



Remake Bodony: Visual Participatory Action Research and Tiny Publics

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Abstract: *Remake Bodony* is a documentary film, which was collaboratively developed by the inhabitants of Siklósbodony, Hungary in 2017. The article presents an account of the film production process as an organic continuation of two prior participatory visual arts workshops using photovoice and community mural painting. The reconstruction adopts a methodological lens and interprets these participatory activities as three stages of a visual participatory action research project. Three analytic dimensions are introduced: methodological configuration, “tiny publics” (Fine 2012), and the participants’ emerging research questions – to produce an account of the collective thought process occurring in the course of filmmaking.¹

Keywords: visual research methods; photovoice; social documentary; participatory action research; participatory film.

Remake Bodony is a piece of social documentary, which was collaboratively developed by the inhabitants of Siklósbodony, a small settlement in southern Hungary, social researchers, and various groups of visual artists in early 2017. The process was framed by a community arts based participatory action research project entitled *FuturePix*, launched as an open-ended initiative with the aim of exploring new social imaginaries about the future and opportunities for collective local action that may enhance community development and counteract the gradual loss of public institutions in the village over the preceding two decades. In 2021, five years after the completion of the film, local adults set up a sustainable vegetable garden, a complex project that heavily relied on the routine of cooperation with various external advisors and a collective effort to

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get integrated into a social innovation network of agriculture specialists. This permaculture project could not have been launched without the preceding two years of various participatory theatre and socio-drama workshops involving various generations of local society and identifying educational mobility, quality food production, and cooperation as core social issues of community level politics. This community drama and theatre-based process could have not been launched, in turn, without the preceding visual arts process. The production, showcasing and circulation of the social documentary helped the community develop a sense of publicity, which enabled them to evaluate the connection between what they do and how they would be seen, and consciously relate their collective action and the public image of the village.

In the present reconstruction, I attempt to form a methodological account of a series of production workshops. I will begin by offering a historical-critical interpretation of the idea of arts based participatory action research and identifying the function of visual methods in it. Next, I will touch on the analytic concepts of local configuration, tiny publics (i.e. small communities, according to Fine 2012), and emerging questions, which guide my reconstruction of the multistage and multi-layered process in question. Based on these, I will provide an account of the stages with distinct local configurations, publics, and emerging participatory research questions through which I offer a balanced ethnographic insight into “what was actually happening” during the image-making process from a research perspective.

The Participatory Image as a Research Tool

In the context of social research, the category of “participatory” tends to follow an imaginary rooted in participatory observation and is often associated either with the engagement of the researcher in the lifeworld observed, or, through a diametrical shift, with the emancipatory participation of lay people in the scientific research process (Clark et al 2009, Syed M. et al 2010, Vaughn et al 2020). The concept of “creativity” has contributed to an instrumentalization of artistic activities in relation to social research by rendering them either as useful tools for informing social research (Kara 2020) or improving the accessibility of research statements by making research results comprehensible and useful through non-verbal dissemination. From the perspective of the history of action research, however, what needs to be emphasized are the strong interdependence of action, knowledge, and artistic activities and their strategic connection to the democratization of social research.

The epistemic base of action research (AC), as defined by Lewin (1946), lies in the action-reflection-(re)planning-(new) action cycle through which knowledge is generated and validated as knowledge of/in practice. Latin-American versions of action research have adjusted this model by recognizing that causal links between the narrow local action and the broader social environment should also be covered while accounting for the success and failure of any planned action. This research tradition has applied the category of participation to active engagement in group work and the group's involvement in social movements. However, artistic activities are not added to the model as pure forms of doing/knowing (see Dewey 1980 [1934]), but rather as related to the growing social consciousness of the knowledge-generating self as an independent epistemic constituent within the participatory action research cycle. Critical self-consciousness, however, can only elevate research cycles to higher epistemic levels if it is anchored in social identity firmly anchored, in turn, in lived experiences. Enumerating the methods of data collection and analysis in participatory action research, Orlando Fals-Borda relates validity claims in PAR to yet unarticulated social experiences rather than to the dialectics of social structure and: "[PAR methodology stems for] qualitative rather than quantitative analysis, without losing sight of the importance of explanatory scientific schemas of cause-and-effect. In this realm, participatory researchers have faced the dilemmas of employing affective logic involving the heart versus dialectical logic with cold-headed laboratory analysis. As a rule, we have followed Pascal's dictum, 'The heart has its reasons which the reason does not at all perceive'" (Fals-Borda 1987, 338). All artistic activities within PAR seek some sort of affective knowledge rooted in lived experience in order to validate research insights. Visual methods are primarily specified through their capacity for bringing insight into previously unheard ideas, as they capture tacit knowledge or address the unconscious registers of knowledge (Courtney 1987). This is the reason why a sense of belonging has become a dominant topic in research through photographic methods, and Müllner (2022, 81) recalls in detail how the psychoanalytic and socio-political conceptualization of displacement in the Fogo Island initiative proved to be definitive for further participatory video projects. Images, due to their immediate comprehensibility but also inherently polysemic character, can easily boost open discussions. For this reason, visual methods are usually applied in combination with verbalization; in fact, they can be considered a necessarily "multimethod method" (Leavy 2009, 227). As participatory images are accompanied by discourse, they also become highly inclusive: amateur images in a civic gathering easily receive various kinds of

