experiment with different ways of working and it is never about one identity or ideology but is open to all – all artistic disciplines and approaches, all ages, economic backgrounds and profiles. Facilitators are in place to dilute conflict by calling it out and by highlighting any potential move towards power. Equally, mutual support ensures that honest disagreements can be aired and resolved.

L'Asilo's commons approach recognises the value of creating. Those involved have reported this leading to innovation, artistic growth and an improved quality of life.

# INDEPENDENT SURVIVAL / SURVIVING INDEPENDENCE

*"...financial independence is strongly connected to the idea of independence as an attitude"*

FANNI NÁNAY

In the present essay, I intend to examine the situation of independent cultural organisations in two Central Eastern European countries whose recent political trends have made them far from supportive of the civil sector: Hungary and Poland[1]. The trends which I attempt to describe through local examples and insights are not limited to these two countries: they are also present in other European countries, though the scale and the intensity of the often threatening phenomena are definitely greater in these two cases. I aim to explore different strategies Hungarian and Polish CSOs are following and try to find some pointers for, hopefully, sustainability even under unfavourable political and economic circumstances.

In the past couple of years, the political trends in the two examined countries have moved somewhat in parallel (which also entails a certain threat for European politics as a whole). In Hungary, the authoritarian regime of the governing right-wing party Fidesz and its leader, Viktor Orbán, has been getting stronger since the government was elected in 2010. In Poland, on the other hand, the anti-democratic shift started in 2015, when the party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS), led by Jarosław Kaczyński, won the national elections.

There is a strong common feature of the dictatorial regimes in the two countries compared to other anti-democratic political systems such as the one in Turkey, for example. While in the latter case, the dictatorial regime is based around the economy, the authoritarian systems in Hungary and Poland focus on a strong ideology[2]. The ideology in question draws its inspiration from the idea or illusion of the "uniqueness" of the Hungarian/Polish nation and history, its constant fight against enemies throughout its history and the "martyrdom" it suffered while protecting Europe and Christianity. Historical traumas (in the case of Hungary, the Treaty of Trianon, which allocated vast areas to the neighbouring countries at the end of World War I; in the case of Poland, the complete partitioning of its territory among the Kingdom of Prussia, the Russian Empire and Austria in the late 18th century) can be considered such cornerstones that retain their power even today – and both Orbán

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1   *Special thanks to Alicja Borkowska for her help with the Polish context.*

2   *Thanks to Philip Dietachmair for this dichotomy of dictatorial regimes.*

and Kaczyński rely on these national traumas in their main political discourses and ideology building. On the other hand, ideologies also need new "munitions" – new enemies and new conspiracies that the nation can fight against. In Poland, the plane crash in Russia in which Lech Kaczyński, the PiS-president's twin brother, lost his life served as a myth for a new martyrology. In Hungary, Prime Minister Orbán launched an absurd crusade against George Soros, a Hungarian-born American investor and philanthropist who is also engaged as an activist fighting for democracy, human rights, free speech and knowledge. These "martyrologist" ideologies nurture nationalism and xenophobia in both countries, with enemies found primarily among refugees (Hungarian political discourse eschews the word "refugee", using the term "illegal immigrant" instead), who are for all intents and purposes absent from these countries, and minority groups, especially the Roma population. More generally, in the political discourse of both governments, the attitude of "whoever isn't with us is against us" takes on a central role.

In the process of creating enemies, which goes hand in hand with the corruption of democratic values, civil society is also under serious attack. This seems even more contradictory if we take into consideration the fact that civil organisations often take over tasks (e.g. protecting the rights of minority and/or disadvantaged groups, caring for children, women, elderly people, etc.) from the state or local authorities, as these tasks are often "tossed away" and ignored by the "governments of power".

The basic form of oppressing CSOs is the withdrawal of public support from these organisations, but occasionally they have to face certain forms of retaliation (like in the cases of Auróra in Hungary and Malta Festival Poznań in Poland, as will be discussed below).

