

Peacetime for “Soldiers of Culture”
“Civic cultivation” in Hungary’s Houses of Culture since 1990

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Author's declaration

I, the undersigned, Márton Szarvas, candidate for the PhD degree in Sociology and Social Anthropology declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 31. March 2023

Márton Szarvas

To my Grandmother Lócsey Anna and her sister Lócsey Erzsébet

Abstract

This historical ethnography of houses of culture (HoC) in two Hungarian towns interrogates the changing relationship between state and culture in contemporary Hungary. I inquired about what actors formed policies and activities in the house of culture. How and who voiced participation and/or resistance to political and social changes in the place? Why did the function of it change? I examine the processes through which actors (both professionals of culture and citizens) create and reproduce but also contest the state's symbolic power in and through practices and programs in the house of culture.

Activities organized in HoCs are called civic cultivation (*közművelődés*). That is an assemblage of educational activities, typically organized by modern states within different cultural institutions to form citizens and labor through moral education and disseminating knowledge about institutional culture and a modern way of life. I formulate civic cultivation as an activity organized by the *integral state*. Following Gramsci's definition of state (political + civil society), it is on the border of and involves participation from both civil and political society. It affects control and coercion by selecting legitimate cultural practices and distinguishing between authentic and inauthentic traditions.

The history of the house of culture is intertwined in the early 20th century with the expansion of Hungarian national sentiments. It also contributed to the fight against illiteracy and the commodification and display of folk culture. For the early socialist state, it was as important that they referred to the staff as soldiers of culture who maintained social cohesion through disseminating socialist culture. During the 1960s, civic cultivation gradually lost its militancy and became a defined field of expertise. Since the transition as an institution, it has been partially abandoned. After the EU accession in 2004, it has been a subject of a series of transformations such as Europeanization or after 2010 centralization. House of culture in towns

of the countryside became the site conflict on reproduction of local elites, and the cultural means they utilize.

I inquire through ethnographic research in two towns located in Eastern Hungary how shifts in understanding of houses of culture's function on the national scale and the transformation of local practices mutually affected each other. The selection of the field sites was based on the fact that in these localities, there is a continuity of programs alongside their differences in conditions of unequal development. The first field, Salgótarján, is situated in north-eastern Hungary, where the early penetration of industrialization resulted in a lively worker culture. The memory of industrial production occupies a central role in the city's identity. The second case is Mezőkövesd, an agrarian town where folk culture was commodified early and became an essential part of modern cultural practices.

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Contents

Abbreviations.....	ix
Introduction: House of culture, a place of contradictions.....	1
Civic Cultivation and culture.....	4
The House of Culture.....	10
Culture and cultural policy	15
Between state and civil society	18
Educators as intellectuals.....	21
Cultural labor in the house of culture	25
Methodology.....	28
Outline of the dissertation.....	32
I. The perpetual transformation of the house of culture	35
1. Developing people and settlements: market and administrative reforms between 1968-1989	39
1.1. Socialist modernization and liberalization of civic cultivation	43
1.2. Ideologues or bureaucrats?	48
1.4. Administrative transformations	51
1.4.1 Professionalization and Decentralization	51
1.4.2. ICC and the ethnographic state.....	57
1.5. Reforms and experiments in the 1980s.....	61
1.5.1. Creativity, autonomy, and crisis	61
1.5.2. Making civil society in a socialist institution	63

1.6. Conclusion	69
3. Negotiating a new role: the post-socialist transformation of civic cultivation	71
3.1. Introduction.....	71
3.2. A brief history of post-socialist civic cultivation	73
3.3. The transition and civic cultivation	75
3.3.1. Civil society and civic associations	77
3.3.2 Elite blocs in transition	79
3.4. Decentralization, informality, and civic associations	82
3.5. Changing patterns of funding	86
3.6. Union- and firm-based civic cultivation	89
3.7. UWCCPM and the struggle for jobs.....	91
3.8. Ideology: Civic or institutional?	95
3.9. Conclusion	98
3. Managing scales of civic cultivation: transformations of civic cultivation after 2004.	101
3.1. Post-EU Accession: administrative restructuring and infrastructural development	103
3.1.2. ICSP – translation and negotiation around policy competences	106
3.1.2. Agora – politicization of scales and new palaces of culture.....	107
3.3. Civic cultivation in the cultural politics of the Orbán-regime.....	110
3.4. Outlining the institutions of the future.....	113
3.5. The birth of the NICC.....	116
3.5.1. Negotiations on the governmental scale.....	116

3.5.2. Ideologies of NICC.....	118
3.6. Precarization of public employment.....	124
3.6.1. Public work.....	126
3.6.2. “Consolidating” employment.....	128
3.7. Conclusion.....	129
4. Civic Life of a Post-Socialist Town: Associations, NGO-ization and the "privatization" of the house of culture in Salgótarján.....	132
4.1. Civil society from below.....	135
4.2. From a red giant to a white dwarf or a black hole.....	138
4.3. The changing landscape of houses of culture.....	141
4.4. Struggles for maintenance.....	144
4.5. The target of politics: parties and the reproduction of local middle class.....	150
4.6. Yearning for the “normal”.....	154
4.7. Conclusion.....	159
5. Longing for development: Cultivating industrial tradition in the Miner and Smelter Choir.....	161
5.1. Residual public, social reproduction and development as “common sense”.....	164
5.2. Worker culture in the early history of Salgótarján.....	169
5.3. Post-socialist transformation of the Smelter House of Culture:.....	172
Summary of the thesis.....	224
5.4. Calling for cultivation: industry, culture, and good life.....	177
5.5. HMMS – the public of development.....	182

5.6. Conclusion	188
6. Between market and nation: authenticating folk heritage – Civic Associations and House of Culture in Mezőkövesd	190
6.1. Mezőkövesd, the town of peasants	193
6.2. Commodification and civil society	200
6.3. Cooperatives and house of culture.....	203
6.4. Doing civic cultivation outside the house of culture	211
6.5. Conclusion	217
Conclusion: who owns the house of culture?	220
What does civic cultivation do for theorizing of state-culture relationship?.....	230
Commons, anti-systemic politics, and the house of culture	232
Bibliography	236
ANNEX 1. Glossary of Names and Institutions	280
ANNEX 2. List of Pictures	284
ANNEX 3. List of tables	287

Abbreviations

Association of Hungarian Public Educators – AHPE

European Union – EU

Foundation of Art and Free Civic Cultivation – FAFCC

House of Culture – HoC

Hungarian Institute of Civic Cultivation – HICC

Hungarian Mining and Metallurgical Society – HMMS

Hungarian Socialist Worker Party – HSWP

Hungarian Socialist Party – HSP

Institute of Civic Cultivation – ICC

József Attila Center for Civic Cultivation – JACCC

National Committee of Unions – NCU

National Concept of Settlement-Network Development – NCSND

National Institute of Civic Cultivation – NICC

New Economic Mechanism – NEM

Patriotic People's Front – PPF

Regional Association of Associations for Civic Cultivation – RAACC

Research Institute of Civic Cultivation – RICC

Young Communist League – YCL

Union of Workers of Civic Cultivation and Public Museums – UWCCPM

“Culture belongs not to him who comprehends the truths of humanity as a battle cry, but to him in whom they have become a posture which leads to a mode of proper behavior: exhibiting harmony and reflectiveness even in daily routine.” (Marcuse, [1936] 2007, 92)

*“You cannot give the Wien Oper to someone whose only desire is a Wiener Schnitzel”
(From an interview with a cultural worker)*

Introduction: House of culture, a place of contradictions

“Why civic cultivation and the law of civic cultivation was the most important for me? Because my religion is culture, and my church is the house of culture. I believe that humanity added culture to the world, which is without that senseless, they added the human culture which crowns the treasures of nature and that is the source of all possible happiness.” (Striker 2017, 2). Sándor S. Striker, head of the civic cultivation department of the Ministry of Education and Culture between 1992-1998, wrote this commenting on the new law of civic cultivation of 2017. In a similar vein, Gyula Juhász, a Hungarian poet from the early 20th century, wrote a poem about the worker home, a form of house of culture organized by unions: “you who enter, you enter the future. That gives Right to millions, traded for blood and sweat. That gives them joy” (G. Juhász 1919). Herbert Marcuse’s term of affirmative culture critiques that bourgeois culture is focused on joy and happiness since it veils daily struggles to reproduce lives and excludes the representation of social antagonisms. Although Juhász’s culture is part of the struggle of the workers’ movement, it still signifies a moment of stillness and rest, a culture of leisure that one should fight for. In the end it is bourgeois culture, which the workers cannot access.

This spiritual world of culture is played off as the opposite of the material world. It contains truth and universal values in opposition to mundane everyday life. The epigraph I chose for this dissertation reflects on the capability of culture to uphold, reproduce, and affirm domination through everyday practices and daily routines. The social history of the house of culture (HoC) I will tell in the following pages is a story of a series of attempts at

institutionalizing distinction between ideas and matter through the selective incorporation of elements of everyday life into what we consider “culture” (Marcuse [1936] 2007, 87).

The title of the thesis is “*Peace-time of the Soldiers of Culture*”. I borrowed this from an article published in *Nógrád Megyei Hírlap*, the daily newspaper of Salgótarján¹, one of my field sites. The article’s author hoped the house of culture of the former Ironworks would be filled with life again after a brief reopening in 2000. That hope was unsubstantiated. The house of culture is still between being open or closed, holding a cabaret every three months. Soldiers of culture are people actively spreading knowledge on culture. They are professionals in education on cultural practices, program organizers, community facilitators, and sometimes social workers. The title also reflects on how activities in the house of culture have a militant appeal and how people working in the institutional system engage with culture. The metaphor evokes Charles Tilly’s understanding of the state making as war-making (Tilly 1975; 1985), where cultural institutions are made of the same stuff as that of coercion machines that enroll working classes in their defense (Bennett et al. 2005, 66, 68), in an ever-expansive process. State-making is both an economical (Wallerstein 1974, 230) and a cultural process (Corrigan and Sayer 1985) in which houses of culture play a role of a frontier stronghold. Furthermore, “Soldiers of culture” also describes making and spreading state culture as contentious, sometimes even violent action (Gramsci 1971, 5; Weber 1976).

The sites of the study will be the houses of culture, and the activities happening there, which I will call “civic cultivation” (*közművelődés*). I follow two kinds of actors: on the one hand, educators, acting as local intellectuals who make decisions according to many determining relationships and, on the other hand, organizers of cultural life who establish associations, and run programs in their free-time. Local politics, the position of their locality in the regional division of labor, and policies catered on the national and international level

¹ Pádár, András. 2000 “Kultúrkatónák békéje” *Nógrád Megyei Hírlap*. 11 (30): 3

influence what will happen in the houses of culture. Political and professional epistemologies of the employees are subjected to the same processes they want to influence. While employees of the HoC imagine that they shape the locality and nation through their activities, their activities are very much molded by their actions' material and cultural embeddedness. Throughout the dissertation, I study the relationship between administration, ideology, and labor within houses of culture. I apply a definition of the state following Antonio Gramsci: the state is the sum of political and civil society, where the former exercises domination through coercion and the latter through consent. In the following pages, I define these terms and describe their utilities by analyzing cultural institutions, policies, and labor through the perspective of the house of culture as a looking glass of these social relations.

One of the questions I started this research with was a very simple empirical one: what is happening in the HoC now, and why can we precisely find those forms of activities? This led to an inquiry on how state-organized cultural production transformed in the post-socialist era. What actors formed policies and activities in the HoC? How and who voiced participation and/or resistance to political and social changes in the HoC? Why did the function of the HoC change? Through answering these questions, I also contribute theoretically to the understanding of culture, state, and capitalism, more specifically to the theory of cultural production Central-Eastern European capitalist states. HoC is specific among the cultural institutions in many ways: it is open to non-professional cultural activities, and in comparison, with theaters, museums, or archives, its emic understanding is a mixture of a romantic idea of culture, something outside of everyday life (Williams 1959, 40), and culture's anthropological definitions. Discourses about autonomy are present since people working in the institutional system consider civic cultivation a profession that produces knowledge on society, communities, and culture. That means that while people working on different levels of the institutions respond more directly to the needs of the state or capital mediated through the state, we can speak about the field of

experts. At certain times they constitute a social space that can be called relatively autonomous and form a field the way Pierre Bourdieu defined it (Bourdieu 1993; 1996). However, ideologies that veil their relationship to the state or market are not a matter of survival or self-legitimization.

I propose a Gramscian reading of the HoC and its activities with three specific foci. I look at the HoC as a place between political and civil society to see how the local state and local actors produce cultural institutions in everyday practices. Considering political and civil society as complementary elements in the reproduction of social relations allows me to expand the understanding of the everyday operation of the state in a way that considers the role of associations and actors like local, national, and international capital in shaping culture. In the following pages I specify what I mean by civic cultivation, the HoC, civil and political society, my understanding of policy and the way I approach cultural labor, and the position of intellectuals.

Civic cultivation and culture

Houses of culture are sites where different understandings of culture meet and mix. They host choirs, theater, dance, painting or photography clubs, and other activities that fit under the general name of “culture”, i.e., “works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (Williams 2015, 52). “Civic cultivation”, encompasses an extended definition that refers to culture as a “whole way of life” (Williams 2015, 53) i.e., a structure of symbols and meanings that are produced and reproduced by acting subjects (Bourdieu 1977, 82). Thus, associations organize activities that are not usually considered “cultural” but very much part of everyday life. Workshops on sewing, clubs on hiking, surviving in the forest or reading maps, and other forms of educational practices such as lectures on specific illnesses are held in the houses of culture. Gardeners exchange seeds, and children enrich their collection of minerals,

but groups around fingerboard competitions and stamp collection are also having their meetings here. All these activities can fit into the category of civic cultivation.

Antonio Gramsci understood culture as “a coherent, integral and nationwide “conception of life and man”, a “lay religion”, a philosophy that has become “culture”, that is, one that has generated an ethic, and civil pattern of behavior’ a life-style and an individual” (Merli 2013a, 404). Gramsci’s culture is a lived process that shows how forms of thought transform the material world, while positions in relation to the material also structure thinking. In contrast with classical anthropology’s definition of culture as a bound system, that is often defined by the opposition between modernity and tradition (Crehan 2002, 37; Rodseth 2018), Gramsci looks at culture as everyday and collective life rife with antagonisms and conflict.

Cultivation in Hungarian (*művelődés*) has similar connotations and meaning to *Bildung* in German. *Bildung* was for Herder and other early bourgeois nationalists “an interactive social process in which men influence each other within a specific social setting and in which they both receive from and add to their distinctive and communal heritage” (Barnard [1969] 2010, 12). It is not necessarily intellectual or educational activity but is always a reciprocal and continuous process of learning. Geared toward human betterment, *Bildung* is a conservative dynamic that protects a (national) community from abrupt change and from outside forces to impose constraining rules upon it ((Barnard [1969] 2010, 15; Öze 2022a; 2022b). But it is also imagined a progressive activity, as it implies that all people in the end are formed to be able to participate in the formation of the world as equals.

As “ethical formation” (Herdt 2019, 6) *Bildungs* is also included in the understanding of cultivation. In the English language this specific meaning is that ‘civility’ in 18th-century usage (Williams 2015, 50). In comparison with the Russian *kul’turnost’*, which means cultured-ness, or a state being civilized and refers to the result of civilizatory work (Volkov 2000, 213–14), the term the state of being cultivated (*művelt*) implies the same result, a person who behaves,

acts according to some rules and conventions and has sense about the order of things, about the fundamental artistic achievements of “humanity” and the nation. Understandings of cultivation as an activity date back to the period of the first fantasies of the nation. Enlightened aristocrats aimed to civilize a population considered backward to adapt to expectations of civility of early modernity. This national awakening, however, in the Central Eastern European context or “national self-consciousness’ is, in its structural totality, an adopted Western model” (Kiossev 1999, 116). That means that being cultured or being cultivated contains two aspects: a comparison with an imagined Western European institutional formation and a desire to behave and live similarly of the bourgeoisie of that imagined locality.

The history of cultivation/*Bildung* in Central Europe thus starts under the enlightened absolutism of the Habsburg Monarchy. The Patriotic Hungarian Gentleman Association was established in Vienna by György Bessenyei, poet and guardsman, in 1798. He considered that cultivation crucially rested in the use of national language in state administration and art (Anderson 1991, 73; Gelencsér 2011, 12). Later policy documents added the prefix which indicates the subject that is undergoing cultivation. Its most common prefix is “köz,” which is the common, the civic. In its early history, it contained elements of public education. As a separate sphere, *közművelődés* (civic cultivation) was defined in the 1870s (Kormos 1999, 1), after the first “public education” law that introduced state-organized education as a compulsory activity in settlements where the Church did not maintain educational institutions. But still, it was used interchangeably with “*szabad oktatás*” (open education), a form of adult education that targeted workers who did not have primary education (Gelencsér 2011, 22). Open education covered practices that mix practical knowledge and knowledge of culture. Its practice followed the English *university extension*, a branch of a university that provides extracurricular education. One of its institutional examples was the Open Lyceum established in 1897 in Budapest, that gave access to education to workers. Yet, compared to the romantic

anticapitalism of William Morris and other members of the Arts and Crafts movement who advocated for this form, the Open Lyceum targeted non-organized workers and provided a free time activity that diverts attention from class-based organizing (Kovalcsik 1986b, 292). We can find “people’s cultivation outside the school” as a term in government decrees from 1908 (Kovalcsik 1986b, 301).

The first Hungarian republic (1918-1919) allocated scholarships to poor students and made education compulsory until the age of fourteen. The 1919 Hungarian Council Republic secularized public education and teachers became state employees. It maintained civic cultivation programs providing leisure and adult education to a working-class public. The peace treaties that closed the World War I took significant territories from Hungary making it an ethnically relatively homogeneous nation-state. During the interwar period, the conservative Christian regime mobilized culture to redefine citizenry and the state. “Education of the masses” backed the idea of “cultural supremacy” of ethnic Hungarians over minorities, and of Hungary over neighbors while responding to the need to fix labor in light of protectionist economic policies (T. Kiss 1999). 9-10 % of the budget was spent by the ministry of culture from 1925. That significant amount was only partially related to spending on cultural institutions. Post-World War I peace treaties limited direct military expenses and the number of a standing army for Hungary, thus the budget was partially spent funding associations that propagated patriotic upbringing of children, including knowledge about weapons and physical exercise (M. Szabó 1999, 32–33; Palló 2007, 1622). Besides these overtly nationalistic organizations, others with the state organized cultural life in the countryside: the local bourgeoisie protected folk heritage or architecture, local aristocrats sought to enlighten the masses through evening classes and other activities. The workers movement had its own, significant infrastructures: houses of culture, worker homes, hiking clubs and athletic associations. Among the agrarian proletariat,

reading circles were the main cultural activity (Kovalcsik 1986b, 35; L. Beke 2013; K. Horváth 2013)

Between 1944-1948 the activity within the house of culture was called open cultivation (*szabad művelődés*). In practice, one central body, the Council of Open Cultivation, fostered the establishment of associations and supported their operation originally without overt political messaging. Civic cultivation did ultimately become a site of political struggle and political parties established their own cultural or educational associations (K. Laczó 1985). The “absence of politics” allowed a vast platform for competition and struggle for power (Vitány 1993).

Between 1947-1949 through a series of takeovers, then the outright termination of associations or institutions, the institutional system got centralized. The activity was renamed to “public enlightenment” or “popular cultivation” (*népművelés*). An ever-growing institutional system with a staff of activist types mostly recruited within public schools had the mission of spreading knowledge of science and of methodologies of inquiry. Citizens were taught politics, geography, physics. Political education and propaganda were widely dispensed. Centralization and standardization, during a brief reformist period, were questioned as early as 1953. Critiques of Stalinist cultural policy pointed out that with the complete diminishing of associational life and centralization, local variations of the organization of cultural life could not be continued and the house of culture did not replace their role (Szóró 2018). In 1958, two years after the anti-Soviet revolution of 1956, a state-party decree changed the logic of “public enlightenment”, warning that the “uncritical adoption of the soviet model” ignored organic, local, peoples’ movements such as the peasants’ reading groups or workers’ homes (Kovalcsik 1986a, 13). State bureaucracy started to use the term *civic cultivation* again after 1974.

Civic cultivation from that point on means a betterment of skills and knowledge in some area. The prefix preceding *művelődés*/cultivation indicates the means and the public targeted. More precisely how the hegemonic process defines a population living in the defined borders

of the nation state. The people (*nép*) in *népművelés* means the popular class, peasants, and workers. It is similar to the Czech and Slovak *l'ud* and the Russian *narod* (Feinberg 2018, 21; Taylor 2021, 16), indicating that the subject and object of this activity is the “common people.” As to the term civic (*köz*), it acquired two distinct meanings in two different periods (T. Kiss 2019). Between 1919 and 1945, it referred to a joint public of aristocrats, bourgeois, the gentry working in state bureaucracy, and the smallholder peasants. After 1974, civic started referring to the whole population – every socialist citizen. Civic cultivation replaced *popular cultivation* and its top-down connotations. I will elaborate this concept further in the next chapter; it is important to stress that, while this conceptualization of cultivation means the autonomous cultivation of the self and community, it remained paternalistic in practice. Moreover, it started containing a relation with the economy and economic growth.

