encourages major developments mainly in the field of social inclusivity and environmental innovation.

<sup>30</sup> Council of 1<sup>st</sup> District, Budapest, Record-keeping – 2<sup>nd</sup> agenda item: The budgetary plan of the council between 2015 and 2019, April 23, 2015, 55/2015. (IV. 23.) 14-15, accessed June 18, 2020, [http://www.budavar.hu/upload/userfiles/1/pages/201606/gazdasagi\\_k\\_2019\\_1467031480.pdf](http://www.budavar.hu/upload/userfiles/1/pages/201606/gazdasagi_k_2019_1467031480.pdf)

National funding, as the institutions, are now in the hands of the ruling regime, and concerning its centralised position, are very much bureaucratic. For a better understanding, explanation of government offices responsible for cultural policies is necessary.

In general, the Parliament is the responsible actor for codification. Its Committee for Culture and Press deals with cultural issues in question, however their power in decision-makings are far less than the newly appointed roles of the Orbán regime.

Such position is, in respect of culture, is the minister operating the Ministry of Human Capacities. The individual on this position can decide on all aspects of cultural amendments, including appointments and funding distribution. In lack of a sovereign ministry of culture, the Secretariat of Culture is responsible more directly for legislations on the level of museums. Nevertheless, decision-making is controlled by the minister, as well as decisions are made on the level of interests of individuals affected. On this level it is not in the interest of the hegemony to be transparent and be examined by members of the parliament. Government was transformed and became fragmented and tangled enough to detect responsibilities concerning cultural policy.

A good example for this as a facility in the power hierarchy is the Prime Minister's Office. It does not only regulate the actions concerning national heritage and archaeology, but also takes care of extensive cultural investments<sup>31</sup>, such as the long term funding support towards representation of Hungarian commercial galleries on international fairs.

Although the Ministry has dominancy over policies on arts and culture, ideological and monetary power has been largely given to the Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA), which therefore has gained leadership in the possession of state funding. The Academy is an association for artists, "committed to national tasks concerning the arts".<sup>32</sup> In the early years, community of the MMA constituted only of being part of the ideologically nationalist group of intellectuals as members of a private association. With the stabilisation of the Orbán regime, however, the power of controlling cultural tendencies was given to the institution in 2012 with the inclusion of MMA into the Fundamental Law, transforming it from cultural association into

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<sup>31</sup> Such as the long term funding support towards representation of Hungarian commercial galleries on international fairs.

<sup>32</sup> MMA was originally established as a 'counter-institution' of Széchenyi Academy of Letters and Arts, both established in 1992. Széchenyi Academy is an affiliate institution of Hungarian Academy of Science (MTA, est. 1825). "About," Hungarian Academy of Arts, accessed June 17, 2020, <https://www.mma.hu/en/web/en/index>.

autonomous public body, with delegated state functions.<sup>33</sup> Today, MMA is a cultural state establishment with a generous annual budget.<sup>34</sup>

Beside national attributes, Hungarian state funding of culture also has a characteristic taken from cultural operations of Western countries.<sup>35</sup> The National Cultural Fund (NKA) had been a primary monetary source for cultural intentions, and functioned as an acting bureau for evaluation of tenders. Originally created in 1993, NKA facilitated the autonomy of culture, as part of the Ministry of Culture.<sup>36</sup> Its structure resembles those of the Arts Council in England or National Endowment for the Arts in North America.<sup>37</sup>

Despite its aim to be a fully functional state body, due to its powerlessness in recent years, the autonomy of the National Cultural Fund was drastically cut.<sup>38</sup> It was merged with the MMA in 2015, giving full power to the director of the Academy over decision-making processes throughout funding distribution managements of the whole profession.<sup>39</sup>

Although, a significant change in cultural politics, great structural alterations – such as the elevation of MMA into state levels – are not the only factors of policy transformations. As cultural production is managed by intellectuals, allies of the capital accumulator regime have great interest in the re-distribution of power and money. This process is done on a patron-client level, serving as a starting point of creating certain policies of the hegemony. Consequently, another aspect of funding is the informal relationships of the political elite of the regime, just as much as in the form of appointments are made.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Kristóf, “Cultural Policy in an Illiberal State,” 136.

<sup>34</sup> Article on the financial support of MMA. According to the statistics of Magyar Narancs, the overall 2015 state support for the Academy was 17,5 million euros, of which 189 thousand euros were for artistic scholarships, and 504 thousand euros for funding reasons. Péter Hamvay, “Megy a kukába – Az MMA költségvetése,” *Magyar Narancs* 30, July 23, 2015, <https://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/megy-a-kukaba-95820>. [Title: Throw It to The Bin – The Budget of MMA. translation of the author]

In the Academy’s Financial Regulations operating from 1 June 2018, the authority of deciding on not more than 472 thousand euros remains to the director, the directorial committee determines the distribution of amounts between 472 thousand and 1.6 million euros, and only above 1.6 million should the director involve the general assembly in the decision-making processes. Hungarian Academy of Arts, Financial Regulation, 2011, II. 3. § a-c, [http://www.mma.hu/documents/10180/136342/Az\\_MMA\\_2018\\_06\\_01-t%C5%91l\\_hat%C3%A1lyos\\_Vagyongazd%C3%A1llkod%C3%A1si\\_Szab%C3%A1lyzata\\_honlapra.pdf/e6dae4eb-cf2d-4c01-8ac8-f92668398d89](http://www.mma.hu/documents/10180/136342/Az_MMA_2018_06_01-t%C5%91l_hat%C3%A1lyos_Vagyongazd%C3%A1llkod%C3%A1si_Szab%C3%A1lyzata_honlapra.pdf/e6dae4eb-cf2d-4c01-8ac8-f92668398d89)

<sup>35</sup> “Institutional Description,” National Cultural Fund, accessed June 17, 2020, <http://www.nka.hu/emmifkp>.

<sup>36</sup> Kristóf, “Cultural Policy in an Illiberal State,” 138.

<sup>37</sup> The financial support of NKA is the income generated from gambling taxes. It functions as a tender resource; applicants must create an individual application in order to earn a certain amount of money.

<sup>38</sup> In 2019 the NKA had its financial base of approximately 15 million euros, 2 million euros less than the MMA received 4 years earlier. National Cultural Fund, Financial Statement for the year 2019, 2018, 76/2018. (XII.6.), accessed June 17, 2020, (1.annex in pdf) [http://www.nka.hu/archivum/jogi\\_hatter/bizottsagi\\_hatarozatok\\_allasfoglalasok/2018#76](http://www.nka.hu/archivum/jogi_hatter/bizottsagi_hatarozatok_allasfoglalasok/2018#76).

<sup>39</sup> From this time on 1/3 of the curators are delegated from MMA, 1/3 from the Ministry of Culture, and only 1/3 is delegated by professional societies.

<sup>40</sup> Barna, Madár, Nagy, and Szarvas, “Dynamic Power,” 227.

Nevertheless, it seems that Fidesz, due to culture's potential in the conveyance of ideology, does not intend to integrate private funding ( support given by corporate institutions or wealthy individuals) into the cultural sector. Having full power over financial and operational aspects of the culture means that validation of intentions as well as the restriction in autonomous operation of institutions are both guaranteed.

It is clearly visible from both the demolition of the autonomy of cultural institutions and the unequal and non-transparent distribution of resources, that in this ideological operation the introduction of a comprehensive cultural politics with a well-established ministerial apparatus are not primary tasks. Long-term functioning therefore is being eliminated, and instead, the cultural sector is based on decision-making done 'en route'. Inconsistency of state culture hinder operation of initiatives. Both in terms of legal operation and funding. Nevertheless, precisely this malfunction can provide space for alternatives to be found.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

In parallel to the deterioration of cultural politics, the crisis of the cultural sector is what determines the theoretical discourse of the opposition. The right wing regime and its cultural political exercise was criticised by local and foreign cultural intellectuals in essays, online and offline publications. Even though the regime does not give much attention to hear their voices, they contribute to the dissemination of the cultural crisis of Hungary in foreign debates. Due to the fact that the dissertation engages with the past ten years of culture, reactions are manifold. Thus this argumentation is unable to list all suggestions and concerns raised by cultural workers. Also, it is not possible to debate on the dynamics of intellectuals and its effect on the wider society and economy of the country<sup>41</sup>. This is because the primary aim of the analysis is to map out several responses given by the intellectuals of antagonists of the regime, which directly affects the operations and reactions of non-government institutions and socially engaged initiatives.

Nevertheless, this chapter strives to investigate the most significant publications of oppositional theoreticians from three angles. The aspects are: critique of the ideology; suggestions for an alternative cultural politics; critique on the opposition from within. Defining leading publications of these views, Chapter 2 aims to create a clearer look on the argument around emerging grassroots initiatives.

### Critique on the Ideology

Criticism on the ideology of the Fidesz regime has been the most trending genre in journalism. It is a feature of most online and offline politically active cultural magazines; many articles have been published not only in Hungarian, but for instance in English, German, French, and

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<sup>41</sup> Ágnes Gagyi's and Márton Szarvas's essay, however, provides a rich field of knowledge regarding power dynamics of society and politics throughout the Hungarian history. Ágnes Gagyi, Márton Szarvas, "Válság, művészet és politikai aktivizmus – ma. A kortárs kulturális mező újrapolitizálódásának társadalmi környezete," *Eszmélet* 28, no.112. (Winter 2016): 111-133, [http://epa.oszk.hu/01700/01739/00097/pdf/EPA01739\\_eszmelet\\_112\\_111-133.pdf](http://epa.oszk.hu/01700/01739/00097/pdf/EPA01739_eszmelet_112_111-133.pdf) [Title: Crisis, Arts and Political Activism – Today. The Social Context of the Re-politisation of the Contemporary Cultural Field. translation of the author]



Polish too.<sup>42</sup> The oppositional mainstream has had leading figures over the past ten years.<sup>43</sup> Professions include art historians, journalists, and artists too. Such publications articulate the illiberal and eliminating aspects of the Fidesz regime in regards of contemporary culture.<sup>44</sup> Main figures of Hungary include József Mélyi and Gergely Nagy, both publishing on this ideological topic multiple articles annually.<sup>45</sup> Their viewpoint consists of heavy criticism of the hegemony of Fidesz; cuts in the funding system; perpetual exclusion of the opposition together with politically and socially engaged initiatives from the few state funding options.

Notwithstanding all these points are relevant in the discourse, such significant intellectuals speak from a blurred position of the professional hierarchy.<sup>46</sup> To criticise the group of political elite on the basis of ethics and aesthetics, while positioning the judgement on a truly transcendent level is, according to Pierre Bourdieu, used on the level of autonomy. It can also serve as an aspect used by artists and intellectuals on themselves, to create the illusion of their non-connection to material relations, in order to describe their role through ethics and aesthetics.<sup>47</sup> Thereupon, as the study states with Bourdieu's analysis, characteristically social and power-related transfigurations are often being the underlying motive behind the proclamation of 'good' or 'bad' actions.<sup>48</sup>

As intellectuals are the primary producers and monopole holders of cultural production, it is the best interest of the ruling elite to hold on to their power, but the subordinate group of intellectuals have the same level of need to regain their place in society and politics, before the

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<sup>42</sup>Kristóf Nagy, Márton Szarvas, "Die Transformation der kulturellen Produktion in Ungarn nach 2010," *ig kultur Zentralorgan für Kulturpolitik und Propaganda* (2017): 28-31, [https://www.academia.edu/34513120/Die\\_Transformation\\_der\\_kulturellen\\_Produktion\\_in\\_Ungarn\\_nach\\_2010](https://www.academia.edu/34513120/Die_Transformation_der_kulturellen_Produktion_in_Ungarn_nach_2010). No MMA! blog entries translated in French. "French Archival Material," No MMA! Blog, accessed June 17, 2020, <https://nemma.noblogs.org/category/francais/>.

Lívía Páldi, "Strach pożera duszę. Fragmentaryczny raport o sytuacji w węgierskiej kulturze / Fear Eats the Soul: A Partial Report on Hungarian Contemporary Culture," *Magazin SZUM*, October 13, 2017, <https://magazynszum.pl/strach-pożera-dusze-fragmentaryczny-raport-o-sytuacji-w-węgierskiej-kulturze-fear-eats-the-soul-a-partial-report-on-hungarian-contemporary-culture/>.

<sup>43</sup> The phrase 'oppositional mainstream' was used by Kata Benedek in her article. Kata Benedek, "Felelősség. Gayatri Spivak afirmatív sabotázs – Milyen kultúrpolitikát szeretnénk? VIII," *tranzitblog.hu* (blog), April 12, 2018, <http://tranzitblog.hu/benedek-kata-felelosseg/>. [Title: Responsibility. Gayatri Spivak's Affirmative Sabotage – What kind of cultural politics do we want for Hungary? VIII. translation of the author]

<sup>44</sup> József Mélyi, "Collective Time Travel Without a Future," *mezosfera.org*, April 2016, <http://mezosfera.org/collective-time-travel-without-a-future/>.

