



The Camera as a Social Catalyst

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Abstract. The methodology, practical aspects and social embeddedness of participatory filmmaking and specifically the catalyst method developed by the author are presented in this study through workshop processes in Hungary. While the catalyst method is based on participatory video methodology, it uses film primarily for interpersonal communication, and its main goal is the use of the camera as a group cohesion and intergroup catalyst. The method addresses the representation and self-representation of participants along social fault lines through filmmaking, it is based on the principle of dialogue and aims at community building and participation. The method is hopefully applicable in other countries, as the democratising potential of participatory filmmaking for at least partially redressing existing inequalities can be utilized in other locations as well.¹

Keywords: participatory filmmaking, minority and majority representation, integration, society, catalyst, community, workshop, group identity.

Introduction

Over the past three years, I have been developing a video workshop method in the doctoral program of the University of Theatre and Film Arts, Budapest (SZFE). The method, which is presented in this study, catalyses inter-group and intra-group connections and is based on international and Hungarian theoretical work and practical experience. Participatory video, on which the method is based, has been used in international communities since the 1960s to give

1 The present article was originally published in Hungarian in the social science journal *Replika* (Haragonics 2022) and has been revised for the English version. Both the Hungarian and the English version were produced within the framework of the four year long research project titled, *The History and Current Practices of Hungarian Participatory Film Culture, with an Emphasis on the Self-representation of Vulnerable Minority Groups* (2019–2023), no. 131868, supported by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund of the National Research, Development and Innovation Office.

disadvantaged people the means to talk about themselves. There have been few experiments with participatory video in the classic sense in Hungary, though filmmaking has been used as a tool in many ways in the past few decades. I believe that creating a tradition for this methodology is important. This essay is the product of a reflective stage of my research, based mainly on my experience as a practical participatory video facilitator (group leader).² The first part of the article introduces participatory video and its international and Hungarian tradition. Then I will present my own methodology, the catalyst method, highlighting specific exercises and illustrating the practical implementation of the methodology through two case studies. Finally I will present the conclusions drawn from my own experiences.

Overview of Participatory Social Research as a Principle and Practice

Participatory filmmaking appeared in Hungary relatively late, in the past few decades. There is no extensive Hungarian tradition of participatoriness as an artistic approach based on an emancipatory dialogue with minorities, although a handful of grassroots initiatives can be found, mainly in the field of theatre.³ They have been working actively with the tools of participatory theatre, mainly drawing on the Boalian tradition.⁴ In the international artistic canon, however, participatory theatre as an approach with philosophical underpinnings goes back much further. The starting point for participatory programs is similar to those of participatory action research. The philosophy of participatory action for social change is rooted in the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire. For Freire, education is about making sense of the world and creating knowledge

2 See more about the motivation and elaboration of this method in the introduction to my PhD thesis, published in Hungarian on the Minor Media blog with the title, *A kamera mint csoportkohéziós és csoportközi katalizátor* [The Camera as a Group Cohesion and Intergroup Catalyst], <http://minormedia.hu/haragonics-sari/>. Last accessed 23. 10. 2022.

3 Among others, Kata Horváth and Márton Oblath (Parforum), Balázs Simon and Krisztián Simó (UtcaSzak), as well as several grassroots Roma theatre initiatives, etc.

4 Augusto Boal's tradition, the *Theatre of the Oppressed* (TO), one of the best known and most clearly defined trends in participatory theatre, aims to emancipate subjugated social groups and socially empower them through drama and theatre. The theoretical and methodological framework for the theatre of the oppressed was developed by the Brazilian-born theatre practitioner, ethnologist and political activist Augusto Boal in the 1960s, drawing on the critical pedagogical concept of Paulo Freire. Boal's system of drama and theatre-based processes and techniques was based on a left-wing, Marxist ideology. The aim of the procedures is to make social hierarchies, oppressive relations and situations visible, to raise consciousness, to liberate, and to develop collective strategies against oppression (Sajátzínház).

together. His philosophy of education, articulated in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), links pedagogy and social transformation. In the course of the pedagogical process, members of marginalized groups consequently learn to see themselves once again as human beings and citizens of full worth by analysing and understanding the social roots of their oppression and seeking solutions to overcome them. The essence of the pedagogy of liberation, as Freire saw it, was not the sensitization of the social majority, but rather the emancipation of oppressed groups through restoring the balance of the system of power between the majority and the marginalized into which the marginalized had been forced for centuries (Udvarhelyi and Dósa 2019).

A Definition of Participatory Video

The international participatory video canon does not include a single consensual definition of participatory video, as the term is used in numerous ways and for many different processes. The reason for the diversity of definitions is clearly the fact that participatory filmmaking has taken many forms over the past decades, which are difficult to integrate into an organic whole while maintaining their diversity (Müllner 2020).⁵ Of these, let me quote the definition I consider most accurate: participatory video is “a collaborative approach to working with a group or community in shaping and creating their own film, in order to open spaces for learning and communication and to enable positive change and transformation” (PV-NET 2008, cited by Lunch and Lunch 2006, 1).