meaningful feedback, which not only offer the artist personal recognition, but also legitimize a mode of collaborative thinking, which may transcend social and educational hierarchies in a group.

Based on the understanding of visual participatory action research outlined above, I will now present the three stages of the FuturePix project in Siklósbodony. The first two stages, photovoice (Wang 2006) and the subsequent community painting workshops, were both managed as introductory phases to the collaborative filmmaking workshops. To grasp the actual connection of these stages and to reconstruct how the participants' thoughts evolved from phase to phase, I will focus on the same three analytic aspects in each of the stages.

1. Local configuration is how I will refer to the combination of social environment and the artistic genre (working formats) that set up the aesthetic space in which research acts are realized and meanings emerge. All creative exercises proposed by researchers formulate implicit research questions by focusing the participants' attention to specific experiences and offer some "grammar" for articulation. Image-making practices usually favour representation over performance: by unpacking experiences of failure and success through the lens of the attached emotions of fear, desire, anger, and joy, and by helping to display individual combinations of categorical social identities. To this extent, the proposed artistic conventions decide what is and is not articulable in the field. However, due to the local temporal order, social ties, and various interests, proposed activities may not meet the needs and fit the taste of invited participants. Involvement in or withdrawal from a creative exercise is thus the main tool by which participants can express the acceptance or refusal of research questions. By focusing on local configurations, we can trace the details of how initial expectations are confirmed through engagement in contributing roles or refuted by disrupting the proposed conventions. Modification of exercises with respect to the perceived local configuration tells what new questions have been proposed or put forward by the participants through inventing more comfortable and more exciting exercises.

2. The output of artistic activities can be evaluated as public articulations of social experiences. Examining the role of the public in artistic activities, I follow the small group approach proposed by Garry Fine (2004, 2010, 2012), who intends to capture how people in local settings come together, invent new places which function as arenas for displaying modes of action: "the local is a stage for action and creates a lens by which participants typify groups or gatherings, establishing boundaries" (Fine 2004, 344). The idea of tiny publics relies on intersubjective visibility (instead of discourse) which enhances

imagining communities through performed actions. Following Brighenti (2010) we can add that tiny publics as places are no less structured in terms of power (certainly guided by affordances, possibilities of action), but a plurality of scopical regimes can be incited, making visible actions variable and imagined local communities inherently contested. Therefore, tiny public “refers not to the fact of community but to the question of community. One cannot be the public, one can only be in public: the public, in other words, is ‘bridging’ rather than ‘bonding.’ Let us recall that for Tarde (1901) the public is defined by synchronicity of attention” (Brighenti 2010, 117).

3. Tiny publics can be traced as a group-level institution, but also as the public place of arranged events, where research participants display their artwork, engage in new encounters, and they formulate new questions about actions and community in response to provocative feedback. While participatory action research has been struggling to avoid including research questions by the academic researcher, arts-based research projects have always been more interested in letting issues and topics emerge rather than formulating questions (Leavy, 2017; Greenwood 2019). In this case, I follow the latter and trace how research questions rooted in social experiences emerge as a result of the local configuration of artistic collaboration and the ever newer tiny publics in which participants become visible through their photos, paintings, and documentary.

Photovoice

Photovoice, the first form of work employed, was intended to map the local issues and problems of concern the partial solution of which could give the participants an experience of communal success. Rooted in the critical pedagogical practice of the 1970s, photo-voice is a process that transforms the somatic process of experience into a shared social-critical knowledge through photography. Participants take photographs of key concepts in their lives and then explore possibilities for transforming their environment through a discussion based on the photographs. In the words of Augusto Boal, who is referring to Paolo Freire’s instructions, “We are going to ask you some questions. For this purpose we will speak in Spanish. And you must answer us. But you cannot speak in Spanish: you must speak in ‘photography.’ We ask you things in Spanish, which is a language. You answer us in photography, which is also a language” (Boal 2008, 98). According to the increasingly solidified conventions, articulated by Caroline Wang in the 1990s, the “answers” crystallizing around the images can be interpreted as a list of social

problems, which enables not only the participants but also decision-makers to understand everyday experiences, thereby transforming them into public policy issues that need to be solved (see: Wang 2006).

