

Creative Public Life. How to Create Change in Times of Democratic Crisis

International Workshop-Conference

Budapest, 20-21 October 2023

Venue: Práter 63. (63 Práter Street, 1083 Budapest)

Organised by Lehetőségek tere (The Space of Opportunity)



Educating young people about human rights, democratic action and solidarity plays a crucial role in enabling them to form opinions about the events happening around them and to stand up against the growing extreme right-wing and authoritarian ideologies, as well as the political movements that emerge from these.

The use of artistic methods can play a crucial role in cultivating a culture of debate and critical thinking. In recent years, the importance of informal forms of learning, including participatory art strategies and activist art, has gained ground as a means to encourage political participation and action within communities. The transdisciplinary nature of art and its practice of thinking outside of the box, supporting experiential learning and critical thinking is providing young people with opportunities to not only explore their creativity but also to feel included and engaged.

We consider the format of our gathering a workshop-conference because its primary goal is to share knowledge through practical experience. The original meaning of the term 'conference' is a meeting of two or more persons to discuss matters of common concern, and this is what we wish to emphasise. The workshop-conference aims to connect NGOs, artists, critical educators, and young people to gain multiple perspectives, think together and find solutions to challenges in activism and civil participation within an interdisciplinary laboratory. During the two days, all participants will engage in workshops led by artists and political scientists, and equally contribute to the discussions guided by the questions posed by the youngest generation.

Thursday 19 October

18.00- 20.00

Exhibition Opening:

Keeping Freedom in Mind. Civil Resistance 2010-2023

The exhibition highlights major civil movements organised in response to the anti-democratic measures of the NER (acronym of Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere / System of National Cooperation in English), which was announced in 2010 by the FIDESZ and Christian Democratic People's Party fraction. NER is a seemingly democratic social contract, but in fact an over regulated and anti-democratic system, close to the structure of dictatorial government. This leadership of the country is, currently in its third term of governance, has held power for nearly a decade and a half. This research-based documentary exhibition, accompanied by the works of contemporary artists, covers civil 'answers' of this period for the suppression and injustice, emphasising the importance of art both as a field and as a means of resistance.

Friday 20 October

Informal-Radical Education

The first day will focus on education, art and activism, exploring questions such as: How can critical pedagogy and art activism support active citizenship education? How can learning communities outside the public education system challenge the status quo and why is it necessary? What are the experiences in education that hinder active participation in society? And what kind of civic education do young people envision?

10.00-10.15

Welcome and Program Introduction

10.15-15.00, including lunch break between 12.30-13.30

Workshop and action with Marina Naprushkina and Nadira Husain, artists based in Berlin.

The workshop by Nadira Husain and Marina Naprushkina will centre around the concept of art education, equal access to educational institutions, using *foundationClass, an educational initiative for immigrant students within Weißensee Kunsthochschule, as an example, and the creation of self-organised platforms, like Neue Nachbarschaft/Moabit and Moabit Mountain College. Both artists have activist practice and are lecturers of the *foundationClass, beside that Naprushkina is a founder of Nachbarschaft as well. By asking ourselves

questions such as: What constitutes a place of learning? And if places of learning are not limited to schools and universities, how can knowledge be acquired, and how do self-organised spaces like alternative schools emerge and function? Participants will delve into concepts and strategies around the idea and practice of equal access to study, regardless of race, socio-economic status, gender, or age. We explore artistic practices as tools for communication, visibility, sharing history and addressing concerns, particularly within marginalised communities. You will be invited to join the discussion and contribute to shape the educational landscape.

15.00-15.30 Coffee Break

15.30-17.30 World Cafe

Discussion circles in World Cafe format, hosted by young people. Participants rotate between three groups

This session aims to bring together different informal educational formats that have emerged as responses to the need for change, often transforming or transcending existing institutional boundaries. Activists, artists, and researchers working with these unveil and explain social and political problems before they become widely recognised. How can their insights be effectively communicated to a broader audience and take a form of action?

Thematic Sessions

1. Free art schools

- *foundationClass, Berlin is a study programme at Weißensee Kunsthochschule Berlin, consisting of lectures, workshops and excursions led by professional artists, designers, academics and activists with migration backgrounds.
- Freeszfe Society is an independent theatre and film school founded in 2020, aiming to continue the traditions of the former University of Theatre and Film in Budapest following a political change in school leadership.
- SZEMinárium is a free and critical educational initiative of a college for advanced studies at the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj, linked to the critical portal *Új Szem* (<https://ujszem.org/>).
- Youth Center CK 13, Novi Sad is an independent social and cultural centre dedicated to strengthening the self-organising and social engagement of citizens, with a particular focus on youth.

2. Neighbourhood

- Pneuma Szöv. is an art co-operative, active mainly in Budapest since 2008, with collaborations and temporary initiatives in Germany and beyond. The collective has been building an open network in the 8th district of Budapest.

- Orczy-Neighbours Project initiated by neighbourhood-based Gólya Cooperative and is a participatory research and art project focusing on the history and the communities living in the Orczy neighbourhood of Budapest's 8th district, with the aim to change the stereotypical view connected to it.
- Uccu Roma Informal Educational Foundation, Budapest is an informal education initiative providing a platform for dialogue between Roma and non-Roma communities to combat prejudices and negative stereotypes related to Roma.
- Neue Nachbarschaft Moabit is a self-organised migrant-based community founded in 2013 in Berlin. Professional artists of different disciplines collaborate with self-taught artists and individuals with no artistic background, focusing on knowledge exchange and mutual support.