The first use of the participatory video method was by researcher Donald Snowden and filmmaker Colin Low in the framework of the Challenge for Change programme of the National Film Board of Canada in 1967. They made 27 short films with members of a fishing community in the Canadian Fogo Islands, sharing the community’s problems related to poverty. By watching each other’s films, the fishermen realized that they were facing similar problems in their communities and that by acting together they could make a difference (Snowden 1984). There are numerous international examples of minority and marginalized groups who have been able to communicate and represent their interests to political and economic decision-makers outside the community through the films produced in such film workshops, often bringing about positive change in local problems. The materials produced can be used for vertical (including downward and upward) communication with decision-makers and horizontal

5 See Müllner (2020) and his articles in English published in this issue.

communication with other communities. One such example is the Rights to Healthcare programme in Nepal.⁶ At a workshop organized by InsightShare⁷ in partnership with Oxfam, young activists produced three videos aimed at improving healthcare. The videos and community screenings reached out to local leaders, significantly strengthening local advocacy groups and providing a healthcare facility with funding for lights and solar panels.

The participatory video process enables a group or community to process traumatic experiences, face their problems, communicate them and find solutions, or strengthen relationships within the community, and can be a tool for positive social change. The method is implemented through informal practical workshops, focusing on the process of social transformation and audio-visual creation. In a workshop process, participants quickly learn to use the technical tools through games and exercises, and create video messages and films together. The results are shared with the wider community or even online. One of the main advantages of digital video as a medium is that the recordings can be instantly viewed, encouraging continuous reflection and self-reflection. [Fig. 1.]

I have identified eight aspects that can help frame and interpret participatory video and analyse existing programs. These aspects are not universal and are based solely on my own previous practical experience and theoretical research. Participatory filmmaking 1) focuses on community and collaborative work; 2) its priority target groups are minorities and marginalized groups; 3) aims at individual and group development, positive change, empowerment; 4) further aims at creating opportunities for self-expression/self-representation (the contrast and intersection of self/me and other); 5) it can have a role in communicating with decision-makers, thus bringing about progress in the advocacy role of the community; 6) it has an important aspect of knowledge transfer and sharing, whereby we interpret the world together and create together; 7) it is not primarily about film education; 8) the workshop process itself is important, which can be successful without a final product.

6 Rights to Healthcare in Nepal: Oxfam My Rights, My Voice. 2014. <https://insightshare.org/videos/rights-to-healthcare>. Last accessed 23. 10. 2022.

7 From the 1970s onwards, a number of filmmakers, anthropologists and social work professionals around the world began to work on participatory filmmaking. One of the oldest and most active of these is the British organisation InsightShare, founded in 1999 by brothers Chris and Nick Lunch. The organisation has run workshops in over 60 countries and trained local facilitators in countless communities to run the filming activities.

The Camera as Catalyst

Catalyst is a Greek word (from the word *catalysis*) meaning dissolution. Figuratively speaking, a person (factor or influence) who promotes a social process or change within a community by his or her presence, his or her communicated thoughts or actions. In participatory film workshops, the camera acts as a (communication) catalyst. Much can happen because the camera is present as a tool, and this presence generates change. The focus of the participatory film workshops I know of is to create opportunities for minority representation (e.g. in Canada), where the majority of the society is only present as a target audience. Although there are some good practices abroad on how participatory filmmaking has been used to implement integration projects (i.e. bringing together two distant or opposing groups), these projects involve two groups working together in the same space from the very beginning of the workshop process. One such example is Adeline Cooke's *We Were Wives, Mothers, Daughters* (2019), a joint project by Papuan indigenous and Indonesian women to express their aspirations for independence from Papua Indonesia. In my doctoral research,⁸ I have developed a methodology that uses film primarily as a means of communication between two geographically, socially or culturally distant groups, in which the encounter through the camera functions as a means of reducing stereotypes and breaking down social and spatial distance.

The catalyst method is based on participatory filming methodology. I have explored the method from the perspective that the camera can be used to reduce the social divides that dominate today's world, thereby promoting social inclusion at a local level, and speaking as much to groups from the social majority as to those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the intersection of the two. My methodology follows the Freirean tradition, which emphasizes dialogue-based, partnership-based learning. The method addresses the representation and self-representation of participants through filmmaking, is based on dialogic guidelines and aims at community building and participation.

The catalyst method as a community-based activity highlights the ways in which the moving image is used to (self-)represent certain minority groups, and the different ways in which minorities, often considered homogenous by the majority, express their own group identity through film. However, the articulation of group identity is important not only for minorities, but also for the self-definition of majority social groups. The mutual dialogue between the two

⁸ *The Camera as Group Cohesion and Intergroup Catalyst*. I also plan to produce a handbook of the methodology in the coming years.

can lead to the resolution of inter-group conflicts and prejudices and, through this, to a kind of local social integration.

