

BUDAPEST

CONTEXT

The political situation in Hungary in 2017: Fidesz, a right wing nationalist party has been governing the country with great majority for 7 years, the campaign for the following year's elections is already in the air. Besides refugees, NGOs are the main target of the state media and the politicians. During early spring there was a big wave of protests triggered by the attack against the Central European University and a law proposed to stigmatize all the Non-Governmental organizations that receive any type of funding from foreign sponsors. To organize a group, even to recruit to an action with a title that has the word activism in it seemed challenging and already was a statement.

Our mindset was very flexible at the start, we could imagine almost anything to come out of our project, from creating a group from activists already taking part in social movements and setting up a network for them, to gathering angry young people, or even to get arrested after actions which communicate a stronger negative opinion about a certain social issue... we were prepared! The only thing we wanted to avoid is superficial work without any long-lasting impact on the participants. So we decided to put our routine of intensive group processes aside and design a long-term process of weekly encounters for the initiation workshops and the campaigns. We wanted to engage young people. We needed to provide enough time to get to know each other and to build trust, time to think about what really mattered for them and to plan and realize the actions they were truly interested in. At the same time we decided to split the whole flow: collecting ideas from a bigger audience and creating the ideas bank should be separated from the initiation and campaign flow.

IDEAS BANK: SYMBOLIC PLACES AND GAMBLING CITY

Inspired by the walking interviews our aim was to create a framework, where people had time to reflect on social questions in a space that supported this reflection.

In Budapest, through a process of research and study, Artemisszió went through different approaches of engaging young people in discussions and at the end created a methodology. The participants had to reach different spots located at symbolic spaces of Budapest, here activities were offered in relation to

special topics. The final frame was created together with local volunteers who were the hosts at the different stations. Also, ideas about social problems were collected throughout the whole path, but particularly at the start of the game.

At the beginning of the game we proposed a dystopic frame: the players travel to 2117, where they face escalated social problems and have the opportunity to solve them. At the first station everyone had to answer one of these two options: «3 things I don't want to bring to the future» or «3 things I would like to change in the world».

After completing the first task by pointing out 3 problems, taking a photo and registering a play-passport, the participants started their journey through the different stations tackling poverty and homelessness, freedom of speech, education and corruption. Our aim was to make them think about certain social issues and in the same time offer a creative activity (drawing, painting protest signs, creating buttons with their own message, etc.). You can read more about this in Chapter 3.

As a result, we had a lot of ideas about what people would like to avoid in the future and what they were aiming for. As the framework was quite creative and flexible the answers varied from a rather personal focus to common well-being and to state critique or of social structures.

INITIATION WORKSHOPS: GROANING

Recently in the Hungarian media, voices opposing the mainstream government ideology are often silenced, sometimes by threats but also due to auto-censorship – people are reluctant to communicate their opinion fearing the consequences. Protesting in Hungary is historically not like in France – in France people would be on the streets and occupy the squares for days. Whereas in Hungary (more like in Spain) people would quickly split into subgroups and fight each other equally hard as they do for the original cause. These attitudes are slowly changing, but it is still not a common behavior to unite as part of movements, or engage in political and social activism.

So the question is: how do we find young people who are willing to take action? How do we prepare for the unknown? Maybe they would like to organize the revolution, but equally possibly they won't have any political agenda or intention, and just want to have fun.

We launched a call on Facebook and via email, printed and distributed posters targeting student associa-

tions, youth clubs, university communities and activist groups. In the application form we asked the same question as in the city game: what are the 3 main social issues that bother you the most in Hungary? This way, by the start of the workshops we already had a list of problems we could start thinking about together.

In the end the pool became quite diverse as we could see from the application forms and at the first session during the group building activities. Even though the participants were all middle class, university students or young adults starting to work after the academic studies, their background varied from sociology through arts to physics and recreation, some of them were already active in social movements but most of them haven't participated in a protest or gone to the street for a cause. During the whole process we had only one male participant in the group, the rest of the 12-18 people were female.