<sup>45</sup> József Mélyi, art historian and academic tutor on the University of Fine Arts Budapest. Gergely Nagy chief editor of the online art magazine 'Artportal', heavily engaged with cultural policies of the Fidesz regime. While Mélyi frequently publishes in the offline magazine 'Élet és Irodalom' [Life and Literature], Gergely Nagy has a series in the form of annual reports on cultural politics of Hungary on Artportal. An example for this: Gergely Nagy, "Régi dilemmák kora. Intézményi körkép 2015 végén," *Artportal*, December 23, 2015, <https://artportal.hu/magazin/regi-dilemmak-kora-intezmenyi-korkep-2015-vegen/>. [Title: The Era of Old Dilemmas. Institutional Overview at the end of 2015. translation of the author]

<sup>46</sup> Gagy, Szarvas "Válság, művészet és politikai aktivizmus – ma," 111-133.

<sup>47</sup> Barna, Madár, Nagy, and Szarvas, "Dynamic Power," 231.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

current hegemony redistributed authority.<sup>49</sup> They are the only group that can convey its own knowledge to other levels of society, so they can advocate their opinion on ‘good’ or ‘bad’, as transcendent message.<sup>50</sup> This position is the context to make judgement on participants of the current dominating group of intellectuals.

Another good examples for this are the publications ‘A kulturális szféra helyzete Magyarországon’ (‘The Context of the Cultural Sphere in Hungary’) from 2013, and ‘Háttal Európának. A kultúra, az oktatás, a tudomány és a média leépítése Magyarországon 2010-2019’ (‘With Our Back to Europe. The Deconstruction of Culture, Education, Science and Media in Hungary 2010-2019’), published in 2019.<sup>51</sup> Both written in order to give a summary and critique on the current hegemony. Written by trending figures of the oppositional discourse (including the contribution of Gergely Nagy and József Mélyi for both editions), it was intended as a strong, academic opinion on the regime. Also, members of the previous hegemony, while articulating the malfunctions of the current regime, they do not speak about their hierarchical position within society, giving the impression that their point of view is beyond individual interests.

Such constant criticism on the Fidesz regime is also based on the aforementioned theory. Consequently, due to the subordinate cultural elite’s lack of credibility, placing itself outside the regime and creating a transcendent entity, won’t enable it to achieve its aims in opposition to the current hegemony.

## Alternative Cultural Politics

There are, however, intellectuals, who, even though does not have much power compared to the previous group within the opposition, they suggest a discourse widely present in recent years’ global debate on right-wing hegemonies. As an attempt to create discussion around an

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 229.

<sup>50</sup> Kristóf Nagy, Márton Szarvas, interview with the author, March 2020.

<sup>51</sup> Péter Lázár Bajomi, András Bozóki, Máté Gáspár, Péter Inkei, György Karsai, Magdolna Marsovszky, József Mélyi, Gergely Nagy, György Petőcz, Miklós Vörös, “A kulturális szféra helyzete Magyarországon,” *Beszélő*, July 3, 2013, <http://beszelo.c3.hu/print/13573>. [Title: The Context of the Cultural Sphere in Hungary. translation of the author]

Iván Bajomi, András Bozóki, Judit Csáki, Zsolt Enyedi, István Fábián, György Gábor, Anna Gács, Péter Galicza, Gábor Gyáni, Andrea Haris, Mária Heller, Tamás Jászay, István Kenesei, Gábor Klaniczay, Dénes Krusovszky, Kata Kubinyi, Valéria Kulcsár, Pál Lővei, András Máté, József Mélyi, Gergely Nagy, Erzsébet Pásztor, Gábor Polyák, Péter Radó, Ágnes Rényi, András Rényi, Ildikó Sirató, Éva Tőkei, András Váradi, Mária Vásárhelyi, *Háttal Európának. A kultúra, az oktatás, a tudomány és a média leépítése Magyarországon 2010-2019*, (Budapest: Humán Platform, 2020) <https://mek.oszk.hu/20200/20272/20272.pdf> [Title: With Our Backs to Europe. The Deconstruction of Culture, Education, Science and Media in Hungary 2010-2019. translation of the author]

alternative culture political system, tranzit.hu together with Ágnes Báthly initiated the series ‘Milyen kultúrpolitikát szeretnénk?’ (‘What kind of Cultural Politics Do We Want for Hungary?’).<sup>52</sup> Timed before the elections in 2018, it serves as a milestone concerning the issues in the hegemony of the current political regime.<sup>53</sup> It consists of eight essays written by theoreticians and art historians translating international notions into the Hungarian context. These are debates not only on questions concerning funding, but also connections between culture and nation, functions and conditions of the culture, as well as the legitimization aspects of its support.

A part of this series is especially significant in the context of this dissertation. Written by Eszter Óze and Júlia Perczel, the analysis investigates the possible functional alternatives and context of initiatives in Hungary.<sup>54</sup>

The characteristic of Hungary is being a semi-periphery country compared to the centrum countries (Western countries e.g. North-America, the UK, Germany) in terms of its socio-economic affect in a global scale. While such centrum, and therefore dominating, countries have an ideology and economic strategy which is being universally accepted and followed, semi-periphery countries, being the dominated ones, are adopting to the tendencies of Western countries, and applying their strategies, constantly compare themselves to those in the centre.<sup>55</sup> As a primary change in attitude, they point out the importance to focus on the country’s specificities and benefits, instead of the “universal solutions” which Western countries provide as institutional models.

Such model is a non-government organisation (NGO). These, however, have different roles in post-socialist countries (Hungary included), and have different system, with which they operate, especially after 2010. In this sense, the Fidesz regime forced such initiatives to provide functions (e.g. graduality of the system, residencies and mentor prorams), which in Western countries, where social support is stronger, state institutions provide.<sup>56</sup>

The polarised cultural political field, the result of the current government ideological transformations, is the reason for the roles of non-government institutions and those of the

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<sup>52</sup> Webpage for all the entries of the series. “Milyen kultúrpolitikát szeretnénk?” tranzitblog.hu (blog), February-April 2018, <http://tranzitblog.hu/category/milyen-kulturpolitikak-szeretnenk/>. [Title: What kind of cultural politics do we want for Hungary? translation of the author]

<sup>53</sup> Introductory text of the series on the Erstestiftung’s website. Ágnes Báthly, “Beyond cultural war. Justice, accessibility and institutional reform. What kind of cultural politics do we want for Hungary?,” *erstestiftung.org*, April 11, 2018, <http://www.erstestiftung.org/en/beyond-cultural-war/>.

<sup>54</sup> Eszter Óze, Júlia Perczel, “The wonderful product of the human mind, voluntary toilsome labour,” *erstestiftung.org*. April 11, 2018, <http://www.erstestiftung.org/en/beyond-cultural-war/>.

<sup>55</sup> Gagy, Szarvas “Válság, művészet és politikai aktivizmus – ma,” 117.

<sup>56</sup> Óze, Perczel, “The wonderful product of the human mind,” *erstestiftung.org*.

public and private sphere overlap each other. Óze and Perczel call the product of this occurrence a “hybrid model”.<sup>57</sup> This is because the Western model with a manager attitude became dominant after 1989, while trade union approach, remained from the socialism, slowly started to transform into its modern version, an association.

This hybrid model, therefore, reflects the ambivalent formalisation of alternative initiatives as a response to the cultural policy of Fidesz. While new strategies were taken from Western countries and started to be applied in the specific context of the post-socialist Hungary, financing of such initiatives was not strategically developed and therefore the proliferate appearance of such initiatives is concurrent with a strong financial struggle. Such a model consists of a project-based and unstable financial strategy, self-exploitation resulted in voluntary work, and at the same time a strive to provide social and professional opportunities, that otherwise being left out of strategies of state institutions.

Óze and Perczel suggest the construction of a new strategy, which resembles more the characteristics of a post-socialist country. Semi-periphery countries have a tendency to consider models different from Western ones as failures.<sup>58</sup> Instead of considering an institutional system only competent when taken from Western countries, efficiency lies within a strategy built upon a local context.

Even though such struggle of hybridity, Óze and Perczel articulated, is notably present at one of the case studies (Studio of Young Artists’ Association), the feature itself is dominant in many initiatives emerged during the Fidesz regime, and therefore an excellent observation to be taken as a starting point for further debates on alternative institutional operation in Hungary.

## Self-Criticism by the Opposition

As an overall feature of the cultural sector, however, there has been a lingering issue determining power structures within the group of oppositional intellectuals. The tendency, which Hajnalka Somogyi described to be an infrastructure of dissent, seems to be present not only when it comes to alternative institutional reforms, but also in the case of many altering discourses on cultural politics within the opposition. This dissent, however, does not constitute into a coherent debate, but remains on the level of fragments of opinions. According to Kata Benedek, author of another valuable essay in the tranzit.hu series, this should be a primary

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Gagy, Szarvas “Válság, művészet és politikai aktivizmus – ma,” 121.

problem to be tackled by the opposition, before the issue of cultural policy and state institutional failures.<sup>59</sup>

Interestingly, her approach for solution is officially articulated in the latter. Benedek suggests to apply Gayati Spivak's *affirmative sabotage* to solve inner discrepancies of the opposition. This is a form of sabotage done not on the remnants of a failed system, but using the tools of such structure, enter the discourse and "turn it around from inside"<sup>60</sup>. According to the definition, the opposition should be self-critical on their own operational mechanism and should consciously change its harmful habits of "protectionism"<sup>61</sup>. Benedek lists some of these inherent tendencies: "the few platforms for publication opportunities shared among friends at the expense of professionalism; lack of feedback on professional platforms; elitism in external communication towards the public; authoritarianism; debate phobia; ageism (to take validity from someone based on his/her age)"<sup>62</sup>. All these aspects are widely present in the power dynamics of the opposition, and therefore, hinder its efficiency in creating a comprehensive debate. As Benedek advises, the profession could potentially take responsibility for all these tendencies, and based on Spivak's theory, the opposition could perform an "affirmative self-sabotage" on itself.<sup>63</sup>

Spivak's affirmative sabotage could be a resolution not only for the theoretical dissent, but also for the alternative institutional operations. Nevertheless, fragmentation is present among members of the theoretical discourse, and so among members of alternative institutions. In this sense, dissent is dominant in all aspects of the cultural field, and therefore it can be traced in the operational solutions of each initiative too.

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<sup>59</sup> Benedek, "Felelősség," *tranzitblog.hu*.

<sup>60</sup> Gayati Spivak's phrase to define the action of affirmative sabotage. Brad Evans, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "When Law Is Not Justice," *The New York Times*, July 13, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/13/opinion/when-law-is-not-justice.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Benedek, "Felelősség," *tranzitblog.hu*.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 3: AN INFRASTRUCTURE OF ALTERNATIVES.

### CASE STUDIES

Even though the past ten years show significant impairment loss in the cultural field as well as the economic system, this crisis is an excellent point for analysis of alternative social practices, which is, in my opinion, the key point of the cultural field of the last decade in Hungary. Hindered circumstances of art workers in state institutions forced many members of the profession to seek for an alternative way to operate and support the arts, to have a solution for the current situation.<sup>64</sup>

The creation of professional self-organization has proven to be an increasing tendency in the art field since 2010.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, most of these were never meant to establish an “alternative”, but to articulate their dissatisfaction with the current regime. In this sense, such projects can be categorised as precursors to the building of what Hajnalka Somogyi phrased as an infrastructure of dissent.

With protests of university students in Budapest as a response for drastic measures made in the system of higher education; then the protest of art workers of public institutions, Budapest shifted into a capital of demonstrations.<sup>66</sup> The elimination of the possibility to distribute state funding for a wider range of Hungarian institutions, created an activist response among members of the profession.

Against this backdrop tranzit.hu made its one-year long event, *action day* between 2013 and 2014. They applied the strategies they learned from the Student Network, such as the action of occupying, or the operational system in the form of direct democracy. The reaction made by tranzit.hu was a direct response given to the regulations implemented in the cultural sector. It

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<sup>64</sup> An investigative report was made about the network of initiatives in 2018, from which many institutions have closed since then. Eliška Mazalanová, “All for One. Grassroots Art Scene In Budapest,” *artPortal*, April 5, 2018, [https://artportal.hu/magazin/all-for-one-grassroots-art-scene-in-budapest/?fbclid=IwAR1gl1hs8xablW4KYlpgKdQyFpv0JIE7GfcMq\\_zBQXPhSHvcAy7URzj51qk](https://artportal.hu/magazin/all-for-one-grassroots-art-scene-in-budapest/?fbclid=IwAR1gl1hs8xablW4KYlpgKdQyFpv0JIE7GfcMq_zBQXPhSHvcAy7URzj51qk).