In my experience so far, it has become clear that the problem of social fault lines is the area where it is most necessary to start a dialogue through film in Hungary today. The only question was whether to join the numerous existing Roma-non-Roma sociological or anthropological research and discourse, or to choose a different research direction. The situation of the Roma, the main target group of prejudice in Hungary, is not helped by the immense politicisation of social relations. This depoliticization and the loaded Hungarian public discourse were the main reasons why I wanted to avoid an ethnic focus in my research, and therefore I chose the urban-rural interface as the area of investigation, and in my projects I built bridges across social fault lines. In recent years, however, it has become clear to me that racism and anti-Gypsyism are inescapable in this relationship as well, both as representation and as institutionalized practice, and that the conflict in the local often brings ethnic aspects to the surface. So, although in Hungarian terms it is inescapable, the origin of my research is not the Roma/non-Roma distinction, but the creation of a methodology to bridge social gaps, to mediate between social groups. The focus of each case study is always different: sometimes it remains the urban-rural distinction, sometimes it is transformed into a Roma-non-Roma paradigm, precisely because of the Roma students' identity definition (see more about this in one of the following subchapters, *The Szomolya-Budapest Case Study*).

In addition to Roma-non-Roma and urban-rural relations, the methodology can also be used to communicate with other groups, such as socially disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged communities, disabled and non-handicapped people, nations or nationalities in conflict, or even between employees and managers in a company.

The Workshop Process

Preparations

a) Definition of the Age Group

The catalyst method for breaking down intergroup stereotypes can be used with most groups above the age of six.⁹ However, based on my personal experience

9 Participatory video also works with younger children. While they are enthusiastic about making films together and it helps them express themselves, they are less aware of what is happening to them. See information about the Dombóvár workshop here: <https://abcug.hu/vacsora-szokasos-lesz-margarinos-kenyer-ketchuppal/>. Last accessed 02. 03. 2023.

and on research by sociologist Luca Váradi, it is the high school age group (15–18 years) whose attitudes are still in the process of being formed, while they can already become aware of what is happening to them (Váradi 2012).¹⁰ This is the age group whose medium of expression and main communication channel is film, voice messages, video, music, and images. They can connect with each other more easily through audio-visual means and are more likely to participate enthusiastically in the workshop process. [Fig. 2.]

Intra-group power dynamics are present in all age groups, but the identity formation of adolescents is likely to lead to fairly extreme cases. The more powerful ones try to dominate the workshop and assert their ideas, and the less leading types actually expect them to do so. As a facilitator (i.e. group leader), it is important to give space to those who prefer to keep a low profile. Standing behind the camera as a camera operator or in front of it as a cast member or interviewee is an experience that gives confidence and snaps the individual out of his or her rigidified role. Participatory filmmaking is partly about the adolescents' developing attitudes and, whenever possible, shifts in the power dynamic. Those who are more powerful or come from a social group publicly perceived to be of higher status (either through upbringing or peer influence) tend to think they have nothing to learn from members of the “lower” social class (Lunch and Lunch 2006, 58). In a workshop, participants constantly change roles, trying their hands alternately as camera operators, directors, lighting or sound technicians or actors, so group dynamics and internal power relations are constantly changing. Seeing the “lower” ones involved in the filmmaking process also helps the “stronger” ones change their prejudices. Filmmaking is a task-oriented, creative, highly emotional process in which all crew (team) members are important and indispensable, which results in significant interdependence and requires a high level of trust. On a film set, a lot of decisions have to be made in a very short time, a lot of communication has to take place and a lot of tasks have to be carried out precisely in order to get the film right.

10 Luca Váradi sums it up in an interview in 2019: “it is in adolescence that we decide how we will relate to people from different minorities, and peers and school play the biggest role in this [...] In the first year of secondary school, even children who previously had no problem with the Roma become anti-Gypsy, simply because they think that this is the price of belonging to the community [...] Our social identity develops by confronting questions about who we really are, what is important to us, what values we want to organise our identity around. How we relate to members of other groups is a very important part of that.” (Translated from Hungarian by the author. See original here: https://index.hu/belfold/2019/11/26/abcug_a_kortarsak_nyomasara_az_a_gyerek_is_ciganyellenes_lesz_akinek_semmi_baja_a_romakkal/. Last accessed 02. 03. 2023.)

b) The Field and the (Self-)selection of the Teenage Participants

What is the basis for starting a workshop, where it happens and who participates? In Hungary at least, where this method is not widely known, one is rarely approached by a school, an after school program or an NGO interested in using this method. Alternatively, the organisation providing the service of participatory video or the catalyst method has the financial resources (typically grants) to implement a workshop, and it seeks out partner institutions open to having such a workshop.