As an introduction, we opened a Family Photo Studio in the attic of the community centre on Roma Day in early summer. Families and groups of friends could have carefully lit and attractive group photos taken. After successful recruitment, we began work with a group of adults (18–40 years old) and a group of young people (10–16 years old), each with 8–10 members. By the third session, however, interest had waned, so we continued work with a youth group of 15 (14–20 year olds). We had expected attrition, as the space created with the Family Photo Studio was a low-threshold one, suitable primarily for getting acquainted and making contacts, while we knew full well that taking, downloading and discussing the pictures would be a time-consuming process that may exceed the patience of some. In addition, weekend planning was difficult for many of the adults (friends and relatives would arrive unannounced from neighbouring villages or they had to leave suddenly), and if someone dropped out of the process once, they would not return to the next meeting).

We drew on our previous experience with the members of the *ÉjjelNappal7ker* group in Budapest (Oblath Csozó 2017; Oblath Csozó Varga 2022) when planning the summer workshop to be held once a week: we planned to foster group cohesion through sessions focused on acquiring photographic skills (composition, framing) involving through a lot of walking and movement, then use a weak fictional framework (i.e. being the editorial staff of a paper) to identify key local concepts to be photographed by the participants, and then have individuals select the photos they consider the most important, hold collective discussions about the selected photos according to the SHOWeD convention and create the photovoice would constitute a current inventory of the most important local social issues according to the young people of Bodony.

However, the editorial framing game introduced in the third workshop proved to be too complicated, documentary and slow for the young participants. The individual photo series – done with the working title, *My Resources*, were made, but once the images were downloaded and selected in the afternoon, we did not have a chance to create a collective voice for the resource images. While the images were being downloaded and we were working individually with each participant as facilitators, the others got hold of one of the “big” (i.e. professional) cameras and created a game of dress-up improvisation for themselves, based on a creative use of the compositional tools they had practised. The series focused

on two objects found in the mayor's office, which had been left open: a crate of red peppers (grown by public workers on municipal land) and a flag of the European Union. Scrolling through the pictures on the camera, which we retrieved in a carnival atmosphere that completely subverted the program as originally planned, we were offered several narratives for the series: "The Union descended on our peppers"; the boy who draped the flag over himself as a cape is "a superhero who saves the peppers from the Union." In the following session, we returned to the movement exercises: we offered the game of driving two groups of blindfolded youths to the edge of the village, and asking them to walk back with their blindfolds off and take a series of pictures under the working title, *Finding Siklósbodony*. However, instead of returning with a photo series, each group made a horror film after discovering the video functions of the camera. One depicts starving people wandering in a void after global extinction, while the other shows migrants searching for the village, having just arrived in Hungary.

A moderated joint discussion of the situation revealed that the young participants thought editorial offices dealt with national political issues that were distant and comical for them, and they did not want to bring their own lives into this world. The group did not want to make their photo essay about the Bodony peppers or their videos public; instead, they would have preferred to create carefully staged and lit professional photographs that would portray them as individuals and appear as professional images on social media.

This is how the series with the working title *FuturePix* was born. After exercises in (studio) lighting and portraiture, the young people independently imagined, composed and went through a long process of fine-tuning the details as they collectively set up images of themselves in ten years' time, in their future environment. These social portraits of the future typically show the participants at work, identifying with their imagined occupation (baker, rock musician, photographer, food blogger, and hairdresser). So we began to call it the *Dream Jobs* series. These individual portraits were already meaningful to their creators in the context of their previous images of resources. The image pairs created typically represented the resource-future dimension as a relationship between "familiarity" and the "dream job," and participants also articulated this relationship textually in the process of individually creating captions. The image pair was supplemented by a variety of tableaus and untitled experimental images taken during the semester's photo exercises, which formed a sort of decorative pattern. While all participants were happy to share the resulting individual portfolios with the public, they still maintained that their collectively and

casually created photo essays had no place in this context despite the facilitators' repeated suggestions to consider it.

The description of the working process shows – even without any thorough analysis of the individual portfolios – that our participatory research proposal, which sought to identify social problems and public policy issues from the perspective of young people, was subverted by the participants and adapted to their own needs. Instead of the “issue images” based on life experiences, the images created were carefully illuminated portraits showing individual dreams/successes, and these would show up in the Facebook profiles of almost everyone after the workshop ended. At this stage, the creators' main concern was selecting a future social role (occupation) that they could personally identify with and that would allow them to distinguish themselves from the others through the elaboration of the details.