<sup>65</sup> For example, with the power gained by the Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA) in 2012, artist Szabolcs KissPál initiated the No MMA! Blog with the contribution of many members of the art scene. They published critique on the Fidesz cultural policy and against the dominant position of MMA. They organised demonstrations in front of state institutions. Nevertheless, it remained mainly on the level of online presence, with its termination in 2016. The blog was active between 2012 and 2016. No MMA! Blog, accessed June 17, 2020, <https://nemma.noblogs.org/>.

<sup>66</sup> The student protests were organised by the Student Network (HaHa). A short video with Kata Balogh, member of the Student Network (HaHa), on their demands and aims in 2013. Grassroots Activist Guild, *Student Occupation of ELTE, Budapest, Balogh Kata Interview*, February 26, 2013, [https://hallgatoihalozat.blog.hu/2013/04/10/student\\_occupation\\_of\\_elte\\_budapest\\_balogh\\_kata\\_interview](https://hallgatoihalozat.blog.hu/2013/04/10/student_occupation_of_elte_budapest_balogh_kata_interview).

was also a brief reaction, with its short period of a year. Action day therefore couldn't become a long-term strategy.

After the 2013 protests and the tranzit.hu action day the art scene seemed to lose its energy. Several unsuccessful attempts were made to gain the position of an equal partner for negotiations. Subsequently, marginalised members of the art field were experiencing a downturn of passion for an activist attitude. Lacking in financial resources to provide maintenance for protests and alternative projects further contributed to the pessimistic mental outlook of the professional scene.

Although, a significant group of art historians formerly working in state institutions was part of such a passive attitude, OFF-Biennale Budapest, a non-government funded biennial was established in 2015. Initiated by art historian Hajnalka Somogyi, former staff member at Ludwig Museum Budapest, it had the personal and professional network to build upon. Manoeuvring between corporate and foreign cultural funding, pro bono and self-exploiting work, they have presented an operational system fairly new to the Hungarian scene. This is primarily because of their constant learning process of how to maintain a grassroots initiative in hindered policy situations and how to effectively mobilise the art scene towards an active participation in fundraising.

An association established in a different political system in 1958, the Studio of Young Artists' Association (FKSE) had once again had to regain its original purpose by 2010. To provide a union-like organisation to emerging artists had a different connotation in the socialism than in the Fidesz era of 2010-2020. The "gradualness of the institutional system" is eliminated by Fidesz, and therefore this new skill had to be introduced to non-government institutions.<sup>67</sup> Above all, a brief managerial period of operation was present in the lifetime of the Association after the regime change. All these experiences, with an ongoing financial emergency of FKSE, generated an identity crisis among board members. Nevertheless, they seem to be persistent in their original goal, to provide support and opportunities to young artists of Hungary.

The above-mentioned three case studies represent different organisational systems and different reactions to the current cultural situation of Hungary. At the same time, they are all socially, as well as politically engaged initiatives or projects. Also, these are not isolated examples given to populist and nationalistic state governance, and therefore could give an insight in initiatives working under similar state conditions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>67</sup> Óze, Perczel, "The wonderful product of the human mind," *erzestiftung.org*.

## STUDIO OF YOUNG ARTISTS' ASSOCIATION

In terms of lifespan the Studio of Young Artists' Association is the odd one out of case studies in this research. Its more than 60 years of existence would imply a difficulty in phrasing its main features into a small subchapter. Nevertheless, its dynamic relation to political power structures has reflected in the Hungarian art society, and therefore an excellent example of how organisations react to cultural political changes.

As the first chapter showed, centralisation of the institutional system has been a feature of current cultural politics. Such circumstances not only indicate the accumulation of power into central points, but also the elimination of opportunity for progression in terms of exhibition spaces, residencies, grants, and awards. From this new structure, relevant actors of the arts are perpetually left out, increasing the gap between national and international fields of the profession.<sup>68</sup>

This aspect affects freshly graduated fine art students the most directly. Against the backdrop of failing institutional infrastructure, their social status is uncertain. They do not have a place to go as a next step in their national career, and having no socially neither professionally supporting safety nets, the tendency of going abroad or dropping-out is increasingly high. In this context have the young professionals' scene the initiative which strives to give support to its members in terms of professional and social integration, the Studio of Young Artists Association (FKSE).<sup>69</sup>

The Studio of the Youth was established as early as 1958, a sort of union to support the generation of young artists. It was part of the Art Fund, a government organisation for cultural management.<sup>70</sup> Only after the regime change in the 1990's could the community gain independence as a non-profit organisation.<sup>71</sup> It was this time when its name was officially changed to Studio of Young Artists' Association.

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<sup>68</sup> Eszter Őze, Fanni Magyar, "Chýbajúce stupne - O štátnom (ne)financovaní umenia v Maďarsku a o úlohe združenia Štúdio mladých výtvarných umelcov," *KAPITÁL* 6, June 10, 2019, <https://kapital-noviny.sk/chybajuce-stupne-tazkosti-vytvarnych-umelcov-na-zaciatku-kariery/>. [For this essay the Hungarian, unpublished version was used]

<sup>69</sup> "SYAA/STUDIO," Studio of Young Artists' Association, accessed June 17 2020, <http://studio.c3.hu/syaa-studio/?lang=en>.

<sup>70</sup> Viktória Oth, "A Stúdió működése a 90-es években. A Fiatal Képzőművészek Stúdiója Egyesület története," *Balkon* 12 (2018): 8, <https://balkon.art/home/print/balkon-2018-12/>. [Title: The Management of Studio in the 1990s. The History of the Studio of Young Artists' Association. translation of the author]

<sup>71</sup> On an extraordinary general assembly in May, 1990, the board made the decision to transform the Studio of Young Artist into an association. Oth, "A Stúdió működése a 90-es években," 8.



## Constraint Resources

A tangled financial history is a key element in the FKSE complex. After 1989, the organisation needed new sources for funding, as the annual income from Art Fund on general maintenance was eliminated after they became independent.<sup>72</sup> The ministry still provides a minor financial support for such expenses on an annual basis, provided that the Association inquires for the fund.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, for exhibitions and other cultural events, a project-based financing system had to be created. As points of supply, national and international applications as well as private sponsorship had to be considered. Applications were made to, for instance, to the National Cultural Fund (NKA), the Ministry, and the Soros Foundation.<sup>74</sup>

A strong emphasis on tenders and private partners for financial maintenance was a typical feature of the period after the change of regime. This was applied instead of stable funding, received from the ministry, a characteristic of institutional operation in the socialism. Networking skills of the artistic director allowed to create a generous capital as a guarantee of financial stability. This helped to build a solid grounding for the association.

A shift in financial maintenance was a typical feature of the 1990s in general. Kristóf Nagy in his analysis on the socio-economic context of FKSE<sup>75</sup> emphasises the importance to see that there was a ‘paradox between decreasing social security and increasing freedom of self-expression’ starting before the 1990’s. Eradicated political system could mean the end of censorship in the exhibition space, and therefore chance to articulate artistic expression. Concurrently, it also meant bankruptcy of the state and major cuts in cultural funding, including the regular income of FKSE.

As current president of the Association, Virág Lódi stated, the brief period of prosper ended in late 1990’s and a long and steep descent followed in financial aspects too.<sup>76</sup> The whole organisation went through major changes, when the board removed the gallery manager position, and replaced it with a Gallery Committee in 2005.<sup>77</sup> After recurring issues with its financial maintenance, they lived up emergency capitals saved from the 1990’s and FKSE found

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<sup>72</sup> Oth, “A Stúdió működése a 90-es években,” 8.

<sup>73</sup> Virág Lódi, interview with the author, March 2020. Summary in the Appendix.

<sup>74</sup> Support from Soros Foundation had a major impact on development of cultural initiatives as well as the establishment and support of educational programs abroad during the 1990s.

<sup>75</sup> Kristóf Nagy, “Szép? Inkább új világ. A rendszerváltás és a Fiatal Képzőművészek Stúdiója egy tágabb kontextusban – A jövőt végképp eltörölni I,” *tranzitblog.hu* (blog), 13 September 2018, <http://tranzitblog.hu/nagy-kristof-szep-inkabb-uj-vilag-a-rendszervaltas-es-a-fiatal-kepzumuveszek-studioja-egy-tagabb-kontextusban/>. [Title: Beautiful? Rather a New World. Change of Regime and the Studio of Young Artists’ Association in a Wider Context – Change Henceforth The New Tradition I. translation of the author]

<sup>76</sup> Virág Lódi, interview with the author, March 2020.

<sup>77</sup> Oth, “A Stúdió működése a 90-es években,” 11.

itself in a financial crisis by the end of 2017.<sup>78</sup> This is partly due to the fact that during the 2013-14 protests of the art world, the board of FKSE decided to refuse to apply to government resources, such as the National Cultural Fund. In the lack of a once thoroughly built extended network, private funding options were unavailable. Therefore, the only public source of funding eliminated, by 2018 the association was close to bankruptcy.

## Institutional Identity

The attitude of FKSE is characterised by each governing boards.<sup>79</sup> With the regime change, even though the system was modified, original functions remained.<sup>80</sup> The Association kept its regular general assemblies with its board members. Its governing board is responsible for operations. A democratic organisation, board members are elected in every 4 years. During the socialism it had 7 members and one director from Art Fund, which grew into 11 board members from 1989 onwards.<sup>81</sup> One can apply, or has to be appointed by members, for the role of a board member. On the annual general assembly members vote for representatives to the governing board and chair. In order to get such positions in the association, simple majority of votes is necessary.

The board had to take on new roles, ones which were previously managed by the Art Fund.<sup>82</sup> Increasing responsibility with the uncertainty of financial backup could easily lead to a weak governing board, and therefore a group of members detached from the association. Based on an interview conducted with the current president Virág Lődi, the organisation have had inconsistencies with its goals and aims along with motivational levels among members.<sup>83</sup> A constant self-reflexion by board members can be noted since its organisational transformation, which was the cause of structural discrepancies within the association throughout the years.

With operational change came the shift in identity. FKSE suddenly had to adapt to the altered environment in which union-like working was replaced by a project-based management attitude. FKSE was a success in the late 1990s and early 2000s in terms of its new managerial strategy, which followed a Western pattern. During this period the Association created the role of an artistic director and major developments were made under the direction of Barnabás

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<sup>78</sup> Virág Lődi, interview with the author, March 2020.

<sup>79</sup> György Orbán, "Stúdió Szótár," *Balkon* 12 (2018): 20, <https://balkon.art/home/print/balkon-2018-12/>. [Title: Studio Dictionary. translation of the author]

<sup>80</sup> Oth, "A Stúdió működése a 90-es években," 8.

<sup>81</sup> Orbán, "Stúdió Szótár," 20.

<sup>82</sup> Oth, "A Stúdió működése a 90-es években," 8.

<sup>83</sup> Virág Lődi, interview with the author, March 2020.

Bencsik.<sup>84</sup> He achieved to integrate FKSE into the Western art scene by creating an extended network, and through his personal connections too.<sup>85</sup>

Also during this period could the Association create long-term cooperations with international art initiatives, such as the B.a.d. Foundation in Rotterdam, DCA Foundation in Copenhagen, or Gasworks in London.<sup>86</sup> Through these connections, managed to arrange several residencies and touring exhibitions, collaborations between Hungarian and international artists and curators alike.

In parallel to international networking, the exhibition-making strategy had gone through a transformation too. Since the beginning, the core objective of FKSE was to connect young and emerging artists with the art world.<sup>87</sup> During the socialist era annual *salon* exhibitions were held in national art institutions. These were the only occasions, where young artists could show their work, and by being judged and priced by a jury, their first opportunity to enter the art scene.

Salon exhibitions, heavily embedded in a certain political era, have had an ideological connotation in Hungary. As the only form of representation in the socialism, it's original meaning of a traditional exhibition form gained an additional layer of connotation. After the regime change the increase in opportunities for artists deprived salon events of FKSE from their uniqueness. These fairs completely lost their significance by mid-1990's.<sup>88</sup>

Instead, thematic exhibitions curated by artistic directors became dominant.<sup>89</sup> The Studio Gallery exhibition space had international programmes<sup>90</sup> as well as a strong curatorial methodology in its management.<sup>91</sup> Adapting to current trends in Western countries, timely topics on the arts and society were added. However, through selection and guidance of curators, the horizontal and democratic way of representation was gone. Thus members of the

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<sup>84</sup> Later successful director of Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art Budapest between 2008 and 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Virág Lődi, interview with the author, March 2020.

<sup>86</sup> Edit Molnár, "Egy felesleges konfliktus margójára – A jövőt végképp eltörölni III," *tranzitblog.hu* (blog), September 29, 2018, <http://tranzitblog.hu/egy-felesleges-konfliktus-margojara/#fn-8114360-3>. [Title: As a Side Note On an Unnecessary Conflict – Change Henceforth The New Tradition III. translation of the author]

<sup>87</sup> Studio of Young Artists' Association, "SYAA/STUDIO."