One of the most critical issues at the beginning of such a process is the extent to which a given location, community and the participants themselves represent the majority or minority in the given neighbourhood, school, after-school program, village or town, etc. (e.g. job opportunities for young adults in southern Hungary, or the situation of Roma youth in eastern Hungary, etc.). The rather broad context of representation can help make such a workshop process more amenable to analysis, easier to assess, and thus perhaps more useful. Once we have the two locations where parallel sessions will be held (e.g. an urban-rural setup), the next task is to reach the participants. Programs are almost universally welcome in rural locations, so the local organisation can easily find 6-8 enthusiastic students. Problems that may arise here include the parents' mistrust or the fact that teens need to work or intern on weekends. Heavy workload may be a problem for youth with a better social background (e.g. attending an elite high school in the capital or in the countryside): while filmmaking may be appealing, they may find it hard to commit to weekends. However, commitment to a workshop is an essential condition for joining. It is worth starting with more young people in case there are drop-outs. Personal contacts are also helpful in the recruitment phase. It's worth going to classes, meeting members of the target group and finding a dedicated teacher or local leader who knows the children and can help to engage them. One of the main developers of participatory video, the British organisation InsightShare, has a practice of using 10-20 people in a group session, with 2-3 facilitators. However, in my personal experience so far, working with fewer participants and more facilitators (mainly because of the small group work) seems to be much more effective. We usually work with 6-14 participants and 3-4 facilitators.

c) The Role of Facilitators (Group Leaders)

Before starting a participatory video workshop process, facilitators should have an adequate knowledge of the background of the prospective participants' social groups and their sensitivities. A lack of this knowledge and unfulfilled or unreasonable promises can lead to disappointment and may even harm vulnerable

groups. The method is not just about putting a camera in the group members' hands, but also about being aware of the expected outcome of a workshop process (Lunch and Lunch 2006).

Workshop Structure

The catalyst workshop structure is not fixed. As each group comes together, the workshop can and should take different forms. The sequence of exercises and games can be varied. The number and length of sessions can vary as well. In my experience, meaningful sessions require at least 3 hours to give young participants a chance to get a feel for group work. The ideal length is 5–6 hours, with a few shorter breaks and a one-hour lunch break.

Participatory Video and Catalyst Exercises

In participatory video and catalyst workshops alike, the key principle is the transfer of empirical (i.e. practice-based) knowledge and tacit (i.e. skill-based) knowledge. In the InsightShare method, the camera is handed over to the participants as soon as the workshop process begins. As Chris Lunch says in his 2013 TedX presentation: “we need to let go of control because we know that this is not a video camera. This is a people magnet, pulling people together to join in, to get involved... But it’s not just about making videos. It’s about getting people together, to plan together, to unite, to take action locally, to make changes that they want to see.”¹¹

The methodology therefore does not include any teaching of classic film theory or film history. The workshop process involves discussions of image making (e.g. types of camera shots), editing (e.g. parallel editing, single-take filming) and other film concepts, as well as some film history, but always in the context of practice, in discussions about their own work and video assignments. The methodological appendix to the study describes some of the exercises that shape the basic structure of a workshop, including both existing participatory video exercises developed by InsightShare and exercises developed specifically for the catalyst method. They use the camera to help participants develop the skills needed to work constructively in groups: to become sensitive to how they can collaborate on different tasks, to communicate clearly and to listen to each

11 Chris Lunch: This is not a Video Camera. TedX. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nVsI2nzzEs>. Last accessed 23. 10. 2022.

other. Although many of these exercises may seem simple, they include subtle yet crucial elements ensuring that the exercises generate confidence rather than anxiety in the participants. Young people often find it difficult to express themselves verbally. Verbal expression is easier for them when they are put in an interview situation (and the other children become a crew rather than just an audience), when they are alone with the camera, or when they are put in a fictional role and have to act something out.

After each exercise, it is necessary to allow time for reflection and analysis. Besides self-reflection (how I see myself and how others see me), there is also a technical reason for looking back: we are trying to help young people learn modes of image creation and visual expression. This tacit (implicit) knowledge is acquired surprisingly quickly by this age group and applied consciously or unconsciously. In addition to group work and group tasks, the workshops also focus on individual tasks and development.

The framing of a workshop has similarities with a training or group therapy session. One such element is the group contract, written collectively at the beginning of the group work and which commits us to the time we will spend together, thus helping to set the framework. The opening and closing circles help with arrival and tuning in to each other and with closing.

Case Studies

I am presenting two case studies to illustrate the catalyst methodology, the types of tasks, and the challenges, difficulties and results. One is a longer workshop process, which was, however, interrupted half-way through by the coronavirus, and the other is a catalyst process implemented during an intensive one-week camp.

The Szomolya-Budapest Case Study

In 2020, as part of my doctoral research, I conducted a catalyst workshop in collaboration with trainers from the Green Spider Media Workshop in a small village in northern Hungary and in Budapest. [Fig. 3.] The project was funded by the OSI Grassroots grant awarded in 2019, and I was not only the professional leader, but also the project coordinator for the purposes of the grant. Our focus was the urban-rural divide, and we were looking for partners in rural areas and in Budapest. We started working with an elite secondary school in Budapest and a local association in the countryside. In addition to the professional learning

opportunities, the aim was to sensitize both groups to each other, and this was emphasized during the recruitment process, exclusively in relation to the urban-rural relationship. In line with the Freire's critical pedagogy, we did not seek to sensitize the social majority, but rather to build a bridge between the social majority and minority, which could also help break down the hierarchical relationship between the two. Most of the Budapest children were from middle-class families and came from its larger metropolitan area. The situation of Szomolya, on the other hand, is very specific situation within the Hungarian context, as the Roma/non-Roma distinction is crucial there.