Our initial idea was to provide a great variety of artistic tools so we invited quite a few artists to hold one or two workshops. We believed that the more techniques they can see, the more inspired the group will be. Also the cooperative tasks will balance the individual learning process, the group will organically build week by week.

Before we started to dive into art, the first two sessions were dedicated to get to know each other and speak about the problems collected through the application process. At the first meeting problem maps were created and shared in small groups aiming to understand how different questions were related to each other. At the second workshop we invited a sociologist to explain how the links on the maps were connected and we organized a skype lecture with a Spanish activist Leónidas Martín to share current examples from his work as an appetizer to the group members for the future work (see more about the work of Enmedio Collectivo).

CREATIVE WRITING

After two group forming sessions we began the artistic workshops. The first was creative writing where – after discussing notions such as creative, inspiration, flow, creation – the artist handed out pieces of texts in smaller groups to work on them. The aim was to get an idea about the construction of a text as a process and to see also its structure. For this purpose the participants created a trial-text on the spot, using quotes from their favorite books/texts that they had chosen and sent before the workshop started.

FANZINE

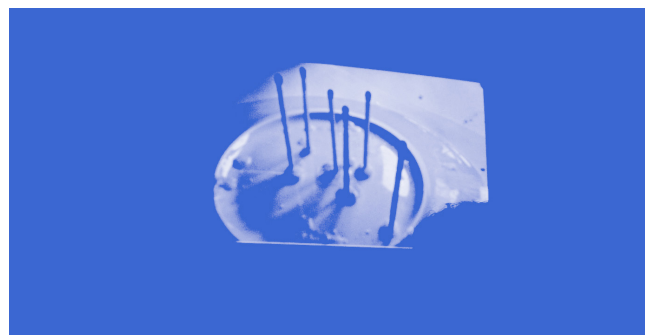
In order to bridge the work with texts and that with images we organized a fanzine workshop. The group was divided in two groups to ease the process. The fanzine artists from Vulkán group asked the participants earlier to bring images and texts to have some basic material to start with. They explained the role of the background and the illustrative small images. Then in groups of twos they each created two pages for the collaborative zine. The technique of the mini fanzine was introduced as well, so were the different styles and genres (risography, comic type, etc.).



PHOTOGRAPHY

We organized two sessions of photography, workshops, where the participants could learn about the basic techniques of taking a picture, also about the use of the image in social movements, the role of action documentation and how an image can be a medium to reach greater public and win them for a cause. At the second workshop the group went through a sort of collaborative curation process when they discussed the photo-series they had brought to the workshop, one by one. It was a great additional value that the workshop leader was a photographer, Gabriella Csozó who is strongly involved in the work of social movements in Hungary.

NEWSPAPER THEATRE



In order to tailor the process to the needs of the participants who expressed their wish to work with social questions again, we held a newspaper theater workshop (this is one branch of the tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed). After some demechanisation and image theatre activities that are basic tools of this methodology – everyone could chose a printed article from the recent past and create a performance about it in smaller groups. After performing we discussed the feelings and thoughts generated by the act. At the second part of the session the participants created action plans inspired by the topics and performances.

SLAM



The slam workshops aimed to work with the presence and with texts too, so during the two sessions the trainer offered various games to try out the different dimensions of slamming. The members of the group created metaphors, short texts, learned basics about the structure of slam texts, had verbal creative competitions and improvisation tasks in the workshop frame. Another important part was how the participants could experiment using their voice, being louder than usual in a safe and supporting context. This was very empowering for them.

INTERVENTIONS IN PUBLIC SPACE



In the frame of two consecutive workshops two theatre experts shared their practices of planning and realizing interventions in specific sites, of involving the audience, and of using audiovisual tools. At the first session, after some examples the group had the opportunity to try out the process in a simple way: the exercise was to transform the public space into an alternative/better reality and to create imaginary itineraries (this part of the workshop happened outside on the street), and finally to see the feasibility of the transformation concepts together, reflect on the potential of the mini performances in a well-structured way.