<sup>88</sup> Even though, the significance of annual exhibitions decreased, thematic exhibition-making at the Studio Gallery brought the curatorial turn into Hungary by the end of the 1990's. This was 'The Fewest' exhibition organised by Barnabás Bencsik, Balázs Beőthy, Eszter Babarczy in 1996, where organisers referred to themselves as curators for the first time. Oth, "A Stúdió működése a 90-es években," 8-9.

<sup>89</sup> Molnár, "Egy felesleges konfliktus margójára."

<sup>90</sup> For example, the artist residency program '*In and Out of Touch – British-Hungarian Cultural Exchange Project on Contemporary Visual Art*' was created, when London and Budapest based artists could work in each other's studios/homes. Oth, "A Stúdió működése a 90-es években," 11.

<sup>91</sup> Virág Lődi, interview with the author, March 2020.

Association became alienated from the goals and aims of Board members and active ordinary members, who primarily formulated the group of organisers. During the period of early 2000s until around 2010 a gap between the interests of Boards and members was present, and along its financial crisis, FKSE experienced an intensified identity crisis too.

This feature of the Association had been a dominant aspect for several years.<sup>92</sup> However, a major change in the attitude of Boards can be seen from 2010 onwards. As the field of fine arts became ideological target to the cultural politics of Fidesz, young artists, and therefore FKSE became one of the leading advocates of the rights of art workers. For instance, members and Board members participated in several university protests during the period of 2011-2012 together with the activist group, Student Network (HaHa) in order to protect university students' rights.

FKSE, therefore, gained an attitude which resembles the characteristic of unions. The Association transformed from a managerial/curatorial project into a socially engaged, politically active initiative. Hence their identity has transformed, and a collaborative strive, with a sense to create alliance on a grounding of mutual interest of its community are the most distinguishing features of FKSE.

Against the backdrop of diminishing opportunities for emerging artists in recent years, the pursuit of members' interest became once again constitutional quality of FKSE. Such ideology is implemented in the form of community building as well as providing space for representation and development. The former is made with various series of events on topics of philosophical, artistic, aesthetical discourses. The latter means exhibitions, awards (Herczeg Klára Award), and residency programs (e.g. Visegrad Artist Residency) are established.

Both actions, community building and management of artists, taken up by the association means a new way of formulating its own mechanism. The union attitude and protection of members are things the society of socialism had. With the dominance of the art market in the 1990s, in parallel to the perpetual deconstruction of a professional institutional network from 2010, such guiding and protection have once again become priorities of young artists.

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<sup>92</sup> Molnár, "Egy felesleges konfliktus margójára."

## ‘STUDIO ’18 – SALON’ Exhibition

In 2018 FKSE celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a good reason for an anticipated self-evaluation. The board of the association felt the urge to present something as a milestone in the recent history of FKSE. This served as a good occasion to process the last 28 years, and therefore to grasp the identity (and context) of the association.<sup>93</sup> For such reason ‘STÚDIÓ ’18 – SZALON’ (STUDIO ’18 – SALON), an annual group exhibition was held between 14<sup>th</sup> of September and 5<sup>th</sup> of October in 2018 (Figure 1).

The curatorial team decided to reimagine the *salon* (without a jury) as a form of exhibition display<sup>94</sup>, both to criticise nationalist tendencies in today’s mainstream exhibition displays of MMA<sup>95</sup>, and as a self-critical move by FKSE.<sup>96</sup> Hence STUDIO ’18 – SALON a heavily imbued form of exhibition, an articulation of opinion in the language of curation.

As the salon theme, so as the subheading of the exhibition reflects the historical relationship of FKSE to political powers. ‘*Change henceforth the new tradition*’ is the reverse of a line in The Internationale, the anthem of left-wing politics and socialist movements since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>97</sup> In connection with the salon theme, it is a clear irony on the past regime. It also refers to the general opinion on the Fidesz regime, that its (cultural) political amendments and conservative ideology eliminate progression, not open to contemporary innovations, hence going backwards in time and history. With the first connotation, even though ideologically radically different, an intended link between the socialist and the current regimes is present.

The decision of choosing such title and subheading also reflects the altered attitude in the ars poetica of FKSE. In spite of having again a curatorial decision on the theme, its aim was to bring together the community and articulate an issue rooted, not in its individuals, but in the union of FKSE.

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<sup>93</sup> Virág Lódi, interview with the author, March 2020.

<sup>94</sup> Based on an article with the topic on FKSE published in a 1993 edition of Balkon. Veronika Ágnes Kovács, “A Stúdió – Félkarú óriás. Beszélgetés a Stúdióról,” *Balkon* 2 (1993): 4-8. [Title: The Studio – One-armed Giant. Discourse on the Studio. translation of the author]

<sup>95</sup> The Hungarian Academy of Arts launched the exhibition series ‘National Salon’ at the Kunsthalle. This reflects the ars poetica of MMA, a predominantly present cultural ideology in conventional institutions and ministries. This is the support of nationalist, traditional art, in opposition to the plural and open artistic practices, preferred by FKSE. Eszter Márkus, “3 az 1-ben – Több vagy kevesebb?,” *Balkon* 12 (2018): 24, <https://balkon.art/home/print/balkon-2018-12/>. [Title: 3 in 1 - More or Less? translation of the author]

<sup>96</sup> Virág Lódi, “Összeáll majd egy képpé. STÚDIÓ ’18 – SZALON / A jövőt végképp eltörölni. Az FKSE éves kiállítása a szervezet 60. évfordulóján,” *Balkon* 12 (2018): 5, <https://balkon.art/home/print/balkon-2018-12/>. [Title: It Will Form a Picture. STUDIO ’18 – SZALON / To Change Henceforth the Future. Annual Exhibition of FKSE on the Association’s 60. Anniversary. translation of the author]

<sup>97</sup> in Hungarian the Internationale line translates to ‘to finally erase the past’ and therefore the FKSE exhibition subtitle goes ‘to finally erase the future’.

In Virág Lódi's view, STUDIO '18 – SALON is more like a community project, than an annual exhibition.<sup>98</sup> The traditional salon theme resulted in a contemporary aim of community based political awareness. The goal of curators to do a community led project resulted in 99 applications made by artists of FKSE. Lódi here connects the high interest with an increasing tendency towards a politically more engaged attitude among members. In her words "The majority of participating artists in agreement with the initiators of Salon interpreted the situation as a sort of power demonstration, alliance..."<sup>99</sup> To add, Márkus also speaks of the STUDIO '18 – SALON, as not a traditional place of representation, but, through artworks installed in a crowded arrangement, "subaltering individual artistic achievements to a community goal."<sup>100</sup> Indeed, from the exhibition display it is clear that the curatorial team wanted to reflect on the mass community of FKSE, and the entanglement of connections, connotations, and issues that the socio-economic context implies (Figure 2).

## Community Crisis

Regardless of the milestone aspect of the exhibition, Lódi writes that, a general apathy was the distinctive tendency among visitors of both the exhibition, or the events organised around the event.<sup>101</sup> This is more due to the long-term issue of community identity, than financial difficulties. As Lódi phrases, there is a distinctive commonality in the mental outlook of boards and staff members in the history of FKSE: "the work in emerging, self-destruction, questioning of principles, search for identity, which appears time and time again."<sup>102</sup>

This specific project of FKSE encompasses all issues emerged within the association throughout the years. 25 junior and senior members created the concept around keywords (self-definition, representation of interest, dependence/independence, volunteering, self-exploitation) to contextualise the research and artistic processes.<sup>103</sup> These words represented the issues within FKSE, and clearly show that identity crisis ('eternal crisis', as Lódi phrased it) formulated around the whole community, not only among board members.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Lódi, "Összeáll majd egy képpé," 5.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Márkus, "3 az 1-ben – Több vagy kevesebb?," 24.

<sup>101</sup> Lódi, "Összeáll majd egy képpé," 6.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> The process is recorded in record-keepings, published in *index – a művészet helyszínei / places of art*, no. 132.

<sup>104</sup> Virág Lódi, interview with the author, March 2020.

For such reasons, as The Barcsay Hall of Fine Art University and their application announced before, was a good place to launch such an event. On one hand, it is the space where two communities – FKSE and students – could reconvene. On the other hand, it is the historical place of the Kunsthalle, which was one of the many national

As the FKSE complex shows, this identity crisis has been the result of its existence under various political infrastructures. In Virág Lódi's opinion the primary source of the crisis is both within the community, and in the relationship towards FKSE in today's society. Even though a constant struggle predestines board members, the oddity is not that the Studio of Young Artists' Association is a bad organisation, but that it was constructed in a different socio-political system, with different aims and goals and management system. It is a "leftist generational organisation".<sup>105</sup>

Regarding the financial crisis, it is important to see a bigger picture provided by Kristóf Nagy.<sup>106</sup> He takes the management in the 1990's as an example. According to him, through its self-inventing skills, FKSE could adapt to the changing socio-economic system. While keeping its original role and function as 'first point of contact' to emerging artists with the art world, FKSE transformed its organisational framework, management, and profile.<sup>107</sup>

The FKSE *complex* incorporates a significant identity crisis and a wavering financial sustenance since the late 1990's. Both originate from the altered socio-economic system created after the regime change, and therefore strongly connected. Such a feature is distinctive in the case of this association, making it a unique example as a socially engaged, union-type initiative.

The antagonism Virág Lódi speaks about – the leftist attitude in a contemporary environment – through Kristóf Nagy's lense, is precisely what keeps FKSE going forward. The self-questioning and self-inventing mental outlook, which in Lódi's opinion is more of a curse than a blessing, are the skills with which governing boards could reinvent FKSE from time to time, and, periodically more or less successfully, could manage to save it from final termination even after 60 years of existence. It has every potential, as a democratic organisation, as long as they keep the dynamics of antagonism working as power-source of renewal.

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institutions housed the annual exhibitions of the Studio of Young Artists. Another was the Ernst Museum, exhibition space for temporary exhibitions of the Kunsthalle. Orbán, "Stúdió Szótár," 17.

<sup>105</sup> Even though she goes on and connects the terms of mutual trust, professional solidarity, self-improvement, self-organisation with voluntary and self-exploiting work. In my opinion, as the former could be associated with left ideology, the latter is a product of capitalism of the modern world, completely leaving out socially engaged political thoughts. Lódi, "Összeáll majd egy képpé," 6.

<sup>106</sup> Nagy, "Szép? Inkább új világ," *tranzitblog.hu*.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

## TRANZIT.HU – ACTION DAY

Tranzit.hu is part of the European network tranzit.org established in 2002, with autonomous initiatives in Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovak Republic and Romania. The loose connection of each affiliates allows them to work in the local context of contemporary art. This also means each tranzit.hu has its own organisational system.

In 2013, amidst the protests on the Fidesz government's new policy implementations on cultural politics, Emese Süvecz from tranzit.hu initiated *action day* (Figure 3).<sup>108</sup> This was a one-year long series of forums held each month mediated between politically engaged visual art professionals, activist groups, NGOs, and members of the public on the politics of contemporary art and humanities. Starting in April 2013, the aim of action day was to create a decision-making platform, and therefore to take action on community level.<sup>109</sup> Through these series, art professionals initiated multiple actions<sup>110</sup> in order to raise their voice against resolutions made in the cultural field by the current political regime. As a characteristic of the series, action day strongly relied on support given by and collaboration made with initiatives or activist groups, which had already had their refined structures and manifestos. Such valuable organisations in the progression of action day were Student Network (HaHa) and The City is for All (AVM).<sup>111</sup>

### Action Day Structure

The 12 forum sessions had their specific structural and operational system, based on grassroots democracy. As a core value of the forum, tranzit.hu intended the events to be non-hierarchical, therefore anyone from participants could join to working groups on organisation, communication, operations. Nevertheless, tranzit.hu seems to be the organiser rather than solely an institutional background. As another form of content, action day actively reflected on its

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<sup>108</sup> "tranzit. hu action day - April: What to do?" *tranzitblog.hu* (blog), April 19, 2013, <http://hu.tranzit.org/en/event/0/2013-04-19/tranzit-hu-action-day-april>.

<sup>109</sup> Action day was held in every month, apart from August 2013. A forum lasted for three hours, between 6 p.m. until 9 p.m. and had an average of 30 participants on each forum.

<sup>110</sup> Ludwig Stairs, Memorial Service and Funeral of the Kunsthalle, Cultural Coup in All Particulars (protest at the opening of Pesti Vigadó)

<sup>111</sup> Website of Student Network/ Hallgatói Hálózat, accessed June 17 2020, <https://hallgatoihalozat.blog.hu/>. Website of The City is for All/ A Város Mindenkié, accessed June 17 2020, [https://avarosmindenkie.blog.hu/2009/01/01/english\\_107](https://avarosmindenkie.blog.hu/2009/01/01/english_107).



operational system, as a grassroots democratic community, and therefore frequently invited and cooperated with activist groups, NGOs.