According to Kovai (2017, 14): "when it comes to the topic of the Roma, the villages and small towns of northern Hungary are particularly significant... On the one hand, this is where there is a concentration of all the problems and tensions related to this topic in recent decades: poverty, decades of unemployment, demographic changes, the disintegration of the village as an integral living space, the hierarchical nature of the Roma-Hungarian distinction, the intertwining of ethnic and class positions, and the advance of far-right political forces. On the other hand, the meanings generated in these social arenas have a strong influence on the development of Roma themes in public discourse, such as the association of Roma with existential anxieties, loss of space, lack of a sense of security, and, in general, the tendency to discuss social problems and issues of public concern through Roma themes." Szomolya is located close to a fairly large city. The city embraces the non-stigmatized white lower or middle class, turning social rivalry into inter-ethnic rivalry. Ethnicity is created through social contact, as one of its most important features is the systematic distinction between the categories of us and them (Eriksen 2008, 37).

We had meetings with the participants every two weeks during the workshop. The first sessions were used to build confidence and learn the basics of camera work and filming. The participants filmed themselves and the other community they imagined: they did exercises in which they could send a message to the other group, present themselves and imagine how the young people in the other group could live and be. The group in Budapest was reserved and quiet at first, but by the end of the second session they were more relaxed. In contrast, those from Szomolya were very loud and talkative, and it was often difficult to facilitate the exercises.

In the first session, we focused on the basics and on group identity; the young participants made two types of self-representational short film, one of which was a so-called mannequin challenge, asking them to enact a typical everyday

situation in space as if they were frozen in time. The people from Pest selected the moment of a maths class, and the people from Szomolya selected the moment when they arrive at the Szomaro House (the community space of the local Szomaro Association) and say hello to each other. The Pest residents chose music written by one of their teachers, while the Szomolya residents chose Ábrahám's song *#romagyar*, which is about the Roma-Hungarian conflict and focuses on the importance of accepting each other. It was clear from the first couple of sessions that the teens from Szomolya are extremely concerned about Roma-Hungarian coexistence, and almost every exercise touched on this topic in some way. In the second introductory film, they were given more freedom to make an interview-based film, a creative mini-film, a situational fiction film and a film that included "Roma versus Hungarian" videos made by the Szomolya youth earlier.

As a final task, we chose portrait dubbing. The young people were asked to come up with a personal sentence about themselves (e.g. here are some sentences of Budapest teens: "I like to spend my holidays at Lake Balaton." "Since I have dreadlocks, people stare at me and I can't blend into the crowd... Anyway, it gave me confidence." Examples of sentences of Szomolya teens: "What I like about myself is that God has given me the knowledge that I can shear." "I really, really love my kind." "What I like about myself is that I usually help others a lot.")

On the second occasion, after the opening round, warm-up, tripod competition and stop-motion exercises, we prepared a video comics task. In the exercise, they first had to draw four pictures (this exercise reinforces their visual thinking, the limits or possibilities of film in relation to the image) and then shoot them as stills. Then they had to describe in four still images what a day in the life of another group might be like. The video of the Budapest people's image of the other included the stereotypical image of a quiet village morning with a dog barking, a cat meowing and a rooster crowing, and then the young people warming up and talking around a campfire. Another important element was the notion of "everybody knows everybody" in small villages: young people strut around in groups and say hello to everybody. The people from Szomolya filmed a very specific school situation: a school learning situation, where students help each other and smoke and talk during the break. In the afternoon, the teams screened each other's self-representational short films. The Budapest team was quite shocked when they watched the video of the Szomolya team for the first time and realized that Roma identity is such a fundamental issue for them and a primary expression of their self-representation. We talked at length about why being Roma is the most defining identity in the lives of many rural Roma

young people, and why their own Hungarianness is not the primary self-defining definition for them in Budapest.

The Szomolya teens were much more critical of the Budapest teens; based on the videos, they were afraid the Budapest teens may not be cool enough and may be prejudiced against them. (“When they start talking in Roma style, we’ll talk to them” – a young man said when viewing the videos. “I have Hungarian friends, but I also have friends who won’t shake my hand because I’m Roma. Man, if they’re gonna be like that...”) The Szomolya teens began their first session with more prejudice and excitement, while the Budapest teens were more curious, but maybe also a bit afraid. They found the Szomolya teens very loud and vehement.