We collectively published the portfolios on two occasions, in two different ways. At the first exhibition, during a professional day on the methodology of community development at the University of Pécs, the participants were given a section of a wall where they presented their portfolios as their own vision. [Fig. 1.] Their photos taken during the exercises were shown on two “common” sections, including their portraits of each other with the EU flag, which were removed from the original context described earlier. The local cable network was invited to the event, and any artist willing to do be interviewed by the crew could do so in front of their own portfolios. [Fig. 2.] The reporters, sensing the shyness of the young people, agreed to trial runs, so anyone could have their statements recorded again, even several times. In these biographic performances, the participants discussed their creative process and life goals before the public of the county, and their talent and the seriousness of their dreams were demonstrated by their portfolios shown as backgrounds and cut-aways. Their self-interpretations in response to the interviewer's questions would touch on the contrast between home/childhood and profession/adulthood, and when discussing the topic of career choice, they articulated the dilemma that it could be “something enforced by reality” or “a hobby dreamed up for the future.” Two weeks later, in the coverage of the professional days in the *Pécsi Kör* (Pécs Circle) magazine, the material was broadcast as good practice in community development. As a result of an editorial decision, the emphasis was put on the methodological specificities of photovoice, and the few seconds about photovoice include one of the creators' interpretation that life experiences are complex, so certain things are easier to tell in pictures. The report's cut-away images include amateur “family” photos of

young people having fun, effectively framed and dramatically lit works attesting to the creators' aesthetic competence, as well as the decontextualized portraits of subversive play with the EU flag, represented within the report as a sign of identification with Europe.

The second presentation took place in the framework of a social art festival organized at Trafó, a centre for contemporary theatre in Budapest. The SajátSzínház (OwnTheater) event focused on a question relevant to all participatory art programs in Roma communities of different situations in Hungary between 2014 and 2017, namely the question posed by the participating communities to the middle class in Budapest: what are the institutions that are missing and that hold us captive? In the framework of the festival, the Siklósbodony group and we created an interactive stage exhibition, including copies of the works of the community painting (see below) alongside pieces of the individual photo portfolios. Tables were set up on the stage, the young people covered them with postcard-sized reproductions, and the audience was free to collect interesting pictures in a folder and dictate the imagined title of their folder to the artists sitting on bar stools and behind notebooks at the edge of the stage. Audience members chatted with the young people, occasionally changing their titles, which would appear continuously on the huge screen set up on the stage. [Fig. 3.] The conception of the exhibition was guaranteed to give the young people positive feedback on their artistic work, on the interesting quality and importance of their dreams depicted, thus bolstering their self-esteem. The internal evaluative discussions (and subsequent biographical developments) show that the second exhibition did not modify the self-reflective dimensions formulated during the first exhibition, but kept the possibility of reconciling individually formulated dreams and possibilities as a research theme in the participants' minds.

Community Mural Painting

Muralism, the Latin-American movement painting that had created alternative public spheres for political contestation, has only survived sporadically (Kunzle 1995). The Ecuadorian and Nicaraguan community painting creative groups founded in the 1990s were meant to replace it in some fashion; while evoking the guerrilla painting of the past, their practices were institutionalised primarily as good practices of an increasingly participatory international development. Being incorporated into the globalised repertoire of international (community) development, the new murals created in Nicaragua typically no longer use harsh

political references (no longer include symbols against “Capital” or “America” or messages extolling the results of popular literacy programs). The NGOs organizing the creative process and reception impose a strict dramaturgy through which local publics are created. The murals are created with the involvement of local community members, and the surfaces display the community resources available to community members and the dreams and development goals commensurate with them. The complex community development processes aim to counteract “learned helplessness,” the primary obstacle to development, by making community members realize and remember their potential: “[in this approach] communities are viewed as resource-rich sites that, once working together to identify and magnify these resources, can cooperate to strengthen their community, either alone or in partnership with external agencies” (Benjamin et al 2021, 2). The role of young people in this creative process follows the logic of Y-PAR: “[youth] creatively identify assets that adult members of the community often overlook” (Benjamin et al 2021, 4).

Kriszta Katona, leader of the Mural Morál group in Pécs, learned the methodology of the Nicaraguan FunArte group in Estenil in 2007–2008. Over the next ten years, she went on to paint tableaus enumerating local resources and dreams on the walls of more than twenty municipalities and public institutions in Baranya County, following the community development goals described above, but also experimenting with innovative forms of work (Katona 2019; 2020). The mural and photovoice workshops ran in parallel. Our original aim with the former was to identify local cultural, social and material resources; however, as the photovoice became increasingly individualized, we became more open to admitting formulations of collective visions for the future in the mural workshop.

