

Eszter Lázár: 'Educational turn' in the Eastern European Art Universities during the 1990s¹

Final Report²

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Introduction

My research deals with the processes and the outcomes of the transformation of higher art education, especially at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts (HUFA)³ after 1989.

During my research at OSA I have been studying the circumstances and antecedent events which happened before and shortly after 1989 in Hungary, especially in the cultural sphere. I am interested in how all these complex and fundamental shifts affected the above mentioned chapter of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts.

The HUFA's story started with a "student revolution"⁴ and within a few months it had results (bigger autonomy from the ministry, revision in the curriculum, academic freedom, new academic positions for artists and art historians)—this of course was not an isolated case.

Other academies, universities, as the whole (art) education system in the Central-Eastern European countries, went through fundamental transformations.⁵ The particularity of higher art education could be approached at least from two perspectives: from the higher educational field (its relationship with ministry and other universities) and as an elite art institution (its connection to museums, collection, art market, curators, public). The question is whether this "intermezzo" in other places during the transformation period were followed by real change and opened the gate to democratic educational platforms, or after a short, performative period a slow consolidation process took place⁶

Questions / themes I was interested in during my research at OSA

a., How were art institutions transformed or new ones founded after/as a consequence of the political change of 1989, and what connection did they have to art education?

b., How were the policy reforms related to different international donors, networks, or even particular players?

1 The title refers to the term educational turn has been used since the second half of the 1990s to describe a tendency in contemporary artist and curatorial practices related to education. See: Eszter Lázár, "Educational Turn", in: tranzit.org, Curatorial Dictionary, 2012; <http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/educational-turn>. Although this report does not deal with the educational turn in the context of the transformation of the art universities during 1990s, I kept the original title of my research proposal. The transformation in connection with the educational turn will be developed in a following phase of my research.

2 I would like to thank to the entire staff of OSA, especially to my supervisor Ioana Macrea-Toma for the support and the inspiring conversations, to László Beke for offering me insight into his personal archive and Eszter Szakács for proofreading this report.

3 The Hungarian University of Fine Arts before 2000 was called the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts.

4 The quotation marks denote the fact that it was not really a revolution, yet it is a commonly used expression for that.

5 In most cases the art institutions of higher art education (before the Bologna Accord) were called *academies*, but most of the academies changed their names into *university* (this also meant certain transformations in the system of education as well).

6 In the center of my initial proposal was a comparative analysis of Central-Eastern European art academies, but I have realized that there was no specific material / time to make a comparative research in that field. What was important in that sense though that I had access to excellent resources related to higher educational transformation in the 1990s (see bibliography), which helped me to work simultaneously on a general overview about higher education) in Central-Eastern Europe.

- c., How could the general approaches towards democratic / liberal education be adapted to art education?
- d., Has the academic staff / cultural elite changed its positions? What kind of fundamental transformations appeared due to that fact?
- e., What was the students' role in the whole process?
- f. How does the HUFA "student revolution" relate to other student demonstrations at the end of 1980s in Hungary and abroad?
- g., In what ways can we talk about an "educational turn" in Central-Eastern European art academies, implying also the recent definition of this term?

The timeframe of my research was between 1985 (when the Soros Foundation Fine Arts Documentation Center was established) and 1992 (when the new departments at the HUFA started working properly).

My initial approach:

At the beginning of my 2-month research I focused on studying the archival materials of the Soros Foundation (reports, correspondences, minutes, board meetings, call for papers, selection criteria, approved grants, final reports) in the hope of gaining a more complex picture about its activity, principles, and impacts in terms of the relations of contemporary art and higher education. Moreover, I was also interested in gaining information about certain key figures (in relation to Soros) whose roles were important during the transformation period both in the cultural / art life and education at the HUFA.

Methodology:

After the first few days spending time trying to get familiar with the OSA resources, I realized that instead of looking through? particular sections of the archive (Record of the Soros Foundation—especially Arts & Culture, Higher Education files)— a kind of time-based horizontal scanning of the archival documents and expanding the scope of research into a more general field would be a more productive approach. After that detour, I could turn back to the topic of the institutional aspects of art education. This step seemed to be a bit risky, but I found very useful information / hints which helped me taking a step forward.