In the second workshop they went through a collaborative process from brainstorming, choosing a relevant issue to tackle, until analyzing the personal connections and framing the possible actions. We used this method after deciding on the focus of the creative actions during the campaign creation period.

YOUR FAVORITE CREATIVE ACTION

Between the slam and the public intervention sessions there was a workshop suggested by a group member. On this workshop everyone could show their favorite creative action they ever participated in, organized, or just heard of. The group watched videos and photos of actions, curated by the members of the group from their point of view. Some sparked discussions and more stories about other similar actions. Each member could present their favorite video or idea, which inspired the others and this gave a better understanding of what kind of actions the individuals really like. It also showed that some members already have experience in creating and organising actions.

LEARNING POINTS

Sense of group cohesion necessary: the fluctuation of the participants was not strong, but still present: after the first session 2-3 people never came back (two of them explained the decision with the overwhelmed schedule and only 1 person disappeared without telling anything!). Some people could join the group at the second or third session, then we drew a line. Also the fact that the workshop leading artists were different almost each session created a certain feeling of constant changes and the lack of time for «ourselves» to discuss and connect. The participants mentioned this at the first evaluation, so we inserted an extra session and started to create extra time for bonding.

Learning vs. doing: At our second evaluation, after the 7th session, the group members indicated that they would be really keen to «finally do something». This was the reason why we held the newspaper theatre session together with the action planning. Still, next time we will consider this issue more thoroughly as it re-appeared at the campaign period. How to overcome passivity and be active?

CAMPAIGN(S): CREATING DIALOGUE

The next step after 4 months was to plan together creative campaigns in order to build bridges between people who are foreign to each other and belong to different social groups. The actions we realized were the followings: (1) on international women's day we put out an online campaign and an offline event to ask what women wanted (interviewing both women and men); (2) a collective and collaborative photo exhibition entitled «I failed therefore I am»: the idea was that people can send or bring their photos they considered a failure – whatever they understand by this – and the images were exhibited in public space for celebrating trying and failing; (3) drawing and writing with chalk on the pavement the reasons why one goes to vote (before the parliamentary elections in Hungary), finally creating a giant chalk fresco at a central square on the day of the election that gave an opportunity to visualize the opinions of people passing by about participating (or not) in the election.

As the leader role of the trainers became less and less marked, the group got to be more and more self-organized. They decided to put the topic of pluralism at focus. They wanted to create actions where they could generate interactions between people from diverse backgrounds, classes and social groups. Their aim was to avoid speaking on behalf of someone else or an oppressed group one is unfamiliar with, and to allow connections and cooperation between people from different social or cultural groups.

After some introductory tasks we started to rediscover our former questions and find specific issues that were relevant for the group members so that they could feel connected to the cause and would be willing to work on a campaign. At the starting point, in order to support the participation and the feeling of safety we invited an expert in the right of assembly to see the opportunities and pitfalls were facing while planning an action in the public space. Attila Szabó from TASZ (Hungarian Civil Liberties Union) gave an overview on the regulations of the activities done in public space

with or without political aims, and answered the practical questions of the group members.

To introduce the campaign period we started brainstorming and collecting every issue, form and even date that was interesting or appealing for any of the participants. This resulted in a list of diverse items, such as invisible theatre, picnic, international women's day, etc. After this the group discussed each item, creating connections, linking topics to forms of actions and developing them further. As a closing step we voted for each action draft considering the possible timing, the capacity and energy the members had in the given period (as a lot of them were students and were writing their thesis).

Based on this vote we planned and realised 4 campaigns and actions between the 1st March and 23th June tackling different topics, but the overall aim was the same: creating dialogue between people who might not have the chance to speak with each other otherwise. Between the actions we still had weekly meetings for planning, co-creating and organizing the campaigns. We also scheduled two special occasions: a communication workshop and a half-year birthday party – when we also started to create our group manifesto.

