

Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts
Doctoral School

Participation and creation – Approaches to participatory art projects

DLA thesis propositions

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Introduction

I present two of my participatory projects in my thesis, and articulate the considerations which have led me in preparing these works and in the continuous formation of my methods. One of my own projects unfolded in a long-term participatory process, while the film „*Profik*” („Professionals”) presented as the master work is a work of art produced in a creative process, which involved conscious preliminary research in a social scientific approach. My participatory works are the outcomes of reflexive processes during which I consciously shaped my own methodological approach.

1. Participatory works represent the practice of fine art where the artists who turn to social and political issues consciously extend their knowledge of the given topic instead of creating with the knowledge they already have. They assume a researcher’s attitude, or they act as researchers themselves: the two roles operate in parallel or alternate, or the artist may involve another person, collaborate with a researcher. I consider my own work to be fine art. However, the anthropological approach is not a borrowed set of tools, but an internalised, acquired discipline. In my creative art, I do not aim to adapt to scientific, institutional expectations. In my creative experiments I have found it necessary to explore with a set of tools taken from science, while the need to combine the two approaches is not a result of a preliminary decision, but evolves in the process.

2. What use is the bifocal approach to us? One of the assumptions that my work is based on is that by unifying the two methods, a joint quality can be achieved, which is not the property of either perspective in itself, and does not follow from either of them. To the social sciences, fine art is a social phenomenon to be studied from various aspects. Meanwhile, a cultural anthropological research can never just deal with the work in itself, without exploring its context. Fine art, on the other hand, may direct our attention to aspects selected arbitrarily or on an intuitive basis, it can magnify them, highlight certain perspectives, and experiment with them without rules. By integrating the two perspectives, my approach launches a special dynamic in the situations where the works are created.

3. As an artist-researcher, by unifying the two ways of looking at things, I have the opportunity to develop my own working method based on my criticism of certain practices of participatory art and participatory action research, reacting to this criticism and exceeding these patterns. It seems that even if unintentionally, I incorporate into my work the

experiences that I gained during my research practice, ones which do not come directly from my artistic activities. In the meantime, I do not reduce or incorporate one perspective to or into the other, but alternate them in the different works and also within individual works. This constant switching is an important tool in breaking away from stereotypes: it helps maintain a distance from artistic schemas and social clichés at the same time. In the meantime, I aim to exceed the level of translation in my works: the effects, the changes triggered by the interaction should be felt at the level of community experience as well as in the methods, the articulation. By this I create a distance from the artistic approach that depicts, represents and expresses. My experiments might be able to go beyond their historical precedents, because my method allows for conflict, and it also enables me to unfold a relationship presented in a conflict in practice, and go on to work with it.

4. The unique dynamic of my projects offers and actually brings about some specific practical opportunities.

- Ethical considerations are important for the artist as well as for the researcher. Both of them rely on the meeting points of the personal and the social as their sources. However, in addition to taking perspectives from the personal, the artist may also raise these considerations as issues and put them into the focus as a theme, while the anthropologist has to institutionalise ethical considerations in advance, independently from the actual research activity.

- When I choose my field as an artist, I am primarily led by the attitude of spontaneity. Curiosity and the desire to discover are forces which are more important than rational considerations in participatory works. I let the persons I work with define the perspective to a certain extent. I do not aim to provoke; I look for situations with incalculable outcomes. The artist does not need the resulting work of art to be analysable, while the aim is not simply to create a new work that is independent from rules. If analysis dominated throughout the creative work, it would narrow down the possibilities. On the other hand, there were several instances during the projects when moving on seemed impossible on a dialogical basis (for example, we lost the participants). My own attitude also changed during the process. This was undoubtedly the case with the participants, too.

- Similar projects that initiate some situation of criticism or aim to create a new situation, step into an unknown and uncontrolled territory, and bear some degree of risk. Problems with ethical, pedagogical or sociological relevance may arise, and these can be mitigated but should not be evaded. Evidently, crises are part of the given project. While the analysis does necessarily follow scientific paradigms and methodological rules, continuous reflexion is inevitably a part of the dialogue and the creative process. The resulting work of art does not necessarily give an account of this process: reflexion is a tool, and not the outcome of the creative process.

Potentially continuing work

My aim is not to represent something in the form of an art work: both the subject and the form are shaped by joint experience, they are created in the interaction. When a conflict of

interest arises, it is not necessary to accept the perspective of one or the other participant, or subordinate one to the other, but it is possible to move on from the two, and change in a way that everyone actually changes in the meantime. The creative process is not simply the documentation of the events: it generates a changed situation, a new dimension that extends the space for moving on, is itself a cultural phenomenon, a step for moving forward. The work remains a pretext for returning, it is not just a product, but also a tool, a station in the interaction.