3. Informal Learning in a Nonformal Setting

- Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić are visual artists based in Belgrade and Berlin. In their collaborative practice the artists explore the relation between art and politics, unveiling the contradictions of today's societies and developing transformative potentials of art in the context of social struggles.
- Romaversitas, Budapest is the first comprehensive support and training program for talented Roma youths in Hungary, founded in 1996. The organisation helped 300 students to successfully complete their academic studies.
- Deviszont Community Space, Budapest is an initiative that provides young people in vocational education and training with an alternative learning and leisure opportunity. Their project-based activities are in critical pedagogy and experiential education and support young people to become informed adults and active citizens.
- Polémia Institute, Budapest is a community of young social scientists dedicated to making politics more understandable for people not specialised in the field.
- Space of Opportunity, Budapest is a cultural-educational programme and a community space for young adults (16-35 years old). It provides an opportunity to engage in critical thinking and in dialogue in encounters, experiential learning and creation.

18.00-19.00 Dinner

19.00-20.30 Game on politics developed by Polémia Institute

The Democracy Assassin - an interactive workshop game

In the country of the Piréz, the form of government is a democratic republic. However, every system has its opponents. The demagogues secretly wish for a

dictatorship instead of democracy. They are tired of debating and want to take action instead. The democrats, on the other hand, are the guardians of democracy and believe in the power and importance of communal decision-making and discussion. During the game, the demagogues' goal is to eliminate all democrats so that no one stands in their way when seizing power, but this is not an easy task. The demagogues strike at night, but the democrats are not idle either. Will the democrats manage to survive the scheming of the demagogues and stay alive? Let's play and find out!

Saturday 21 October

Learning Activism in Communities

The second day will focus on active citizenship, how taking initiative can grow from the bottom up through self-organisation, and how solidarity and knowledge can be spread among activist communities. Key questions of the day include: How can members of society be motivated to engage in political participation? How can artistic strategies contribute to this motivation? How can we identify pressing issues and generate interest in participating in efforts for change?

10.00-12.30

Parallel workshops:

1. Workshop and action with Rena Rädle & Vladan Jeremić

The three-hour workshop aims to bridge the gap between art and activism, offering valuable insights for practitioners in both fields. The first segment will provide an overview of transformative artistic practices, drawing on examples from the artists' own experiences of how art can be useful in social struggles, and community-building solidarity activities. The main part of the workshop will focus on the creation of a collective drawing with acrylic paint on textile. Participants will visualise a burning issue and the local activism related to it, which they will propose, choose and execute themselves. To do so, participants will first depict the current situation and then make interventions by adding drawings (or text) to illustrate how they envision changing this situation. They can choose a metaphorical or even fictional approach, or propose practical steps; every approach is welcome. This way, participants will create a meaningful and impactful textile banner with a collective design, drawing and text.

Meeting Point: Space of Opportunity at Práter 63.

2. Workshop with Pneuma Szöv.

The workshop offers insights into the tools and practices of the art network Pneuma Szöv. In the first half, participants will explore the work of the art collective including their involvement in Budapest's 8th district, their approach to creating public spheres through a fusion of arts, activism and poetry. After a walk through the district to the Space of Opportunity, the second half of the workshop will introduce some reflective tools used in the Pneuma Szöv. project "The Spectacular Society", developed in the spring of 2022 through a series of workshops and soirées.

Meeting point: 26 Népszínház street (near Blaha Lujza square)

12.30-13.30 Lunch

13.30-15.00 Second part of the workshops at and around The Space of Opportunity

15.30-17.30

Discussion circles in World Cafe format, hosted by young people. Participants rotate between two groups

This session aims to connect local and international organisations to discuss common or distinct challenges on equal footing. Panellists will explore various methods of effecting change, including community organising, solidarity-driven movements, campaign organisations for public causes, political movement organisations, and transnational connections of social and political movements.

Thematic sessions

1. Organise yourself

- School of Transnational Organizing is a grassroots school initiated and run by European Alternatives' Berlin Hub. It brings together different groups of the society to learn the tools and skills needed to master the lost art of organising solidarity.
- Civil College Foundation Hungary is an adult education organisation focused on community development, community work and citizen studies, actively engaged in community organisation.
- ADOM Student Movement is a Hungary-wide, self-organised and student-led organisation in solidarity with the social position of teachers, founded in 2014. It aims to create a modern, student-centred and equality based education system in Hungary.

2. Leftist traditions

- School of Transnational Organizing is a grassroots school initiated and run by European Alternatives' Berlin Hub. It brings together different groups of the society to learn the tools and skills needed to master the lost art of organising solidarity.
- Egységes Diákfront (EDF) is a Hungary-wide active student organisation founded in 2022 as a reaction to demonstrations, engaged in solidarity efforts with teachers in Hungary. The student members of the organisation recently initiated a referendum about the educational system and fair salary for teachers.
- Szikra ("Spark") is a Hungarian green-left political movement. Focusing primarily on housing, labour, and environmental issues, it engages in community building, direct action, educational activities and institutional politics.
- „A Város Mindenkié” / „City is for All” was founded in 2009 by people who are committed to working for a just and egalitarian society and taking action on housing issues. Their members are currently or formerly homeless people, those experiencing housing poverty and their allies.

18.00-19.00 Dinner

19.00 Karaoke based on shared learnings, facilitated by Pneuma Szöv.