Resources⁷:

OSA Archive

The Archive of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts

László Beke's personal archive

Interviews

Books, articles at the CEU Library (accessed via the CEU Library database)

Concerning the above mentioned questions, the timeframe, and the expanded scope of my research, I was studying the

⁷ See the details at the end of the report.

following documents.⁸

1. Records of the Soros Foundation–Hungary, 1989-2006 (HU OSA 13)
2. Black Box documentary films / Fekete Doboz – films made on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Soros Foundation,⁹ and they also made reports (these were draft footage about the student demonstration initiated at the József Attila University (JATE) Szeged, Fall 1988.
3. RFE Hungarian Unit – Education: Youth: University, 1970 - 1989
4. RFE Hungarian Unit – Képzőművészet / Fine Art, 1978 - 1990

(Art)Education and the Soros Foundation

The higher education system throughout the region has experienced major changes during 1990s. The previously ideological driven education went through a democratic reshaping, the aims of which were, among the others, institutional autonomy, the renewal of the academic staff, academic freedom, and curriculum revision. Furthermore, new courses were announced and new departments were founded.

Regardless of the profile of the universities, these changes resulted in remarkable transformations, keeping of course the specificities of certain higher educational principles?.

The presence of international relations? in the reforms (both in terms of donors, exchanges, visiting professors) that helped the integration of the European education models (considering the local economic base) is a relatively well-researched topic¹⁰. At the same time, the critical approaches of the implementation of Western models have contributed to a more nuanced reading of the educational reforms in the Central-Eastern European countries in the 1990s.¹¹

The above mentioned comparative surveys— with which I became familiar during my research at OSA—provided a useful theoretical background for analyzing the Hungarian situation.

Narrowing my focus from education in general, even the theme of higher education, to the field of more art related humanities and social sciences seemed appropriate for the following steps.

The documents of the Soros Foundation indicate that the education in fine arts was not the Foundation's priority, first of all, as the support of contemporary art had been delegated to the Soros Foundation Fine Arts Documentation Center founded in 1985. The documents about the Center's role also contains the possible realization of new educational methods, however, there were no documented results in terms of education in the annual final reports.

Apart from the important technical and books/journals support offered for universities and university libraries (in which the HUFA also partook), the priorities were humanities, economy, and the education of young managers in the framework of the Liberal Art Reform at the beginning and after the HESP (Higher Educational Support Program).

Studying the Foundation's documents, reports, and varieties of surveys, and comparing them with the list of selected projects, the new directions appeared which brought me back to the HUFA's story.

Interdisciplinary Department at HUFA

The “western” model was promoted by new subjects and courses related to new disciplines, and they appeared at elite

8 See the specification of the researched archive materials at the end of the report.

9 I came across the Black Box as they were not only supported by the Soros Foundation, but they also made a two-part documentary film about the Soros Foundation, in which the key figures of the foundation were interviewed.

10 See the details in the bibliography

11 See for example texts by Susan Zimmermann and Allaine Cerwonka, see bibliography

universities (Eötvös Loránd University [ELTE], Budapest, József Attila University [JATE] Szeged, University of Economy Budapest—now called Corvinus University).¹² The most common attributes in them is the term *interdisciplinarity*. Interdisciplinarity has been used in various theoretical and even practice-based approaches, but if we examine the usage of the term, it has been formulated in universities a similar feature is “the desire to facilitate unity and synthesis in terms of knowledge” “... the interdisciplinary curricula offer the opportunity for students to engage in critical thinking and synthesis beyond the capacity of a single discipline”.¹³ .

These research-based programs / departments could be considered as an alternative to traditional practices at a university. Their role in the art universities (especially in the Central European universities) was important in creating a framework for intellectual creative work, since “the concept of intellectual activity must not be monopolized by scientific research only”¹⁴

„...Intellectual creative activity should be regarded as the basic value category of the Higher Educational Law. Independent of any branches of knowledge (sic!) while specializing in accordance with them as an interdisciplinary form of activity. Intellectual creative work comprises the scientific, art-theoretical, researching, teaching and practical activities as well.”¹⁵

Connection between interdisciplinarity and the HUFA

Not only art education was changed because of the newly appointed artists/professors but the curriculum revision (which matched the wish of the students as well) resulted in the acceptance of the importance of the theoretical studies in art education. At the HUFA Interdisciplinary Department started its operation in Fall 1990.)