The agendas followed a strict format and remained more or less in the same structure throughout the year. Being a democratic forum, action day had its own agenda prepared prior to the event, and which was put together with issues raised by participants on the newsletter of action day. Every forum started with the introduction of participants along with the explanation of rules – use of hand signs and timeframes for speaking. In this section action day organisers not only gave time to individuals to introduce themselves, but also to the invited activist groups or non-profit organisations. In such cases initiatives had to make an introduction in a concise and informative way – as they did on the first action day in April 2013.<sup>112</sup>

Thereafter two main sections followed: report on topics and the debate. On most of the forum sessions topics were researched, discussed, and common position was then made by action day working groups. These were formulated by participants of the forum who volunteered to unfold certain issues in detail.<sup>113</sup> In other cases, the above mentioned groups were invited to discuss their working methodology. Such session was prior to the forum on September 2013 with The City is for All activist group or the first session co-organised with Student Network.

Opinions equally confronted, every respondent got the same timeframe to articulate comments during the debate section. A majority vote on the final decision concluded the discussion. As a closing, everyone could give a brief feedback on experiences, needs, how should the next session be conducted, what was a good method or resolution, and what to leave out next time.

The first session, as a pilot one, naturally indicated potential alterations in the future ones. Nonetheless, due to the aspect of grassroots democracy, comments of participants were actively taking into account for next months' agendas, as well as topics were shaped by latest issues (mostly in line with cultural political amendments). Forum-preparation meetings were taking place prior to each action day. Organisers met to set up plans for a smoother session with the participants.

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<sup>112</sup> “tranzit. hu action day - April: What to do?” *tranzitblog.hu* (blog) April 19, 2013, <http://hu.tranzit.org/en/event/0/2013-04-19/tranzit-hu-action-day-april>.

<sup>113</sup> Additionally, a communication group was responsible for the set-up of newsletter and internal communication.

As the program was action-based, organisers had to self-assess the working process of action day regularly.<sup>114</sup> For instance, action day organisers created a catalogue of issues to discuss with The City is for All in September, in order to troubleshoot the generation gap, lack of community equipment, online/offline communication, effective decision-making processes. On the forum, thus, resolutions were articulated by the AVM group primarily on external and internal communication, and moderation of forums. As a third suggestion, AVM emphasised the importance of conducting meetings in two different sections. Mainly, that action day should have meetings separately for operational working groups and for strategical meetings for organisers.

## Session Topics

In content, topics were on timely issues prevailing the cultural scene. During the first forum in 2013, for instance, the lively debate section was on the hegemony of MMA, the institution which gained power only recently, and had already showed the result to dominate the art scene, both ideologically and monetarily. Participants evaluated the current context, outlined specific issues, and as a following section, created a to-do list on how to react to the situation. Action day then concluded in a resolution. Participants agreed on the need for a change in attitude in society, and the structure they operate in. For the former they agreed there is an urge to stimulate a wider range of people inside and outside the art profession, to create civic awareness. This, according to action day, could be reached by organising a boycott.<sup>115</sup> The solution for the latter was a more complex proposition: members were in unison that an alternative system should be created instead of the one existed.

In November 2013, members were informed on the report of the museum law working group on action day. The report was assessed from a professional and legal angle of the legislative amendment on museums, public libraries, and cultural education. implemented in

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<sup>114</sup> Namely at the end of the first session in April 2013, in September, then at half-term in December, and finally as an evaluation on the last forum in April 2014.

<sup>115</sup> The boycott refers to the application for the National Cultural Fund, which had been annexed by the Hungarian Academy of Arts by then. After this session the Unite for Contemporary Art activist group was formulated, which organised Ludwig Stairs, a one-day series of events in a form of an occupy action. It was held in the Ludwig Museum in response to the appointment of the director, Júlia Fabényi. "Position of United for Contemporary Art (UCA)," *No MMA!* (blog), May 15, 2013, <https://nemma.noblogs.org/2013/05/15/position-of-united-for-contemporary-art-uca-may-15-2013/>.

October.<sup>116</sup> On this regard, the proposition of the working group was to hold a forum for the wider public of professionals, which unfortunately remained undone.

On the forum in January 2014, a debate section was held on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of National Cultural Fund (NKA). Perspective of participants was articulated in the form of brief comments,<sup>117</sup> and proposed some resolutions to change the system of the Fund.<sup>118</sup>

Action day had its external and internal communication platforms. The former functioned as a public way of informing people, as the latter provided a private and live platform for discussions between participants only. For a wider public the primary, and most effective way was to create Facebook events, as a form of information-sharing as well as advertisement. Both operated by members of the forum, minor discrepancies in assessment of information (external) and inconsistent policy for regulation purposes (internal) can be detected.

A more specific form of external communication (and now as a form of documentation) was via the record-keepings, 'Action Day-Reactions', of each action day.<sup>119</sup> Their structures and concisions are varied, thus a comprehensive knowledge on the action day procedures is hard to grasp. Nevertheless, these are the only public documents on the forum discussions of action days, therefore a good point to start the analysis. Their examination is important to reconstruct the content of each forum, but also to follow the development of evaluation and self-reflection of organisers on the stages of operation.

## Participatory Democracy

The first and foremost aspect of an event like this, is its objective. On the first session in 2013 action day was announced as a democratic forum on cultural politics. Their main focus was on co-operations with activist groups, non-government institutions, and other, politically active initiatives, in order to engage with and to mobilise professionals of all kinds of art

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<sup>116</sup> Member of the Parliament Proposal, A múzeális intézményekről, a nyilvános könyvtári ellátásról, és a közművelődésről szóló 1997. évi CXL. törvény módosításáról, 2013, <https://www.parlament.hu/irom39/12053/12053.pdf>. [Title: Amendment of the law 1997. CXL. on Museum Institutions, Supply of Public Libraries, Community Culture. translation of the author]

<sup>117</sup> From the participants' perspective the fund had stopped focusing on art projects and artists, and turned towards monument erection in public spaces and to give financial support for private galleries on international fairs. Also, they raised their concerns as it is less independent, under the close control of MMA.

<sup>118</sup> Transparency in the process of evaluation of applications; clearer delegation and regulate conflict of interest of curators; re-separation of merged colleges etc. "Akciónap-reakció: egy jobb NKA-ról is szó lehetett volna a januári Akciónapon," *tranzitblog.hu* (blog), February 19, 2014, <http://tranzitblog.hu/akcionap-reakcio-egy-idealisabb-nka-rol-is-szo-lehetett-volna-a-januari-akcionapon/>. [Title: Action day-reaction: There Could Have Been a Discussion on a Better National Cultural Fund. translation of the author]

<sup>119</sup> The name was given to the record-keepings after a couple of forums by the organisers. These are published on *tranzitblog.hu* in Hungarian, and two entries on the April and July 2013 events are published in English on *tranzit.org*. These are all written in different forms, depending on who wrote the entries.

practices. In the focus of topics was the contemporary fine art institutional system and its broadcast to a wider public. Tired of the aimless grumble of art professionals, action day was created “with a characteristic of practice, rather than ventilation”<sup>120</sup>, where preparation takes place for actions. Throughout the months it gives the implication that action day found its own operational base, although, still actively invited activist groups to help troubleshoot. As a consequence, on the forum in April 2014 the question was raised: how to describe the identity of action day. Is it a community or a structured and supervised entity, in which participants repeatedly get involved without a long-term commitment? If it’s a community, then how closed it is? How to maintain a self-organised community: not to generate topics artificially, but make it produce topics itself?<sup>121</sup> These are questions to be interpreted by the theoretical background of action day.

In the words of the organisers: “the project bases its activity on the belief that in order for advocacy of interests to be successful and effective, it must be radically rethought in terms of form and framework.”<sup>122</sup> In this regard, action day was a unique initiative in the field of visual arts. A grassroots democratic system was unprecedented, as a form for problem-solving.

Tranzit.hu launched events of the “community and self-organisation based policy initiative”<sup>123</sup> in collaboration with Student Network, thus emphasising the action preparation aspect. The Network is an autonomous organisation made by university students and is based in Hungary. Initiated in 2011, they organised major protests in 2012 and 2013 with universities (most prominently Corvinus University and Eötvös Loránd University) as a response to drastic measures proposed by the government regarding major cuts in numbers of scholarships and implementing the ‘student contract’<sup>124</sup>. Their form of operation is based on the system of *participatory democracy*. As such, they do not have permanent positions for representatives or

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<sup>120</sup> “Jegyzőkönyv tranzit.hu akciónap: Április – Mi a teendő?,” *tranzitblog.hu* (blog), April 26, 2013, [http://tranzitblog.hu/jegyzokonyv\\_tranzit\\_hu\\_akcionap\\_aprilis\\_mi\\_a\\_teendo/](http://tranzitblog.hu/jegyzokonyv_tranzit_hu_akcionap_aprilis_mi_a_teendo/). [Title: Record-keeping tranzit.hu action day: April – What to Do? translation of the author]

<sup>121</sup> “Akciónap-reakció: Hogyan tovább?” *tranzitblog.hu* (blog), May 20, 2014, [http://tranzitblog.hu/akcionap-reakcio\\_hogyan\\_tovabb/](http://tranzitblog.hu/akcionap-reakcio_hogyan_tovabb/). [Title: Action day-Reaction: What’s Next? translation of the author]

<sup>122</sup> “tranzit.hu action day – July,” *tranzit.org*, July 31, 2013, <http://hu.tranzit.org/en/event/0/2013-07-31/tranzithu-action-day---july>.

<sup>123</sup> Emese Süvecz, “A hónap bloggere: Süvecz Emese,” *tranzitblog.hu* (blog), April 7, 2014, [http://tranzitblog.hu/a\\_honap\\_bloggere\\_suvecz\\_emese/](http://tranzitblog.hu/a_honap_bloggere_suvecz_emese/). [Title: Blogger of the Month: Emese Süvecz. translation of the author]

<sup>124</sup> Student contracts require students studying with scholarships to ‘give back’ to the country, and after graduation work the number of years the students studied at universities.

a leader, but create working groups or committees to undertake tasks, and use majority voting to find common settlement.<sup>125</sup>

Participatory (or participationist) democracy is a primary subtype of democracy, in opposition to representative democracy.<sup>126</sup> The intent of participatory democracy is that people are directly, regularly, actively, and intimately involved in the political decision-making process. Its main focus is not on the resolution, but the process by which resolution is reached.<sup>127</sup> By people getting directly involved, it is believed to be one of the most effective ways to improve the quality of participants' political inclinations, thus the quality of decisions made through the process.<sup>128</sup> Above all, it increases legitimacy of policies – precisely because people make these political decisions, therefore more likely to accept them, even if they do not agree.

While socially engaged groups and movements remain on the margins of power-hierarchy in representative democracy, Donatella della Porta and Alice Mattoni articulates its strength, when it comes to reforms. “Recognising the democratic potential of mistrust means, in fact, to push forward the reflections of the democratic role played by non-institutional actors in the political systems.”<sup>129</sup> In this case, acquiring the form of a participatory democratic group, action day made a step forward in the search for a version of democracy, to be implemented instead of the current regime. Amidst such undemocratic circumstances (and during cycles of protests) can grassroots organising formulate, where equality in decision-making is primary.<sup>130</sup>

Representative politics could often be the subject of dissatisfaction. On account of issues in decision making under conflict by such political systems, participatory democracy could be implemented, therefore eliminating the cause, and not the symptoms of the problem.<sup>131</sup> “Participationists seek to reform people, not just government.”<sup>132</sup> In this regard, participatory politics bear the same features as prefigurative politics, one which is a characteristic of OFF Biennale, according to Eszter Szakács.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> “How HaHa Works?” *Hallgatói Hálózat*, accessed June 18 2020, [https://hallgatoihalozat.blog.hu/2013/04/02/daniel\\_g\\_szabo\\_on\\_danesjenovdan\\_si](https://hallgatoihalozat.blog.hu/2013/04/02/daniel_g_szabo_on_danesjenovdan_si).

<sup>126</sup> Richard S. Katz, “Participationist Democracy,” in *Democracy and Elections* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 67-78.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* 67.

<sup>128</sup> Dieter Fuchs, “Participatory Democracy,” in *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*, ed. Aaron Delwiche, Jennifer Jacobs Henderson (United Kingdom-New York: Routledge, 2013) 168.

<sup>129</sup> Donatella della Porta, Alice Mattoni, “Cultures of Participation in Social Movements,” in *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*, ed. Aaron Delwiche, Jennifer Jacobs Henderson (United Kingdom-New York: Routledge, 2013), 172.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Katz, “Participationist Democracy,” 68.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> Eszter Szakács, interview with the author, December 2019. Summary in the Appendix.