The work, and even the existence, of CSOs is made even more difficult through judicial and tax regulations. In 2018 the government of Hungary introduced the "Stop Soros" law (again referring to George Soros as the ultimate enemy of the country) with a new category of crime called "promoting and supporting illegal migration". The law practically bans individuals and organizations from providing any help to undocumented immigrants and, furthermore, places a 25% tax on donations arriving from abroad, which is primarily aimed at organisations "supporting illegal migration", although the law makes it possible to target any NGOs or CSOs, even ones with a completely different focus.

Another threat that the independent organisations have to face is the instrumentalisation of their work by the governments. For example, it is more efficient to apply to the Polish Asylum, Migration and Integration Foundation (FAMI) if the applicant organization is collaborating with a state office operating under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, thus many organizations that previously survived off of FAMI grants are now no longer willing to apply for fear of being instrumentalised by the official political discourse.

My aim is to examine the situation of independent organisations (especially in the arts and cultural sectors) in these countries and the "survival tactics" they use under the anti-democratic conditions described above. These tactics – quite understandably – focus on economic survival and trying to explore alternative means of financing, but these intentions are inseparably connected to the exploration of wider contexts in which art and culture can play an important role. I will mention examples of the examined tactics – although, naturally, space limitations prevent me from presenting a wider panorama of independent organisations in the two countries.

Before attempting to describe the different ways of operating by these organisations, there is one more aspect which is worth mentioning. The conviction that the state should give full (financial) support for art and culture (which is partly the legacy of the communist era) is one that is still strongly held by many artists and cultural workers – thus a significant number of organisations (mostly in Hungary) simply do not try to find alternative ways of financing: instead, they keep complaining of insufficient funds, gradually limit their activities and, very often, eventually cease to exist. Public support for art and culture obviously exists, but the governments (both in Hungary and Poland) practically starve those organisations that are not in line with their cultural politics (which is also the case in many other countries, although it is fair to state that the scale of this exclusion is larger and the decision-making on support is more politicised in the two countries in question). In Poland – in spite of the fact that, since the last elections, public grants have been more focused on patriotic and historical issues, including the promotion of Polish Christianity on a national level – the political palette is still more diversified on a local level, thus NGOs have opportunities to receive funding from local municipalities.

There is also another dangerous trend that appears in relation to public support: applicants start self-censoring themselves in order to receive the grants – and not just in the applications, but also while realising their cultural-artistic projects, which leads to a deeper compromise with the system (again, this is not a phenomenon unique to Hungary and Poland, but the regimes in these two countries, with which these independent organisations have to reach compromises, are less acceptable to many of these organisations than those in other countries would be).

I will present different case studies of NGOs in Hungary and Poland in which the aim of "financial survival" and the social/political engagement are strongly and inseparably interconnected. Based on their main focus, I would define the following "tactics" (no organisation, obviously, ever relies on any one single tactic; instead, they combine them in their activities):

1. complementing non-profit profile with for-profit activities,
2. placemaking, emphasising local identity and targeting local businesses,
3. empowering (local) communities and/or disadvantaged groups,
4. political activism, new "agoras" for engaged discussions,
5. political resistance as a means of community building and fundraising,
6. relying on international and/or local networks.

1. One might say that it is quite common for a cultural organisation to complement its non-profit (or not-for-profit) activities with some kind of business model that is connected to its "main" activity (the most prevalent examples are running a café or bar in the cultural venue or offering training programmes or team-building workshops based on the artistic experience and knowledge of the cultural organisation), thus I would like to mention some examples where the for-profit activity intends to achieve a deeper impact than "merely" providing a certain solution to the fundraising problems of an organisation.

Valyo Association (HU), a collective of (mostly) urban activists, aims to bring the Danube closer to the inhabitants of the city of Budapest, which it flows through, and make the riverside more accessible (in the inner districts of Budapest there are two-lane motorways with heavy traffic on both sides of the Danube). To achieve this goal, they organise playful and entertaining free events – the most visible and well-known of them is called "Szabihíd" and involves closing one of the city's bridges for four consecutive weekends during the summer and hosting different kinds of social, sports and cultural activities over the river. They started this initiative in 2017, and it took place for the second time in 2018, with the authorisation of the city council, but without any support from them or any public grant – and yet the entire program is free for the public. On the other hand, Valyo also runs different for-profit activities, like a mobile sauna which pops up at different locations close to the Danube and draws attention to the inaccessibility of the riverside while generating income for the association at the same time. At one point, they were also running open-air pubs and community spaces at two different spots at the river where – beside concerts, film screening, children's programs etc. – they organised lectures, talks and interactive projects focusing on local problems and issues.