We did not build a closed group in this workshop, which was held biweekly for six months. As participants were free to skip sessions and return when time allowed, we managed to avoid cutting generational and trans-local ties. Gradually, a group of regular participants was formed, consisting of 14 adolescents from Siklósbodony, but parents, grandparents, and friends and relatives from four neighbouring villages could join in on an ad hoc basis. We will see that this open group provided local legitimacy for the display of local resources and dreams, but we also perceived deficits of ecological validity, i.e. which groups of participants no longer had a stake in the process at some point.

The first pedagogical layer of the workshop series gradually introduced the forms of self-expression of automatic painting in individual, pair and group setups and thereby allowed the participants to develop a routine of expressing

and reflecting their experiences and gave them the sense of security required for collective creation. This process ended with body mapping, an exercise that represented social identity in a painted life-size body outline. In partial overlap with the process of creating a self-expressive routine, exercises also gave participants the formal and technical skills needed to compose a mural. From comic strips depicting individual daily life and community life events through graffiti and poster painting, we worked our way to the collective creation of a model of an ideal village. Exercises were built on each other in this process as well, and learning increasingly complex technical skills also entailed the accumulation of insights into the community. Finally, these insights were converted into an inventory of resources to be acquired and goals to be achieved during the collective design of a mural for a location chosen collectively in consultation with the municipality and participants.

The work process was pedagogically complex and ethnographically very dense; I will only examine here how the issues that engaged the participants were identified through the forms of work offered and the “small publics” organized.

The works were presented to the public in three stages. We invited parents, relatives and teachers and NGO staff from the surrounding municipalities to the first presentation, a Professional Day held in the cultural centre of a nearby town. The heterogeneous audience gathered in the liminal space outside the village not only admired the finished works, which were a testimony to individual efforts, but also viewed the painting covering the wall of the cultural centre and discussed how the workshop would accomplish the final work and praised the participants’ performance in terms of the anticipated greatness of the result. In addition to the positive feedback for the young people, the viewers we imagined (the adult residents of the village) could also consider their potential involvement in the process. At this public event, the creators’ only question was which parts of their efforts would be acknowledged by their environment and to what degree. Nevertheless, the dramaturgy of the Professional Day turned the responses into a dialogue between the two groups of receivers: the appreciative phrases that could be expressed in the “strange space” were modelled for the adult residents of the village by the teachers and the NGO staff as “strangers,” phrases with which the parents inevitably acknowledged and affirmed the young people as program participants.

The second and third presentation of the results of the process was linked to the photovoice presentations, where audience interest was mainly focused on the young people who created the works. In other words, the participants had to think

about their fantasies for the collective future not primarily through the audience reactions (through responding to them), but through the negotiations during the preparation of the exhibition and the selection of the works. As the initiators of the program, we designated the formulation of positive fantasies about the future of the village as the primary objective, and in this respect identifying questions were relevant to the participants can be interpreted as a research result. The first theme of the large stencil and tempera posters was the future beach (swimming pool), exploiting the water sources available in the village, and the fun of young people enjoying ice cream and swimming in the imagined facility. The second poster focused on the call for improvements to transport infrastructure: "Let's act! No more waiting!" proclaims a group of girls waiting for the long-distance bus in the rain. The third poster also shows the joy of unity and collective action, celebrating the community care of public spaces with the slogan "The future belongs to Császárfa!" [Fig. 4.] After the posters, a collectively made model of the dream village, built from playdough, cardboard and recycled materials, was populated by institutions that the young participants thought the village would need in the next decade and a half: a doctor's office, a school, a kindergarten, a shop, a movie theatre, an (afternoon) bus service, a fishing lake (with a boat). The adults who became actively involved in the selection and arrangement of the works (and later in the design of the final mural) were shocked to realize that the institutions "invented" by the young people had actually existed in the village, which had been gradually, "almost imperceptibly" losing its mostly publicly funded institutions and community spaces over the previous two decades. When the current resources were enumerated, "the power of working together" and the general relative advantages of village life (over urban life: "clean air," "quiet," "closeness to nature") seemed to be the resources easiest to pinpoint, so these were used in the eventual design of the mural. However, during the preparation for the second exhibition (held at the University of Pécs), the participants were less concerned with the question what the village wants to become than the question "What do we want to how of ourselves and to whom?" Two fundamental dilemmas emerged. For the adults, the question was "How much should we push this?," i.e. what is the legitimacy of asking the villagers about their common future at the bottom of a several-decade-long process of losing institutions? At the same time, the adolescents' dilemma was whether the relative advantages (water, air, silence, nature) identified as village resources were an attractive enough alternative to moving to the city, still an available option for them. On the horizon of the sociology of the Hungarian village, the formulation of these