Although it seems a feasible system to implement on a smaller scale (e.g. level of local governance), there is a major concern raised by both in Katz's book and by the organisers of action day. Namely, that indifference could exist in the action of participation. Katz says "the primary benefit is from involvement in participation itself, not the impact on the outcome. if one has never experienced participation, cannot be expected to anticipate its rewards. In this case, disinterest is result, not cause."<sup>134</sup> This could be the case, in the situation of action day, when at the stage of self-evaluation in the very end in April 2014, was a lack of affirmation whether it is worth keep doing. Participants were debating in a lively manner in April 2013, all seemed to be personally, and therefore emotionally involved in the issue.<sup>135</sup>

This can be interpreted as a strong will, which unfortunately, didn't last until the end, and, according to the notes of organisers, was active until December.<sup>136</sup> From this point on, as mentioned above, topics were generated artificially in order to keep the sessions going. In this sense, Katz is clearly ahead of the concern of organisers, when he states: "Even if a participatory system would be self-sustaining, it might not be self-initiating."<sup>137</sup> Accordingly, tranzit.hu and organisers, although, had a very specific and solid idea of the topic of the one-year long sessions, still couldn't reach out to their audience. After this period, action day still couldn't reach the point where its participants could see the potential in their organisational form and could initiate own ideas; take the action day events further. Consequently, without a strong will in the project participants, and with the abrupt termination, no long-term sustainability of the direct democracy could be successfully formulated. Nevertheless, such an organisational framework, if applied consciously, could potentially enhance the cooperation of the group of professional opposition.

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In fact, this connection is also being made in the Cultures of Participation in Social Movements' writing. "...while social movement organisations stress the prefigurative role of participation as a "school of democracy". della Porta, Mattoni, "Cultures of Participation in Social Movements," 173.

<sup>134</sup> Katz, "Participationist Democracy," 72.

<sup>135</sup> In the record-keeping from April 2013 one can follow the actual discussion made between participants. e.g. '3. Responder: MMA has all the ideological censorship. MMA equals to money and threat. Hegemony of MMA has to be erased!' "Április – Mi a teendő?" *tranzitblog.hu*.

<sup>136</sup> "Akciónap-reakció: Hogyan tovább?" *tranzitblog.hu*.

<sup>137</sup> Katz, "Participationist Democracy," 72.

## OFF-BIENNALE BUDAPEST

Continuous withdrawal from state museums by art workers was a characteristic of the 2012-2014 period, in parallel to appointments of members of the political elite. This drastic shift in the institutional system brought about the emergence of alternative, grassroots initiatives and galleries. The reason being that the highly qualified staff members of state institutions established their own initiatives and started to engage with debates missing from the ‘official canon’ represented by their former work places.

Such theoretical discourses, for instance, are feminism, popular culture, contemporary art (with a focus on emerging young artists). All of them interpreted in the local as well as in the post-socialist contexts, therefore in relation to the art history of surrounding countries. Individuals started their own businesses in such a way are Kata Oltai<sup>138</sup> and Hajnalka Somogyi, both formerly curators at Ludwig Museum Budapest and left after the appointment of the new director, Júlia Fabényi in 2012.

Hajnalka Somogyi established OFF-Biennale in 2015. OFF-Biennale is a one-month art event coordinated by a board of curators, with many projects presented (around 80 in 2015, and 50 in 2017) by various emerging Hungarian and international participants. As she realised the restrained circumstances of expression created by the altered institutional governance, Somogyi left the state institutional system.<sup>139</sup> Such a step means bravery when state operation is largely embedded in society as the only way of function of art (and most cultural) institutions.

Political in meaning, the second and third editions process similar issues from different perspectives.<sup>140</sup> The Biennale held in 2017 engaged with the idea of a democratic republic, a project called ‘Gaudiopolis’ or “The City of Joy” made by Lutheran pastor Gábor Szthelo after World War II between 1945 and 1950. The topic was clearly a response to the current regime (Figure 4).

The intention for the 2020 edition titled ‘Breathe!’ was a version between the first and second Biennales. The first being more of an activism, the second much more similar to a curatorial project with a definite theme. On one hand, it was a response to the climate crisis. A

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<sup>138</sup> A good example for the representation of feminism is Kata Oltai’s FERi Gallery. Oltai established her privately funded gallery in the VIII. district of Budapest, which costs are covered by the income of her upcycling fashion store, Konfekció [Fast Fashion. translation of the author].

<sup>139</sup> Hajnalka Somogyi, “Can We Work Like This? OFF-Biennale Budapest,” in *Curating after the global*, ed. O’Neill, P. – Sheikh, S. – Steeds, L. – Wilson, M. (London: MIT Press, 2019) 426-440.

<sup>140</sup> The 2020 edition of OFF-Biennale Budapest had to be postponed because of the COVID-19 crisis. Instead, it is going to be held in 2021.

global issue, which has affected all aspects of our lives, including the global art world. On the other hand, it was also a critique on the ‘suffocation’ of the cultural sector. The term means the perpetual elimination of opportunities (financial and existential) given to cultural workers by the government, with less and less free space for artistic expressions. In this case, an even stronger purpose of context can be traced than in cases of previous editions.

OFF-Biennale of 2015 was marked as success of the cultural opposition. Its bare existence was regarded as not only a protest, but a milestone in *positive resistance*.<sup>141</sup> The term was emphasised by Somogyi too at the time the project was originally established, and it has been closely attached to the initiative since then. It means an action, rather than a passive attitude in the form of disapproval. Somogyi, just like Olta, are professionals who made steps towards an alternative solution on existing discrepancies in state culture.

The name of the biennial has a similar implication too. Following the theory of Svetlana Boym on being ‘off-modern’, the OFF curators suggest the creation of a system parallel to the ‘official’.<sup>142</sup> The terminology here means not only being ‘out’ or against something as a binary opposition, but to establish an arrangement, unlike others. The Biennale proposes an alternative way of thinking. In this sense, following Boym’s theory, OFF-Biennale curators do not intend to change current institutional operations.

## Financial Sustenance

This aspect of being alternative is well represented in their funding system. The operational system of OFF-Biennale reintroduced private funding support, which was once started by Barnabás Bencsik at FKSE in the 1990s and abruptly adjourned by the cultural sector in general. Based on an interview conducted with Katalin Székely, one of the curators of the Biennale, its financial structure can be reconstructed here.<sup>143</sup>

Involvement of external resources is what primarily defines fundraising. OFF does not have a passive attitude in its finances. They are constantly working on an efficient operational structure to function in order to actively reach out to various stakeholders of local and global

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<sup>141</sup> Eszter Szakács, “Unofficial Art and Positive Forms of Resistance Today in Hungary,” *Independent Curators International*, October 13, 2016, <https://curatorsintl.org/research/unofficial-art-and-positive-forms-of-resistance-today-in-hungary>.

<sup>142</sup> Svetlana Boym, “On Off,” in *The off-modern. International texts in critical media aesthetics, volume 11*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 133-134.

<sup>143</sup> Katalin Székely, interview with the author, November 2019. Summary in the Appendix.



market. This also helps the initiative to protect itself from harmful measures made by the government.<sup>144</sup>

The private sector and corporate partners are therefore heavily involved in the financial maintenance. To manage corporate partners, however, an ethical approach is needed. Székely cited the case of the latest biennial, as one of its topic was surveillance in society. In this regard, they strongly rejected Google as a partner: it would have ruined the Biennale reputation if they had accepted funding from the largest company infamous for their online inspection on society.

Organisation structure, in accordance with its financial strategy, transforms from time to time, adapting to hindered conditions for non-government organisations. The first edition of the biennial in 2015, according to Székely, was not even a legal entity. Instead, Liga Association (managed by Barnabás Bencsik) provided legal background for operations. Similarly, OFF acted as a campaign for represented artists, and provided financial support too. It was a less organisational, more activist approach compared to later years. Today they operate on a non-profit basis as OFF-Biennale Association.<sup>145</sup>

The activist attitude brought about financial difficulties for the 2017 edition, in terms of support provided for more than a hundred projects. Although, on both Biennales cultural institutions and associations served as primary financial support<sup>146</sup>, a change of strategy was needed. Consequently, for the 2020 edition Katalin Székely emphasised the management of operation in the form of a democratic group.<sup>147</sup> OFF-Biennale in the past years was therefore built up as a brand by both curators and artists alike. While OFF works as an ‘incubator’ and as a producer, that gives financial framework, members of projects help in the fundraising and the realisation of everyone’s projects too. Through this organisational system, responsibilities are evened out and a democratic approach enhances efficiency in the decision-making process.

Also for financial reasons, organisers created a Members’ Circle for collectors and individuals as early as 2015. At the beginning there were auctions organised where members could support the initiative in exchange for art. On these occasions, fee was paid for the artist,

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<sup>144</sup> An example for this is the case of the LXXVI. 2017 law or ‘2017 NGO Law’. It states that every organisation which makes an income more than 7.2 million Forints from foreign sources, should publicly declare that they are an ‘initiative supported from abroad’. The law primarily targets politically engaged initiatives supported by mainly leftist, foreign organisations such as the Soros Foundation or the Open Society Foundation. “2017. évi LXXVI. törvény,” Wikipedia.org, accessed June 18, 2020, [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017.\\_%C3%A9vi\\_LXXVI.\\_t%C3%B6rv%C3%A9ny](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017._%C3%A9vi_LXXVI._t%C3%B6rv%C3%A9ny). [Title: LXXVI. 2017 law. translation of the author]

<sup>145</sup> A donation page was set up accordingly. Available from their website. “Association,” OFF-Biennale, accessed June 18, 2020, <https://offbiennale.hu/en/about/association>.

<sup>146</sup> In 2015: Open Society Foundation and Norwegian Fund; in 2017: Kulturstiftung des Bundes and Leipzig Cultural Institution. Katalin Székely, interview with the author.

<sup>147</sup> Katalin Székely, interview with the author.

and the income of the gallery on each artwork was donated to OFF-Biennale. Recently, however, as Katalin Székely phrased, it was an important move from the biennial organisers to reframe the circle of donors, and build a system which completely reflects Western notions. In this sense, Members pay annual membership, and instead of receiving a physical token for generosity, they get exclusive treatment arranged by the association. Such events are art historical travels abroad, or dinner parties. Such supporting system is used in several cultural institutions in the UK too. In exchange for an annual fee of memberships, people can participate in exclusive members' events, such as private views, evening lectures, or discounts on museum merchandise.

This form of donations represents a large sum in the Biennale's income. Benefits of such sponsorships are ease of use together with the prob on aspect of several donations. The former simply means that the initiative has more freedom in expenditures, as they are not as accountable for as in cases of fund received from institutions. The latter stands for non-financial 'favours'. Thanks to its extensive network, Members' Circle of OFF Biennale includes members of East-European Acquisition Boards from Tate and Centre Pompidou.<sup>148</sup> In this case, help is a mutual gesture. Such members recruit valuable donors as well as partners and potential projects for OFF, at the same time they increase their influence and own network for the institutions they represent.

Nevertheless, according to Székely, 80% of their income is spent on projects, leaving only 20% on other payments, for example salary of organisers. Accordingly, only the founder, Somogyi works in full-time position to the Biennale. The organisation also has two part-time staff members, an administrator and a promoter.

The biennial strives to function as an inclusive hub. Artists engaged with contemporary politics in their working methods have very limited spaces for introduction, but OFF heavily embedded in counter-government discourse, is one of them. In terms of broadening of the visitor spectrum, inclusion of a wider public is also a feature of the biennial (Figure 5).

This function is reflective in the inclusion of a large amount of other, non-primarily artistic forms of projects throughout the years. This tendency reflects the mechanisms of the global art world, with a specific focus of OFF on the currents of surrounding countries, rather than on Western states.

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<sup>148</sup> Katalin Székely, interview with the author.

A conscious methodology is apparent in OFF-Biennale's operations. Let it be sponsorship, ideology or promotion, OFF-Biennale organisers aim to manoeuvre between the many ethical obstacles of local and global society and market.

OFF-Biennale is a good example of resistance produced corollary to such a state operation typical of Hungary in last ten years. Creating such a functioning alternative to the current management of state institutions, is a form of survival.<sup>149</sup> It is an initiative in which organisers managed to reach a point where government legislation can hardly affect their effective functioning. It is because OFF relies largely on private sponsorship. The formalisation of the biennial is embedded in a Western capitalist discourse. The choice of projects reflects trends in society and topics are easily sellable to corporate and private members. The Members' Circle is also a characteristic of corporate funding of museums in Western countries. Such system is, nevertheless, a double-edged sword, and one has to keep the conscious attitude towards both public and private capital with all their connotations as well.

## The Attitude of Prefigurative Politics

On the distinguishing feature of the Biennale as a grassroots initiative, a wealthy amount of essays has emerged and a discourse has been formulated since its inception. One, however, stands out from the range of theories. Eszter Szakács, curator of the 2017 Biennale, made a self-reflection on their own operational methodology, and created a context around the unrivalled initiative.<sup>150</sup> Her essay 'Szakmai önszerveződés' (Professional Self-Formulation) was published in the book '...NYITOTT MÚZEUM...' (...OPEN MUSEUM...). Initiated by the Museum of Ethnography, the aim of the publication is to interpret and analyse aspects of participatory based museum management in Hungary.<sup>151</sup>

Szakács's essay is written from the viewpoint of self-formulated initiatives engaging with cooperation and participation, and points out critical approaches on the relationship between grassroots and top-down regulated culture.