The first joint event was held in Szomolya in March 2020. As a warm-up, we played a few ice-breakers, some spatial sociometry exercises¹² and a tripod competition in mixed teams. There were a lot of video etudes, mostly done in pairs, fostering a dialogue between them and jumpstarting the process of getting to know each other. In the exercise called *Dubbing in Pairs*, pairs of students from Szomolya and Budapest had to invent one-sentence slang statements that characterize them and say them in a posed shot. The voice of a Szomolya teen was then dubbed by a Budapest student and vice versa. This exercise shows the children how interchangeable the roles are, but also helps them learn about each other’s culture and customs implicitly. They learn the Budapest teens’ slang, e.g. “You make my eyes bleed” (in the original, “Kiégek rajtad,” meaning literally I’m burning out on you), “It’s all crap” (“Gatya az egész,” literally “It’s all pants”), “I’m really tired, I’m gonna skip this program” (“Nagyon kivagyok, offolom ezt a programot”). Examples of slang from Szomolya: “Last night was awesome” [“Kegyetlen volt a tegnapi este,” literally “Last night was cruel”], etc. On the afternoon of the joint session, we made a single-take video clip to Manuel’s *Like in a Movie* [Mint egy filmben], which again served as a great team-builder. We formed three mixed groups and each group worked together on their own 20 seconds of choreography and lip sync. The whole process took a long time and was a kind of game of patience, where despite blaming each other (why did you mess up again, now we’re waiting out here in the cold) the initially difficult

12 Such exercises demand that you stand in one of two groups, based on various criteria. For example, people who like coffee vs. energy drinks; Kola or Fanta, going on foot or riding a bike, using Instagram or Facebook, playing foosball or billiards, being in Hungary or abroad, etc. The groupings clearly show the differences between individuals or even groups, but also the similarities. It is important to point out at the outset that despite coming from such different backgrounds, with different opportunities, temperaments and social circumstances, they share many of the same likes, aspirations and visions for the future.

connection was helped by the joint film, resulting in a finished video clip fit to post in two hours.

Due to the outbreak of the coronavirus and the quarantine situation, we had to postpone the final sessions from the spring semester to the autumn one. This break of more than six months really stalled and set back the workshop process, the development of the children's trust in each other, the deepening of the trust they had in us, and their confidence and independence in working with technical tools. The last two separate sessions were held in September 2020. Unfortunately, several of the Budapest participants were in quarantine, so only three of them were able to attend this time. In Szomolya, the sessions were attended by all but one teen (who was working).

The disconnection from teamwork was noticeable in both places, but especially in Szomolya. We did simple exercises with the primary goal of getting back into the groove of filming and intergroup communication. The first exercise was an individually made self-promotion film. The people from Pest were very enthusiastic, active and creative in their exercises. In Szomolya, however, there was more resistance, with several people withdrawing from the tasks. The only exercise that succeeded in getting them enthusiastic was a video message to the people of Pest, telling them why they were looking forward to the joint event and what they would like to do in Budapest. We shot this film in Szomolya first and the next day we showed it to the participants in Pest, who responded.

The rise in COVID cases forced us to make another decision: the joint Budapest event and the closing camp were merged into a joint two-day camp in Budapest. As several students fell ill or were quarantined, only two students from Szomolya and two from Pest could participate in the final camp, which was held in late September. As their first task in the session, the young participants were to find a place or a feeling that reflects what Budapest means to them. They worked in two mixed groups. The one-minute, single-take "I like Budapest" films were more about a memory or a favourite place (e.g. having coffee in Váci Street) for the people from Pest, while the people from Szomolya expressed a wish (a footballer in the stadium).

We opened the second day with the *Future Vision TV Studio* exercise. We swapped roles, with everyone taking on the roles of reporter, interviewer, camera operator and sound engineer. The future is always an exciting topic for teenagers, wherever they live. During the exercise, the young people imagined that ten years later (in 2029) they would be invited to a TV interview and would tell us about themselves: where they live, what they do, whether they have a family, etc.

This would reveal what each teenager wants and the distancing from the present allows them to express their vision of the future more boldly, however unrealistic it might seem. It is very important that one would not get such liberated and honest answers in an ordinary discussion group as one does in this imaginary TV studio situation.

Most of the videos were edited by January 2021 and a small number of them, for which the participants gave their permission, were published online.¹³ Due to the COVID situation, we did not have the opportunity to have the final screenings and the evaluation session at all, so the workshop process felt unfinished to me. Even though this was the result of external circumstances, I am disappointed. I had naive ideas of what could be achieved by filming and bringing the two groups together, but much less could be actually achieved at the cost of much greater hardship. Although the virus and quarantine situation were extraordinary obstacles this time, this type of work requires one to be prepared for the workshop having a different outcome from that predicted in the preliminary plans. We may have to face attrition, loss of motivation, uncompleted tasks, changing circumstances and countless other things, so we must become resilient (i.e. flexibly resistant) and let go of the obsessive insistence on producing a presentable final product, and rather focus on the importance of the workshop process (as do most participatory video organisations abroad).

The Tomor-Dunaszekcső Case Study (Summer Camp)

A year and a half after the Szomolya sessions wrapped up, a summer camp was held with the support of the Minor Media/Culture Research Centre at the Department of Media and Communication, ELTE Faculty of Arts, Budapest, funded by a Hungarian Scientific Research Fund grant for research on participatory film culture. [Fig. 4.] The camp employed the catalyst methodology and numerous participatory video exercises.