After 1990 many new terms emerged with the introduction of different programs, like andragogy which focuses on adult education, and cultural management, that centers on the commodity aspect of culture. Community building as a specific branch also emerged after the transition and became more common after the EU accession in 2004. It is usually organized around the mobilization of shared resources, cultural and material alike, owned by a group of people defined as a community based on traits they consider as common (Arapovics and Vercseg 2017).

Emic definitions of civic cultivation describe a process that is about accumulating knowledge to connect to other humans in a “society” (Kozma 1977, 219; Koncz 2004, 65; Ponyi 2017, 16). After the 1960s these definitions included the possibility that the subject of civic cultivation might be a community (Vitányi 1995, 274; Maróti 2007, 114). In this dissertation I will use Mary Taylor’s critical definition of civic cultivation as “a process resulting from struggles within civil society concerning the education of the masses toward the practice of citizenship. [...] Projects of civic cultivation encompass those activities referred to as adult

education, moral education, public education, extracurricular education, cultural enlightenment [...] socialization [...], aesthetic enlightenment, aesthetic education, and militant education.” (Taylor 2021, 51). In other words, it is “a technique of modern power” (Taylor 2021, 12).

In slight difference to Taylor’s approach, I take civic cultivation not only to reflect struggles within civil society, but rather interactions between “political” and “civil societies.” It encompasses compromises, incorporations, or alliances between state and non-state actors. While Taylor’s definition crucially highlights the contentious elements of the practice, I wish to stress its political, as well as social function. Civic cultivation makes citizens as much as it makes labor. In similar ways to public function performed by state organizations like schools it conditions the body as well as the mind even as it might only focus discursively on the spiritual, moral aspects of this training, veiling its material elements.

The House of Culture

The physical location where civic cultivation takes place is interchangeably called *művelődési ház* (the house of cultivation) and *kultúrház* (house of culture)². It is usually a building in the center of the settlement that includes a theater hall, smaller performance spaces and rooms. In rural towns and villages, it is typically the largest, non-commercial, secular building. While its building is mainly associated with Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union as an asset of modernization, it is a global phenomenon. It is a case of cultural institutions that were common throughout the modern state system and that sought to advance cultural and aesthetic literacy (Musat 2013, 152). Such institutions include public schools, higher education,

² In certain periods there is policy-related significance of the distinction. Also, *közösségi ház* (community house), *kultúrotthon* (cultural home), *művelődési otthon* (home of cultivation), *művelődési központ* (center of cultivation) are used to signify size and function. These administrative categories have been ever changing during the history of the institutional system, they signify size, range of activities and its focus on either social or cultural aspects of civic cultivation.

and structured disciplines in universities, scientific academic and museums, policies consolidating copyright law and other aspects of cultural markets.

The rise of “culture” as an official institution of national states was prompted by the rise of a bourgeois class in the core countries of capitalism eager to “modernize” and civilize subordinate groups. In Eastern-Europe we see temporary class coalitions that position themselves as a ruling stratum and utilize cultural institutions in their struggles for power or for its reproduction. The establishment of houses of culture as institutions in the Western European context thus was rooted in urbanization and class- or state- control over agrarian areas (Bennett 1998, 122), the self-organization, Chartism (Hobsbawm 1997, 63; 1995, 265) or unionism of the urban working-class (Hoggarth 1957, 110). On the periphery of Europe, the semi-periphery of the modern world system (Wallerstein 1980, 143), it is tied to top-down modernization of the countryside and its integration as a satellite in the global value chains (Chirot 1991; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1993).

HoC as a place of modernization is therefore of high importance in the context of dependent development. If we compare them to salons and cafes as places of bourgeois civility (Habermas 1991), we see that these places are “made” by groups who are dominant either because they possess capital, state position or mediate between local and international actors. The vocabulary of a “civilizing mission” is recurrent in the organization of cultural institutions. The Russian and later Soviet houses of culture were an asset of colonial expansion in native (both Russian and surrounding linguistic) communities (Grant 1995, 11; İğmen 2011). While having welfare roles, worker homes built up before 1917 in urban centers are transformed from places of worker socialization and movement building, typically used in the pre-soviet era, to disciplinary places and places of management of discontent (Siegelbaum 1999; C. Read 2006). In contemporary ethnographies of the Russian HoC, it occupies a similar place that I observed during my research. It is a place of nationalist performances and education (Habeck 2014), the

commodification of culture (Vaté and Diatchkova 2011), the last frontier for cultural workers who try to “enlighten” the people (Donahoe 2011), or just an empty place that performs its activities for state administration (Sántha and Safonova 2011).

Chitalishte in Bulgaria means reading room and was established to cultivate the national language under Ottoman rule in the mid-19th century (Santova and Nenova 2010). “Reading rooms” were typical also in Western Ukraine, but *narodni domy*, people’s house, was more widespread as a recreational and educational space (Makuch 1988, 202). In Turkey, the Kemalist movement created “people’s houses” (*halkevleri*) as well in its effort to “colonize the countryside” culturally. Introduction of state administration and infrastructural development was coupled with the provision of secular free-time activities in these houses (Karpát 1963; Bozdoğan 2002, 101; Yeşilbursa 2018). The first Latvian HoC was also established as a means of national culture-making in 1869 (Putniņa 2011, 215). In Romanian, the *cămin cultural*, a similar institution, means hearth, fireplace a spiritual and social center of the settlement (Musat 2013, 153). These institutions aimed to create cultivated citizens and strengthen national sentiments. Raluca Musat argues that, combined with research on the countryside, Romania’s HoC system was an integral part of state-making through the homogenization of fragmented peasant cultures (Musat 2013, 159; Urdea 2020; Botea Bucan 2022). The history continues like that in Poland (White 1990, 45) or in the territory of contemporary Czechia (Veverka 2021). In the latter, another HoC-like building was more widespread: the *sokolovna*, a place of the *Sokol movement* that organized communal physical exercise with the aim of the betterment of the body and soul of the urban working class (Roubal 2020). Each of these national histories reflect different class contexts and political projects; but the general class and ideological dynamics were the same: social control through education and nation building.

In pre-1945 Hungary, the people’s or nation’s house (*népház*) traditionally targeted the most impoverished segments of society, especially the urban poor, and their integration in the labor

force (K. Horváth 2007). They were feeding, educating, and entertaining people, channeling charitable donations from the propertied classes and dominant groups. In their own time, workers, trade unionists and communist intellectuals in charge of coordinating activities perceived these institutions as paternalistic and controlling (J. Gergely 1977; Kovalcsik 1986b, 297–99)³.



Picture 1: Library of the Vág Street People's Home 1910s (source: <https://hu.museum-digital.org/object/386039?navlang=hu> last accessed: 29.03.2023.)

In the countryside, the inflow of capital from Austria in financial assets also allowed the establishment of a cooperative saving bank which founded modernization of agriculture by smallholder peasants prior to 1914 and between the two world wars. Hungarian magnates

³ While the house of people was considered a social institution with complementary cultural functions and clubs and widely perceived by organized workers as a place of control, the library of the People's house in the fifth district of Budapest was selected and run by intellectuals who were active among the early worker movement. Ervin Szabó, an anarcho-syndicalist who advocated for a system of public libraries, selected the collection of books, and Gyula Alpári, the minister of foreign affairs of the council republic of 1919, ran the library prior to the first world war (Kovalcsik 1986b, 117).

funded the bank to pacify the gentries and smallholder peasants of the time (Sidó and Szarvas 2020). Some houses of culture were built from loans and functioned as a cultural and economic center of agricultural cooperatives before 1914. However, they were built in the interwar period on a mass scale. Compared to people's houses, these were not motivated by social policy but were assets of modernization for smallholder peasant associations. Data on this would diverge, but from 600 to 1100 houses of culture were built until 1949 by different actors such as unions, peasant associations, associations funded and established by magnates and aristocrats, and agricultural cooperatives. After 1949 to meet the perceived demands of cultural venues first places, such as parts of castles, and farm buildings, were nationalized and transformed. After that new socialist realist, then modernist buildings were erected that were specialized in civic cultivation. In 2003, 2681 houses of culture were active in Hungary. However, statistical categorization would differ, which means that whenever the number of houses is mentioned, researchers would say it is an estimate (Kovalcsik 1986b; Hunyadi 2004; Hunyadi and Kuti 2008).



Picture 2: Vörösmarty House of Culture, Fót. Built by the local branch of the Hangya Cooperative in 1932 (source: <https://vmh.hu/> last accessed: 29.03.2023.)

Worker movements addressed and resisted the attempts of incorporation of their places to state administration and offered alternatives.⁴ The Hungarian Metalworkers' Federation⁵ established houses of culture parallel to the making of houses of people providing alternative lectures on history, cultural events and leisure time activities. These houses of culture embedded in the syndicalism were similar to Italian *casa del popolo* (house of the people) that served as a venue of cooperative movement, union organizing and mutual aid in a form of a proletarian public sphere (Kohn 2003).

As we could see from this short history the contested function of these places remained constant as different class alliances has been projecting their image of ideal knowledge, citizen or culture on it. No matter how contentious and alternative, these educational programs and activities remained in the same category as those they opposed: sites of intervention and production of social space by actors with specific situated systems of knowledge and interest (Lefebvre 1974, 44)

Culture and cultural policy

While it hosts many activities related to public education and social services, the HoC is, first and foremost, a cultural institution. The chapters of the dissertation and the dissertation itself are structured in a way that simultaneously looks at the place of policy making, the nation-state and the place of implementation, the HoC, or the municipality. Thus, I will outline how I approach institutionalized forms of cultural production and the policies that govern those. One of the leading advocates of studying policy as part of the study of cultural production is Tony Bennett. While I use his work approvingly and share several of his observations, I disagree with

⁴ Christian Socialist peasants, however, asked for more houses of people (Gergely 1977, 344).

⁵ Csili, the Home of the Metal and Iron Workers, opened in 1918. These places were typically built with the contribution of the members. People could buy special stamps, called brick tickets, in their proof of membership.

his take on Gramsci's inadequacy to study the cultural policies of current states as it is rooted in a narrow definition of state and governance.

Bennett refused to consider class a social agent of political or governmental programs, focusing on the expert who forms actions (Bennett 1992, 30; 1998, 2–3). He defines this as “technocratic reformist” understanding of cultural policy, where experts are the audience of the critical analysis with the intention of changing their engagement with different “occupants of a specific class, race, or gender positions” (Bennett 1992, 31). I find several of his claims limiting from the perspective of this dissertation. First, I show that class matters in many ways in cultural policy. The process of making the institutions of civic cultivation in its early history already had a class association. They were assets for creating common experiences and interpretations of the world. Thus, they were used in the making of the working class and, in a limited way, strengthening the agrarian proletariat's organizational basis. Second, the class trajectory conditions the everyday decisions of the “expert,” the political alliances, and the programs they make.

The Foucauldian understanding of cultural institutions and policy would also be counterproductive in the case of the Hungarian houses of culture. Although ideology and discourse are essential elements in making and reproducing cultural institutions, their interpretation and enactment happen through several situated interests of actors and their relationship with each other (Mikuš 2018, 20–23). For example, when Brian Donahoe and Joachim Otto Habeck (Donahoe and Habeck 2011), in their work on the post-soviet HoC in Russia, argue that the activities organized in the place can be understood historically with the term “governmentality”, they disregard the way houses of culture's operation is highly contextual. In their analysis, divergences from the “normal” use of the HoC that is not submitted to a dominant ideology seem like heterotopias. I argue against this take through my empirical study, showing that the distinction between normal, a discourse manifested in the institutional

framework, and divergence from an intention makes little to no sense in a space that is highly adaptable to the social context it is embedded in and rather structured by local social relations than structuring them.

Instead, I will attempt to look at cultural policy not merely through governance but as a “constitutive element of the integral state” (Merli 2013, 412). What does that mean in practice? Cultural policy means more than the narrowly defined practices of branches of government, like funding and the texts that are produced by people specialized in setting up structures of different activities related to culture. Thus, the study of cultural policy should be based on the analysis of class projects and their utilization and production of cultural institutions (Rodseth 2018, 404). Moreover, practices of private actors within the civil society with their specific interest regarding the necessary labor power, place-making, or commodification of local culture should also be considered actors in making cultural policy.

For these reasons, I consider definitions such as “interaction between culture and politics and their transformation in time” (Dubois 2013, 2) incomplete as they only look at institutional forms of governance as politics. They do not include the full range of institutions. They lack the openness to include forms of cultural practices that, while affecting the way cultural production transforms, are not necessarily organized by experts or the state. Moreover, focusing on expert knowledge disregards the “bottom-up” aspect of the formation of cultural policy. Cultural institutions are the “material organization intended to maintain, defend and develop the theoretical and ideological ‘front’” (Merli 2013b, 444), with their logic and history (Althusser 2014, 175). To conclude, I will study cultural policy as an element of the institutionalization of cultural production. However, I will look at it as historically specific class projects that are modified by the previous history of the institution but are embedded in the governmental scale.

Between state and civil society

Throughout the thesis, I will speak about state and civil society in relation to the HoC as a place that is constituted by the interaction of the two. I borrow the analytical distinction of political and civil society from Antonio Gramsci and follow contemporary takes that tried to understand political and economic transformations (Mikuš 2015; Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017; Kalb 2018; Gagyí and Ivancheva 2019) in Central- and Eastern Europe. I also rely on the anthropological literature that inquired about the state in the context of globalization and civil society actors in different forms of global integrations, such as the reproduction of US hegemony and social movements against it (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Gupta 1995; Gupta and Ferguson 2002; Chatterjee 2004; Trouillot 2001) or EU enlargement and its effects (Vetta 2019; Mikuš 2018; R. Read and Thelen 2007; Thelen, Vettters, and Benda-Beckmann 2018). I use civil society throughout the thesis in two ways. It will be mobilized as an analytical word and an emic, normative term used by people in the HoC and policymakers. As an analytical term, I use it as part of the *integral state*, the total political organizations of state and society, where control is practiced through consent (Jessop 2008, 26). As a term used by my informants, it is a space of wanted freedom and control practiced by citizens on the state.

Marxist analysis of the state attempted to conceptualize it as part of and actor in reproducing class relations (Poulantzas 1982; Miliband 1987). Relational takes of the state distinguished functions and images of the state considering the reproduction of relations of production (Abrams 1988; Jessop 2007). Bob Jessop, advocate of a strategic relational approach studies “how power relations are condensed and materialized in and through the ensemble of institutions and centers of power which comprise the state” (Jessop 1990, 303). He focuses on power and the reproduction of it. He describes the state as a “class force, which has a vital role in organization class domination, in securing the long-run interest of the bourgeoisie [...] and securing active consent of the governed” (Jessop 1990, 145). States according to him are

comprised of civil and political society. In comparison with the *integral state*, political society means only the institutional system of organizing politics, governance, or coercion (Gramsci 1971, 56, 257–63, 267). Thus the “[S]tate is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (Gramsci 1971, 244) Civil society/hegemony and state/political society are not distinguished as entities that “organically” can be found but are separated for methodological purposes (Mikuš 2018, 16–17). The relationship between them thus is a “knot of tangled power relations which, depending on the questions we are interested in, can be disentangled into different assemblages of threads” (Crehan 2002, 103).

How can these terms describe statehood, which develops through and by many dependencies? Hungarian nobility in the Habsburg Empire and as part of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy were specialized in grain export on latifundia through exploitative, semi-free labor regimes. Gentry reform movements mobilizing forms of romantic nationalism were active in several waves, like in 1825 and 1848, when for a brief period, the independent Hungarian state was created (Stokes 1991, 224). In 1867 it was permitted to work out an independent political system from Vienna, which was characterized by a fragile class alliance of the magnates, a Jewish industrial bourgeoisie who got political rights through nobility and gentries, small landowners with titles, admitted to the state bureaucracy. The productivity of latifundia was ensured mainly by a series of coercive measures and restricted modernization of the smallholder’s property (Berend et al. 1964, 553; Gyáni 2006, 323). Hungary’s politically independent state depended on loans from the League of Nations and then on German capital, then in the Soviet sphere of interest, relied simultaneously on loans and technology imports coming from the Western-European capitalist states and the Soviet Union’s cheap raw materials

and market. These political and economic dependencies characterized its state formation and the subsequent formation of elites (Éber et al. 2014).

This set of institutions mediating accumulation and institutions of unrest management becomes one of the highlighted effects of uneven development in Eastern-Europe (Wallerstein 1974, 402; Szelényi 1988a, 308; Bodnár 2001). Conditions of politics were most of the time determined outside of the reach of the dominant social groups, which were usually small in numbers (Böröcz 1999a, 198). Integration to the world-system means also peripheralization in which modernization does not universally equate to progress, but new forms of extraction can also be manifested in decay (Parvulescu and Boatecă 2022, 40). Thus, modernization and decay, investment and disinvestment are recurring patterns of semi-peripheral history. As a theoretician of state, Gramsci will be my aid in this inquiry, since he studies state and civil society in relation to modernization and the effects of uneven and combined development. He asks who commands the integration of rural Italy into the capitalist world system in a particular historical conjuncture. His understanding of political and civil society thus is also integrated into an epistemological position of a study of a region that occupies a dominated position in global capitalism.

Anthropological literature uses hegemony or civil society through Raymond Williams (Williams 1959; 2005; 2015, 110–12), or it interprets it from the perspective of British Cultural Studies (P. Anderson 1976; Hall 1986; Woolcock 1985). According to Kate Crehan, these interpretations are, on the one hand, more than what Gramsci meant, that is, a totality of social relations, but also less, as these relations are first and foremost structured in and through the realm of culture (Kurtz 1996; Crehan 2002, 172–74; Buttigieg 2018). In contrast with the totalizing but primarily cultural usage of hegemony I consider it first as “not a ‘sector’ naturally and distinct from state and economy, but the field of practices that generate, reproduce and transform those distinctions” (Mikuš 2018, 17). Gramsci defines it as “intellectual and moral

leadership” (Gramsci 1971, 181), which is practiced through retaining consent and establishing norms (Kurtz 1996, 106). This form of leadership is not exclusively achieved through cultural means but covers a wide range of knowledge and activities produced by different associations of people. Political power, in the meantime, is not exclusively covering the use of force but also forms of knowledge and institutions that create consent (Texier 1979, 52; Jessop 1990, 147). Civil society and state thus are complementary aspects that show the real agency as conditioned and constrained by power. Thus, I am not looking at them from the perspective of democratization or intending to categorize forms of state power. However, I study the historical transformations of the relation between them to see how state institutions of cultural production are produced, reproduced and changed.

Educators as intellectuals

What people were doing in the HoC had multiple names. It was called culture work, inspired by the German-speaking workers, that organized reading clubs and choirs, and later by the adaptation of the Soviet institutional system (*kultúr munka*; translation of the *kul'turnaia rabota*). However, except for the Stalinist period (1949-1956), it was not widely used⁶. Two alternatives picked up: *Művelődési munka* (“labor that aims to cultivate”) and *művelődés szervezés* (“organization of cultivation”). Cultural workers themselves are still referred routinely to as *népművelő* (“cultivator of the people”) despite the preferred official neologisms of *művelődés szervező* (“organizer of cultivation”) and *közösség szervező* (“community organizer”). The symbolic connotation in this vocabulary is similar to what’s contained in the Soviet notion of *metodisty* (methodician/methodologists): staff mediates, and instead of

⁶ For example, Zoltán Kodály, composer and practitioner of music pedagogy, argued in 1955 that “*kultúr*” is a foreign import and thus, in comparison to civic cultivation, does not describe the activities in the house of culture. (Kovalcsik 1986a, 14)



Picture 3: Klára Kokas's Music Pedagogy Workshop in the House of Culture of the Capital (Fővárosi Művelődési Ház), 1975 (source: Fortepan.hu 195323)

intervening into the content of cultivation they mobilize a “didactic expertise” to persuade and educate (Luehrmann 2011a, 13).

In that process, they interpret the content, and through those interpretations, they modify flexibly. The term organizer and the widely used “cultivator of people” highlight their intermediary role in making cultivation possible in practice. They also produce content based on their knowledge of the place they operate. Thus, I am going to refer to them as educators. I deal with two distinct aspects of educators’ position: one is the cultural labor itself, its conditions, and its effects; the other has to do with their status within the broader social structure. In Gramscian terms, educators constitute an intellectual stratum mediating hegemonic processes. This position means that their “interests” stand at the intersection of multiple social identities and obligations, ranging from narrow, local, kinship-based responsibilities to institutional requirements defined at the national or international levels. At a basic practical

level, as a stratum earning wage from an institutional system, they also work to reproduce the system itself.