In an interview conducted with the two curators, Nikolett Erőss and Eszter Szakács in 2017 Szakács made a statement regarding the realisation of the project: "OFF is not another

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<sup>149</sup> Katalin Székely's phrase. Katalin Székely, interview with the author.

<sup>150</sup> Eszter Szakács, "Szakmai önszerveződés," in ...*NYITOTT MÚZEUM*..., ed. Zsófia Frazon (Budapest: Museum of Ethnography, 2018) [http://nyitottmuzeum.neprajz.hu/szocikkek/szakmai\\_onszervezodes](http://nyitottmuzeum.neprajz.hu/szocikkek/szakmai_onszervezodes) [Title: Professional Self-Formulation. in ...OPEN MUSEUM... translation of the author]

<sup>151</sup> ...*NYITOTT MÚZEUM*... is available online and can be downloaded for free, unfortunately only in Hungarian. Zsófia Frazon, ed, ...*NYITOTT MÚZEUM*... (Budapest: Museum of Ethnography, 2018) [http://nyitottmuzeum.neprajz.hu/szocikkek/szakmai\\_onszervezodes](http://nyitottmuzeum.neprajz.hu/szocikkek/szakmai_onszervezodes).

protest, but an effort aimed at producing concrete results”<sup>152</sup>. According to the quote, the creation of the Biennale does not only mean the aspect of positive resistance, previously mentioned above. Such a statement also implies that the project is meant to be a long-term, project-based reaction, rather than a form of theoretical debate on the cultural crisis. OFF is therefore not in the focus of analysis from the curators’ side, but as a tangible basis and starting point of action. Nevertheless, in her essay Szakács as a curator attempts to comprehend their own ideology. Thus her essay serves as an excellent grounding for further theoretical thoughts.

The primary principle of professional self-formulation is the grassroots aspect, rather than participation.<sup>153</sup> The latter, also a significant method to revolutionise curatorial practice, can be considered as a second step. Initiatives, as OFF, have their strength in their will of doing something for society in the long-run. Establishing such an initiative requires great commitment, as apart from a part-time employee and Hajnalka Somogyi, the rest of the members are still in full-time positions of various institutions. Nevertheless, all the curators as well as the rest of the staff put enormous effort in the creation process in every other year. This clearly comes through the many interviews the curators did, when they emphasise this as one of the most important messages of the existence of the project.

Although such cultural initiatives are realised as an alternative, these are in strong connection to public institutions, as they often respond to systemic faults. However, in relation to institutional criticism, Szakács puts in opposition Nora Sternferd’s interpretation<sup>154</sup> on ‘transformative strategy’, as the most adequate way of participation<sup>155</sup>, and professional self-formulation. She concludes that while transformative participation operates within the institutional system, the latter formulates outside the arrangement. As for OFF Biennale, precisely because the curators couldn’t find common ground with the centralised ideology behind institutional transformation of Fidesz, they created an alternative system.

The very notion of OFF as a grassroots initiative, according to Szakács, therefore, can be considered in the dialogue around *prefigurative politics*.<sup>156</sup> The term by definition means to create a society on the basis of democracy, which cannot be created at the moment, but can be

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<sup>152</sup> Quote from Eszter Szakács. Martyna Nowicka, “Piecing The Puzzle Differently. Martyna Nowicka interviews OFF-Biennale curators Nikolett Erőss and Eszter Szakács,” *Erstestiftung.org*, December 20, 2017, <http://www.erstestiftung.org/en/off-biennale-budapest-2017-interview/>.

<sup>153</sup> Szakács, “Professional Self-Formulation.”

<sup>154</sup> The terminology taken from Carmen Mörsch on the four different types of education. Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> the terminology originates from the 1960’s and 1970’s North-American, Marxist New Left sociologist, Carl Boggs, however, opinions are varied on the source of terminology and practice. Ibid.

realised in future. Thus prefigurative politics is a form of prediction in the present for future goals.<sup>157</sup>

Such uncertain conditions would imply that the theoretical is a preferred approach than the practical. Nevertheless, this happens the other way around, and the action of prefiguration is executed on the level of practice, and not on the level of theory. Projects operating in such way are without precedent in their local contexts, and their practicality is a result of their own systemic creation.<sup>158</sup>

This kind of operation is a source of ambiguity in terms of unpredictable success and effectiveness of performance of prefigurative politics. Criticism formulated around the fact that projects based on prefigurative politics does not want to change current political systems, only want to create one in parallel. Szakács brings up the example of Chantal Mouffe's impression on the concept that it will not achieve any actual political change, because, for instance, *occupy* actions, as self-formulations, withdraw from traditional political and institutional structures.<sup>159</sup> In Mathijs van de Sande's and Szakács's opinion, and in opposition to Mouffe, such initiatives, as 'political laboratories', are able to create new operational principles precisely because they do not take part in traditional institutional arrangements.<sup>160</sup>

These initiatives want to build an alternative structure. In a recent essay Hajnalka Somogyi wrote on the operation of OFF-Biennale, she emphasises this aspect of the project, saying: "One of the long-term objectives of the project is to try to contribute to the building of an 'infrastructure of dissent' in its own field."<sup>161</sup>

Projects operating with the notion of prefigurative politics have a fundamental strive for change on the long run. At the same time, participants of such initiatives would like to achieve this from the *outside* of the conventional system. They would create a new one, which, according to their intent, will serve as a basis for the traditional arrangements to change and build upon, and slowly become a new convention.

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<sup>157</sup>"building the new society within the shell of the old", Industrial Workers of the World. Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> "The infrastructure of dissent is described by Alan Sears as "the means of analysis, communication, organization and sustenance that nurture the capacity for collective action." Alan Sears, "Creating and sustaining communities of struggle," Somogyi, "Can We Work Like This?," 436.

## Defining Artistic Practice – Chantal Mouffe

In February 2019 a talk was held in Tate Modern between Tania Bruguera and Chantal Mouffe, ‘Talking as Neighbours’, on the topic of Bruguera’s recent work with the title ‘10,148,451’ commissioned by Tate.<sup>162</sup> During this conversation, taking Bruguera’s working methodology as a case study, Mouffe proposed a theory on current right-wing political notions dominating throughout the world and artistic practices. She took the hegemonic aspect of civil society as a starting point, in which transformation of the common sense and subjectivity is currently happening with the strong control of politics. Politics as well as art operate within society, therefore, both hegemonic, and have a mutual effect on each other. The former, as it can function in the aesthetic dimension, the latter as it is a system precisely built on hierarchy, created for influence. In this sense, according to Mouffe, critical art should be used as a term instead of political art, as such thing like art without politics does not exist.

Mouffe goes on when she claims that cultural policies in capitalist structures is strategically important in recent years more than ever before. Meaning, in modern production creating of goods exponentially grew and in connection, individuals’ capacity for production largely depend on their emotional wellbeing. Thus the best way to stimulate one’s soul is through culture.

According to Mouffe, today right-wing populism can prevail by cause of their sole understand on the effectiveness of mobilizing affection and passion, based on their control on marginalised members of society.

As people are moved to act by their feelings, the affective dimension via the cognitive is stimulated. In this case, critical art stands for the ability to give voice for those who are silenced, and to visualize strong artistic intentions. Intentions for good or bad, critical art can influence just as much as political parties do. Consequently, critical art could contribute to the work of left-wing populism to mobilize affection in order to deepen democratic feelings.

In the case of OFF-Biennale, participating artists are encouraged to produce art in a way it does not only bring attention to faults of the system, but also engages with a form of solution and triggers visitors/participants to implement it into action. For a long time, this couldn’t happen because of a block in people’s emotions towards the current regime. OFF could change the widely-spread resignation, and turn it into a spark of interest. Somogyi makes the key statement in her essay when she writes: “While OFF aims to transform the frustration and

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<sup>162</sup> Tania Bruguera, Chantal Mouffe, “Talking as Neighbours: Chantal Mouffe” (conversation with Tania Bruguera, Tate Modern, February 19, 2019).

resignation within the art scene into emotions that mobilize, which then leads to the formation of new projects and platforms, the art that it presents can convey such positive, mobilizing collective emotions to a wider audience. OFF makes sense inasmuch as its example as a civil project, and its art projects provide the local audience and the civil scene (including the art scene) with some kind of momentum to keep on questioning, criticizing, debating, protesting, and organizing themselves.”<sup>163</sup> She not only signifies the importance of action, but she does this through stating that OFF is precisely here to emotionally trigger its audience. In her statement there is also the notion of prefigurative politics, the basis of professional self-formulation, according to Eszter Szakács, the one, which Mouffe refers to as the ‘strategy of exodus’.<sup>164</sup>

Nevertheless, both Mouffe’s and Somogyi’s theory agrees on two crucial points: the objective to change current right-wing politics, and that emotional stimulation could be an effective tool to mobilise society. The use of such tool originates in a right-wing ideology, therefore it is part of the existing system, however it shows that manipulation can be adapted in order to formulate a democratic, socially engaged, and critically aware society. In this sense, such common grounding would be beneficial and more efficient to stimulate debates as well as action, instead of emphasising parallelism, a symptom to an institutionalised resistance.

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<sup>163</sup> Somogyi, “Can We Work Like This?,” 438.

<sup>164</sup> Bruguera, Mouffe, “Talking as Neighbours.”

## CONCLUSION

Even though, the thesis is concerned specifically with the Hungarian aspect of neoliberal and populist countries' cultural policies and operations, it is important to note that this topic forms part of a wider, international context. Therefore, it is vital to list some other, foreign and alternative initiatives which have crucial commonalities with the Hungarian case studies. While this paragraph cannot suffice all relevant examples, it is still important to give an insight in the wider context to the reader.

As we can see through the case studies as well as the theoretical discourse, there are ways in which abandoned members of the cultural profession can manoeuvre towards an alternative solution. However, as mentioned before, these reactions to the hindered cultural policy of a country are not isolated cases of a specific country.

In the case of the Studio of Young Artists' Association the renewed importance of trade unions can be traced throughout populist and neoliberal nations. The most adequate example would be the realisation of the non-profit organisation 'Working Artists and the Greater Economy' (W.A.G.E.) in the United States in 2008. Initiated after the financial crisis, "in the face of accelerated privatization, deregulation and defunding", their main aim is to protect the artist society.<sup>165</sup> They provide support with regulated artists fees, in order to "bring about a more equitable distribution of its economy" and to work towards a sustainable industry.<sup>166</sup> In this case, organisers of W.A.G.E. have similar intentions with members of the artist society. Both cases of Hungary and the U.S. have irresponsible cultural policies implemented, only their intentions differ. While in Hungary exclusion of progressive artist from the 'official' is ideological, in the United States it is market driven, therefore based on corporate interest, with the total disrespect to artists' living conditions.

Another example against the prevalence of corporate interests in cultural institutions are civil service trade unions of the UK, which protect the rights of staff against the corporate interests of institutions. This prevents unfavourable care towards workers, and enhances the level of responsibility, such as equal pay and condition, of workplaces towards their staff.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Quotation from the W.A.G.E. statement. "About," W.A.G.E., accessed June 18, 2020, <https://wageforwork.com/about#top>.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> An example is the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) which has nearly 200,000 members nationwide. "About," Public and Commercial Services Union, accessed June 18, 2020, <https://www.pcs.org.uk/about-pcs>.



Having its own network since its inception, tranzit.hu is well embedded in a European context of artistic research and projects. The main aim of the whole organisation, tranzit.org, is to support post-war and contemporary art and research with the specific focus on the history of its affiliate tranzit organisations' countries.<sup>168</sup> Being largely funded by the Erste Stiftung, they strive to provide art historical progression independently from state politics.

Action day, the one-year event of tranzit.hu is an outstanding approach towards a more equal and just cultural profession. Even though they couldn't succeed in the long run, this remains to be seen as the inception of the mobilisation of art workers in order to stand up for their own field of profession. Probably the most prominent direct democratic projects in the field of arts are the ones made by Joseph Beuys in the 1970s. In terms of a response given to political discrepancies, his projects 'Office for Direct Democracy by Referendum' at the 5th documenta (1972) and 'Free International University' at documenta 6 (1974) show similarities to action day.<sup>169</sup> Both of his projects, even though controversial in contemporary art history in terms of his radicalism, have the original aim to bring people together, and by active participation, mobilise society through discussions on democratic education and culture. His context of belief was the political operation of 1960s Germany, which heavily relied on ideological control. Albeit action day was focused on a more specific group of society, the professional scene, the very same issue brought about the initiation of the Hungarian series of events 50 years later.

A relation can be seen between action day and a more recent example, the work of Jonas Staal.<sup>170</sup> Describing his methodology as "propaganda work", his participation-based projects reflect a strong intention to actively intervene into current state politics with the aim to represent the voices of art workers in a more democratic and unionised way.<sup>171</sup> His event 'Unionizing the Polish Parliament' very much resembles the notions of action day, in terms of implementing direct democracy in the sphere of art professionals (Figure 6).