The concept of the new department was written by art historian László Beke (one of the candidates for the vice-rector position in 1990).

The written concept focused, first of all, on the importance of theoretical knowledge that the artist should be aware of (social sciences, humanities...etc) and all this should be built upon their creative thinking.¹⁶ .

Moreover, these two “knowledge-pool” should even meet certain managerial skills, since art mediation is an inevitable knowledge / skill for contemporary artists. Beke's concept actually was very similar to the profile of recent curatorial studies program (Beke did not use the term curator or curating though).

Another concept for the renewal of theoretical education at the HUFA (conceived by Péter György) was very similar to Beke's, but it rather emphasized the necessity of teaching the contemporary art and the international networks¹⁷

Both concepts would have opened the HUFA's door to young art historians interested in contemporary art and curatorial (in the 1990s rather called art mediational) practices as well.

Members of the HUFA Senate wanted a kind of mixture of the two ideas (and some of the professors imagined this new

12 For example the Cultural Anthropology (1990) the Media Studies at the Department of Aesthetics (1993) at ELTE, American Studies at ELTE in 1990, JATE), Comparative Literature, ELTE.

13 Holley, Karri A.: Overview in: Understanding Interdisciplinary Challenges and Opportunities, ASHE Higher Education Report, Volume 35, Number 2 1st Edition, p. 2.

14 Project for Educational Reform of the Hungarian art colleges for the new Bill of Higher Education, Budapest, 1991. The ELIA (European League of Institutes of the Arts was founded in 1990) conference was held in Budapest in 1991. This document was probably written (and signed by the rectors of the art universities in Hungary) on the occasion of this conference. The document were signed by all the rectors of the art universities. in: Beke's archive

15 Ibid. 5.,

16 Interdisciplinary / Art-Mediation Department / Draft proposal for the establishment of the department, 26. November 1991. in: Beke's Archive. This concept was a revision of the previously written one presented at the Senate on 12. September 1990.

17 Peter György was appointed Head of the Theoretical Department (former name was Department of Social Sciences)

specialization under the Visual Art Education Department).

Interdisciplinary thinking and creativity have its own background in the Hungarian art scene, related to the InDiGó group (Interdiszciplináris gondolkodás / Interdisciplinary Thinking) led by artist Miklós Erdély founded in 1978.¹⁸

Students revolutions / demonstrations as catalyzer of the transformation process

Although the HUFA did not take part in the national university demonstration wave that swept through the country during the Fall of 1988, the fundamental demands of the students in the two cases (1988 / 1990) show numerous similarities¹⁹

The students were represented by the Students' Union both in 1988 and in 1990, and the events were accompanied by remarkable media attention. (Although in the latter case, there were only few participants compared to the previous one, the students called for the resignation of the HUFA's directorate, and the media was particularly interested in the personal changes as well as what kind of (political) circles were supposed to control the situation.²⁰

The 1988 student demonstrations are well documented in the media, the materials are divided into subject files (for example Higher Education, Education / Universities/Colleges) in the RFE archive containing situation reports as well, which seemed very useful and effective to research the Hungarian situation. From the almost three-hour raw documentation footage made by the Fekete Doboz (Black Box) archived in the OSA, we are informed about what happened in the Szeged—open forum with the representatives of the ministry and the university led by the students, as well as interviews—and how it continued (meeting of the representatives of the students' union, forum at the ELTE University, a symbolical funeral ceremony of higher education organized by ELTE students).

Besides the “general demands,” one of the most important ones for both demonstration series—which links both cases to the democratic transformation—were the expulsion of the curriculum from the ideological subjects and the discontinuation of the art education as understood from a Marxist perspective.

„...the Szeged protesters complained about the fact that about one-fifth of the classroom hours in the first four years of their five-year course was devoted to the study of Marxism, but also that most other subjects were taught from a Marxist perspective.”²¹

One way for the departure from the Marxist perspective in higher education was definitely the adaptation of new (western-type) disciplines / fields what was in the case of the Intermedia and Interdisciplinary Departments at the HUFA, new specializations at the Applied Art University²² in Budapest²³ and actually similar tendencies could be recognized in the art

18 A few newly appointed professors were very close to the InDiGó group (Miklós Peternák, János Sugár, László Beke, Dóra Maurer).