Another example of "alternative for-profit activities" worth mentioning is the publishing and distributing of books, as a way for the editors to efficiently promote and support their cultural, political or activist work, while generating a certain amount of income. I would note two organisations from Poland, both founded in 2002 in Warsaw and partly funded by public support and different grants, but also relying on revenues from their publishing activities and bookshops. Krytyka Polityczna (Political Critique) is one of the most important liberal left-wing organisations and networks in Central Eastern Europe. Their original aim has been to function in three areas – culture, science, politics – and to eliminate the boundaries between them. They edit an online daily and a quarterly magazine and also run cultural centres, activist clubs and a research centre. All these non-profit activities are supplemented by their for-profit publishing work. In turn, Fundacja Bęc Zmiana, operating across areas as diverse as architecture, visual arts, design and urban cultures, regularly initiates interdisciplinary activities in public space, organizes exhibitions, conferences, etc. and researches the social impact of culture, art and architecture. Furthermore, it publishes and distributes books, mostly focusing on the topics mentioned above.

2. Another way of trying to mobilise local resources can lead to placemaking initiatives that often relate to local identity and pride (or aim to sustain and strengthen them).

MindSpace (HU) started their activities in one of the market halls of Budapest (market halls used to serve as important centres of the economic and social life of the local district, but the recently built shopping malls and supermarkets are threatening their existence), which is situated on the border of one of the poorer and ambivalent districts of the capital, mostly inhabited by Roma. After thorough research and mapping of the local small businesses and the needs of the local people, MindSpace and invited artists started working with the tenants in the market hall, and are opening pop-up stores and workshops as well in the area in order to strengthen the commercial attraction of the market hall compared to that of the shopping mall located just one tram stop from there. MindSpace is also the initiator of a wider collaboration or platform of civil and public nonprofit and for-profit organisations working in the 8th district, once a disadvantaged district. But now with development and gentrification underway there in recent years, such a platform is meant to help communications with local inhabitants through this process.

For its part, Placcc (HU), originally and primarily an arts festival, works intensively in a post-industrial district of the Hungarian capital, where the centre of the inhabitants' lives and the backbone of their identity used to be the local industry, which flourished from the late 19th century until the fall of communism in Hungary. After 1991, the "pumped-up" communist steel industry ended, and what remained here were empty or partly used factory buildings, a huge residential area of socialist block houses and an ambivalent reputation of the district that didn't prove to be attractive for new investors. The organisers of Placcc started a new kind of cultural-social activity in the area in which they don't aim to involve local people as an audience, but rather on a curatorial level: they have designed, planned and organised two mini-festivals together with a group of local civilians, through anti-hierarchical and horizontal conversation among artists, local inhabitants and organisers. The presupposition of the initiators was that if they strengthen the feeling of ownership of art and culture in the local community, it will correlate with a sense of pride and ownership of the district. The artistic projects were strongly inspired from the local context, and while realising the program, the organisers tried to involve small local businesses to support the events (which they did mostly with in-kind contributions).

3. When we talk about placemaking and strengthening the sense of ownership, we are already touching upon the question of empowering a group or community – which is something that can actually be the main aim of certain civil organisations.

Another activity of the aforementioned Valyo Association is also based on the inclusion of local people, involving them in a specific local issue and empowering them through a capacity-building process. The "Fák a Rómain" ("Trees on Római riverbank") movement aimed to mobilise (mostly local) people against the planned construction of a dam (helping new real estate investments, but destroying the natural environment in the area). The project was launched with the help of an international grant, but the organisers also used crowdfunding to supplement the grant. After a year and half of joint activity with a group of local civilians, Valyo has withdrawn from the project and handed it over to its former partners.

While Fák a Rómain is an example of empowering a local group engaged in a local cause, we can also mention different examples of independent organisations that work with and for disadvantaged groups or communities, using art as a means of empowerment.