As for the OFF-Biennale, its established biennale network is a great example for the international referencing of its circumstances of initiation.<sup>172</sup> Its partners include the Kyiv

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<sup>168</sup> A summary on the tranzit.org network can be read on their website. "About," tranzit.org, accessed June 18, 2020, <http://tranzit.org/en/about/>.

<sup>169</sup> A summary on projects of Joseph Beuys can be found in the archive of documenta online. "#2 Joseph Beuys And His Initiative For Direct Democracy," documenta archiv, March 1-May 27, 2018, <https://www.documenta-archiv.de/en/aktuell/termine/1244/2-joseph-beuys-and-his-initiative-for-direct-democracy>.

<sup>170</sup> Jonas Staal, "Unionizing the Polish Parliament," 2018, <http://www.jonasstaal.nl/projects/unionizing-the-polish-parliament/>.

<sup>171</sup> Anna Remesova, "Art is Always Related to Power"- Interview with Jonas Staal," *artPortal*, July 24, 2019, <https://artportal.hu/magazin/art-is-always-related-to-power-an-interview-with-jonas-staal/>.

<sup>172</sup> Katalin Székely, interview with the author.

Biennial, Biennale Warszawa, and Prague Biennale. Established in countries with populist party politics, all have attributes in common. These are biennials on socio-economic complexities within the field of art. They all support interdisciplinary approaches, therefore progression, which is highly neglected in their own countries. Especially true to the Biennale Warszawa, they provide an alternative to current cultural circumstances, with a relative independence gained from state funding.<sup>173</sup> Their common aim to elevate concerning cultural circumstances of Europe gives a certain level of affirmation that building the infrastructure of dissent in Hungary may have support from outside borders.

Even though, current circumstances created by the cultural politics of the Fidesz regime hinder operations in public institutions, as Kata Benedek and Katalin Székely emphasised it, such a state formation can produce strategies of survival. On the level of institutional operations this can be traced. In the case of the Studio of Young Artists' Association survival means a constant adapting strategy to altered cultural policies; action day operated in a direct democratic way in order to equalise the profession and make individuals active participants; OFF-Biennale financially detached itself completely from the country it operates in.

Each case study shows a particular aspect with which Hungarian initiatives try to operate, and therefore somehow respond to unfavourable circumstances. Each initiatives' mechanisms are reaction-based, therefore, all have their own benefits and drawbacks.

Chapter 3 shows that action day was not and Studio of Young Artists' Association is not able to successfully mobilise members in a way they could gain power from within their community. An aspect, OFF is very efficient in: they have built the 2020 edition together with participants.

Similarly, lifespan is a significant difference in all cases. The project-based one-year event of tranzit.hu, even though applying a potentially effective methodology in the form of direct democracy, does not seem to succeed when it comes to discrepancies in the society. In this case, the long-term engagement of FKSE and OFF with the profession is a more expedient way of organisations.

Funding systems of the three are similar when it comes to project-based mechanisms. They all have experience in applications made to tenders of foreign cultural institutions and the European Union, and all have a well-established network with cultural institutions of surrounding, post-socialist countries to build cooperation on. However, this is a disrupted way

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<sup>173</sup> The statement of the Biennial Warszawa can be read on their website. "Idea of the Biennial," Biennale Warszawa, accessed June 18, 2020, <https://biennalewarszawa.pl/en/biennale/idea-biennale/>.

of fundraising, and it is important to note that long-term existence and planning of initiatives is very much dependent on such annual sources of monetary backup.

In the case of OFF-Biennale, organisers consider it an autonomous organisation, however, they fail to see the strings attached equally to the private sector, which they largely rely on to generate income. Dependence of cultural institutions on private funding in Western countries (e.g. the UK) has already been showing symptoms of severe drawbacks. In the case of Hungary, as a post-socialist and ‘freshly-capitalist’ country, it can be seen as a ‘hybrid model’: a synthesis of voluntary work and project-based fundraising. Accordingly, as Eszter Óze phrased it in her essay, it is more important to build a cultural alternative from the country’s assets, rather than to see Western characteristics as something to be applied on non-Western countries. On a global scale, to learn from the country’s own history, and to see the ‘centrum’ countries’ own lineage of development as separate, is a skill should be obtained in Hungary amidst the cultural crisis.

It also seems that the *infrastructure of dissent*, which building Hajnalka Somogyi with OFF-Biennale would strive to contribute to, is a characteristic of all the group of opposition, as well as the organisers of initiatives. Less like an infrastructure, and more like a tangled web of disagreement, it also gives the impression that the theoretical debate parallel exists to the practical solutions. Although, in some cases we see that participants of grassroots initiatives reflect on their own methodologies (e.g. Eszter Óze in the case of FKSE; Eszter Szakács with OFF-Biennale), they do not seem to collaborate actively with leading participants of current debates (e.g. the authors of ‘Dynamic Power’).

A blatant dynamic of both opposition and political elite is that both groups have leading figures, whose individual charisma determine the impression about the whole. This is a significant failure of the opposition, as it mirrors the attitude, it firmly criticises. Therefore, inclusivity and equality among members of the opposition is much needed.

Nevertheless, as Kata Benedek emphasised Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s affirmative sabotage theory, to be applied on their own work attitude as affirmative self-sabotage, I believe this could be applied to the whole of the opposition. To create a common debate between initiative organisers and theoreticians means that the two conditions, on which affirmative sabotage builds, could be realised: the academic and activist attitudes. Contrary to producing an other alternative to the alternatives (e.g. prefigurative politics), the aspect of building from inside is, in my opinion, a more effective way, based on both Spivak’s and Mouffe’s theories. This deed would potentially forge the opposition into a community of professionals, and together would form a competent antagonist to cadres of the current cultural politics.

Furthermore, Spivak's and Mouffe's suggestion, could prevent state institutions from becoming entirely irrelevant and light-weighted in the eye of the profession.

Instead of being characteristically project-based, or to neglect the practical implements of theory, participants of the opposition could potentially work together on a more inclusive and more coherent community.

Notwithstanding the general strive of socially and politically engaged initiatives to actively take part in political fields of each countries, the pandemic spread throughout the world definitely hinders their positions. Such initiatives often still have strings attached to public and private funding, therefore they heavily depend on local and global economics. This year brought about many unfavourable occurrences, including COVID-19, in which isolation of society was necessary. A brief halt in cultural events and programmes of institutions can be seen. A similar tendency is true to funding institutions of aforementioned initiatives. Under these circumstances, financial support can hardly be imagined for culture, let it be a corporate or a state support. Under these circumstances, such progressive initiatives need help like never before. For states operations and private companies to take up the responsibility for the grassroots/non-profit sector in the field of culture is more urgent than ever before. Nevertheless, a positive, grassroots attitude among initiatives worldwide can be seen. In June 2020, documenta 15 organiser, ruangrupa announced members of the 2022 edition. Among those, OFF-Biennale has also received invitation. The notion of cooperation among likeminded grassroots initiatives can be interpreted as a positive way of thinking on a global, and more democratic cultural field. This could also be implemented in the local scenes too, in order to build a strong infrastructure of dissent, from within the system.

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[Title: LXXVI. 2017 law. translation of the author]

# Appendix

## Interview Summaries

Name: Virág Lődi

*Current president of Studio of Young Artists' Association (FKSE).*

Date: March 26, 2020.

Summary: A brief history of FKSE before her presidency, in accordance with the re-politisation of the association. The association's social context within the field of arts and its individuals. Power dynamics of the initiatives of Hungary in recent years. Socially more engaged, leftist attitude by the association's current board members and president – which is not an overall feature of the association. The shifting relationship of FKSE towards changing party politics, and the difficulty in advocating members' rights. Funding system and fundraising opportunities of the association throughout the 60 years of its existence. The importance of SZALON '18/ STÚDIÓ, (SALON '18/ STUDIO) annual exhibition on the occasion of the association's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Names: Kristóf Nagy and Márton Szarvas.

*PhD students at Central European University; authors of "Dinamikus hatalom. Kulturális termelés és politika Magyarországon 2020 után." Fordulat 26, no. 2 (Autumn 2019): 225-251.*  
[http://fordulat.net/pdf/26/FORDULAT26\\_BARNA\\_MADAR\\_NAGY\\_SZARVAS\\_DINAMIKUS\\_HATALOM\\_KULTURALIS\\_TERMELES\\_ES\\_POLITIKA\\_MAGYARORSZAGON\\_2010\\_UTAN.pdf](http://fordulat.net/pdf/26/FORDULAT26_BARNA_MADAR_NAGY_SZARVAS_DINAMIKUS_HATALOM_KULTURALIS_TERMELES_ES_POLITIKA_MAGYARORSZAGON_2010_UTAN.pdf). [Title: Dynamic Power. Cultural Production and Politics in Hungary after 2010. translation of the author]

Date: March 24, 2020.

Summary: What is the theoretical discourse that guides their analysis on Hungarian politics, with a specific focus on the cultural sector? The social embeddedness of culture, and its structural changes within shifting political tendencies. Bourdieu's theory on the aforementioned aspect of culture, including the paradox tendency that culture often seems to be autonomous from society/the political field. Elite/academic field as a mediator between politics and society. The phrase 'hegemony' used in their research, based on Antonio Gramsci. Theories behind their analysis: feminism, ecological sustainability, anti-capitalism. Their research leads to alternative frameworks for initiatives, which could potentially be more sustainable than the current dominant ones in Hungary (e.g. an initiative with social network, which provides financial resources, and at the same time politicises its users).

Name: Eszter Szakács

*Curator at OFF-Biennale, member of tranzit.hu.*

Date: December 22, 2019.

Summary: Her theory on the connection between prefigurative politics and OFF-Biennale. This idea after she was part of the project in 2017, and for the book ‘...NYITOTT MÚZEUM...’ (...OPEN MUSEUM...). This publication as a result of a research based on socially engaged, politically engaged art and initiatives worldwide, and how can a museum implement new tendencies to its framework of operation. Her research includes mapping the politically engaged individuals’ group within the cultural field, with special focus on József Mélyi, Gergely Nagy, or Edit András. Important resources include, for example, the No MMA! blog created by artist Kisspál Szabolcs; Curatorial Dictionary on tranzit.hu.

Name: Katalin Székely

*Curator at OFF-Biennale since 2014; Creative Program Officer at Open Society Archives (OSA Archive).*

Date: December 2, 2019.

Summary: Finance and framework of OFF-Biennale from the establishment of the initiative, 2015. No structural change since the socialism, including state funding. The infiltration of the Fidesz regime into education and the arts had led to the financial crisis of cultural associations. This was the precursor of organisers to create something which strengthens the field of ‘independent’ art workers. Constant wayfinding of the association based on financial resources and hindered cultural policy of Fidesz. Strong emphasis on private and cultural fundraising from abroad along with voluntary work done by the organisers. For the 2020 edition they have created a democratic alliance between organisers and participating artists in which everyone takes part in fundraising as well as project developing works. OFF organisers to create international network of fellow partners on the long run.

## List of Images

Figure 1.



Installation view, 'STUDIO '18 – SALON', Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Budapest, 2018. (Source: Hungarian University of Fine Arts - <http://www.mke.hu/node/38691>)

Figure 2.



Installation view, 'STUDIO '18 – SALON', Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Budapest, 2018. (Source: Hungarian University of Fine Arts - <http://www.mke.hu/node/38691>)



Figure 3.



Voting on the April 2013 session, *action day*, tranzit.hu, Budapest, April 19, 2013. (Source: tranzitblog.hu - [http://tranzitblog.hu/jegyzokonyv\\_tranzit\\_hu\\_akcionap\\_aprilis\\_mi\\_a\\_teendo/](http://tranzitblog.hu/jegyzokonyv_tranzit_hu_akcionap_aprilis_mi_a_teendo/))

Figure 4.



Installation view, 'Somewhere in Europe – Gaudiopolis', Galeria Centralis/Open Society Archives, Budapest, 2017. (Source: Fidelio.hu - <https://fidelio.hu/vizual/kortars-muveszet-alulrol-szervezodve-somogyi-hajnalka-es-az-off-biennale-140764.html>)

Figure 5.



Still from an OFF-event, 'Gladness Demonstration', Budapest, 2017. (Source: [kreativ.hu – http://kreativ.hu/kreativ\\_online/cikk/magyar\\_csapat\\_a\\_vilag\\_egyik\\_legfontosabb\\_kortars\\_muveszeti\\_esemenyen](http://kreativ.hu/kreativ_online/cikk/magyar_csapat_a_vilag_egyik_legfontosabb_kortars_muveszeti_esemenyen))

Figure 6.



Still from the event, 'Unionizing the Polish Parliament', Powszechny Theatre, Warsaw, Poland, 2018. (Source: [jonasstaal.nl – http://www.jonasstaal.nl/projects/unionizing-the-polish-parliament/](http://www.jonasstaal.nl/projects/unionizing-the-polish-parliament/))