19 Similar demands should be considered in the student demonstrations that took place in other CEE countries as part of the transformation. For this comparative research, the material that can be found at OSA would have been useful, but due to the limited time, I rather concentrated on the situation in Hungary / Budapest.

20 The student-leaders in Szeged did not want to have any political connotation (so they refused any support of any political/party-related associations) but when it reached the open forum organized at ELTE in Budapest, Tamás Deutsch, a representative of the Young Democrats' Association was one of the invited people who gave a speech. The students from the HUFA at the beginning dealt with only “institutional affairs,” and later a will for creating a platform for all the art universities (applied art, film, music) was formed, in the hope of composing a working material related to art education that could be used by the ministry later on for the new (and first) Law of Higher Education.

21 Hungarian Students Questions Marxist Curriculum / East FF099 88.Nov. 9. 10.46, HU OSA 300-40-2 RFE/ RL Education: Youth: University 1970-1989

22 The archive material related to this period of the history of the Applied Art University (now called Moholy-Nagy University of Art and

universities (for example in Bratislava, Prague, Poznań) in Central Europe.

For the deeper analysis of the background of the Interdisciplinary Department, different approaches could be appropriate: researching the situation of interdisciplinary—related specialization, department, courses (Interdisciplinary, Visual Culture, Gender Studies Departments) and their relationship to gender studies at the beginning of the 1990s in the CEE countries.²⁴

- researching the personal involvement in, and the impact of, the foundation of these departments.²⁵

My research at OSA was extremely useful and instructive because it broadened my perspective towards new subtopics in relation to my theme. Several notes, texts, ideas that I became familiar with at OSA during the summer have been waiting for further elaboration in the future.

Materials consulted during the research:

HU OSA 13 Records of the Soros Foundation–Hungary, 1989-2006

HU OSA 13-1 Executive Office, 1984-2006

HU OSA 13-2 Board, 1985-1995

HU OSA 13-3 Publications, 1989-2006

Ezredvégi beszélgetések, 1993. rend.: Monory András

1069, 1070 The Foundation of the Opening I-II.: The History of the Hungarian Soros Foundation, Part I-II, Kreatív Média Műhely 1995, VHS 50, 48 min

200. The Soros, Fekete Doboz, 1995

HU OSA 13-5 Short-term Travel Grants and Conferences, 1985-1995

HU OSA 13-6 Social Science Grants, 1985-1990

HU OSA 13-9 Arts and Culture Programs, 1985-1999

HU OSA 13-10 Higher Education Programs, 1987-1991

HU OSA 305-0-3 Fekete Doboz Alapítvány Video Archive

56, 57 Student Strike at JATE University in Szeged. Camera One/Diáksztrájk, JATE, Szeged. Kamera A (raw footage) DLT: 88-21, file 88-116

Student Strike at JATE University in Szeged. Camera Two/Diáksztrájk, JATE, Szeged. Kamera B (raw footage)[id: VHS 88/53, 1st footage] DLT: 88-21, file 88-117

Design) is unfortunately not available for research.

23 A new specialization at the Applied Art University in Budapest would have been called Határesetek (Border-line cases) which would have been very similar to, a kind of mixture of, the already existing Intermedia Department and a short-lived Interdisciplinary Department (which officially was not accredited but this name had been used in the HUFA documents until 1995). The specialization would have been realized with the support of the World Bank / Higher Education Development Policy Program.

24 Lisa R. Lattuca: Creating Interdisciplinarity in: *Interdisciplinary Research and Teaching among College and University Faculty, 2001*. in <http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9780826591364?auth=0>. Lattuca refers to Zimmermann's text where she „reads the emergence and institutionalization of gender studies as being not so much about gender, but within the framework of the “western” style liberal market.”

25 The role of the cultural players during the transformation period is obviously very important, yet it seems to be the most difficult to research. Useful resources could be found in the RFE files especially (HU OSA 300-40-1, Képzőművészet / Fine Art / 585, Cultural Opposition 1970-1989).

HU OSA 300-40 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute,

Hungarian Unit

HU OSA 300-40-2

- 7 Culture: Samizdat, 1977-1984
Culture: Samizdat, 1985 - 1988
22. Education: Youth: University, 1970 - 1989

HU OSA 300-40-1

40 Hungarian Unit, Képzőművészet
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