Antonio Gramsci says that intellectual position is primarily a social function (Gramsci 1971, 6–7) that mediates between hegemonic social forces and the dominated class, he calls subaltern (Gramsci 1971, 97). According to his understanding, every work or human activity involves “intellectual-cerebral elaboration,” and everyone “participates in a particular conception of the world” (Gramsci 1971, 9). Intellectuals are not defined by what they do or if they have superior intellect but by the “ensemble of system of relations in which these [organizational] activities [...] have their place (Gramsci 1971, 8). Their thoughts and actions are also structured by the historical, political setting that mobilizes them (Crehan 2002, 131–32). Thus, they are themselves produced as much as they are producing certain hegemonic processes. Because of this every emerging class must consolidate “intellectual and moral leadership” (Gramsci 1971, 57–58), loyal intellectuals, before conquering political institutions. Building consent is a process in which knowledge and culture are produced by the dominated social groups and incorporated by the class striving to be hegemonic. In this process, intellectuals are agents who translate and exercise power in production, and political and cultural institutions (Kurtz 1996, 108).

Gramsci distinguishes organic and traditional intellectuals (Gramsci 2000, 179–80). Organic intellectuals are the ones who are involved in a hegemonic process as allies or junior partners of capital or a hegemonic process. Traditional intellectuals are those whose functions are rooted in a former historical, institutional setting and decoupled from a hegemonic process. While their analysis and position can be felt and seem universal, they are a remnant of a former historically developed ordering function (Gramsci 1971, 9–10). The class origin of these people matters, but their activities are more contingent upon the class alliances they are embedded in and the ordering function they practice (Crehan 2002, 139). The HoC is also a place where we

can observe intellectual position that can be defined in multiple ways. Intellectuals in the institutional sense of people with official state credentials, diplomas and intellectuals in Gramsci's sense, producers of thinking labor who reflect critically on their place and society's order.

For the sake of the analysis of the workers of the HoC, and as a diversion from Gramsci whose analysis puts intellectuals in the mediating role and does not consider them a distinct class, I introduce the term the Professional Managerial Class (PMC). Barbara and John Ehrenreich worked out the term to understand how middle-class actors participate in anti-systemic movements and fail to make long-lasting alliances with the working class. They argue for the understanding of "salaried mental workers" as a class (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979, 8) based on the definition of class as a coherent social and economic existence (Thompson 1980). They describe the emergence of PMC in the history of modernization, and the birth of experts and technocratic professions. They claim that they were born in the process of regulation of civil society and commodification of working-class life and culture. Marketing jobs or the emergence of Hollywood can be interpreted as the specialization of a social group on mental work, which is then coupled with particular cultural, spatial, and material features. In a similar vein, socialist modernization produces a stratum of intellectuals who are responsible for cultural institutions, which on the one hand, provides access to cultural products and production, on the other, separates working-class culture from workers and integrate it into the everyday operation of the ideological state apparatus.

I complement the understanding of these positions based on the institutional and structural positions with an element taking into account the everyday observations of the activities of these intellectuals. Activists collecting heritage sites (Kowalski 2007) or rural teachers' curricula on nation and language (Kowalski 2012), workers in the movie industry and recording (Siefert 2016; 2021), and in underfunded museums (Kuleva 2019) all participate in the

reproduction of their position through a creative adaptation to the circumstances and the maintenance of the institutions that employ them. It is a necessary feature of the work since investment and disinvestment create places of decay while the state policies still require maintaining the institutional system. Similarly, dependence on funding and political adaptation to different metropolises make their conceptualization of work a translation of the metropolises' understanding of civic cultivation. People, however, participating in modernizations do not enact an invisible script of power. Their everyday choices and negotiations structure hegemonic processes as much as the material, political forces that act upon them structure their understanding of local culture, language, or history.

Cultural labor in the house of culture

The intersection of intellectual and manual work typical in civic cultivation told by Sonja Luehrmann in her article on anti-religious educators of the Soviet Union. Her graphic description of the work of the *methodicians* shows similar traits to the work of the educators. She tells the way posters and illustrations are painted by educators following samples, reproducing the form and content of them manually. In that process, they materialize ideologies. She argues that this process is never just copying. But localized cultural forms and knowledge also manifest in them, making the ideologies more effective without the knowledge or intention of the ideologues (Luehrmann 2011b). These people do translation, interpretation, educational work, and manual labor. Moreover, administrative work, organization of events, and negotiations with different actors are also part of being an educator. In big institutions educators sometimes become graphic designers, projectionist or sound engineers. This work is a mix of different responsibilities and skills.

Alongside the observations that cultural work covers a multiplicity of practices not necessarily contained by its contemporary definitions Mark Banks and his co-authors argue for reconsidering cultural labor as a historically and spatially specific set of activities (Banks, Gill,

and Taylor 2013, 7). While their take does not deny globally present traits of the cultural institutional system. It was created by actors from core states through colonialism and other forms of coercion, thus cultural institutions of modern states do have identical elements (Mitchell 1989; O’connor and Gu 2021). Yet, they argue that the practice of cultural production and the local institutional system is dependent on the specific infrastructure and activities of a given locality (Williams 2005, 50). The mix of these globally conditioned and locally implemented, operated elements will show cultural institutions and labor histories.

Creative or cultural labor is often defined as labor “geared to the production of original or distinctive commodities that are primarily aesthetic and/or symbolic-expressive, rather than utilitarian and functional” (Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009, 416). While I favor this understanding, since it speaks to a wide range of activities in the cultural industries, I consider it restrictive. Apart from universalizing a very specific form of creative or cultural labor as a typical form of wage labor during late capitalism, it focuses only on cultural production. The focus on the producer, and among producers, the prominent role of visual artists, poets, and writers as social actors has a long history. Authors we associate with critical theory are especially prone to deal with these forms of cultural expression (Adorno 1982; Benjamin 1999). In a similar vein, the rules of the field of production of culture are extensively described by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1983; 1996). His study on conditions of position taking and the space of possibilities (Bourdieu 1983, 313) will be less helpful when we look at the educators since he focuses on the way cultural products and the knowledge on them develop in a social space.

Thus, the study of the work of educators should avoid three overlapping and mutually constitutive biases. First is the bias of production, which means that activities are usually called art, highlighting the producers and veiling the multiplicity of workers and activities in an infrastructure necessary for the production and dissemination of culture (Scholette 2010). The

maintenance and reproduction of a cultural institutional system is a collective process. Second, a temporal bias focuses on the contemporary precarization of cultural work as an extraordinary phenomenon, without putting it into the context of the history of states and capitalist world-system (Linden 2008). That contextualization would help to understand how multiplicities of hegemonic processes unfolded with the help of cultural labor mobilized in multiple forms of employment (Alacovska and Gill 2019). Finally, a spatial bias means that researchers tend to study only the Western-European and US-based processes and universalize it as the norm of cultural work and, in some instances, a future of work globally (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 422). Following this line of thought, cultural labor can also be interpreted as a “human capacity for interpretation, action, improvisation and judgment using symbols and signs within in the context of waged work” (Siciliano 2021, 6). This definition gives more space to include below-the-line workers who provide material and intellectual infrastructure for producing and disseminating cultural goods.

Another specificity of cultural workers is they tend to accept low remunerations and to even deny the labor nature of their work, a phenomenon well established in the literature on art and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986; Praznik 2021, 43). Creative desires and the logic of an “economic field reversed” often hides the economic features of culture as a social relation. Cultural workers’ ethos expands their understanding of their role way beyond their function as specialists of local artifacts or organizers of village festivals; they imagine their work as a key source of social and community cohesion. That messianic attitude that they want to redeem their community from its perceived cultural poverty creates conditions for self-exploitation and vulnerability to exploitation by others. Their commitments can also result in a universalistic conception of their role which then works as the justification of a more authoritarian take on conceptualizations of culture (Boyer 2005; Mannheim 1991, 187).

Methodology

My motivation in starting this research was partially rooted in my political positionality. My imagined utopia is a combination of political and economic democracy through the institutions of shared ownership and decision-making. I share this vision of the future with many organizers, researchers, and members of different associations, cooperatives, and solidarity economy initiatives in and outside Hungary. As an anthropologist and sociologist specializing in cultural production, I was interested in a cultural institution that is more inclusive in the sense that non-urban and non-middle-class actors can enter easily without significant economic constraint or cultural capital. It is also one of Hungary's most numerous cultural institutions, and most of the population has experience with it.

I myself was dancing Hungarian folk dances in the Rose House of Culture on the outskirts of Budapest and participated in many children's programs. The dedication of the dissertation also shows that my family history bears a mark upon the transformations of the institutional system. My grandmother was a Cultural Party Secretary of the XVIII district of Budapest, and her sister worked in several houses of culture. She became a program organizer of the Philharmonic Orchestra of the Railways. As daughters of a printing worker and a janitor coming from Transylvania, Romania they got university education. They had access to careers in the state administration at the end of the 1960s early 1970s. Both of them could have been protagonists of this dissertation, and in many cases, discussions with them fueled my research. I share my findings from these positions in search of democratic forms of cultural production and, as a member of a family that achieved steep social mobility through the cultural institutional system of socialist modernization.

This thesis is a historically informed comparison of different implementations and enactments of policies on civic cultivation. The analysis traces the policy-making processes on civic cultivation within state institutions and looks at how houses of culture operate in the given

settings. My take on the *integral state* also implies that I go beyond the space of the HoC. The employees of the houses are embedded in local communities occupying specific roles, and the house hosts multiple organizations; thus, the ethnographic study looks at active associations in the locality. I study both the national and the local levels from a historical perspective. I consider the historicization of such an institution a necessary element of a critical study.

Pierre Bourdieu calls the way state and cultural institutions veil their constructed-ness a “labor of naturalization which every group tends to produce to legitimize itself and fully justify its existence. One in each case must reconstruct the historical labor which has produced social divisions and the social vision of these divisions” (Bourdieu 1991a, 248). Thus, the historical study is also a way of demystifying the everyday operation of these institutions (Bourdieu 1993, 254). The mystical self-conceptualization of the HoC is that it serves the community, moreover its existence is inherently good if one wants to decrease inequalities. It is so durable that even disenchanted educators, despite all the counter examples, would tell me that conservative educators cannot exist, since HoC serves progress through egalitarian politics.

The system of civic cultivation is an ever-changing set of institutions. Historical study is consequently important since different conceptualizations of civic cultivation are constantly produced through practice and, in different settings, gain multiple meanings (Sahlins 1992; 1999a; Bennett 2005). Identifying continuities and ruptures, structural determinants, and contingencies is a way to avoid classifications of social systems that are essentializing (Wolf 1990). HoC is widely considered among the general population a socialist institution. If we follow this imagination of the institution we do not see the specificity of the socialist house of culture in relation to the post-socialist or pre-Second World War formation. Similarly, the way traditions are created in the given localities represent the way class, capital, and politics shaped social life while remembering in ways talk more about the current struggles and social relations (Narotzky 2011).

Finally, the history of such an institutional system as the HoC has practical effects. In history here, I mean the actual transformation of understandings, building and demolishing infrastructure, or creating educational programs. These shape how cultural workers understand their role, limit or open spaces of imagination, and can also be sources of contemporary ideologies. To follow funding, debates on administrative changes and their implementation I intended to conduct archival research. In practice, I had a hard time accessing material on the national scale as the erection of the new governance of civic cultivation was under way during my research, including the moving and fragmentation of the archives. Researchers socialized in the infrastructure of Hungarian civic cultivation would have similar problems. However, the local scale still provided enough material to understand general processes on the national scale. The lack of access to archives also meant that I relied heavily on narratives, documents, published materials, and policy papers produced on a national scale.

Suppose one wants to study an operation of a state institution, the institutionalized forms of power, and social relations. In that case, a variety of factors depend on the local social setting and politics. Studying policies and their history is not enough, as their implementation can vary from place to place. Programs and activities can be directly monitored centrally or loosely connected to the intentions of the national scale. That is why my work also relies on an ethnographic study of the individual houses of culture and communities around them. Studying one house would have little if not no significance since how regions are integrated into the regional division of labor highly modifies the cultural practices that emerge there. The institutions that are built on those have their history. It means that the social history of the locality will be highly determinant in the role of the HoC, however institutional history, namely the way the national scale of houses of culture transforms, resource allocation changes and experiments, unique houses emerge and disappear also affect the local level.

The significance of the specificities produced by the history of the institutional system I learned through mistake: I chose my two fields with an assumption based on a political-economic perspective. I considered the different social histories the primary variable when choosing field sites. The choice of the cases is informed by the *longue durée* study of the social history of places (Győri 2011). Both are archetypical in their place in the history of the dependent development of Hungary. Salgótarján developed into a town thanks to its industries that emerged in the late 19th century. It shows a worker culture made from above, which is still cultivated by the middle class of the town. Mezőkövesd is an example of the proletarianization of the local peasantry due to the growing property of the magnates, which contributes to the making of specific folk culture. It became a cultural export in the late 19th century, and through different integrations into state-ordered cultural production remains that. It is an agrarian town with a known “folk culture,” which was selected and preserved as an authentic Hungarian one. As an ethno-region, it occupies a historically significant role in making Hungarian state culture (Fügedi 2000).

The problem with this selection was that it did not pay attention to the institutional logic. That means that I could have chosen according to position in institutional hierarchy or simply by size of the building. Instead, I applied a reversed logic and started with the towns I considered interesting because of their social history. While theoretically, I was aware that cultural production is not a direct reflection of the penetration of capital or struggles between factions or politics, those are mediated through the institutional system. I learned that in practice too. However, I consider my field choices productive since they allowed me to see the regular or everyday operation of the houses. Not choosing houses of culture which were unique or had highlighted role in the history of civic cultivation enabled to avoid reproducing the institutional logic in the research.

The operation of the houses is context dependent. Thus, I insisted on doing the comparative study to shed light on generalities and identify elements that can be considered context-specific (McMichael 1990, 392). I also followed processes beyond my place of research, be it the field site or the HoC (Marcus 1995). Opening up the field enabled us to look at processes that affect the way local processes play out but are unseen from the level of the field (Burrawoy et al. 2000). A multi-sited, comparative, and historical perspective also helps to avoid the understanding of the field site as a totality (Wolf and Silverman 1999, 399; Candea 2007, 180; Holmes and Marcus 2007; 2021; Holmes 2019). I am reconstructing the local and national history using secondary literature, people's claims on the history of the institutional system, interviews, and archival materials. I conducted three kinds of interviews. With cultural workers, I focused on their professional and social trajectories. I interviewed people who run cultural associations in their free time. In their case, semi-structured interviews were centered around this free time activity. Finally, I conducted structured expert interviews with policymakers and researchers on specific laws and funding schemes. I made twenty-five semi-structured interviews on the fields and fourteen with people who worked on the level of national governance. All together I conducted thirty-nine interviews.

Outline of the dissertation

The thesis has two distinct parts. The first three chapters follow the general transformation of civic cultivation after 1968 until 2017, then the second three chapters are based on the local history of Salgótarján's and Mezőkövesd's houses of culture. Local and national history is present in both sections. However, I do a detailed analysis of policies and politics in the first three chapters, focusing on their effects and intersection with local social history in chapters four, five, and six. In the first chapter, I will argue that the late-socialist transformation of civic cultivation is a combination of administrative and market/economic reforms that had political implications. That is, the transformation of the infrastructure of civic cultivation (houses of

culture, staff education, budget constraints) was happening first for the sake of raising its effectiveness in providing leisure time activities for people and adapting to changing funding. Second, the socialist economy demanded different labor forces and citizens. Thus, civic cultivation adapted to the demands of adult education and vocational training. Third, debates within the field of professionals also gave rise to new approaches, like the economization of civic cultivation. Here I outline how this process defined the expertise on civic cultivation that still affects its operation.

In the second chapter, I will tell how competing factions created their narrative on civic cultivation between 1990 and 2004. However, both imagined civil society as the one that is responsible for the reproduction of localized forms of cultural production. They, however, defined that in relation to the infrastructure and the nation differently. The third chapter engages with the contemporary conservative nationalist hegemonic project that got into power in 2010. The main building blocks of the new system on the level of national governance of civic cultivation were the re-centralization of national infrastructure to manage indebtedness and recalibration methodological support for local houses of culture. This process was manifested in the remaking of the central institution of governance. The chapter will tell a story of the informalization of redistribution of funding and centralization of ideology and control in an institution that adapts to the liberal understanding of community building propagated on the level of the European Union.

The fourth chapter outlines strategies of the municipality, the main HoC and associations in Salgótarján. I argue that state support of the establishment of associations to maintain institutions of social reproduction and cultural production has been present in the history of civic cultivation since the mid-70s. I observe a shift to the increasing reliance on the local civil society as a typical feature of the post-socialist transition. In the fifth chapter, I stay in Salgótarján and analyze the activities of one specific amateur group and their motivations to

cultivate the miner and smelter traditions in a shrinking (post)industrial city. Based on an eight-month-long participant observation, I will focus on the relationship between social reproduction and ideology in the case of a town that had a highlighted role during socialism and got marginalized by the transition and the post-2010 political transformation. The sixth chapter focuses on Mezőkövesd, it inquires the role of the HoC in commodification and de-commodification of folk culture. I will tell how civic cultivation outside the HoC operates through associations responsible for the cultivation of folk heritage. One of the main associations represents the folk artisans of the city, who run the peasant houses in the heritage site, selling different arts and crafts items. The chapters contribute to further understanding of the role of the state institution in relation to particularities of local culture and attempts of their universalization as national. I will argue that socialist modernization enabled the contemporary commodification of cultural practices and its privatization in the institutional framework of an association.

I will conclude my dissertation with two general observations on cultural institutions: first, they reproduce local elites even when that stratum with high cultural capital do not have a position in a given hegemonic process. Second salaried mental workers in the field of culture are dependent on the reproduction of the institutional system that employs them; thus, they tell their grievances through the perceived lacks of the institutional system and handle the problems with their employment and the institution they work for in unity. As I outlined in the methodology, my inquiry is also motivated by possibilities of democratization of the cultural institutional system based on my dissertation's findings I will theorize the way houses of culture-like places can be positioned in movement for economic and political democracy.

I. The perpetual transformation of the house of culture

In the following three chapters, I will overview the changes that happened with the different scales of governance of houses of culture. It is a system of governance that is perpetually restructured and tried to be adapted to the requirements of the given hegemonic process. Its logic of government during socialism is transforming alongside the interest of competing elite blocs of the socialist state and their evaluation of the role of civic cultivation in maintaining state power and facilitating economic development. In 1990, different groups privatized assets to foster their struggles for hegemony. In the meantime, educators themselves tried to consolidate their position and ultimately contribute to the making of the civic cultivation of the post-socialist capitalist state. With the process of Europeanization, the local scale only adapts to the conditions determined on the supranational scale. Thus, while ethnonationalist ideologies emerge in the governance of civic cultivation, the EU-level understanding of rural community and cultural development would remain a dominant organizing logic even after the emergence of the authoritarian conservative governance of the Orbán-regime.

Since legislations and theorizations usually follow existing practices and ratify them, the local scale in forming the actual practice of civic cultivation has a highlighted role. Educators in these series of restructuring silently or in a fight with local and national politics reproduce the whole of the institutional system. Simultaneously in the late 1980s and more evidently after 1990, the HoC system becomes increasingly dysfunctional from the perspectives of reproducing citizens and labor. However, it becomes more significant in reproducing this stratum of professionals or cultural elements of local middle-class politics. The processes I identified in this long history consist of a series of de-centralization and liberalization during socialism, decentralization without subsidiarity in the post-socialist period, and then selective centralization of tasks and decentralization of employment after 2010. Different forms of expertise were required in these periods and mobilized different forms of intellectuals.

Throughout its history, first-generation intellectuals are typical among the staff; however, the forms of capital it provides, and their convertibility depend more on the historical period they studied or worked in. For example, before 1990 mobility in the institutional system can be directly translated into social mobility; after 1990, its status becomes like a bureaucrat or a local municipality employee.

With this Table, I intend to aid the reader in identifying the series of restructuring that is dependent on the series of investment and disinvestment in this semi-peripheral region that modifies understanding of the ideal worker and ideal citizen. The Table looks at the three periods I study in the following three chapters. It outlines the main administrative reforms, then the laws that normalize everyday operations. Laws are important in my analysis not only as determining elements and defined conditions of the operation of the HoC but also as means of struggles which different factions wage (Denning 2021). This will help us identify a group of people involved in defining the role of the HoC system in the given hegemonic processes. Then it clarifies the name of the central governing and research institute of the houses of culture the Institute of Civic Cultivation (ICC, *Népművelési Intézet*). Alongside general transformations, functions are taken away and given to this state institution, which I speak more comprehensive way in the given chapters. Sometimes just budget cuts or political intentions motivated the change, but we could observe conceptual transformations that affect this governing body. The last two categories are conceptual and ideological changes and the status of work in the HoC. The former tells the main ways different factions define the role of civic cultivation, and the latter how all these elements of change affect educators on an everyday basis.