Strefa WolnoSłowa (PL) states that its aims are to "organize theatre, artistic, cultural and educational activities aimed at intercultural and intergenerational dialogue", yet still their main focus is to work with refugees and immigrants living in Poland. Being a multidisciplinary group, Strefa WolnoSłowa's activities are not limited to organising artistic events and theatre pieces with the participation of excluded social groups (though these are at the heart of their work), as they also facilitate conferences, educational programs, social campaigns and research – always collaborating closely with their target group. The collective has found its seat in Teatr Powszechny (discussed below) and funds their activities mostly from international grants and donations, but it has also received public support from the Ministry of Culture.

4.  Auróra (HU) runs a creative and social hub in the 8th district of Budapest, where they provide space for civil organisations to have their seats or organise programmes. Recently, Auróra had to face retaliation from the local authorities, who wanted to close the place down, backing up their decision with false (or at least unjustified) claims. The real reason for this was that a significant mass of active citizens reclaiming democratic values were gathering around Auróra. The place is still open and working, though in a legally uncertain situation. The association behind Auróra, Marom, also runs a festival (Bánkitó) at a lake 60 kilometres from Budapest, which is basically a music festival with a very strong civil, social and political "side programme". The event receives minor public support, but its main financial basis is actually its ticket revenues; furthermore, the organisation relies almost exclusively on volunteer work.

    Ogród Powszechny (PL), "Common Garden" in English, is an initiative of Strefa WolnoSłowa, Teatr Powszechny and the Goethe Institut, realised in front of Teatr Powszechny (which is probably one of the most interesting and important theatres in Poland today). The building is situated in a district of Warsaw called Praga, which used to have a questionable reputation, and the garden is a way to attract local people to the theatre, if not to performances, then at least to join in for some work or a common meal in the garden. Furthermore, the garden is meant to be a space and forum, a "new agora" for free and critical political and social discourse – just like Auróra in Budapest.

5.  There are organisations that go even further with their political message and basically "use" (in a good sense) political resistance in art to build a community and raise funds for their activities. OFF-Biennale (HU) is a month-long series of events, organised without any support from the Hungarian government, outside official state arts institutions. The Biennale can be considered one of the most important and powerful arts initiatives of recent years in Hungary. So far, it has been organised two times (in 2015 and 2017), both financed from international grants and by private foundations, using the concept of independence effectively in their fundraising. In their curatorial program, the organisers use the starting point that art is a laboratory for social

change, thus independent contemporary art plays an essential role in a democratic society. The curators consider financial and institutional independence to be the basis for artistic and ideological independence: they don't even accept proposals that are realised with the help of state funds into the program. However, even if the actual projects presented as part of OFF-Biennale are not supported by public funds, most of the artists and collectives participating in the event series apply for and receive support from the government for their activities. Thus, there is a threat that, without any public support involved, the Biennale would lose a major number of its participating artists.

Malta Festival Poznań (PL) was founded in 1991 and has always tackled social and political issues in their program selection. It was able to do this with the help of significant state and municipality support until 2017, when an unprecedented development occurred: the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage cut back its support for the festival by 300,000 PLN (approx. €70,000), after having approved it earlier pursuant to a three-year agreement made in 2016. The reason for this decision was the fact that the festival had invited the Croatian theatre director, Oliver Frljić, to be one of the curators of the 2017 edition. Frljić's performance was based on a very important Polish romantic drama, Stanisław Wyspiański's *Klątwa* (*The Curse*), and was presented at the Teatr Powszechny. It stirred up a scandal by breaking certain national and religious taboos (more precisely, Frljić had been commissioned by the festival prior the scandal and his invitation wasn't withdrawn afterwards). The festival filed a lawsuit for the approved funding, launched a crowdfunding campaign (never used by the festival before) and organised an ongoing auction for which Polish and international artists offered their works. The donations came from both private individuals and companies, thanks to the fact that the festival managed to mobilise its social bases, built up over the course of its 26 years of work in the city. In addition, they effectively cited the breach of contract by the Ministry of Culture and the real jeopardy that threatened the artistic integrity of the festival as well as other cultural institutions and organisations, since the case could create a precedent.