dilemmas can be interpreted as follows: the community development game of identifying individual and collective resources and goals reveals the logical questions of the systematically excluded groups of the post-socialist state running local development programmes: Can the community development discourse of empowerment be understood in the social space of a small Hungarian village surrounded by privatized land, gradually losing its public institutions, but at the same time not functioning as a suburb, if the offer of new forms of identification is not accompanied by new material, network and expert resources. However, the pragmatic question arising on the horizon of arts-based participatory action research is if the participants are uninterested in political self-organisation, but face the collective trauma of the loss of institutions or are not thinking in terms of an organic rural-urban relationship, but rather perceive the choice of a rural vs. urban life path as a zero sum existential decision, what kinds of publics can they enter as a collective, where their collective insights can grow to further and further contexts (possibilities of action).

These ideas shaped the frameworks of the second and third presentations. On the Professional Day of Community Developers at the University of Pécs, our main objective was keeping the focus of the panel discussions on the results of the photographers' work, their future opportunities, and creating new useful social contacts for them. In these terms, the key question was what opportunities and supplementary channels of mobility were available to local young people to compensate for their school careers. The group entrusted the presentation and interpretation of the results of community painting to the workshop leaders, Krisztina Katona and Eszter László. The exhibition was a methodological demonstration organised in university space, and the local television report also focused on the community painting workshop. In the report, the program organisers offered a detailed explanation of the logic of community development and the methodological development of community painting, while the participants' statement that was broadcast emphasised the importance of attachment to place and organic future creation with reference to the poster "The future belongs to Császárfa!"

The creation of publics in the complex photographic and muralistic creative process offered an opportunity to pose and redefine participatory research questions. The continuously expanding sphere of locally relevant questions that emerge in the public sphere and through public reflection can be characterized as the cognitive interest in art-based participatory action research. Media representations do not contradict and erase these collectively

experienced questions anchored in local experiences; rather, they function as a provocation within the reflective process much like other types of feedback. Based on our shared considerations regarding the organisation of the exhibition and the editorial considerations by the cable station, the TV report presents the media framing of community development methodology, the organic future, the importance of non-verbal self-expression and the identification with the European Union, which comes across as the recognition of the professional work of NGOs and the balanced significance of a rural idyll and Europe, at least when read from the perspective of the national public in 2017. However, this frame was too rigid for the next presentation of the community painting workshop; while it serves the purpose of supporting the brand of the village and its young people, it erases dilemmas about the future. This frame provoked a new desire of self-expression in the participants that leaves more room for their uncertainties about the local future. After watching the TV report together, the participants decided that they would like to have small postcards of the large paintings for the exhibition in Trafó, visitors could choose from these and, if they so wished, they could ask the artists what the given experience or dream was about. The accompanying folder mentioned earlier (in which visitors could compile their own collections) was accompanied by a text that simultaneously emphasised the importance of the loss of institutions, the relativity of the category of the “poorest village” and the diversity of dreams.

The dilemmas articulated in the group-level public, the media representation of empowering community development and the interactive exhibition that explored the tensions between the two allowed the creative group to return to their mural project in the summer of 2017. The expanded concept gives a more prominent role to the dream jobs expressed in the photo workshop, as well as to life situations that are simultaneously arranged as branches of a tree and as (once) possible events of a time spiral linking past and future. The carefully designed painting was created on the walls of a disused gas cylinder exchange in the geometric centre of the one-street village during a three-day community creative process. [Fig. 5.] The subsequent complex use of the mural over the years has fulfilled three distinct functions. In keeping with the use encoded in community painting methodology, it reminds villagers of the shared values, goals and resources they have identified and the thought process that led to their identification. A distinctive hospitality ritual has also developed: visiting journalists and NGO activists coming to the village on exchange visits view the gas exchange plant. The local “tour guide” who accompanies the visitors is

usually not the only one telling the story of the process, as the villagers passing by tend to add their own, and visitors have the opportunity to ask further questions in this context of collective self-representation, for instance about daily life, conditions, achievements and new difficulties in the village. The wall of the gas exchange plant, as a participatory spectacle, has also become a public counterpoint to the church and the World War I memorial at the entrance to the village from the direction of Pécs. A website collecting works of art in public space in Hungary² lists it as *Children's Dreams*. A few tourists come every year, and they usually have the courage to ask the first villager who passes by what it is. Reportedly, no one has ever replied that they didn't know, shrugged their shoulders or been embarrassed.