	LATE SOCIALISM (1968-1990)	POST-SOCIALISM (1990-2004)	EUROPEANIZATION AND THE ORBÁN-RÉGIME (2004-2017)
MAIN ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS	<p>Budgetary cutbacks and liberalization</p> <p>Professionalization The emergence of reformism and big institutions of large towns' lobby</p>	<p>Elite factions struggle to define their role</p> <p>Participation of labor in forming the institution</p>	<p>Large-scale infrastructural investments</p> <p>Decentralization of budget, centralization of content</p>
LAWS THAT NORMALIZE EVERYDAY OPERATION	<p>1976 V.: Decentralization, strengthening big institutions.</p> <p>1981: selectively allows the establishment of associations</p> <p>1983 118.: puts the burden of maintenance on councils</p>	<p>1997 CXL.: Normalization of post-socialist civic cultivation</p> <p>Allows municipalities of small towns to choose the way they fulfill their task of civic cultivation</p>	<p>2017 LXVII.: Allows direct intervention on the governmental scale</p> <p>Give place to desecularization, define goals instead of means</p>
THE MAIN INSTITUTION OF RESEARCH AND GOVERNANCE	<p>1956-1980 Institute of Civic Cultivation (ICC)</p> <p>1980 split: Institute of Civic Cultivation (ICC) and Research of Civic Cultivation (RCC)</p> <p>Renamed in 1986: National Center of Civic Cultivation and Civic Cultivation Information Center</p>	<p>1992-2009 Hungarian Institute of Civic Cultivation (HICC)</p> <p>Civic Cultivation Information Center is privatized</p>	<p>2009-2012 Hungarian Institute of Civic Cultivation and Fine Arts Lectorate</p> <p>2012- National Institute of Civic Cultivation (NICC)</p>

Table 1 Overview of the historical transformation of the house of culture system A

	LATE SOCIALISM (1968-1990)	POST-SOCIALISM (1990-2004)	EUROPEANIZATION AND THE ORBÁN-REGIME (2004-2017)
CONCEPTUAL/ IDEOLOGICAL CHANGES	<p>From public enlightenment to civic cultivation in 1974</p> <p>Centering the community, ethnographic governance, economic development</p>	<p>Open civic cultivation is an ideal</p> <p>The civil society that is responsible for civic cultivation</p> <p>Adult education is the main focus.</p> <p>Community development gains traction.</p>	<p>Community development as the central understanding</p> <p>Ethnonationalist elements of NICC rooted in the inter-war period&#39;s associational life and post-socialist right-wing ideas</p>
WORKING IN THE HOUSE OF CULTURE	<p>On the field, dependence on the local council or political clientele.</p> <p>Low remuneration, flexible hours.</p> <p>Independent profession, having own research and rules.</p>	<p>Informal flow of information.</p> <p>Entrepreneurial attitude expected</p> <p>Struggle for a place ultimately forms post-socialist civic cultivation</p>	<p>Grant-based funding and creativity on the local scale</p> <p>Intellectual public work</p> <p>Normalization of funding but decentralization of employment that negatively affects job security</p>

Table 2: Overview of the historical transformation of the house of culture system B

1. Developing people and settlements: market and administrative reforms between 1968-1989

“An engineer from a small factory could advance to a position where he might supervise the investment of billions. An architect accustomed to designing private villas could go on to draw the plans for giant industrial complexes or whole sections of cities. [...] A poet who once paid for the publication of his verses out of the proceeds of a clerical job could now live in a onetime chocolate manufacturer’s villa, and see his poems published in editions of tens of thousands and recited on revolutionary holidays in hundreds of factory and village house of culture. A librarian who used to rejoice if he could interest a few readers in his favorite books could now command from his post high in the ministry that libraries be organized in every factory and village with funds from his budget, and could determine their contents, at the same time removing from existing collections not only books which offended ideologically but also any which went against his literary taste.” (Szelényi and Konrád 1979, 204)

“T[t]he [Marxist] system led to an atomized, individualized society, where it was barely possible - or literally not possible at all - to find a philatelic club without political supervision.” (Gellner 1994, 5), writes Ernest Gellner on late-socialist (lack) of civil society. In the lengthy quotation, György Konrád and Iván Szelényi claim that state-employed intellectuals had similar capacities to allocate resources as engineers or architects. State actors spoke about employees of the HoC as “engineers of the soul” or “soldiers of culture”, militant actors who expanded state power and reproduce hegemony. Even critics such as Konrád and Szelényi saw them that way and evaluated their effectiveness based on their capability to spread ideology, while Gellner’s take sees places of civic cultivation as a terrain of constant political supervision.

In this chapter, I argue with both perspectives. First, multiple communities were formed around multiple activities, and especially during late socialism, politics or ideology was not necessarily their main organizing logic. Second, I show that the period after 1968 brings two seemingly contradictory processes in the houses of culture. For one, civic cultivation becomes a profession with rules and requirements, for another, fiscal austerity give rise to a discourse of crisis and innovation. I chose 1968 as a caesura since it is the beginning of the series of economic and social reforms that led to the reintegration of the region into the capitalist world-system. These reforms directly and indirectly affected civic cultivation and the HoC system.

Historians of houses of culture usually argue that houses of cultures were opened on a mass scale during the Stalinist period of socialism between 1949-1956⁷. They aimed to spread socialist ideology and culture in a centralized, top-down way. The Stalinist governance ended with a series of Party decrees following the 1956 revolution, civic cultivation changed from the enlightening and controlling the public to providing essential cultural services (Koncz 2004, 211). Comparing the Polish, Soviet, and Hungarian Houses of Culture between 1953-1989, Anne White uses the term “de-Stalinization” to describe these changes. Her analysis understands that shift as a linear “development of democratic tendencies” and implies that the transformation was mainly happening through politics (White 1990). In this chapter, instead, I argue that the late-socialist transformation of civic cultivation was a combination of administrative and market/economic reforms which resulted in political liberalization and the rise of civic cultivation as we know it.

⁷ In 1953 the reading circles debate signified a change in political control. A group of intellectuals in the official journal of agitators *Művelt Nép* (Cultivated People) questioned the effectiveness of the decision that rural reading groups were disbanded as the extensive development of the house of culture system was not fast enough to bring programs to peripheral localities. Moreover, they praised the associational life of the inter-war period and the fact that people voluntarily established reading groups. While they despised the fact that this associational life was fragmented and organized by class interest, they also saw the reluctance of the rural population to accept the centralized form of civic cultivation. Between 1954-55 reading circles were allowed to be formed, which resulted in a boom, especially in places where it had a tradition rooted in the agrarian proletarian movement, like Hódmezővásárhely (Szórá 2018).

While these transformations sometimes resulting in a feeling of loss of function and perplexity on the side of the staff, they also professionalized and autonomized civic cultivation. Using Andrew Abbott's definition of a profession, one can speak about profession if the group specialized in a craft or specific skills can create abstractions about their everyday activity (Abbott 1988, 20). As I argued in the introduction, I see educators as mental wage workers. "Professional Managerial Class" a category that describes their position as mediators of power (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979, 22). Barbara and John Ehrenreich's account of the problematique of experts differs from Abbott's. While the latter covers a wide range of work /positions/statuses/occupations and their social history, he puts them mostly in the context of institutions of knowledge and public perception, ignoring the larger transformations of capital and labor. The Ehenreichs see the rise of experts as a process that is an integral to the emergence of monopoly capitalism, with its need for the technical knowledge, and for intensified commodification of all parts of working-class life (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979, 14).

In the socialist context following the anti-Stalinist revolution in 1956, in the 1960s, political groups created centers of economic power (Böröcz 1999a, 196; Gerócs 2021, 20). As part of that process, groups of intellectuals acted as allies of these centers. As state-employed cultural workers educators were *organic intellectuals* of the state socialist system, a political role in ensuring the rule of the party, and policing norms of everyday life through forms of censorship and education. Similarly, the commodification of working-class culture created the expert of culture and cultural industries in the monopoly capitalist context, the Stalinist modernization through the centralization of associational life, and then the mediated commodification of culture from the 1960s created another form of expert, the educator in civic cultivation.

Transforming the infrastructure of civic cultivation (houses of culture, staff training, budget constraints) aimed originally at improving its capacity to provide leisure time activities and adapting to changing budget constraints. Socialist economy demanded a change in labor force

and citizens' focus, thus civic cultivation adapted to the demands of adult education and vocational training. Debates emerged among professionals that gave rise to new theories and approaches to cultural intervention, such as introduction of economic incentives, conception of culture as sector of production or the autonomy of local communities in production of culture. In some cases, projects were worked out to inform the citizens on complex economic processes or foster participation in the production of amateur art in their free time (Mátyus 2003b, 225). The idea of local associations as tools of self-governance of cultural life was also introduced (Kovalcsik 1986c, 238).

Both cultural consumption/production and self-governance as sectors of production/consumption and as an object of governance, culture gained managerial, developmentalist dimension. Using the economic processes as a metaphor we can say that the development of civic cultivation itself changed from extensive development to intensive one (Kalmár 2005, 61). In other words, in the period under study the emergence of experts resulted in a shift of focus: instead of spreading the institution and propagating worker habitus more emphasis was put on the community around the HoC. Civic cultivation thus started to be perceived as a tool of economic development and enhancing the workforce's capabilities. It was redefined in a way that highlighted the democratic aspects of the activity, such as self-organized cultural groups, clubs and other forms of leisure. The name of civic cultivation was changed from top-down cultivation, education of the people (*népművelés*) to cultivating the public, including cultivating the self (*közművelődés*) in 1974.

A new director, Iván Vitányi, was appointed in 1972 to the directorship of the Institute for Civic Cultivation (ICC), the central body of governance of civic cultivation. Vitányi had been an active anti-Fascist during the Second World War and part of an amateur folk dance ensemble. Active in the 1956 anti-Soviet uprising, he was subsequently sidelined, to be reinstated as an editor of several cultural publications. In 1972, he was given charge of the Institute with the

mission to work on civic cultivation research and programs. He introduced the concept and practice of a science-based governance of culture. A new age of professionalization and specialization unfolded between 1971 and 1992 for the staff of the houses of culture.

ICC was established in 1946 as Institute of Folk Culture (*Népművészeti Intézet*) and focused on collecting and disseminating popular cultural practices supporting the growth of the network of houses of culture. After 1956 the Institute was renamed to Institute for Civic Cultivation (*Népművelési Intézet*). Instead of folk art, it aided the development of the pedagogical practices and methodology of civic cultivation by publishing three journals on the topic, methodological advising, and research on houses of culture. After 1972 it gained its relative autonomy from the Committee of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party after the appointment of Iván Vitányi (P. Halász 2006).

1.1. Socialist modernization and liberalization of civic cultivation

After World War II the Stalinist model of import-substitution industrialization relied heavily on available, cheap, raw-material imports from the Soviet Union. Civic cultivation focused on socialist worker culture, making up new rites and holidays related to industrialization, and rewriting folk songs with ideologically loaded texts. Campaigns promoting hygiene, science, and literacy sought to make and manage the labor force. Members of the party and primary and secondary school teachers preached the benefits of agricultural cooperatives and new techniques of land cultivation. These forms of “agitation” and ideological control were deployed in the context of industrialization and urbanization: control over leisure time was part of labor and productivity control (Siegelbaum 1999; C. Halász 2013). The dominantly agrarian country’s agriculture and industry were transformed swiftly with investment into heavy industries and mechanized agricultural production. While in the early period, adaptation to the Soviet-style form of governance was typical following 1956, local elites gained more autonomy

to adapt to “national” contexts (Böröcz 1999a, 198). In Hungary, it meant policies that maintained a balance between blocs interested in the development of large state farms and those lobbying for industrialization (Berend 1996). Proletarianization and industrialization meant to make the position of Eastern-European countries and the Soviet Union better in the world-system and through new local elites consolidated their position with welfare measures and dispossessing the former ruling classes (Arrighi 1990, 29).

With the depletion of the post-war development, a series of reforms were introduced in the region to adapt the socialist economies to the changing macroeconomic environment. One of the most significant reforms in Hungary was called New Economic Mechanism (NEM). The NEM started to be worked out in 1966 by reform economists and was launched in 1968. It sought to reduce the burden on central planning and introduced profitability indicators emphasizing market mechanisms (supply and demand) over planning (Bockman 2000; Berend 2009; Gagyí 2015, 64). The reform was warranted by the Soviet Union’s failure to supply cheap raw materials. Within this broader restructuring of socialist economies in Eastern Europe, Hungary came to serve the function of a bridge between countries of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), the economic alliance of socialist countries, and Western economies. That resulted in an outflow of foreign currencies and an indebtedness of the country to the World Bank and the US. The 1973 and 1979 oil shocks raised the production price and made the country’s indebtedness sevenfold (M. Éber et al. 2014, 25). In 1982 Hungary, like many other countries from the COMECON and the Global South, joined the IMF (Gagyí and Gerőcs 2022, 39). These crises were followed by different forms of austerity and economic restructuring (Gerőcs and Pinkasz 2018b). This process intensified the dependence on Western powers while internally raising the influence of monetarist technocrats and managers (Böröcz 1999b).

Under the NEM, the possibility of cultural production's marketization became a debated issue. A special college was created in the Ministry of Civic Cultivation that reviewed Yugoslav and Czechoslovak examples of marketization, with a specific focus on the movie industries (Kalmár 2005, 57). They decided on a mixed regime of funding that propagated an openness towards more profitable cultural production, urging artists to create a socialist mass culture but did consider the funding of ideologically beneficial pieces necessary. While reformers were aware that the state of the HoC system was diminishing, they postponed its refurbishment, and these reforms primarily focused on "art." In addition, state budgets were decentralized to shift the cost of employees' leisure time and leisure activities directly onto the industries and the unions (Ballai 1967, 44–45). The reforms started with NEM specifically affected the field of civic cultivation in three different ways: First, by altering the funding structure and the governance of the houses of culture; Second, by supporting the "scientization" of the field; and third, by introducing of market incentives to the operation of the HoC in terms of introducing tickets and trying to rationalize division of labor between the council and the workplace organized civic cultivation (Koncz 2004, 225).

In 1971 the National Concept of Settlement-Network Development (NCSND; *Országos Területfejlesztési Konceptió*) program organized a county-wide restructuring of houses of culture and other community centers. The plan suspended funding for HoC that fell in the category of "settlement without function" — i.e., small settlements to which the plan did not assign any economic roles. Multiple HoC had to close over the following decade as a result, a decline that official statistics sometimes hid through definitional modifications (Koncz 2003).

Studies of cultural governance in the West showed that neoliberal capitalism made the funding of cultural production (Wu 2002) a responsibility of the cultural industries, which in turn flexibilized and precarized cultural labor (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; McGuigan 2005; de Peuter 2011). Some scholars even argue that the cultural industries became a model for the

labor market as a whole, with their short-term contracts, project-based funding, and self-employed workers (McRobbie 2002; Fabiani 2014). Critics claim that the demise of the cultural state instrumentalized cultural policy (Belfiore 2004), which means “to use cultural ventures and cultural investments as a means or instrument to attain goals in other than cultural areas” (Vestheim 1994, 65). The thesis implies that artists and other cultural producers became media for economic development and restructuring (Beck 2003; Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Vuyk 2010). Such privatization of cultural institutions in Western-Europe “is not about the withdrawal of the state but its involvement in ‘opening up new spaces of accumulation of wealth,’ including the creation of new publics and audience” (Yúdice 1999a, 4). In practice, of course, this meant channeling resources from state-run cultural venues toward corporate ones (Yúdice 1999b, 19–20).

In Hungary, we cannot speak about identical processes to neoliberal policies. Similar processes did not play out in the cultural sphere or the economy. Austerities were primarily introduced through administrative restructuring or allowing informal economy, such as allowing private house constructions or agricultural production on small-scale lands (Böröcz 1992b; 1999b; Éber et al. 2014). Similarities are notable however, such as the intensification of the commodification of culture and a moderate growth of associations (Nagy 2020; Nagy and Szarvas 2021a). Social engineering through culture and the cultural state’s management of social inequalities did not disappear but made space for new means of cultural governance. It is also important to note that while the pragmatic adaptation to needs and resources is one aspect of the policy changes, intellectual struggles, and informal relationships were significant in allocating resources or determining policy goals (Szelényi and Konrád 1979). Kathrine Verdery’s observation about intellectual’ actions in Romania would also be legitimate here: struggles are simultaneously about defining or constructing the institutional framework of

intellectual work and striving for a dominant position within that structure (Verdery 1991, 18–19).

The television in the 1960s and computers in the late 1980s brought about their own share of new constraints to civic cultivation. Television privatized leisure time and the importance of public spaces such as the HoC declined accordingly. Computerization introduced new educational programs and pedagogies calling for new forms of expertise. What happened to culture/cultural policy in these decades should not be reduced to economic parameters since ideological control through cultural education was still present. The transformation of the public sphere related to new technologies of communication also affected the use of houses of culture. From the point of view that looks at the debate between political orthodoxy and reformism, the periodization of the following history could be understood with the changing role of György Aczél, an influential cultural politician of the era. That means that 1958-1966 marked the first period of consolidation orchestrated by Aczél, the second 1966-1974 a reformist era when he was sidelined, and between 1974-1983 a backlash of ideological control (Tóth 1984)⁸.

However, in analyses of -socialist cultural production, the role of individual politicians and informal relationships tend to be overemphasized, and the institutional history is always narrated from perspectives of Cold War constructions, such as the overtly emphasized role of ideologies and culture in reproducing state power. In contrast, institutions as collective elements of policymaking tend to be missing. Thus, here I emphasize how the interaction of policy, ideology, and labor through the economic transformation of the socialist state determined the transformations of cultural politics.

⁸ While that can be perceived as a narrative after the political rehabilitation of Aczél in the early 1980s, researchers of party documents on cultural politics confirm that waves of reform and orthodoxy concerning the reforms in economic governance and debates between cultural politicians (Bolváry-Takács 2011)

1.2. Ideologues or bureaucrats?

Who were the actors employed in the houses of culture in this period? In her study *De-Stalinization of the Houses of Culture*, Anne White identifies two distinct attitudes of cultural workers in the HoC of Poland, Hungary, and the Soviet Union, manipulators who operationalize ideology and contribute to the reproduction of the “rule of the parties” on the one hand and enthusiasts who genuinely believed in the power of civic cultivation to educate and contribute to an egalitarian society (White 1990, 11–12). The main difference between these positions was, according to her, their relationship to ideology: The former actively embraced and worked to reproduce the system’s ideology. The latter disregarded the problem of it in order to be able to work for culture as a universal value of humanity, or simply believed that equal access to culture was a backbone of socialism.

Although this distinction accounts for variable attitudes toward the hardships of working in the institution, the question of “how seriously cultural workers took ideology” assumes that the HoC system’s role was propagandistic. During the 1970s, professional biographies narrated the struggles of running a HoC in different ways. In one sociographical study, educators are called “blacksmiths of a cataract” (Lipp 1979). The metaphor describes a person performing well at an extremely demanding job, in the absence of previous training, perfecting their skills on the job, through practice. This is a commonsense description of educators’ work and skills. University programs taught them how to disseminate culture, community organizing methods, and the legal expertise required in the context of council work. However, on the field, most of the time, their function was not defined and they were not acknowledged by the local secretary of the Party or the head of the council. Tamás Lipp was traveling around the country, conducting interviews with former classmates encountered several failures of intellectual trajectories, like an educator who became a poet and hardly survived or struggled with the local council to work out functions, but also saw successful compromises that enabled the work of the educators. In

one case, three former classmates got together; one became the head of the council, the head of the house, and the other ran the library. That enabled them to renew the civic cultivation system in their settlement.

Lipp noted that cultural workers were most often not activists but became professionals who complemented public education through different types of educational programs. They were bureaucrats of culture supporting locals' leisure time activities. People who chose to be educators in the house HoC were typically women and first-generation intellectuals. Lipp also tells stories of peasant and working-class background which is confirmed by several contemporary studies and memoirs. People most often became involved in organized cultural activities during school through a theater group or folk-dance group. They were subsequently approached by HoC employees and asked to act as educators after high-school. Most of my interviewees finished university, only during their work. In comparison in the interviews with the class of Lipp his colleagues could spend their college time in Szombathely running different student initiatives then they were sent in small houses and libraries all around the country.

Katalin Gelencsér, a 1969 graduate of Eötvös Lóránd University in Budapest who went on to teach civic cultivation there, recalls being trained at first in every field to become a “general intellectual” in mathematics, psychology to aesthetics, folklore and sociology (Kálóczy 2007). Students had to learn them as they either acted as lectures or let others' lecture for the visitors of the HoC. In the latter case they still had to interpret the lecture for the audience. Original training as a generalist transformed into training for organization and mediation or communication. From 1971 on reforms differentiated civic cultivation specialists from primary and secondary school teachers⁹.