The concept was to hold two parallel youth camps in Tomor (eastern Hungary) and Dunaszekcső (southern Hungary). Participants in Tomor would be Roma teens (aged 10–20) living in local and surrounding villages, and those in Dunaszekcső would be non-Roma middle-class teens (aged 10–16) living in surrounding towns. The programmes and tasks of the two camps were identical, the children made films for each other, shot based on each other's footage, and they met and collaborated creatively at the end of the camp. There had been prior film sessions

13 See: Green Spider Vimeo channel: <https://vimeo.com/greenspider>. Last accessed 21. 12. 2022.

in both locations, so filming and group work were not entirely unfamiliar to most of the participants. Each camp had 16 young participants and 5 film facilitators, who led the sessions. I was part of the Tomor team, so my experience is based mainly on my experiences and impressions there.

For the first three days of the six-day camp, the teens worked separately, each group in their own village. On the fourth day, the Tomor team of participants and facilitators travelled to Dunaszekcső, where we worked in creative collaboration involving both groups. In addition to the film exercises, we had an opening circle, a closing circle and various team-building, ice-breaking and energizing exercises every day, and we also wrote a group contract. The first exercise was an interview circle [Fig. 5], then we shot a single-take video clip, aware at the time that we would be screening it for the other team, so it would also function as a first introduction video. The Tomor participants chose the song *The Gypsy Kid Was Caught by the Police* (*Megfogták a cigánygyereket a rendőrök*) whereas in Dunaszekcső the soundtrack was the song *Freak out*. The filming, which was great fun in both places, helped the group dynamics, but it also started an intergroup rivalry.

The finished clips were uploaded to the shared drive the same night so that the other team could watch them the next day. The young people then sent each other a message on video “postcards.” They were asked to make a film (single take, up to two minutes) to send as a postcard to the other village: they could describe their environment, their village or themselves. In both places, they worked in two groups. The films made in Tomor included a village presentation video shot while riding a bike and a “field circus” film shot among straw bales. In Dunaszekcső, one film shows the children telling personal memories and historical facts about the Danube, while the other shows the playground, based on semi-factual, semi-fictional information. It was important that this exercise did not constrain the children to either fiction or documentary film, so they were free to choose the genre (including hybrid) that suited them.

The following morning, the two teams watched each other’s single-take video clips and postcard films, and had a chance to make a response film in which they could react to what was left out. If they were inspired by something in the other team’s film, they could carry it forward or incorporate it into a new piece. In Tomor, the response film was inspired mainly by the fact that “they called us Tomorians, we should also say hello, Dunaszekcsőites” (Iza, one of the participants) and showcased their own community centre, Romama, which had been left out of the other two videos. The people of Dunaszekcső were inspired by the field circus and responded with a circus film.

So communication started. The single-take films were more about self-representation and a game bolstering group cohesion, while the postcards were a more direct message, no longer just about the creators, but also about the recipients. This was further deepened by the response films. This is the point where we got to the first collaboratively developed exercise: the “generation films”. The participants split into four small groups in each location. Each of the eight groups had the task of producing up to fifteen minutes of documentary footage on the theme of generations. The documentary raw material shot by Group 1 in Tomor was followed up by Group 1 in Dunaszekcső the next day, who added a fiction supplement. It worked the same way with all the other groups. This is how the films could be mutually inspired collaborations even before the groups actually met. Much of the documentary material consisted of interviews or village views. The fictional additions included re-enactments, mock interviews, chamber dramas, video clips and other illustrative materials. The teens participated in the editing of the films at the end of the camp.

The moment of meeting arrived after this exercise. We and the Tomor participants spent half a day travelling to Dunaszekcső. The teams were both scared and very excited to meet each other. The people of Dunaszekcső welcomed us with signs and a concert, which lightened the mood. The meeting of the two groups resulted in a very large group. Forty-five people have a harder time working together, listening to each other and paying attention to each other, so we tried to limit working in this large group to the group contract and a few icebreakers. The first joint film exercise was the making of a short film titled *Eight Objects*. The teens worked in four mixed groups. They were asked in advance to bring an object or photograph that was important to them and had a story to it. The groups of eight were to make a film including all eight objects. Through brainstorming and filming, they shared a story about themselves through their personal objects, which helped them to get to know each other [Fig. 6.] Crafting a coherent story from the objects and then filming it was also a great challenge and creative work, requiring openness, cooperation and flexibility. While varying in style, all of the films turned out to be very exciting works. The final task was a collective single-take video clip, which ended up being shot in six groups in six (interconnected) takes rather than one. Choosing the song went without a hitch; Ham Ko Ham’s *My Bike Was Stolen* (*Ellopták a biciklim*) was picked because both groups knew and liked it.

Starting with separate exercises (single-take clips, postcard films and response films), through the generation cinematic etudes (not made together yet, but composed of shared raw material) to the films made in mixed groups out of

personal objects and photographs show a clear arc and development through which both the participants and the footage they shot began to interact. The culmination of this process was a joint single-take clip where all 32 children were in a single film. The primary outcome of the Tomor-Dunaszekcső workshop process was a shift in position and the instigation of tolerance, acceptance and learning something new. We saw that the teens could begin to connect through the exercises. Shared memories and acquaintances were formed, friendships began to sprout. Even if these may not endure, they can still be a life-changing experience for many.