1. CAMPAIGN: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S

On 8th March we celebrate Women's day in Hungary, similarly to other countries. As some group members wanted to start the campaign activities as soon as possible and the situation of women in Hungary was also an issue in our pool, we decided to do an event (and an online event as well) where the aim was to ask people what they would like to have for women's day. Both men and women answered our question, some through Facebook, but more on the street. (It is important to mention that this was the historical moment, when the group decided to create a Facebook page with the name of the group!)

We posted the Facebook event with the question some days before Women's day, and on the 8th March we spent 3 hours at a frequented square outside and in a lobby of a library nearby, talking with a very diverse audience (high school and university students, members of a Spanish feminist group, elderly people, and so on). They wrote their answers on post-its, and these notes stayed hanging there on the street during the time of the action.

2. CAMPAIGN: CHALKING FOR PARTICIPATION!

Before the national elections we organised a 10 days long creative action to call attention to the importance of participation. The Hungarian political context has many layers; similarly our group members have very diverse opinions about the system and also about solutions. Their level of motivation was generally low when it was about engaging in discussion where explicit arguments would emerge about political parties, but their urge to do something – even something little – to facilitate change was stronger. So they created this easy access and copyable action and a Facebook event: Chalking for participation!

PREPARATION

→ Take a sidewalk where many people pass by.

→ Take a sentence that is exciting for you.

→ Write the sentence on the sidewalk.

If someone is addressing you while writing, enter in conversation about the topic.

→ For more information about the campaign tools, check the next chapter!

Following this campaign our group Artvizmus Budapest was invited to take part in a community event to speak about our aims at Auróra, a community and cultural centre, which accommodates NGOs and events that are critical towards the government. Due to this reason they are often assaulted by the local municipality and the government friendly media. We also appeared also in the media, on both sides: opposition and government friendly as well.



3. CAMPAIGN ACTION: ASPHALT

As a final and also separate event on the day of the elections some group members occupied a central square in Budapest in order to speak with the passerby if they went to vote and their reasons why, then they

together painted the answers and illustrative figures on the pavement. They were there for hours engaging in dialogue with strangers, encouraging them to share their opinion and paint on the pavement together with their portraits. The event was reported on one of the biggest national online news portal.



4. I SCREWED UP THEREFORE I AM A COLLABORATIVE PHOTO EXHIBITION IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

In May we designed a photo exhibition that embraced photos one took at some historical point in their life and now thinks that in some way the image is a failure – but it's still worth showing it. The main idea was to celebrate mistakes and see them as opportunities. Before the exhibition opening we conducted a 2-week-long online campaign both to promote the exhibition and to call for participation. People were sending their images online. This was the most successful campaign in terms of number of participants joining the action who were not part of the group. We installed the numerous images they sent together with a short explanation to the wall an abandoned office building right before the exhibition opening. The installation stayed there for a couple of weeks.

WELCOME TO THIS EXHIBITION

These are long forgotten pictures from the bottom of boxes or computers. They didn't quite work out. Anyone could and can join to the exhibition space, we let go of these pictures, of these mistakes and errors we made in the past. By sharing these pictures publicly, we let go of blame and embrace our creations.

«You learn from your mistakes.»

«Those who don't make mistakes are unlikely to make anything.»

I SCREWED UP, THEREFORE I AM

5. ARTIVIST PICNIC

Our last campaign event was the activism picnic, called KÖZ – AERT Piknik. After carefully choosing an outdoor venue, the group split to prepare different activities. The aim was to combine the smaller ideas from our brainstorming period. These ideas might not be complex enough to make them happen by themselves but as we combined them, they added up to a fun afternoon activity matrix.