⁹ Through constant reforms from 1971 civic cultivation got separated from the education of primary and secondary school teachers (E. Juhász 2016). The first independent department of civic cultivation was established in Debrecen in 1971. However, from 1959 as a minor track, it was already taught in the pedagogy departments of

The experience and hardships of professionals in training are confirmed by institutional ethnographies focusing on administrative levels. In her study of *Obsessed, Opportunists and Travellers*, for example, Éva Benkő showed that HoC staff changed frequently. Many educators left the HoCs between the age of 30-35 (Benkő 1982). Although on the level of leadership staff numbers were stable, staffing problems at lower levels were endemic, suggesting that first-generation intellectuals lacked the cultural capital and career vision needed to work in the houses of culture. Many of them did not have a clear idea of the professional pathways opened by HoC jobs, and the lack of definition of positions and organizational charts stood in the way of good work. Jobs were poorly remunerated while demanding constant presence and offering low status and salary rewards.

The workforce mainly consisted of women who, in case of having children or had husband were in “double burden” (Haney 1994; Ferge 1997; Barna et al. 2018; Csányi and Kerényi 2021): they contributed to the income and the reproduction of the household. Hence, family life and the long shifts in supporting clubs’ communities were often incompatible. However, on the leadership level, the number of staff was stable. One of my interviewees, who is now the head of a rural HoC, recalled that she started in a one-person institution¹⁰, a HoC with only one employee. This meant a HoC operated by an educator organizing all the clubs while also operating the library. She was experiencing a merge of private and professional life. Since she realized that her working hours would never end if she lived in a small flat attached to the house, she decided to live in the neighboring town.

Benkő’s analysis concurs roughly with White’s. The term “obsessed” in the title of her study (*Obsessed, travelers and opportunists*), however, describes much better than White’s notion of

Eötvös Lóránt University, Budapest, and Kossuth Lajos University, Debrecen. In 1972 it was followed by the opening of a department in Gödöllő, then in 1975 in Eger, Pécs, Szeged (T. Kiss 2000).

¹⁰ Tapodi.Katalin 09.06. 2021. Interview by the author.

“enthusiast” the disposition of the educators who held on to their jobs. Obsession with the calling of cultivating the community or the people was a more typical habitus among the ones who actively and consciously participated in the life of the HoC and clubs. Moreover, this institutional system provided social mobility for many of the educators. The cultural capital related to being an intellectual trained in humanities in the contexts of small villages produced a form of calling and responsibility. In light of the policy-based and ideological restructuring, it is important to remember that cultural governance relied on these forms of engagement. It made their labor force cheap, and despite its lack of funding the institutional system sustainable.

1.4. Administrative transformations

1.4.1 Professionalization and Decentralization

Prior to 1968, the role, funding and institutional structure of civic cultivation were defined through the Directives for Civic Cultivation of the Hungarian Socialist Worker’s Party (*Directives*) in 1958. As a part of post-1956 regime consolidation, the Directives broke up with Stalin-era style of cultural governance. The document would be rethought based on “consultation” with groups of intellectuals from different horizons in order to build up legitimacy. As the cultural element of the post-1956 political consolidation, the Directives listed the Stalinist governments’ mistakes. First, it considered the rapid cultural transformation forced and too abrupt. It referred to Lenin and claimed that in economics and war, speed is an essential factor; however, changing consciousness takes time. Second, it also considered the uncritical Sovietization and the lack of integration of the tradition of democratic culture of the Council Republic and the workers’ movement of the inter-war period a failure (Vass and Ságvári 1979, 286–87). In the *Directives*, the often cited loose ideological control system was institutionalized in the three T’s. Ban: “*tilt*,” tolerate: “*tűr*,” support: “*támogat*” were categories of censorship that implemented a more nuanced understanding of the manifestation of ideology in cultural

products (Bolváry-Takács 2011). Informal deals, competition between cultural firms or economic rationalities often overwrote these categories.

With this goal in mind, the Ministry of Civic Cultivation issued new governing decrees in 1965. A National Council of Civic Cultivation (*Országos Népművelési Tanács*) was assembled in 1966¹¹ with the mission to plan their implementation. Both the ministry's and council's decrees pressed the councils, political institutions, and local firms to scale down redundant local institutions and to streamline the organization of institutions of culture ran by different entities. In 1969 the National Committee of Unions (NCU, *Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa*) demanded that the role of civic cultivation in socialist governance to be rationalized and precisely defined by law. It initiated the process that resulted the 1976 V. law because of the unclarified relationship between union and council owned houses of culture and the lack of clear division of labor among these institutions. This required co-organizing and coordinating programs across unions and council in the houses of culture of smaller settlements.

The work on a new regulation started in 1970 at the National Conference of Civic Cultivation (1970 NCCC; *Országos Népművelési Konferencia*), where employees of the houses of culture, representatives of the cultural governance, and researchers of the Institute for Civic Cultivation were working on laying down the main principles of such a law. In the meantime, in 1972, the heads of the Houses of Culture assembled in a conference that negotiated the need to invest in the houses of cultures and rethink cultural governance. Through operationalizing the 1970 NCCC's decisions, they were attempting to draw the Party's attention to the alleged poverty and dereliction of the system. The meeting on HoC in 1972 defined the houses of culture as places providing conditions for local economic development, social and community life; that support cultural production on a national scale by integrating local traditions and

¹¹ In 1965 a series of decrees were published that aimed to rationalize the funding and maintenance of houses of cultures and libraries (Koncz 2004, 215).

amateur groups into the larger scales of cultural production and enable innovation by bringing together scientific and cultural associations (Koncz 2004, 219). The views expressed, in line with the reform attempts of 1970 conference, continued the direct critique of the Stalinist concept of temples or halls of culture. While the previous understanding imagined houses hosting many people in multi-functional theaters. The new concept offered the model of spaces that should be part of communities' everyday life and serve their needs¹².



Picture 4: House of Culture, Orgovány, winner of the 1967 "Upgradeable House of Culture Competition" opened in 1969 (source: https://index.hu/kultur/epiteszet/2019/11/05/orgovany_muvelodesi_haz_jurcsik_karoly_varga_levente/ Last Accessed: 30.03.2023.)

The formation of the law on civic cultivation started with this series of negotiations. The goal of the new law of civic cultivation was to “develop people and communities which have socialist worldview and habits, contribute to the building of socialism consciously and willing

¹² On the debates amongst architects and competitions on designing the masterplan of the rural house of culture, see Mariann Simon's analysis. She overviews two architectural competitions for rural houses of culture: one in 1963 and one in 1967, concluding that the diversion of resources and policy changes did not allow development of a replicable master plan (Simon 2021).

to develop their level of knowledge on culture and professional skills for the sake of building a developed socialist society” (T. Kiss 1997, 15). It sought to define the functions of civic cultivation in a socialist society, namely: 1. To improve the well-being and quality of life of society and local communities; 2. To provide the infrastructure needed to support amateur cultural production, thus contributing to social cohesion locally, in particular through direct participation in the production and definition of community life; 3. and to support also the professionalization with training and other programs (T. Kiss 1997, 16).

The shift away from the principles of civic cultivation from 1958 was considerable. From integration of socialist society, through some top-down dissemination of socialist culture, the goal became to elaborate an infrastructure that aided local economies and communities. This amounted to a democratization in the sense that communities were considered able to determine their own programs according to their interests. It also amounted to a degree of the budgetary decentralization which was the prelude to the austerity that would soon unfold.

“Development”, in a sense that was both civic and economic, became the central concern of professionals of civic cultivation. They considered citizens as capable producers and local cultural production as means of economic development. Cultural economics emerged around that time as a subdiscipline within the ICC and later in the Institute for Research of Civic Cultivation (Nagy, forthcoming). Cultural economists sought to quantify the contribution of culture to socialist economy. They complemented quantitative studies with ethnographic inquiries of communities’ cultural activities and their impact on general production/economic activity.

Hungary’s connections to the capitalist west and economic liberalization were not a unique feature. (Chase-Dunn 1980; Cohen and Arato 1994; Boatca 2006; Ban 2012; Gerócs and Pinkasz 2018a). In Yugoslavia for example, a variety of cultural entrepreneurship appeared: cultural workers were offered short-term funding on a competitive basis in place of a public

service position or sold their art works as entrepreneurs (Praznik 2021, 112) In Romania, sociologists shifted focus to audiences, and on patterns of reception and cultural consumption (Aligica and Preda 2022). They asked how to transform audiences from passive spectators into active producers of culture. Debates however around the role of television and radio in socialist cultural production were cut short by the autocratic austerity measures of 1980s (Hincu 2017).

While the Enlightenment Act of Czechoslovakia from 1959 aimed to continue the “fight against bourgeois ideologies and residues of the bourgeois way of thinking” (Janečková 2021, 57) in other fields, one would see similar fiscal decentralization that enabled more decentralized program planning but also swift privatization in the 1990s (Mervart 2015). The statutes regarding the Polish HoC in the 1970s aimed for more intensive centralization and campaign-like enlightenment instead of a community-based one. Nevertheless, union-owned houses of culture and staff could operate more autonomously. Polish employees of HoCs were active collectively in the Solidarity Movement, a union-based movement for social rights in the 1980s, after which, as reaction, civic cultivation activities in 1980s Poland were centralized (White 1990, 50–51).

The shift consisting in foregrounding the role of the individual as a creative subject and as economic actor was not specific to Hungary or the socialist world of the 1970s. The idea of “cultural development” was very much a transnational norm elaborated in countries such as France, Canada, and through these countries’ expertise international organizations such as UNESCO. In France, the age of top-down “cultural democratization” heralded in the 1960s by writer-turned-minister of culture André Malraux was increasingly contested in sociological and progressive circles, as exemplified by Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel’s work (Bourdieu and Darbel 1969). Under Malraux’ successor at the helm of Cultural Affairs, Jacques Duhamel, “cultural development” referred to the total development of an individual (Ahearne 2010; Lemasson 2015). The concept was partly rooted in anti-colonial and leftist critical thinking

which found its way through official language in the aftermath of 1968, opening the definition of culture to accommodate everyday life practices, as well as lower class and non-European cultural production (Kowalski 1999; Eleonora Belfiore and Bennett 2008, 145). Duhamel and other critical intellectuals wanted to open the definition of culture to accommodate the everyday life of the working class and non-European cultural production. Ultimately this shift contributed to the expansion of cultural markets to these forms of cultural products.

The Hungarian law resulted from negotiations between the Young Communist League, the National Civic Cultivation Committee, and the National Committee of Unions. As the writer of the law, Zoltán Bíró recalled also different factions among cultural politicians were competing through the law, and its liberal tone reflected the declining influence of György Aczél¹³. (T. Kiss 1997). The law was passed on 15th October 1976. It followed a logic of decentralization: councils and methodology centers at county level received authority over cultural programs, and the burden of funding worker's leisure time activities was partially shifted to firms, cooperatives and local councils. In the long-term, analyst of Hungarian public administration András Vígvári claims, following the NEM central governance tend to pay for the local level, like the county and the councils instead of money with democracy. That means in this context that they could make decisions by themselves, but financial means were not provided to fulfil those tasks (Vígvári 2008, 154). This form of budgetary austerity and the administrative reforms generated a practical contradiction. On the one hand, the HoCs had more limited resources as they became more dependent on local firms and economies. On the other hand, one of the joint effects of professionalization and of the rise of scientific governance was a stratum of professionals, bureaucrats, researchers and pedagogues who were openly critical of economic liberalization (Tibori 2018).

¹³ Zoltán Bíró. 13. 07. 2021. Interview by the author.

In the following years, two other laws had long lasting structuring impact on civic cultivation: one of them established the status of autonomous associations (1981); the other (118th decree of the council law, 1983) handed the houses of culture, including the burden of their financing, to local councils. The association law was utilized mainly by town beautifying groups, small entrepreneurs, and fans of clubs. Around the establishment of these institutions, there was widespread confusion.¹⁴ One of the instances got publicity where members of the council felt threatened by the establishment of a town beautifying association and continuously blocked its establishment until the PPF intervened¹⁵. The head of the Patriotic People's Front (PPF), the civic branch of the Party commenting that instance claimed that "people have more trust in the state, thus they are suspicious about these new forms". These two laws when applicable however made possible the self-organization of rural cultural associations but also the budget cutbacks of rural houses. We will see the effects of it in the following chapters on Salgótarján and Mezőkövesd. However, in most cases, it allowed the accumulation of power for people outside the party or the managerial elite during socialism.

1.4.2. ICC and the ethnographic state

Understanding civic cultivation as a tool of economic development also established a clear link between human resource management and cultural production. In his study of the growth of the economy of culture into a subdiscipline, Gábor Koncz claims that 1970s planning and cultural development economics became a central function of the ICC (Koncz, 2004, 222). Several of my interviewees working in the Institute between the mid-1970s and 1980s identified the term between 1972 and 1992 as the most prolific period for the people dealing with communities and everyday forms of cultural production. For them, it was a time of innovation and change. According to my understanding, this is a period when one can speak about civic

¹⁴ "Egyesületpárti Népfrent" *Magyar Hírlap Képes Melléklete*. 14. 04. 1984.

¹⁵ Nográdi, Gábor. 1984. "Törvény és valóság". *Valóság* 27(1). 68-76.

cultivation as a distinct profession with its institutional structure and distinct methodologies. One of my interviewees, who was working in the Institute then, framed it as “we put 1968 into practice.”¹⁶ He meant that all the practices like all the organizational innovation among the amateur movements of that period was channeled into the everyday operation of ICC. At the same time, anti-systemic or critical practices were banned (Nagy & Szarvas, 2021), and other cultural critiques of the socialist state, such as the dance house movement (Taylor, 2021, 96) or amateur theaters (Jákfalvi 2006; Szarvas 2016) are incorporated into the state institutions.

Iván Vitányi was appointed as the head of the Institute in 1972. He led it until 1980 when the Institute was split into the Research Institute of Civic Cultivation (RICC; *Művelődéskutató Intézet*) and the Institute of Civic Cultivation (ICC, *Népművelési Intézet*). The two were merged again in 1986 into an institution called the National Center of Civic Cultivation as a part of a series of centralization during the late 1980s (Köpf 2003, 181). The ICC and later, the RICC had the liberty and budget to produce independent sociological research in three fields: 1. Research on the production and consumption of mass culture 2. Research on community building and the role of culture in it, and 3. Research on cultural policies, long-term planning, and strategy (Tibori 2018, 45–46). In the meantime, the House of Culture Division of the ICC conducted several experiments related to the usage of the space and the possibility of making it more accommodating for the general population.

The ICC assessed the effectivity of cultural institutions and planned programs for their everyday operation. Researchers collected and analyzed large data sets on cultural consumption and behavior patterns. They also studied the operations of the houses of culture and the career choices of their educators. One of the ICC’s first programs was called “*kirajzás*” (swarming), started in 1975: the Institute's students and young employees completed inspections of the HoC

¹⁶ Földiák, András. 29.09.2020. Interview by the author.

in Budapest to produce data on their everyday operation. In the absence of reliable public data on the working of state offices, the Institute set itself to produce by its own means studies that could support the reform of civic cultivation it sought to achieve.

This endeavor of mapping the activities in the HoC contradicts the picture researchers of the institution paint them. Bruce Grant (Grant 1995, 27–28) reports the practices of tampering with visitors' numbers, and Anne White shows discrepancies between propagandistic allegations about the effectivity and the actual activities in the houses. From my point of view, "effectivity," as also White elaborates (White 1990, 152) is a question that carries several preconditions; one is that there is a set role of the institution that is first and foremost political. There were endeavors of adaptation to the expectations of the local council or in the competition for funding. In these cases, reportedly false data was used. However, in cases when my interviewees spoke about it as falsifications for making the house effective, using practical knowledge of the field. That means that the actual operation of the house and the things happening differed because these were means to avoid bureaucracy and operate effectively. Of course, it happened that people did not take the HoC and the programs seriously, but at the same time, tampering with the number of visitors or the number of borrowed books was a way of dealing with the bureaucracy that was considered burdensome. The central government, in fact, had comprehensive data on discrepancies between goals and actual activities in the HoC. Failings or blind spots were generally identified (Koncz 2004, 210).

Debating with James Scott's take on central planning (Scott C. 1998), who looks at the socialist state as a radically centralized body of governance, Alina Cucu (Cucu 2014) claims that in early socialist Romania, ethnographic knowledge was essential for the development of socialist planning. Ethnographers integrated the knowledge of how production was organized and what kind of activities and power structures were present on the production lines. Instead of intensifying centralization and standardizing the plan (Rose and Miller 1992, 175), as it is

depicted by Scott planners had more fragmented and instrumental knowledge about the production process on in our case the everyday operation of a state institution.

The ICC exemplifies comparable forms of ethnographic governance. In 1973 the Institute received funds to research fluctuations in worker flows between rural areas and light industry areas (construction, weaving, etc.). Teams researched to figure out the reasons why people migrating to urban centers often left their new job soon and went back to their villages. Thirty-five educators and researchers used ethnographic methods and focus group interviews. Through photography clubs and reading groups, they made the people living in the worker hostels reflect on the experience of rural-urban migration. By helping them produce narratives on their social mobility, educators sought to build a more familiar environment in worker hostels for the workers coming from the countryside (Mátyus 1980).

Activities in the houses of culture themselves were also under scrutiny. Mária Andrásy in 1977 (Andrásy 1985) reviewed the performance of houses of culture nationally with the aim of assessing civic cultivation in both rural and urban areas. She found that that houses of cultures of larger towns operated in a favorable environment and could provide basic cultural services to urban populations. On the other hand, rural, smaller houses operated in sub-optimal conditions, forcing them to reduce working hours and place heavier workloads on the organizers, educators, or volunteers. These studies were published in small numbers and distributed among the workers of the infrastructure. It showed that large-scale reforms, like NCSND, failed to deliver the expected rise in effectiveness and outreach of the institutional system. Thus, the smaller-scale experiments became more prominent. In them, this form of ethnographic knowledge had a significant role.

1.5. Reforms and experiments in the 1980s

1.5.1. Creativity, autonomy, and crisis

One can identify several branches of reformism in the institutions of civic cultivation in this period. Like cultural economists and community developers, the head of the ICC Iván Vitányi could also be considered part of the reformist branch since he was committed to working out new forms of socialist cultural policy, that aimed to democratize civic cultivation. The emergence of cultural economics and the integration of cultural policymakers into the network of neoliberal expertise was reviewed by Kristóf Nagy (Nagy, forthcoming), here I focus on Vitányi's thought and the experiments led by the HoC division in ICC on facilitating civil society initiatives. While the 1970s was a period when several new forms of thinking on civic cultivation could emerge in line with socialist thinking, in the 1980s, elements such as civic associations, autonomy of citizens dominated the goals of the profession.

Iván Vitányi's take on culture was an object-focused relational understanding of the daily production of meanings and objects (Sági and Vitányi 1971; 1979; Vitányi 1979). He and Mária Sági were interested in the human capability of generation patterns and harmonies through analyzing musical performances. They defined creativity as a generative relationship that may be grasped as a set of types through distinct qualities, and quantification, all of which are susceptible to be observed and researched empirically. Creativity emerges when an individual and/or community mobilizes their generative capability toward the creation and reception of artworks.

Summarizing his thoughts on culture, Tímea Tibori claims the he often referred to mass culture as a “swamp” and an obstacle to cultural development and creative innovation (Tibori 2018, 45). According to him, what makes art “art” lied in the producers and their work as a community. One of the Institute's goals was thus to facilitate the formation of communities of

cultural producers. Cultural production, according to him, fell into two distinct categories: an *autonomous* one and a *folkloristic* one. In the case of autonomous forms of culture, the producer is often an individual author or artist (Tibori 2018, 45–46). In studying that field, researchers were expected to distinguish analytically between the audience and the producer. In the case of *folkloristic culture*, cultural production is a collective effort. The audience and producer cannot be strictly distinguished through research during that effort. The likelihood of commodification was more significant in the case of autonomous artistic practices, according to Vitányi. In contrast, folkloristic practices remained embedded in everyday social relations, thus most likely escaping the circuits of capital (Tibori 2018, 46).

In intellectual debates of the 1980s, the critique of the top-down organization of civic cultivation dominated the discussions; educators of the HoC division urged the Institute to strengthen small communities and grass-roots organizations (M. Beke 2016; Dóri 2021). As the reforms put more financial burden on houses of cultures and the liberalization opened the possibility of forming “self-organized” communities, the spatial inequalities became more apparent in the institutional system of civic cultivation. At the 1985 Civic Cultivation Meeting, the debate was centered around the legitimacy of the house of culture system. Two main factions could be identified institutional lobby and rethinking the HoC since its an anachronistic institution. Directors of big, well-funded houses from larger towns represented the first one. They claimed that money and time were wasted on new experiments and instead the HoC-specific activities should be developed. “It [house of culture] is the *home* of activation of citizens, the dynamics of a strengthened autonomy that selects and reveals interests, its employees are the professionals of this process and with its assets also a patron¹⁷” said one of the participants. The second was saying that the HoC system was outdated as such new forms of civic cultivation were needed (Köpf 2003, 177). It was clear thus that the priorities of the

¹⁷ Német, János István’s contribution. 1986. in *Kultúra és Közösség* (2)92. quoted by (Köpf 2003, 177)

institution shifted in the eyes of the reformists and the lobby of big institutions alike. However, their position in the institutional system pushed them in different directions.