Conclusion. Critical Reflection

One significant conclusion from the case studies was that the catalyst method is a radical intervention, as these encounters would not happen on their own. The oppressed are isolated by the Hungarian social milieu, the Roma have very limited opportunities for breaking out of this, which is the result of the majority's (conscious or unconscious) segregationist policies. However, the catalyst method still attempts to dislocate participants from this – perhaps seemingly safe, but often hopeless – situation. This can often be both frightening and painful for them: being confronted with opportunities that others have but they perhaps don't. I cannot say for sure, but the risks for middle-class youth are perhaps smaller. They are not in danger of seeing a life that they may never be able to live, due to their circumstances. Yet how can we make these artificially built but well-intentioned bridges work effectively despite these obstacles? What are realistic goals? How can you get members of two different groups to interact in a fractured society? The catalyst method aims at the kind of dislocation that Antonio Gramsci talks about (Dósa 2018b). The key to the liberation of the oppressed is the ability to experience from time to time, even if only for an hour, what living in freedom would be like. Learning can be such an experience. In doing so, participants can experience a life situation or even a quality of life that many have never experienced before, and it is an uplifting experience for them. It broadens their scope, or at least the image of life and the world they can imagine for themselves. And perhaps more importantly, this is what may enable many of them to recognize and eventually shed the manifestations of internalized oppression, which is an essential step towards liberation (Dósa 2018a).

Over the last three years of research, I have found that filmmaking is an excellent tool for learning, self-awareness and expressing one's images of the

other, and can be liberating for individuals, while at the same time fostering connection, learning and accepting ourselves and others, building team cohesion and strengthening cooperative skills. The workshops have also taught us to adopt the resilience necessary for the success of projects in similar fields or those aiming to break down social hierarchies. I also gained hands on experience of differences between long-term workshops lasting months and a week-long intensive camp. The advantage of long-term workshops is their continued presence in the village and the community, bringing colour to the often uneventful days of the year. The disadvantage is that the less frequent sessions (once every 2–3 or 4 weeks) are more likely to lead to attrition, with participants finding a job during the process, than in a week-long camp. Participants make more preparations for a one-week camp, and their approach to it is more planned. During the intensive one-week camp, you can progress at a completely different pace, everything is much more concentrated, which is partly good, but also severely limits the time to absorb experiences and things learned and to process new experiences and acquaintances. Being continuously present in the field can also be useful if one can keep the team together and there is no attrition.¹⁴

Although there was no evaluation questionnaire or evaluation film exercise at the end of these two workshops, which is one of their shortcomings, there was very useful feedback from participants in previous sessions on what they got out of the process. At the end of a previous Catalyst workshop process, for instance, students stressed that learning to use technical equipment was useful and made them more confident; they appreciated the chance to meet people they would not have met otherwise, whom they wanted to get to know even better, by visiting their homes, schools, etc.; and the fact that they learned so much not only about filmmaking but also socially was an important experience for all of them.

Besides the feedback and evaluation process, another important area to focus on in future workshops is defining the goal. What is the goal we are working towards, what do we want to achieve with the process or with the films we make? I tend not to identify a specific goal beyond the basic objectives of the catalyst method (sensitising the two groups to each other, reducing prejudice, learning self-expression, familiarizing the unfamiliar and thereby accepting each other more). Yet, identifying specific goals may be helpful (integration in school,

14 Currently, we are working with Márton Oblath in Siklósbodony, where young people from Bodony are conducting civil society research using film as a tool in the framework of the *YouCount* project. We meet monthly and all seven participants are very motivated. Here participatory film is seen as a tool for a larger programme with long-term, concrete goals. Perhaps that is why it has a better chance of working? Is that why the participants are more motivated?

achieve a higher rate of further education in a community, helping with finding jobs, etc.). I have been concerned with the formulation of these goals, and it is something I focus on in my research.

As I indicated at the beginning of the study, this methodology is still in the development phase, during which I keep incorporating lived experience into my methodology. Based on the experiences of these two (and previous) workshop processes, the method seems to be able to generate change mainly at the individual (personal) level, at least for time being, while wider social impact cannot be realized yet. The latter would require disseminating the films, organising discussions, carrying out a more in-depth (longer-term) work process in a region, and sharing the films in a systematic way. I hope that the artistic results of my DLA studies will help make this available to those interested. I intend to create an interactive website with a map showing the results of participatory video workshops in Hungary. So far, these include a few dozen short films or clips from a few dozen locations. The arrangement of the short films and the varied order in which they can be viewed makes the interface similar to a web documentary film experience, which encourages interaction. It will also give participants the opportunity to share their results and start new conversations. It may also provide interesting insights for those who are unfamiliar with participatory filmmaking and the catalyst methodology and would like to apply them in their work, or would like to learn how young people in Hungary articulate things, express themselves and build bridges through film today. In the coming years, we plan to work with different social groups, attempting to build new bridges, focusing primarily on dissolving the hierarchical relationship between majority and minority society. I believe that the experiments in dialogic filmmaking we are collaborating on with several colleagues will one day make a difference not only at the micro, but also at the macro level.

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Figure 6. Group discussion about the *Eight Objects* film.