Collaborative Filmmaking

The photovoice and community painting workshops laid the groundwork for the community's documentary about itself. The team invited to shoot the film included Martin Boross and his theatre company StereoAkt, whose previous work includes site-specific theatre, filming film etudes with large groups, and experimental documentary theatre with amateur actors. The initial idea was to create a site-specific theatre production with carnival elements, in which the young people who were the core participants of the workshops would try to involve the other residents of the village in a process of creative collaboration and thinking about the future of the village. This participatory social experiment was to be captured in a reportage film that the community view years later, thus providing a baseline for assessing the future state of the village community. However, StereoAkt's suggestion was to combine theatre and film work to make the filming itself the carnival event to which the villagers might flock, and by documenting the preparations for the "big" shoot, we could capture the young people's fears related to involving the adults, the results of their own efforts, and the future of the village. Based on a joint interpretation of the research results of the two previous workshops, i.e. the individual and collective local dilemmas related to agency, we ended up developing a concept of a communal film shoot of a "making of film" consisting of three scenes.

The first part focused on staging a talent show and re-enacting key scenes from the young participants' favourite films. The second part focused on the local conflicts preventing the local community from acting together, using the "power of

2 See: www.kozterkep.hu. Last accessed 02. 03. 2023.

unity,” the community resource so often emphasised in the course of community painting. The third part was a street theatre scene we would internally refer to as “low-threshold,” which offered the opportunity for any local resident who had stayed away to come outside their front door and to compose themselves into the community film by performing a simple but surreal gesture.

The starting point for the first part was the documentary, *The Wolfpack* (2015, dir. Crystal Moselle), which shows the socialisation of brothers locked up in a big city high-rise through the films they watch and re-enact and the practice of re-shooting. The re-enactment of famous film scenes, seen many times and recalled regularly, proved to be a safe space for self-discovery for the young people of Bodony as well. Organising the shoot for the costumed re-enactment of a classic Bud Spencer-Terence Hill scene and a duel scene from *Troy* also provided an opportunity to learn about the dramaturgy of filmmaking. This, in turn, was the starting point for making two short films of self-representation using the green box technique. In the first one, a Roma dance is shown with the backdrop of the Heroes’ Square in Budapest, chosen by the protagonist. The second one shows the participants perform their own rap song in front of a backdrop they painted. All the details were decided by the actors during the shooting of the scenes, but they did not know how their work would fit into the film as a whole. The finished film also included footage from two other exercises. First, individual interviews were conducted, in which the protagonists explained their aspirations, plans and dilemmas for their personal futures by explaining the dream job images they had created in the photovoice workshop. Then we filmed a “secret room” scene familiar from the world of reality TV, in which the actors were not to talk about themselves, but rather to show their secret talent they were still afraid to reveal to the public. At a joint viewing of the footage, the actors could choose to include a moment of their talent clip itself or rather images of them viewing the footage of their secret talent.

For the second part, we used group discussions and drama pedagogical games to find conflict situations in the life of the village that participants considered irresolvable. Our starting point was a version of Augusto Boal’s forum theatre convention often used in drama in education (DiE) workshops, in which a protagonist in a difficult situation is confronted with several antagonists at the same time, who prevent the protagonist from achieving his or her will. This form of participatory theatre encourages the audience to intervene in the action. That is, any spectator can stop the scene they are watching by clapping, then step into the protagonist’s role and show in the restarted scene how he or she would

enforce the protagonist's will against the antagonists. In the course of creating the scenes, we try to reconstruct the participants' everyday experiences that fit into the dramatic structure as authentically as possible. A variety of parent-child disputes and classroom and school bullying situations came up, but what the participants found the most exciting were family rivalry and the escalation of conflict. After analysing several local family and household conflicts, the team concluded that the conflicts between households they knew internally typically started from small disagreements, and it was typically mutual "jealousy" driven by limited opportunities that pushed relationships into lasting resentment. In these cases, the will of an "external" actor, such as a young family member, was not even registered by the adults. In the scene that was eventually filmed, a wedding mishap is shown: the bride's jealous younger sister (perhaps accidentally) spills red wine on her sister's wedding dress, and the parents (the fathers and mothers of the bride and groom) respond to the tense moment by continuing their prior argument of rivalry (looking down on each other and identifying as superior), and exposing the secret affair between the younger sister and the groom in the process. The audience was allowed to intervene in the scene on the day of filming. [Fig. 6.] The solution consensually accepted with applause, the intervening spectator resolved the situation not assuming the role of the bride, but that of a suddenly appearing older female relative who helped the bride escape.