The debates did not conclude only in the direction of the development of “socialist democracy,” however it was clear that the centralization of funding to the towns created a lobby group interested in the maintenance of the infrastructure, while reformers involved in experiments in the underfunded emptied rural institutions were critical about the future of the whole HoC system. They were looking for solutions that satisfied the local needs through self-organization. In the meantime, big institutions could already experiment with higher price tickets, a program based on popularity, and a restricted form of the cultural market. In this period, an understanding of the state emerged as an entity that only corrects inequalities. Those inequalities in access were created by different cultural institutions targeting a variety of strata of society. Advocates of the commodity nature of culture claimed that this restricted market incentivizes producers to compete and produce higher-quality culture. Civic cultivation in this context would only provide educational activities to ease the access of the consumers to the market of cultural goods ¹⁸.

1.5.2. Making civil society in a socialist institution

Reformers affiliated with ICC’s HoC division engaged with the perspective of everyday practices. One of them was Pál Beke, who, parallel to his criticism, with other reformists already articulated¹⁹, with several of his colleagues, was trying to develop an ecologically sustainable, community-based understanding of civic cultivation. They tried to work out operational, practical solutions instead of working based on concepts of efficiency from a policy perspective. These actors were interested in the development of civic self-governance and generally the

¹⁸ Liska., Tibor. 1981. Kultúra vagy antikultúra a piacellenesség? *Kritika* 10(10). 16-17.

¹⁹ Beke, Pál. 1983. Elaggott intézmény, avagy virágzás a periférián? in *Alföld* 34(5) 46-56.

functional shift of the HoC from a state institution determining the program as a shell or a host enabling civil society's development. The domestic source of their thinking was the post-World War II idea of "open cultivation" (*szabad művelődés*). While the idea of the HoC as a place of the free association of civil society was informed by their encounter with the French and Dutch community center system during their study visits in the early 1980s.

In retrospect, these attempts are usually interpreted as oppositional or a form of dissent, but in their time, they were rooted in the idea of reforming the socialist institutional system (Dóri 2021). Pál Beke, Tamás Varga, and Ferenc Balipap sought low costs solutions for providing cultural services, knowledge, and free time activities to the populations living in villages. They launched several programs. One of them was the "open house initiative" led by Pál Beke and the Division of House of Culture of the ICC; the other "container program" worked out by Tamás A. Varga; and they attempted to build "village centers" under the joint lead of Pál Beke, Tamás A. Varga, Ferenc Balipap and the founder of the organic architecture in Hungary Imre Makovecz (Beke 2001; Dóri 2021). They were also trying to address people working in allotment gardens complementing their daily job with agricultural production. Because of the state's indebtedness, a series of reforms that allowed semi-private enterprises were introduced. One of them was private production that was allowed in the countryside on small plots. That meant that people would work on these lands in their free time instead of going to the HoC, and communities would be formed around these kinds of informal economic activities. These experiments tried to address these efforts with practical knowledge and tools.

The "*open house initiative*" was funded and supported by the National Civic Cultivation Council. Six to twelve houses of culture participated in the program between 1978-79. They bought some missing infrastructure, such as tape recorders, televisions, radios, and/or various materials used by educators in the workshops. According to Pál Beke, the program was a functional reconsideration of the HoC. He claimed that this initiative tried to be loyal to the

HoC as a specific place in the history of Hungarian cultural policies. According to his understanding of the presence of educators and the profession of civic cultivation in general, many times became the obstacle to the formation of communities²⁰.

The HoC might work as a place of organizing or meeting, but the communities should work beyond the profession. The open house provided the space for encounters with active citizens of the given locality. In that process, the employees of the houses of culture, instead of a bureaucrat of a cultural institution, should become a coordinator or, in the future, community developers. This localized understanding of economic development focused on the resources of the given settlement and facilitated building a network of local experts. After the transition, it became the basis of the reconsideration of the profession of civic cultivation.

The idea behind *the “container program”* was similar in that it opened the HoC to develop self-reliant citizens. However, compared to the *“open house initiative,”* which took a holistic approach and considered the whole locality as the subject of development in which the HoC is only one element, Varga’s containers were trying to make underutilized houses of culture functional through removing the educators from the process of community building. Houses of Culture in that equation became just a place filled with activities by local citizens without employing educators, pedagogues, and organizers. The containers were equipped with basic tools that different clubs could utilize, like patterns for sewing workshops and saws for the woodworking study groups. Varga was installing the containers himself and observed the way people used them.

Based on that program, he wrote one of the most important publications of the reformists titled *“Role of Civic Cultivation in the Development of Autonomous Personalities.”*²¹. In that,

²⁰ Beke, Pál 1982. “A “nyitott ház” és vidéke 1.” *Népművelés* 13(2).

²¹ Varga A., Tamás. 1979. A művelődés szerepe az autonóm személyiség kialakulásában. Manuscript

he engaged with one element of the problematique of the late socialist crisis of civic cultivation. He focused on how the houses emptied because of the lack of funding and staff. However, he reconsidered civic cultivation as a tool for developing the self, like the propagation of entrepreneurial skills through facilitating the establishment of cooperatives. He claimed that access to information would enable citizens to accumulate power, and thus they would be able to lead an autonomous life. His argument was Based on V.I. Lenin, György Lukács, and Lucien Sevé and argued for a new self-reliant socialist subjectivity. Thus, educators need to give enough room for movement to the individual to make conscious choices.

In the “*village center building programs*” Pál Beke, Tamás Varga teamed up with the architect Imre Makovecz who engaged with the idea and practice of organic architecture. They met in the Division of the House of Culture of ICC when Makovecz got the opportunity to produce the plan for the HoC of Sárospatak. After Beke became the head of the Division of Houses of Culture and started to map the problems and lacks in the HoC network of Hungary, he realized that settlements which are classified as “ones without economic role,” cannot maintain separate houses of culture, administrative buildings, schools, shops, and sports centers. The understanding of the HoC as a place of community organization and the reconceptualization of the profession as not a form of education but an activity that facilitates the formation and development of communities found its form in the organic architecture of Imre Makovecz. Organic architecture meant that the building followed the motives and structure of nature, and they used materials that could be found in the close surrounding of the locality.

Imre Makovecz and reformers of ICC first realized their ideas in the case of the construction of the village center of Zalaszentlászló in 1985. The building was built with the local forestry cooperative, and the citizens of the village contributed to the construction with their social work. The local council funded the raw material, and ICC provided a small contribution. This usage

of the communal organization of labor (*kaláka*)²², on the one hand, was in line with the late socialist dissident's idealization of informal solution (Böröcz 1992a) for economic hardships and the understanding of it as the organic development of late-socialist entrepreneurship (Szelényi 1988b). On the other hand, they connected it to historical examples of peasant informality using these communal responses to economic and social crises as general habits of rural communities framing them as “tradition.”



Picture 5: Village Center in Zalaszentlászló planned by Imre Makovecz (source: https://makovecz.hu/terkep/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/13706-STAT_2-1981-CONT_6-CC_HUN-KOZ-HIV-F-7.jpg Last Accessed: 30.03.2023.)

The building was constructed around one central place, which differed from the modernist houses of culture that usually had one theater hall and multiple exhibition and workshop places. The idea of one multi-functional central place followed the buildings they saw on their study visits. De Meerpaal, or the Dronten Agora, is a building often mentioned in memoirs (P. Beke

²² *Kaláka* meant a communal and informal redistribution of labor among people living in a given settlement or having some kin-like relation with each other. From the seventies on, parallel to how light industries were strengthened, new housing stock was needed in rural towns. *Kaláka* was substituting the lack of capital investment in housing from the side of the state (Gagyí and Vígvári 2018; Danyi and Vígvári 2019).

2001, 76). It is a modernist structure erected between 1966-67 with one central place which works as a market and venue. The Agora is flexible and adaptable to changing needs but also a place where different groups of people accidentally meet and cooperate²³. Village centers were not considered houses of culture. However, advocates of such places attempted to create continuity with traditional forms of communal places, where people got together to weave the wool while singing and telling tales. They also added to the Hungarian historical examples the idea of integral settlement development and the facilitation of the making of local civil society.



Picture 6: De Meerpal in Dronten (Source: <https://architectuul.com/architecture/de-meerpaal> Last Accessed: 30.03.2023.)

In all three cases, we can see attempts to renew the institutional system, which these reformers did not see fit to serve the community. Later most of these actors, in one way or another, became associated with the post-socialist right advocating for conservatism and organic development of national culture, including peasant or folk culture and the support of

²³ They encountered the building at a conference organized in 1976 by the Institute of Civic Cultivation. People came from the GDR, Soviet Union, Poland, and Czechoslovakia but Finnish, French, and Holland architects and community developers were also invited. The conference was titled “Places of Active Community Based Civic Cultivation.”

rural civil society through the withdrawal of the state. In comparison, Vitányi stayed in the successor party of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and became a full-time politician.

1.6. Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to demonstrate the ambiguities which surrounded the late-socialist development of civic cultivation. Its reforms integrated first into the policies of the New Economic Mechanism and the National Concept of Settlement development, which resulted in a double process of centralization of program planning and decentralization of funding. That was legalized with the 1976 V. law. It put the development of local communities and community-based cultural practices at the center of the profession. We could observe that the HoC and the profession of civic cultivation were integrated into socialist modernization, such as intensive economic development and spatial restructuring, but also into the making of new labor and citizens.

Although civic cultivation was perceived as a tool of economic planning and the management of human resources during that period, the process was highly criticized by socialist intellectuals who imagined the practices of civic cultivation as a tool that provided equal access to culture to the whole of society. While this period made a distinct definition of civic cultivation invented by professionals, like researchers and educators employed in the houses of culture, it was also a period of uncertainty with a constant struggle to determine the exact function of civic cultivation. Debates around marketization and commodification of culture and the abandoned rural infrastructure were already present before 1990, but they became more frequent with the transition.

Parallel to the disinvestment into the infrastructure and the growing indebtedness of socialist Hungary, civic cultivation opened up new ideas from Western examples and managed fiscal

deficit in the infrastructure through decentralization. Through educational means and cultural infrastructure, the socialist state also produced a stratum of intellectuals it could not necessarily integrate since demands for the role of educators changed substantially. Instead of providers of culture, they became facilitators of community while their position was also threatened by the emergence of decentralized forms of civic cultivation, such as associations. In the next chapter, we will see how these intellectuals will cope with disinvestment, competing understandings of civic cultivation, and the politicization of their role.

3. Negotiating a new role: the post-socialist transformation of civic cultivation

“Like Moses, they found that their task was more complicated than they had anticipated. They thought initially that it was to lead the people towards freedom and, in the course of the (as they thought, rather short) journey, to rule by gentle admonition rather than coercion. Alas, also like Moses, they discovered that it would be a longer journey than they had anticipated. Forty days turned into forty years, primarily because the people were not ready for freedom. Hence they redefined their task as turning slaves into free individuals by giving them laws and educating them to become law abiding citizens.” (Eyal, Townsley, and Széleányi 1998, 98)

3.1. Introduction

“And after a two-thousand pages long book²⁴ I could not write a six-page long article [...] Because I did not want to write only about terrible things, and there were no good things to write about.”²⁵ József Kovalcsik recalled in 1994, as he was writing about the virtues of the 1990 municipality law, that decentralized tasks including the operation of the house of culture. He was that time the Deputy Head of the Department of Civic Cultivation in the Ministry Culture²⁶. He was asked to join the ministry to take part in the formation of the new governing principles of civic cultivation. During writing that article he ran in circles in his house for two weeks, chain-smoking, unable to write a single word, until a heart attack forced him to stop working. His “two-thousand-page book” was a major opus on houses of culture and similar

²⁴ Halls of Culture is the most comprehensive historical study of the Hungarian House of Culture that inquires about the development of “house of culture-like” institutions from a comparative perspective from the 19th century to 1972.

²⁵ Mátyus, Alíz. 2002. “Kovalcsik József.” *Szín-Közösségi Művelődés* 7 (3): 16–30.

²⁶ The name of the Ministry responsible for the cultural policy was constantly changing throughout the years between 1990-2020; when I call it a Ministry of Culture, it generally refers to governing ministry of funding, policy and where I refer to its specific name (e.g. Ministry of Public Education and Civic Cultivation 1990-1998) I speak about the specific ministry responsible for the field.

organizations dedicated to adult education and leisure in the UK, France, Russia and Hungary. He favored the “open civic cultivation” model—a framework in which governance and activities are organized. It is a model of a network of cultural associations funded, but not governed, by state institutions. This idea of civic cultivation, while attempted to be realized by several actors after transition the actual transformations did not get even close to that idea. Reforms mainly led by political motivations and interest. Consequently, the 1990s only brought defunding and uncertainty.

In this chapter, I use interviews, policy documents, and secondary sources in order to show how the post-socialist institutional system of civic cultivation developed. I reflect on the actors’ positions in the field and on their embeddedness in different political factions and elite blocs. My goal here is to show how civic cultivation was integrated into the post-socialist, capitalist state, and what roles educators negotiated for themselves through public debates and actions in a period of intense social transformation. I will argue that in a context prone to defunding public institutions of culture and education, educators took it upon themselves to maintain the civic cultivation system in post-socialist Hungary. Moreover during labor negotiations they also formed the way the transformation of the house of culture system played out.

The previous chapter told the history of late-socialist liberalization of culture and explained how decentralization of funding played out which put more budgetary burden on the local scale. During the transition, both continuities and ruptures can be observed. Decentralization intensified. The importance of civic cultivation as a state function declined noticeably. Cultural workers’ political leverage and ability to be heard higher up also declined, as cultural and welfare institutions generally were hollowed out. A stratum of professionals was on its way to becoming a “surplus population”. They re-invented their role and struggled for their positions in the new, emerging hegemony which led to the remaking of the system of house of culture in

a way that kept the profession of educators but gave more role to local political and economic elites.

In a self-defeating way, the HoC became a site of making civic associations and civil society. That devoted function was also in line with the imagination of democratization and catching up to the West fantasies of many of the professionals of the era. Austerity policies, combined with the perceived need to locate debate and public sphere in physical space, were conducive to reimagining houses of culture as such a space of civic “publicity,” popular self-governance, and education to bourgeois participation practices. Modernization, however, remained a central mission; HoC in the post-socialist context, it assumed the distinct form of a project to develop civil society through citizens’ training and education (Taylor 2021, 190–91).

In policy debates, one narrative, that could be more associated with conservative understating of civil society, presented the houses of culture as parts of bourgeois history and development of which was interrupted through decades of socialist centralization. On the ground, educators and other organizers suggested instead that the house of culture had become home to forms of intellectual critique of state socialism long before 1990. Which was why, the latter narrative went, these places and their personnel and actors made an ideal terrain for the growth of civil society.

3.2. A brief history of post-socialist civic cultivation

The idea of reforming the institution along such liberal line preexisted the transition (Fodor, Földiák, and Köles 1988). In the volatile context of post-socialist transformation, policy reform generally was contingent upon wider political power struggles. The law on the operation of municipalities 1990 made the maintenance of places of civic cultivation compulsory for municipalities of towns and mid-size villages but there was no obligation for them to provide cultural services. In the meantime, houses of culture, which were managed and owned by the

National Council of Unions (NCU) or were owned by cooperatives and factories started to be privatized. NCU was the second largest owner of assets after the state (Thoma 1998, 18). So, their holiday houses, hotels, community places, clubs, and houses of culture represented a significant portion in the process of privatization.

In 1997, after several years of debate and preparation, a new law on civic cultivation was passed which stabilized municipal operations. Disagreements had been rife between socialists and liberals in the coalition government. Socialists, and among them Iván Vitányi, head of the parliament's Committee for Culture and the Press, hoped to maintain the public, educational mission of houses of culture at the hands of municipalities. In contrast, liberals envisioned a collection of independent civic associations that organize rural cultural life voluntarily. Both sides wanted to facilitate civic participation, but liberals were in favor of further outsourcing the provision of basic cultural services to private associations. They struck a compromise: the houses of culture would remain in the hands of local governments, but they would be habilitated to hire or otherwise coordinate with private actors in providing cultural services. The burden of organizing events and communities was shifting progressively onto local civic associations. Multiple municipalities started operating their houses of culture as non-profit organizations. They often integrated other leisure infrastructures such as stadiums and swimming pools in the culture complex. Not only the focus was loosened, but educators were asked to adopt a more entrepreneurial approach-- to come up with new ideas and activities, and to commodify and monetize them.

In the wake of the 1997 law, during the first Orbán government (1998-2002), actors worked on consolidating civic cultivation as a field. The Hungarian Institute of Civic Cultivation

(HICC; *Magyar Művelődési Intézet; MMI*)²⁷, a successor to the Institute of Civic Cultivation (ICC) published journals, normalized the education of the employees of the house of culture, and reinstated research programs. In 2001 the new head of the Institute, Pál Beke attempted to put into practice his and others' ideas about community-based houses of culture. They imagined the latter mainly as hosts (P. Beke 2010) and associations would have been the program organizers. The model went back to his time at the House of Culture Department of the ICC in the late 1980s. Together with others, he conducted experiments, researched transformations, and learned about “community organizing” as it was practiced in the 1990s. This concept of democratization grew out of this community's original intellectual work, but it also conveniently fitted austerity-era ideologies shifting cultural responsibilities on private actors and civil society organizations. The debate on the modalities of state-civic coordination continued through EU accession.

3.3. The transition and civic cultivation

Quoting Judit Bodnár's work on post-socialist cities, Mary Taylor suggests that “every epoch has its type of building that indicates the symbolic and financial preferences of their age. The preindustrial epoch found its form of expression in the temple, the church, the palace, the agora, or the city hall; hotels and restaurants are the incarnations of symbolic power today. (...) The characteristic contribution of state socialism came in the form of party headquarters, prefab housing estates and ‘houses of culture’” (Taylor 2021, 84). One should add to Bodnár and Taylor's remarks that the image of empty houses of culture is as much a symbol of the decay of the socialist cultural state as it is of the house of culture, a flagship element of state-socialist

²⁷ When the Institute of Civic Cultivation (ICC) and the Institute of Research of Civic Cultivation (IRCC) were merged briefly in 1986, a National Center of Civic Cultivation and Civic Cultivation Information Center was made. The former was turned into the Hungarian Institute of Civic Cultivation HICC in 1992, while latter was privatized into the Civic Cultivation Information Company. The transformation was also utilized to purge the Institute of left-leaning intellectuals. (<http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/hatra-harc> last accessed: 24.03.2023.)

cultural policy. The image of the empty house of culture is integral part of intellectual and popular imaginations outside the profession of civic cultivation. However, the house of culture is empty only if one looks at it from afar. Its perceived emptiness hides the staff's and local elites' struggles around it to reproduce themselves and the place simultaneously.

The capitalist integration of Central-Eastern Europe brought about the privatization of land and state-run enterprises, the dominance of monetarism, the promise of democracy, and the ideology of civil society-driven politics and policy. As argued in the previous chapter, the post-socialist transition was initiated prior to 1990 through a series of economic reforms facilitated by Hungary's growing indebtedness. The power of management and reform economists in state firms rose in the 1980s (Böröcz 1992; 1999). Managers managed deficits by placing their more valuable assets in the hands of semiprivate legal entities that provided managerial and financial flexibility in a time when the mammoth state's organizations were under increasing debt pressure (Stark 1996). The forces that would govern the transformation in the post-socialist period were already in place in the 1980s. On one side were the managers, the economists, younger members of the Party, urban intellectuals, as well as international lenders; on the other side, emerging propertied classes worried about international influence sided with unions (Gagyi and Geröcs 2022, 39–40). The state supported capitalist integration via transformed class politics (Geröcs 2021). In the post-1990 period, public policies fostered accumulation while also policing popular discontent with unprecedented unemployment rates and poverty (Scheiring, Irdam, and King 2019; Scheiring et al. 2023).