The purpose: the group members believed that it is frustrating for many that people in general do not talk to each other, so our aim was to strengthen dialogue and the capacity of involvement. We designed several smaller activities with diverse level of participation (e.g. drawing a fanzine – less challenging; participating in a framed debate with a foreign person – more challenging) and we linked them as stations of a game.

THE MAP OF THE STATIONS WAS THE FOLLOWING:

RECEPTION AND WELCOMING

Here the visitors could receive guidance about the event itself and about the group in general. They could pick a random Yoko Ono text or challenge themselves with the activism bingo. (The tasks were connected to the different workshops the group experienced during the introductory process.)

YOKO TEXT

- *Make a wish.*
- *Write it down on a piece of paper.*
- *Fold it and tie around a branch of a wish tree.*
- *Ask you friends to do the same.*
- *Keep wishing until the branches are covered with wishes.*

DISPUTE POOL

The original idea was to create a small pool where 2 people who are unknown to each other can sit in, choose a topic and share their probably different opinion.

Due to technical difficulties at the end we only laid down a blanket with a lake design where people could sit and discuss statements like «Boys shouldn't cry», «The healthy meals are extremely expensive» or «Conflict is the sign of failure: one is only successful if they have a harmonic relationship with the people close to them».

LEAVE YOUR MESSAGE

There was a big sheet where people could finish the sentence «I like to live here (in Hungary), because...»

It meant to be a visual presentation of the different positive ideas about the country and the society. The group aimed to break the usual culture of blaming and complaining with finding positive statements.

FANZINE WORKSHOP

We planned a mini fanzine workshop when people could simply create an 8-page fanzine from an A4 paper in diverse topics (urban jungle, what could you do to replace scrolling on your smart phone, etc.)

BAG REUSE

The activity was to recycle/redesign a tote bag. People could bring tote bags that have a sign or message they didn't like and create a brand new design by adding different textiles.

WHAT WE LIKED IN OUR CAMPAIGN

The group found a way in which they could all engage in the topics of the creative campaigns. Even if some did not participate actively in the preparation or in the realization, there was no one who would have said «I don't give my name to this» at the end. They always went for the consensual decisions. The members enjoyed working together very much, taking action for something meaningful. What is more, most of the active members are considering to somehow continue the group process after the project ends.

About the success and motivation the participants said that it was easier to connect and be motivated to a certain action if there was someone from the group who felt strongly about the topic and was willing to coordinate – this made the others also motivated. The general opinion of the group was that the photo exhibition was their favorite campaign event for several reasons: it was inclusive (outsiders could join easily); the framework was clear; the message was positive and not very political, but also not weightless.

WHAT WE SHOULD DO DIFFERENTLY

Right after the brainstorming session, where we had 26 great ideas, maybe we should have already split into smaller working groups, divide the tasks, clarify responsibilities and keep the workflows in parallel. This way we could have avoided overwhelming the members with tasks, and would have had more time to elaborate ideas, methods, etc. At the final evaluation some members said that it was challenging for them to engage with only one thing at a time (to decide what was the most important/urgent/recent topic),

and it helped the decision when together they could connect the action to a certain day (Women's day – role of the women in society, National elections – active citizenship/political apathy).

THINGS TO CONSIDER

TIMING:

Almost the whole campaign period took place in spring when most of the university students had a stronger workload (a lot of them wrote their thesis). Even if they were committed and tried hard, they couldn't participate so actively in the planning and realization as they wanted and as we expected based on their activity level in autumn.

CHALLENGE OF COMMON DECISIONS:

During the campaign creation process we faced a very high number of decisions considering the issues, the tools, the space, the target group, how we distribute tasks, etc. For the trainer it was hard to both leave the ends open, not to direct things towards an outcome, and to support the process and encourage the participants to create and communicate their opinion. All members of the group was very attentive to respect the opinion of the others – this can create a safe environment but can also prevent from even thinking of ideas of more radical actions which was otherwise preferred for some of the group members.