6.  Last but not least, we have to add that all of the above-mentioned organisations, no matter what kind of tactics they choose, strongly rely on their international and local networks.

In the present cultural political atmosphere both in Hungary and Poland, where the official discourse claims that culture is supposed to protect national and Christian values against "foreign influences" as well as trends of "aping other cultures" (as Viktor Orbán put it in one of his recent speeches), and donations arriving from abroad are heavily taxed (as detailed above), having international connections is almost becoming a form of resistance. However, the reason for independent cultural organisations to join international networks is not primarily political, but rather professional and also financial. The most important aspect of being a member of a network is the possibility of joining a wider professional and artistic discussion, to find inspiration and to exchange knowledge and experiences – to remain open for new information and influences, even in a country where these intentions are repressed. Obviously, the membership can also have financial aspects, when the network is supported, most often through different

EU grants. Additionally, we have to mention the sense of solidarity an organisation in an oppressed situation can get from its partners in the network, which can count for almost as much as actual financial support.

On the other hand, as a consequence of the series of political decisions that have put the independent organisations in a disadvantaged situation, these organisations feel the necessity of "sticking together", to collaborate on a national level (or on a city level). In both countries, national networks (still) work in an informal way, but there are more and more attempts and initiatives to establish a coalition or platform to gather the "like-minded" organisations, committed to free, critical thinking and democratic values.

As we can conclude from the above detailed examples, the two main "tactics" civil (art and cultural) organisations choose to survive in Hungary and Poland are to be engaged on a local level, to collaborate with local inhabitants, and to get involved in a more general civil political resistance. In both cases, it is crucial that CSOs rely on a community – be it a local or a wider one – and try to find solutions to the present situation, in which financial independence is strongly connected to the idea of independence as an attitude.

It would be difficult to close this essay with a positive conclusion. If we accept that a catastrophe can open ways to new opportunities, and out of the collapse of a certain system a new one can emerge, we might be able to hope that if the publicly-funded independent art scene has to disappear, a new structure, based on (international and national) collaborative networks of civil organisations as well as on intersectoral activities and cooperation might have the chance to arise.



NATIONAL GALLERY    BANK    PARLIAMENT

# NEOCOLONIALISM AND CULTURAL POLICY

*"We need to stop the misappropriation/ commodification of certain cultures and cultural practices"*

TUNDE ADEFIOYE

Racism, or to call it by another name, white supremacy, in the funding structures of the Flemish, Belgian, Dutch and wider-European arts and cultural sector has caused what some of us experience as nightmares. One could also say it is the neocolonial approaches of, for example, the Flemish cultural landscape where I live and work.

What can Flanders and other regions of Western Europe do to decrease this type of animosity? Stop using archaic standards to attract new talents and cultures. Do your homework, relax your fears, because the next non-white Vlaming that you hire might be the one that pushes your organisation to a new innovative and cosmopolitan horizon. Breathe...this is maybe not a nightmare... it's going to be ok...we might get through this together. The structures and history that have created this system and its disadvantages, as well as criminalising people of colour, are the real horror.

Is this a nightmare or like the legendary Langston Hughes asks "what happens to a dream deferred...does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore ---And then run. Does it stink like rotten meat? Or crust and sugar over---like a syrupy sweet? Maybe it just sags like a heavy load. Or does it EXPLODE?" There are other solutions to this bad dream, which include things like apprenticeships and training projects that last at least a year for non-white individuals interested in leadership functions within the cultural world. Institutions and publicly-funded organisations need to move away from superficial "diversity" work. As Sara Ahmed puts it in her book *On Being Included,* "To be seen as 'being diverse' can be a way of 'not doing diversity,' because the organisation says it 'is it,' or that it already 'does it,' which means that it sees there is nothing left to do."[1] As we all know, there is so much left to do. The situation in some institutions is dire and they have no real strategy to make their organisations more equitable. They may have a strategy to recruit more people of colour in their halls as audience members and may even achieve this on stage in terms of the productions that they support. Many, though not all, are not concerned with

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[1]    Ahmed, Sara. On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life. p. 76. Duke University Press. Durham and London. 2012