The 1990s were contentious. Alternative imaginations of culture and citizenship kept flourishing. General trends were confirmed in matters of cultural policy, nonetheless. I will grasp these features through the notion of “liberal hegemony”. Luca Kristóf (Kristóf 2021) claims that post-socialist cultural policies were dominated by an imperative of *cultural diffusionism*, whereby cultural institutions were to disseminate various cultural goods and

services. While Kristóf writes about cultural practices usually associated with art and situated at the *autonomous* poles of their fields (Bourdieu 1983, 333), *diffusionism* also defined more utilitarian and consumer-driven cultural fields. *Diffusionism* was coupled in governance with *democratic elitism*—a system where a few professionals were in a position to direct public funding toward select events and cultural goods. This setup was “democratic” in the sense that the cultural committee’s proposals were submitted to parliamentary debate; and yet also “elitist” in so far as it was dominated by individuals qualifying as “professionals”. (Kristóf 2021)

What does “liberal hegemony” mean in this context? One cannot speak of a coherent, deliberate implementation and understanding of liberal cultural policy—for example a market-based understanding of cultural production was never fully implemented²⁸ and put into practice. But at least three, interdependent axioms distinctly guide representations and endeavors in matters of cultural policy through the period: 1. the market should rule the world of cultural goods, where everyone can choose according to their interest, 2. Civic capacity and cultural activities support each other, and 3. Instead of unconditional state support, the activities and groups should compete for funding.

3.3.1. Civil society and civic associations

This chapter’s epigraph tells that the making of post-socialist “civil society” was a project of social engineering. Paradoxically, the normatively defined “democratic habitus” had to be fostered independently from the will of the *demos*. While these developmentalist views dominated discourses, they didn’t play out that seamlessly in real life. In the first two years cultural educators faced a dire lack of funding and, in some cases, had to struggle to survive. This is still often interpreted as “the civic capacity did not grow out to maintain the house of

²⁸ In the analysis of CSR funding Éva Kuti claims that the corporations on the lower level of the value chain are less likely to fund cultural events as they cannot target their consumers through that (Kuti 2010).

culture, but state funding was not anymore there.”²⁹ Despite these circumstances’ educators negotiated a place for themselves locally and in certain places the emerging propertied class also started to participate in the making of associations. The educators’ faith in the house of culture remained, but they had to figure out how to help it perform its function. State actors engaged with the house of culture system saw it as a tool for enlightenment, and for the development of self and community.

HoCs dealt with diverse publics in the socialist period: workers in the firms, or peasants in rural houses of culture while, to some extent, also teaching them bourgeois cultural forms. Post-socialist civil society further diversified, precipitating the disintegration of “civic cultivation” as a homogeneous or consistent process. The worker-based houses of culture declined together with the unions that operated them and with the funding that became insufficient. Folk culture became ideologically more conservative and, after 2002, the conservative Fidesz party made conscious efforts to integrate it in its repertoire of political mobilization (Greskovits 2020, 251). However, folklore-related leisure time activities and associations brought in and still mobilize various strata of people. Thus, it would be a significant exaggeration to say these attempts succeeded. In post-socialist civic cultivation, civil society was a norm associated with the bourgeois ideal of citizenship. It was a symbolic location where truth and virtue combined in an authentic life. Such was the civilizing mission of post-socialist elites (Eyal, Townsley, and Szelényi 1998, 102–3). Consequently, the creation of these kinds of subjects was possible either through “teaching them self-governance” or abandoning the HoC altogether as a state institution, since it is too autocratic thus local associations could govern themselves.

Paradoxically while the house of culture system made it possible for civic associations to quickly proliferate at first, civil society-based civic cultivation meant an attempt to reduce the

²⁹ Correspondence with an educator 16.03.2023.

number of educators and scale back the state organized activities. In certain places some the well-to-do groups could organize their leisure time activities and later represent the interest of their enterprises; however, it was far from a general tendency. Moreover, domestic development of organization of association in line with their interest did not necessarily resonate with the top-down endeavors of creating civil society (Halmai 2011). That means that one would find circles from this time that would propagate radical right-wing ideas, question the scientific accuracy of academic institutions based on anti-semitic views, or just be used to raise political capital.

Besides the organic developments of different civic associations growing out from the initiatives of the 1980s' reforms, establishing associations and building civic institutions of self-determination separate from the workplace and institutional politics was the standard of liberal project of the development of the people. Nevertheless, civil society was not only an ideological construct (Praznik 2021, 101) used only by intellectuals. It was also a material reality of reconstruction of funding of associational life which also allowed to build up vertically integrated alliances of competing elite blocs.

3.3.2 Elite blocs in transition

Erased by their “dissident” identity under socialism, divergences, that were rooted in their different interest resurfaced swiftly after the transition. Sociology focused on post-socialist transitions has had a close look at the clienteles associated with conservative and liberal blocs (Eyal, Townsley, and Szelényi 1998, 93; Szalai 2001; Melegh 2006). Looking at strategies of accumulation of capital through different forms of world-systemic integration, based on Ágnes Gagyi's formulation, I would call them anti-democratic populist and democratic anti-populist blocs. (Gagyi 2014; 2016). Different views of capitalist integration associated with distinct sociological trajectories, conditioned different strategies in accumulating different forms of capital (Szelényi and King 2004, xxxii) and different ideological alignments. Anti-democratic

populism for example meant supporting the consolidation of a national middle-class and domestic capital, while embracing a conservative ideology relying on the “people” for legitimation. Democratic anti-populism consisted in a developmentalist project welcoming international capital, legitimized through future, projected welfare and a civilizing mission to spread democracy and civil society from above. Both blocs were integrated projects with allies among capital-holders and other cultural elites. As to workers, they were systematically excluded from debates and negotiations about the transition (Szalai 1994).

These groups organized into parties, the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) and Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz), the conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), and the successor of the Hungarian Socialist Worker Party, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), all had different theories of civil society and citizenship. Concerning civic cultivation, their positions oscillated between a public pole in favor of state funding on the one hand, and the primacy of “spontaneous” forces that shape cultural activities through civic associations on the other. Educators were themselves bifurcated between liberal-conservative and socialist leanings and organized through a trade union and other representative organizations with corresponding ideologies and theories of post-socialist civic cultivation.

Elite blocs in the field of cultural policy also set up parallel institutional systems which propagated different aesthetic forms and interpretations of the nation’s history and citizenship (Barna et al. 2019; Huth 2022; Nagy 2022). In the field of civic cultivation, we can see two opposing views about the place of civic cultivation in the post-socialist capitalist state an etatist and an anti-etatist. Liberals (SZDSZ) and conservatives (MDF) stood behind the latter, supporting privatized, for-profit versions of the infrastructure. Both were profiting from it through setting up loyal associations and foundations in their hegemonic projects and diverged among themselves in their imagination of civil society. For liberals it was based in human rights

and the social contract. For conservatives it rested instead on the “natural” [ethno-linguistic] community of the nation (Eyal, Townsley, and Szelényi 1998, 94).

The main educators’ union and other professional associations worked to maintain the infrastructure afloat and support employees in their roles. This position received most support from the MSZP. In practice however, professional organizations helped propagate moderate privatization programs and supported the participation of associations in the operation of houses of culture. Spokespersons for the profession emerged successfully to negotiate transformations of state institutions and its employees with the governments using the politically active, educated, and informed, locally embedded employees of houses of culture who impacted the formation of local associations. Still, the number of educators was primarily used as leverage as the negotiations were done by middle management.

Changes in economic and social policies in times of hegemonic shifts can happen swiftly, claimed Nicos Poulantzas. The field of culture, however, is slower to move as it is less directly connected to the struggles of factions of capital and the coalitions of experts “With the ideological apparatuses, things are different. These are the apparatuses best able to concentrate on themselves the power of nonhegemonic classes and fractions. They are, therefore, both the favored ‘refuge’ of such classes and fractions and their favored spoils.” (Poulantzas 1979, 308). Ideological state apparatuses have more autonomy from policies and politics that are directly related to the organization of relations of production. When we scrutinize the concepts in civic cultivation, we see the persistence of the professional image of educators in the house of culture on the ideal institutional formation and function despite all the transformations. Moreover, intellectuals who occupied a prominent role in the life of towns and villages as employees of the houses of culture claimed a place for themselves in the transformation despite their declining significance and the representation of employees was also part of the debates on the transformations of the houses of culture.

Prior to the transition, several oppositional actors could find employment opportunities at the Institute of Civic Cultivation or the Institute for Research on Civic Cultivation³⁰ and their meetings and places of socialization very much happened in the system of clubs and houses of culture. The founders of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) include many educators. The party also had a program on the infrastructure prior to 1990³¹. The members had roots among the rural landed peasants or aristocrats; their oppositional politics were also concentrated around the description and representation of the countryside. According to them, the house of culture should have been reintegrated into the nation-building project of the inter-war period (Köpf 2003, 193). Similarly, politicians of the socialist party were active in the house of culture system before the transition through unions or other socialist institutions. Thus, they also used field-based knowledge in the debates around the future of the house of culture. Consequently, debates were informed by technocratic and ethnographic knowledge alike beyond the set position of political interest.

3.4. Decentralization, informality, and civic associations

Houses of culture before the transition was run by different entities, local councils, the National Council of Unions, and individual firms. The Party also had houses of culture, together with the Alliance of Communist Youth and the Patriotic People's Front, but they operated independently from the national governance of civic cultivation. After the transition, the union and firm-owned houses were planned to be privatized with the companies, offered to the municipalities. The main supports of civic cultivation were now found at the local level, especially among municipalities. To understand how council-owned (municipal) houses of

³⁰ Members of all the post-socialist parties worked on different projects in the Institute. This protective environment was recalled at a memorial meeting after the death of Iván Vitányi 30.09.2021.

³¹ Founding members of the party like Sándor Lezsák was the head of the house of culture in Lakitelek, and Zoltán Bíró was the Head of the Department of Civic Cultivation in the Ministry of Culture between 1974-1980.

culture transformed during and after the transition, it is essential to review the municipal decentralization that was enacted through the municipal law of 1990.

“Democratization” was often translated in 1990s post-socialist states into an imperative to decentralize the state apparatus (i.e., a transfer of capacities local administrations and governments), and to boost civic engagement at the local level. According to my informants, the process started in the 1980s continued and intensified. The decentralization of tasks was coupled with a lack of funding despite the decentralized decision-making capability. András Vígvári (Vígvári 2008) calls this decentralization without subsidiarity. Civic cultivation became a local capacity together with primary education among others. The associations established around the houses mostly represented the tastes and interests of local middle-classes or of specific interest groups brought together by occupation, age, common interests, illness, etc. In small villages where such groups tended not to organize by themselves, houses of culture either became empty, or were rented for income, or were transformed into day-care or after-school programs for impoverished children or turned into provider of other type of social services. Most of the time, these three outcomes all resulted at once. The municipality law which Kovalcsik was asked to write about in the anecdote that opened this chapter distinguished between “compulsory” vs. “voluntary” duties befalling local governments. Civic cultivation was a voluntary duty. Maintaining the physical space of the houses of culture was the compulsory part. Transfer of central state funding barely covered the municipalities’ compulsory tasks.

Central state contributions typically included employment of staff, at least for town-size municipalities. For smaller villages, employing educators or investing in programs was usually beyond the budget. We will see how educators in Salgótarján coped with financial scarcity, and how disinvestment in Mezőkövesd contributed to the emergence of private, market-oriented cultural associations. For now, it is enough to say that decentralization made civic cultivation

optional for smaller settlements and the chronically underfunded municipalities chose to spare themselves the expenses of civic cultivation when they could. As economist Vígvári pointed out, the shift from the obligation to maintain institutions to the obligation to perform tasks, coupled with the availability of alternative legal frameworks (such as not-for-profit models) to the municipal house of culture, forced the municipalities to become more entrepreneurial (Vígvári 2008, 146). In Salgótarján for example, a member of council projected to open a car show in the house of culture with a modernist glass façade. In a similar vein, the Mezőkövesd council let the parts of the HoC to a pub owner.

So far in the hand of councils for both operating and program expenses, houses of culture in small settlements were only guaranteed budget for their basic operating costs³². Educational programs, shows, performances, or clubs (the “tasks” in legal language) were contingent upon local actors and synergies. If the houses of culture were not technically privatized, contents and activities now depended overwhelmingly on the good will of a “skeleton” staff whom residents often blamed, together with the socialist system with which commonsense associated them, for the paralysis. This common narrative further demotivated employees already aggravated by the daily spectacle of their empty houses of culture and the local civil society, or active citizens take up their responsibilities. This all, in turn came to reinforce the liberal creed that imagined civic associations as the ideal policy framework for culture after socialism.

The current head of the National Institute for Civic Cultivation (NICC) Magdolna Závogyán, who was born and raised in Kondoros, a small village in East-South Hungary, described the process in the following way:

"I was standing there at the age of 16-17, the house of culture closed, and they did not let us in the library because we were too loud, so we started a village beautifying association. We started to organize

³² Striker, Sándor. 07.07.2021. Interview by the author.

events, like corn days (as a professional of the field, I would call it culture-based economic development now). We invited producers to speak about technologies of agricultural production or make popcorn. At that age, I did not even comprehend what we were doing. When I turned twenty, the possibility of funding came up, and we grew rapidly. The village was in a bad state so we worked on it every Wednesday. There were jurists, a judge, the notary in the association, but irrespectively from their social position, everyone wanted to do something for the village.”³³

The regional methodological support in the meantime, the mid-level of governance remained without tasks. According to one professional³⁴ this scale of civic cultivation, which was responsible for the implementation of national policies locally and the flow of information, became dysfunctional because the municipality decentralization of 1990 transferred all capacities to the municipal level. Counties had no mandatory role in civic cultivation. Many educators claimed that the informal information flow was reproducing the profession. More “seasoned” practitioners were informing the new employees or newly appointed leaders of different institutions in the HoC. In the meantime, university training for civic cultivation professionals was under reconstruction (T. Kiss 2000; T. Kiss and Tibori 2013; Juhász 2016). Professional training for civic educators focused on program organizing and adult education. All these redefinitions and the uncertainties they generated caused feelings of abandonment and uncertainty. Local houses of culture were still operating, but their programs and activities became more contingent on local politics. Civic cultivation survived this early period partly because of voluntary practices that mobilized social capital accumulated prior to the transition.

Educators’ work thus reproduced the state, but state actors were barely able to define their function any longer (Mitchell 1991; Kowalski 2007). Informality defined the post-socialist state (Böröcz 2000; Wedel 2001; Haney 2002; Dunn 2004; Sneath 2006; Junghans 2007; Humphrey

³³ Závogyán, Magdolna. 15.04.2021. Interview by the author

³⁴ Anonymous educator 18.05.2021. Interview by the author

2012), and so it did civic cultivation too. Knowledge transfer happened informally through ad hoc professional self-help. Resilient professionals persisted in defining and practicing civic cultivation as a service to the community and as decommodified cultural labor. They still saw their action as public service. These ethics and forms of knowledge of civic cultivation shows similarities with anti-religious education in the Soviet Union as analyzed by Sonja Luehrman (2011). According to Luehrman, professional practice remains relatively constant over time, adapting to the needs of users in a new regime. In the Russian case, anti-religious campaigners and educators became union activists, preaching for new churches and beliefs. In the case of Hungarian civic cultivation, house of culture educators put their skills developing community and socialist citizens in the service of a liberal project.

3.5. Changing patterns of funding

In additional to the municipalization of cultural action, other institutional changes were implemented at other policy scales. The Ministry of Education and Civic Cultivation started a grant-based funding system in 1991 and renewed it in 1992. The idea was two-fold. First, HoCs and programs needed funding, but supporting “projects” gave funders flexibility as termination, not continuation of programs was the default option. Second, activities and the growing civil sector needed funding. Associations could apply in six categories: 1. amateur artist groups and local traditions of civic cultivation; 2. acceleration of civic cultivation activities in poor areas; 3. informational services and new forms of civic cultivation; 4. adult education and extra-curricular educational activities; 5. national and international events in civic cultivation; and 6. training programs for professionals of civic cultivation.

In 1992 with the participation of fifteen amateur associations, the success of the tender was evaluated. The list of the winners implies that mostly local houses of cultures and related associations applied for funding in the first category to substitute for the lack of funding from the municipality. From Mezőkövesd, the local house of culture and the association for Matyó

culture, while in Salgótarján the József Attila Center of Civic Cultivation and Smelter House of Culture Association were the main winners.³⁵ From 1993 the Foundation of Art and Free Civic Cultivation (FAFCC, *Magyar Művészeti és Szabadművelődési Alapítvány*)³⁶ got the right to process the tender. FAFCC was established by members of the MDF and were supporting their conservative canons and cultural policies.

As one of my informants explained³⁷, within that period, several foundations emerged which got properties and funding during privatization. According to his understanding, that was an endeavor from the side of the competing blocs to raise their funding and support the cultural associations aligned with them. It was put more directly by Iván Vitányi, according to a recurring anecdote from Salgótarján. When he was asked by some local socialists just after 1990, “why we let these people (other parties, technocrats, entrepreneurs) dismantle the socialist state,” he would answer that “these are different times; we have to build up our power again in civil society.” While the anecdote does not give justice to his work on the topic as public intellectual, since he also propagated the idea of civic association as place of democratization of civic cultivation, this struggle for power ultimately utilized the newly emerging associational life.

This outsourcing of the decision of the grant to FAFCC met the obstruction of liberal politicians since the competing faction would have got the means to fund their initiatives, yet the Ministry, in the end, asked the foundation to appoint curatorial members for board on distributing the grant. Establishing the tender and playing out it to a non-state-owned foundation can be interpreted as a result of two complementing processes. First, the decentralization of funding was embedded in the efforts of liberal transformation. On the ideological level, this

³⁵ Zolnay, János. 1993. Foratókönyv: A Művészeti és Szabadművelődési Alapítvány – a tiszta kultúráért. *Beszélő* 4 (14): 5-6.

³⁶ The association was aligned with the MDF and the post-socialist conservatives.

³⁷ Striker, Sándor. 07.07.2021. Interview by the author.

early endeavor of liberalizing funding by channeling it into tasks was celebrated. From the side of the people running the tender, it was considered proof that civic cultivation within and outside the houses of culture “lives and wants to live.”³⁸ However, from a budgetary perspective, the tender was rooted in recognizing that the infrastructure was in crisis. Second, with the overtaking the tender by the FAFCC, this funding got embedded in a conservative civil society under construction by the MDF. Consequently, while the efforts of decentralization were imagined that they would lessen ideological control on cultural production, it provided the opportunity to integrate funding into the competing elite blocs’ civil society.

Later in 1993, the National Cultural Fund (NCF) was established on the arms-length model of the National Endowments of Arts of the US and the Arts Council of the UK. In this model, the funding was supposed to be drawn first and primarily from private sources, which the state would complement through matching grants, letting independent professionals make substantive decisions about funds allocation. A College of Civic Cultivation was created within the NCF: the tender-like, targeted support of civic cultivation was thus normalized.³⁹ At a time when different fractions of the dominant classes struggled to impose their institutions, the NCF provided crucial support for the elite to establish its new infrastructure of cultural production. It provided an operational framework for cultural producers and other professionals to interact. It produced a public image of a balanced cultural landscape where every actor, no matter their politics, could be supported and strive. The reality was that liberals and conservatives, from the heights of their ruling positions, had built up and used these institutions to strengthen their loyal intelligentsias nationally and locally.

³⁸ Közművelődési pályázat: nyertesek listája. 1992. Budapest, MKM Közművelődési Főosztály.

³⁹ Zádori, Zsolt. 2003. “Az alapötlettől az alapprogramig.” *Beszélő* 8(4): 46-58.

3.6. Union- and firm-based civic cultivation

A different process played out in workplace-based civic cultivation. The new capitalist firms of the liberal era did not organize cultural events any longer through houses of culture. Events were more directly instrumental in the reproduction of the labor force, and often took the form of “group development” and other exercises meant to develop skills and loyalty to the company and the group (Czirfusz et al. 2019; Scheiring 2020; Bartha and Tóth 2021). Privatization of the houses of cultures once owned by socialist firms was affected by selling them together with the latter. In some cases, such as the house of culture of Videoton in Székesfehérvár or the Miner House of Culture in Dorog, municipalities could take over a firm’s house of culture. Houses built by trade unions in the late 19th, and early 20th century, such as the Csili House of Culture in Pesterzsébet, Budapest, ended up in the hands of the municipalities too (Slézia 2005; 2014).

Joe Grim Feinberg once cast the disappearance of labor-related culture and civic cultivation from the discourses of the public sphere as a symbolic exclusion of the proletariat from civil society (Feinberg 2013, 20)⁴⁰. This erasure is also conspicuous in policy debates about civic cultivation, from which trade union-based arguments and concerns are systematically sidelined. In the debates on the 1997 law this manifested in discussions about the trade unions’ as their greediness, child-like behavior is against the general interest of the society in creating a democratic culture. The decline of trade union membership on the one hand, and the privileging, in the reallocation of public properties, of trade unions that aligned politically with one or the other “democratic” parties of the post-socialist era, fragmented the infrastructure of labor-related cultural production and consumption.