The preparations for shooting the third part included several formal and thematic games. The first set of exercises involved creating a remake of a video clip in which they lip-sync their favourite song with their most desired environment providing the backdrop. The background is intermittently interrupted by a slow-motion panorama of the village, showing the villagers in front of their houses making unusual gestures. The Seoul skyline was chosen as the backdrop for the Hungarian pop song about love, and the village street was populated by young people dressed in different kinds of protective gear and performing practical jokes. The second set of exercises was a preparation for the community mobilisation necessary for the shoot. Back at the time of the individual dream job interviews, the participants had to identify a small but significant change that the young people wanted to achieve in the village, but could only be realized by working together. Making the football pitch level and re-growing the grass seemed a public policy reform that could be achieved through community collaboration, and the most important moments of this reform were captured on film. If the young people later became unsure of their agency, we could refer to the film documentation as evidence of the collective success achieved through small

steps, following the logic of community development. We also made an advance demonstration of the effectiveness of our joint efforts in another preparatory exercise, when we tried to invite the villagers to the day of the filming. Many of the participants were worried about villagers who were in a quarrel with each other (and perhaps with the participant's family or even with the participant) and wondered how they would refuse when asked to come up a week later to watch a theatre performance in front of the community centre, or at least to stand outside their houses to show themselves for the filming. As a first step taken together, we approached a farmer thought to be one of the "toughest cases" in order to borrow his horse and carriage for the filming. Although the farmer did not want to appear in the film, he was happy to offer the use of his carriage "for the village, in the village's interest." With the help of the horse-drawn carriage, we organised a loud and spectacular carnival parade, during which the young people dressed in festive outfits befitting a wedding rang the doorbell of each house and handed out personalised invitations to all the residents for the day of the filming.

Of the village population of 120, 80 people gathered on the day of the shoot. They contributed to the preparations for the stage wedding, played the wedding party by eating the prepared dishes and played the audience in the forum theatre scene. In the closing scene of the film, we see the bride running down the main street of the village with the villagers in the background. The residents, who show surprising gestures in front of their house – prying, scolding, paying respect or just expressing themselves – were played by the villagers themselves, with the young people previously modelling the gestures. We can see a public worker fleeing with a string trimmer, a person in a red leather jacket dumping oranges from a wheelbarrow, a kid bouncing on a trampoline in front of a house [Fig. 7], a man barbecuing in front of his house and setting the stand on fire, and passers-by who take reverse photos of the Google Streetview car with their mobile phones.

During the making of the film, the participants continued to reflect on the issues raised in the two visual workshops, constantly redefining their dilemmas about their social position resulting from their age and place of living and about their social identity and their questions about the cohesion and agency of the village as a community. The theatricality of the filming institutionalised a tiny public sphere in which the same overarching dilemmas could appear simultaneously at the safe distance of a fictional framework and as practical questions for concrete action plans in the work of representation. The possibilities of the creative process, conceived as art-based participatory action research, are no doubt determined by the forms of work devised by the workshop leaders and the order in which they

are carried out, but we saw that the participants were able to subvert and adapt the newly learned forms of work to their own interests and to censor the resulting works based on their individual and collective tastes.

As for the distribution of the films, we also made sure to keep the screenings in the tiny public defined by Gary Fine (2012) as the meso-level. This was meant to give the filmmakers the opportunity to confront their own representational possibilities through the now separate work, without becoming permanently alienated from their own representations, in the sense that they always have the possibility of withdrawing, supplementing or shaping them further. In this spirit, we agreed with the actors that the film would only be screened for audiences of somewhat predictable sizes and compositions, and the actors would be present at the screenings and in the subsequent discussions as representatives of the whole creative team. The voicing of the experiences of reception offers an opportunity for the filmmakers to encounter new interpretations of themselves and their lives, to correct what they consider misinterpretations by sharing further stories, and use the resulting dialogue to make acquaintances with people who represent new resources for them. These people are primarily “weak social ties” for them, i.e. compensatory social capital they can use to overcome the disadvantages suffered as a result of the loss of institutions and exclusion from the labour market and schools.

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Figures 1–2. The first Photo Voice Exhibition (photos by Gabriella Csozó, copyright *sajatszinhaz.org*).





Figure 3. The second Photo Voice Exhibition (photo by Gabriella Csozó, copyright *sajatszinhaz.org*).



Figure 4. Posters of the community painting workshop (photo by Márton Oblath, copyright *sajatszinhaz.org*).



Figure 5. Community mural painting (photo by Márton Oblath, copyright *sajatszinhaz.org*).



Figures 6–7. Community film about a wedding mishap (photos by Gabriella Csozó, copyright *sajatszinhaz.org*).