⁴⁰ One of the counter-examples was the Worker Academy Foundation, established by former prime minister András Hegedűs from his pension in 1991. The Academy organized a four-semester-long program with a group of intellectuals that combined practical knowledge with political and social sciences. They established three academies in former industrial centers such as Tatabánya, Székesfehérvár, and Dunaújváros, to educate working people on the ways they can protect their rights in and outside the workplace. It operated until 1999 (Mink 2022).

Union-based communities ran houses of culture and established associations that continued to perform the activities. These groups established an umbrella organization, the Federation of Civic Cultivation Organizations for Unions and Workplace, to handle the privatization and distribution of state property (Vadász 1998). Civic cultivation associations were established to sustain the trade institutions with the help of the state; however, the goal was to give the operating ones to municipalities and sell the ones without an audience or community. The Association survived its transitional, early role and was later renamed Regional Association of Associations for Civic Cultivation (RAACC; *Területi Művelődési Intézmények Egyesülete*) in a move that erased the stigma attached to “trade unions” and its connotations. The association was funded by the Ministry of Culture and re-distributed some of its subsidies among member-associations. This income could also be complemented either with municipal subsidies or tender-like grants.

In former industrial towns where industrial heritage became the focus of local associations, municipalities and unions’ cultural associations started cooperating. For example, in Tatabánya, the Miner House of Culture hosts the annual meeting of miners’ and steel workers’ choirs. The number of associations, however, is constantly decreasing.⁴¹ Members of former trade unions cultural associations age and die. In addition, many of my interviewees complain about the scarcity of funding. Expenses absorb the entirety of the small income, which makes any measure of growth impossible. RAACC are not interested in growth since the the sum of state support did not significantly change in the last thirty years; thus new member organizations would further fragment this little funding⁴².

⁴¹ Aninymous educator 29.10. 2021. Interview by the author

⁴² Aninymous educator 26.06. 2021. Interview by the author

3.7. UWCCPM and the struggle for jobs

During this period, educators struggled for the stability of their employment, which also meant they helped remake the institutions they were working in. The first law which clarified the status of local civic cultivation, and the employees was 1997 CXL. It resulted from negotiations between the state administration of culture, the liberal, socialist, and conservative parties, the Union of Workers of Civic Cultivation and Public Museums (UWCCPM; *Közgyűjteményi és Közművelődési Dolgozók Szakszervezete; KKDSZ*), the Association of Hungarian Public Educators (AHPE; *Magyar Népművelők Egyesülete; MNE*), and the field of library and public museums.

One of the main protagonists of this story was János Vadász, head of the UWCCPM, educator, and librarian since 1969. This trade union was born out of a split in the union of civil servants. It was established in 1988 to represent the specific needs of state-employed cultural workers. Vadász was among the actors who initiated the split and was elected head of UWCCPM on the first assembly. In debates about civic cultivation, Vadász was what Bourdieu called a *spokesperson*. (Bourdieu 1991, 211) He had acquired capital through representation, and through that, he created a representative organization. As typical in the post-socialist history of unions, UWCCPM depended heavily on his lobbying power. Because of his close connection to the Hungarian Socialist Party, the union had moderate success in wage negotiations up until the mid 2000s.

According to the Ministry, the elaboration of law 1997 CXL had started in 1990 when the state collected complaints, problems, suggestions, and demands from the side of the profession of civic cultivation (Kovács, Kovalcsik, and Kováts 1992). The 1991-1992 tender delayed

progress as an immanent solution for the early problems of civic cultivation.⁴³ The conflict that accelerated the drafting of the law was the introduction of the austerity package or “Bokros-package” in 1995. The fiscal reforms of the Socialist – Liberal coalition aimed to freeze the government deficit decreasing demand and, on a macroeconomic level, to meet the demands of the IMF concerning Hungary’s fiscal deficit. These measures completed the process, started in the 1960s, of Hungary’s reintegration in the capitalist world-system in the semi-peripheral region (Szalai 2001; Éber et al. 2014). The Hungarian Forint was devalued. Public universities introduced tuition fees. Free services in the field of healthcare started decreasing. 1995 thus saw a series of large-scale demonstrations in September the university students. In November the healthcare workers, and the educators together with the teachers demanded 25% rise and normalization of the operation of cultural and educational institutions.

The “Bokros-package” froze the house of culture employees’ (and other civil servants’) salaries, adding educators’ discontent to the already visible unrest among students. Vadász stroke a deal with Minister of finance Lajos Bokros: the wage freeze would end within three years, by 1998, and the legal status of civic cultivation, and beyond of the institutions of culture would be consolidated⁴⁴. The Ministry promised that the main problems concerning archives, public museums, and houses of culture would be solved, including that of missing regional administrations and of unclear responsibilities for local house of culture functioning. The governmental subsidy of the cultural sector, which had increased relative to the GDP between 1990 and 1994, decreased significantly following the “Bokros-package” (Tóth 2013). Bokros

⁴³ Sándor Striker got appointed as Director of the Department of Civic Cultivation (MKM) during the socialist-liberal government of 1994-1998. He was mandated to work out the law as Acting Director of the Department of Civic Cultivation of MKM, which stood unfinished by the government change. According to his narrative, he was asked to stop the process of the preparation of the law by the minister of MKM and should have worked on the privatization of the house of culture infrastructure (Striker 2017).

⁴⁴ Vadász, János. 05.08.2020. Interview by the author.

also promised to raise again its share of the state budget after the cutbacks consolidate the economy.

In July 1997 after more than a year of correspondence and preliminary discussions, the actual drafting started within a committee of experts headed by Iván Vitányi, a Vadász ally. All the debates and the corrective suggestions happened within the committee, leaving for the parliament to approve or reject the final text. The process was accelerated under the pressure of mobilized organizations of museum workers, houses of culture employees, and archivists. The latter handed the Ministry a petition signed by 40 000 professionals demanding to clarify the duties of state and municipalities providing basic cultural services and guaranteeing the maintenance of the infrastructure required to make access to cultural institutions equal for all citizens. They asked for the necessary direct funding to sustain the institutions and called for decent salaries for houses of culture, archives, and museum employees, and correct work conditions (Vadász 1998, 31).

The transcript of debates in the committee shows evidence of an antagonistic process. Liberals wanted civic cultivation to be independent from state intervention and pursued by voluntary associations instead. Moreover, despite the agreement, the process of law-making was obstructed by several actors. Discussions happened in a corporatist framework: politicians and the representatives of the professions equally participated. Local educators also played a crucial role. “My husband was calling me during the night and dictating the text of the law to see if I approved,”⁴⁵ remembers the head of the house of culture in Dabas. Her husband was at the time an official in the Cultural Ministry, checking with field-level educators’ reactions before proceeding to further negotiations. Information from the local level was thus integrated into the committee’s discussions which referenced working conditions and actual informal

⁴⁵ Tapodi, Katalin. 09.06.2021. Interview by the author.

practices. As the operation of the houses was barely known by the decision-makers in the debate that knowledge as a form of capital was a decisive factor, systematically mobilized by actors of MSZP and UVCCPM.

Committed to their model of democratic governance of culture based on associations of free citizens, liberals were concerned that the law would overly reflect the interests and standpoint of educators. One of the politicians of SZDSZ once stormed out of the conference room in which discussions were taking place, blaming educators' views for obstructing the modernization of Hungarian cultural policy (Vadász 1998, 312). In the meantime, socialists were siding with educators in preserving the civic cultivation system as much as possible.

As to conservatives, they pushed for an alternative model, the *Volkschule* (*népfőiskola*). They had created an adult education institute in the early years of the transition and hoped to elevate it to the rank of publicly funded associations. Issues of labor and cultural policy constantly collided throughout the committee's discussions (Vadász 1998, 388). One of the hot button issues for example bore on possible alternatives to the houses of culture where they did not exist. Fearing that this alternative would be generalized and lead to massive privatizations of existing houses, UWCCPM representatives argued for a restriction of the applicability of this statute. The compromise came in the end, that the municipalities could establish civic-based places of civic cultivation. However, they barely outsourced since the funding and the demand to employ professionals maintained the function of the house of culture as the place of civic cultivation.

As this analysis makes it apparent, educators defended their position through a defense of houses of culture as a public operation and of their status as its dedicated civil servants. Politicians could not entirely dismiss these actors who held significant amounts of cultural capital and were seasoned professionals of organization with solid skills and experience mobilizing their own and the communities around them. The house of culture, an institution

that post-socialist, managerial capitalism had no reason to maintain, effectively resisted regime change largely due to the accumulated skills and capital of this surplus population of intellectuals trained before 1990. They succeeded in reproducing the conditions of their own reproduction by exerting significant political pressure through a corporatist union.

3.8. Ideology: Civic or institutional?

As we saw, anti-etatist and pro-institution forces reached a compromise through the law. First, the law obligated counties to harbor methodological centers to support local houses of culture with research and programs. Second, support to the latter was compulsory but with provisions that permitted municipalities with alternatives like foundations, non-profit corporations and associations to run HoCs. The law, in addition, prescribed the adequate educational background qualifying houses of culture staff for their job. Finally, it secured targeted unconditional state support toward the maintenance and basic operations of HoCs. The law was the basis on which civic cultivation was later consolidated through further cultural policy reform.

The question of HoCs' dependence on the everyday operation of the state, however, remained controversial and contested. The conflict was sharply reflected in different approaches under two directors' operation of the Hungarian Institute of Civic Cultivation (HICC): András Földiák (1996-2001), and Pál Beke (2001-2006). While they themselves did not have open debate about the house of culture system, the processes unfolding under them differed.

András Földiák started his career as an educator in several houses of culture in Budapest and the Pest County. He became the head of the Association of Hungarian Educators, and directed a house of culture in downtown Budapest after 1989, in which function he hosted the post-socialist, Budapest alternative music scene. Under him, HICC tried re-institutionalizing civic cultivation by establishing research, education, and professional periodicals. Compared to

the elite bloc-dominated politics in which civic cultivation was only instrumentalized while the work was done on the field, this period can be interpreted as a struggle over the field and the rules of the field.

According to Földiák, civic cultivation as a profession was too dependent on local politics after the transition. To counter that dependence, the mores, methodologies, and legitimate knowledge of the institutional organization of cultural mediation should have been strengthened. The civic cultivation organizer departments, coupled with the secondary school teachers, were the main places of education for professionals in the field. In some towns (Debrecen and Pécs), these tracks could be studied at the university level, but in other places, only at the college level. He commented in the following way, “adult education tried to appropriate civic cultivation, claiming that it is a socialist residual. As part of the Bologna adaptation, the socialists wanted it to be diminished. It meant that andragogy dominated education in the following ten years. Education of civic cultivation professionals did not exist for that period. From our side, accepting that was a tactical decision since we wanted to keep the institutional structure [...] the same people were teaching it though and still (in 2020) the same people were running these departments which are now called community organizers.”⁴⁶.

Andragogy focused on integrating adults into the labor market, on human resource management, and on the organization of leisure in and outside the workplace. People trained in these departments could also get jobs in human relations offices and specialize in team building in multinational companies for much higher salaries than those offered in houses of culture. As a form of knowledge production, andragogy was the successor of civic cultivation in that it

⁴⁶ Civic cultivation education based on andragogy adapted to the bologna system was changed to community building after 2010. Although the Durkó-school in the Szeged University already started to operate according to the principles of andragogy. (T. Kiss and Tibori 2013)

provided organic intellectuals for the productive capacities imported into post-socialist Hungary.

Since the focus shifted from culture to labor happened in education, HICC tried also to fill the gaps in organizational practice. They focused more on folk festivals, international, regional, and local alike, and strengthened the cultural aspect of their activities by putting more emphasis on folklore generally⁴⁷. Adult education-based andragogy was problematic from a “traditional understanding of civic cultivation” perspective, since it lacked the cultural perspective of the profession, like organizing amateur groups and other forms of leisure. The creation of funding for village festivals and a heightened focus on folklore in this period fitted into the HICC’s endeavors to fill the gaps adult education did not cover.

By contrast with Földiák, Pál Beke tried to center on open civic cultivation as a policy principle of organizing activities in the houses of culture. We met Beke in the previous chapter as a reformer of houses of culture in the late-socialist period. His appointment as the head of HICC enabled him to further experiment with association-based civic cultivation (P. Beke 2001). Under the title “From Civic Cultivation to Open Civic Cultivation” his program advocated for establishing a network of free civic cultivation committees, following the model which he, József Kovalcsik, and other practitioners considered the only democratic model for civic cultivation in modern Hungarian history. In this model, parties, unions, associations, and municipalities formed committees in every locality. Those would control local activities of civic cultivation pluralistically. These socialized institutions were meant to control “hegemonic activities of different social institutions” (P. Beke 2003), ensuring that civic cultivation is not used by political groups. For Beke the village was the basic unit of community life and the place where culture may be mobilized for economic development. (P. Beke 1998, 337).

⁴⁷ Földiák, András. 29.09.2020. Interview by the author

Following these ideas, open civic cultivation would have meant that there is control over the places of civic cultivation by local institutions, and the profession only supports the democratic practices of them.⁴⁸ They called this model of HoC a “socialized institution”⁴⁹, which refers to a locally governed place. Implementation was attempted when Beke became head of the Hungarian Institute of Civic Cultivation. It would have strengthened the civil or bourgeois aspect of the institutional system. Nonetheless, the effects of these endeavors were highly contingent upon the local activity of cultural associations and the way the municipalities handled the presence of parallelly existing associations of local political parties.

3.9. Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed how the policies related to the infrastructure of civic cultivation transformed between 1989 and 2004. Three main features define the period. First, the houses of culture were left hanging in a liminal situation after the socialist period, with no clear policy regarding their governance and precarious funding prospects until 1997. Second, debates concerning civic cultivation and its integration into post-socialist, capitalist society opposed, as on many other issues, a party of civil society advocating for its radical liberalization, to the pro-institution party advocating for its conservation as a public service. Third, before 1990 we could distinguish three main targets of civic cultivation: the cultivation of labor, peasant or folk culture, and civic or citizen-based culture. In the course of the transition out of state socialism, the third object (the making of citizens) became the primary target; labor-related culture was abandoned; and folk culture gathered new significance after 1998, after also being left in the lurch or stagnation.

⁴⁸ They established several institutions promoting community development: the Association of Community Developers was a professional support institution. It had a journal titled *Parola*, a radio titled *Civil radio*, Foundation for Networks of Communities, which facilitated knowledge sharing, and the Civil College Foundation, which helped the education of locally embedded civic activists.

⁴⁹ In a detailed way through actual cases, it is described through *Budafok, Hajdúnánás, and Törökszentmiklós* (P. Beke 2010).

Born from negotiations between unions, professional associations, and political factions, the law 1997 XCL cemented the role of civic cultivation in the post-socialist, capitalist state. While civic cultivation was always conceived through a variety of forms and missions, debates generated by the law put in bold relief the ideological clash between supporters of the institution and supporters of the new “civil society” hegemony. The introduction of tenders and the undefined nature of municipality funding coupled with the decentralization of governance put extra burden on local administrations and non-governmental organizations. By mobilizing in defense of their occupational and class interests through corporatist strategies, educators largely shaped the new institutional system as it emerged from these debates and was embodied in the law of 1997. While it entrenched their status and consolidated the house of culture system inherited from the late socialist period, the reform still left them and the institution with unstable support from municipalities and the state.

I argued that elite blocs imagined civil society as it was capable of substituting the function of civic cultivation. From the perspective of the conservatives, that meant a reestablishment of the inter-war system of associations that was interrupted by an “arbitrary” development of the socialist institutional system. From the liberal viewpoint, civic cultivation as an activity threatened the autonomy of cultural production. UVCCPM and the socialist party that sided with the profession tried to keep the institutional system the leading player in the production and dissemination of culture. They wanted to integrate local associations into the houses of culture but only as communities that educators support. That would have kept the staff as the primary provider of programs.

All three groups, liberal’s, conservative’s and the employees and their allies’ tried to strengthen its position by making and supporting loyal institutions. Civil society, in the end, became integrated into the understanding of civic cultivation as a developmentalist idea. Establishing civic associations all over the country was a specific vision of modernization that

should be done through the localized form of civil society that controls cultural production. This vision dominated the profession also after the EU accession and symbolically had a central role in the post-2010 transformation. However, the house of culture system did not become such an integral part management of labor and citizenship as before 1990.

3. Managing scales of civic cultivation: transformations of civic cultivation after 2004

“Effective defense of capitalism at this stage therefore requires a philosophy that not only does not deny the discordant character of bourgeois society but, on the contrary, proceeds from it, but which interprets this discord in a way that leads to affirmation of the capitalist world in its most reactionary form.” (Lukács 1943: 22⁵⁰)

In 2020 the new building of the National Institute of Civic Cultivation (NICC; *Nemzeti Művelődési Intézet*) was opened in Lakitelek. Old oppositional educators narrated the move of the central institution of civic cultivation in different ways. Some would say cultural policy was not in sight in the move since it was pure corruption lobbied by the Speaker of the House, Sándor Lezsák, who has been connected to the Eastern Hungarian town Lakitelek since 1969. Others branded it as insanity since no one would commute from Budapest to that place. Some pointed out the ideological confusion of the architecture of the building which is a neoclassicist mansion with Christian, mythological, folkloristic, and astrological elements. Interpretations that brand policies are irrational or corrupt are common even among social scientists when speaking about the emerging conservative or fascist regimes of Eastern Europe. Yet, I would argue, alongside the epigraph of this chapter: the post-2010 transformation of the state and civic cultivation tells the story of the way contradictions are used and incorporated into an effective hegemonic process.

I showed in the previous chapter that the post-socialist transformation of civic cultivation was dominated by labor disputes and competition between different elite blocs to utilize the spaces of the house of culture. Compared to these renegotiations, civic cultivation was redefined

⁵⁰ English translation: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/nietzsche/ch04.htm> (last accessed: 31.03.2023.)

through a series of centralized processes after 2004. One of the recurring interpretations of changes during my interviews was that “instead of an autonomous, professional understanding of the tasks of civic cultivation, we are just interpreting laws and decrees.”⁵¹ Namely, the expert understanding which could be observed before 1990 changed into the representation of the interest of educators after the transition and after 2004 transformed again into a more open understanding of the houses of culture. A causal relationship was articulated between forming people and civic cultivation as a state activity. Educators often complain that legalistic speech dominates the program planning and dealing with communities, and they see the administrative burden on the reproduction of the institutional system as overwhelming.

The first part of the chapter observes two major infrastructural development realized following the EU accession in 2004. I tell them as a form of rescaling or scalar restructuring. After joining the EU, the scale of policy decisions and resource management was put the supranational level. Grants were translated and adapted to the local contexts, instrumentalizing professionals’ localized knowledge, but that was an adaptation to the requirements defined in another scale. Following that part, I will look at the policies, ideologies, and informal negotiations around the emergence of the new governing institution of civic cultivation, the National Institute for Civic Cultivation (NICC). Finally, I will inquire how these changes affected the work and everyday life of people employed in the house of culture.

I argue in this chapter that Europeanization of civic cultivation, centering the community building aspect of the profession and ethnonationalist ideologies are present concomitantly. A new understanding of civic cultivation that developed was dependent on the project logic, and EU funds’ spending requirements. While new ideologies around the activities in the house of culture emerged, namely the idealization of a version of national culture that has roots in the

⁵¹ Anonymous educator 09.07. 2021. Interview by the author.

post-socialist right (Molnár 2016), their impact on the everyday operation of the house of culture is negligible.

3.1. Post-EU Accession: administrative restructuring and infrastructural development

In the previous chapter, I claimed that the state function of civic cultivation was maintained on a local scale with little to no funding. I ended the chapter with the argument that from the struggles in the field, the understanding of civic cultivation that defines the activity as “community development” or “culture-assisted community development” emerged as dominant. The 2004 EU accession marks another caesura. The new investments and redefinition of policy competencies transformed the activities in the house of culture in two ways: first, large-scale infrastructural development worked out through the cooperation between several ministries. Second, a further shift towards grant-based funding relied heavily on the habitus and choices of the institutions’ workers or the association they partnered with. The significant redefinition of the field with a new system of governance, new central institution, and ideology was formed after 2010.

In human geography and social sciences, the term scale is used to signify that social processes are played out in different territorial levels and not fixed; but change according to multiplicity of social processes rooted in the contradiction between capital and labor (N. Smith 1992; Brenner 1999; Swyngedouw 1997; 2000; Brenner 2004). Rescaling thus is a process through which decisions regarding resources and concepts of the operation of state institutions are transforming according to multiplicity of interests. Robert Brenner observes the way state rescaling provides increasing power to scales beyond state institutions. He claim that in that period state power diffuses in multiscalar institutional hierarchies (Brenner 2004).

Processes of scaling and rescaling has significant role in the joint production of global and national in cultural policy, and production, for example rescaling in defining heritage “produces new cultural and political territories for a national polity restructured by global transformations” (Kowalski 2012, 308). Alexandra C. Oanca argues in her thesis that inter-urban competition for the status of European Cultural Capital enables the devaluation of cultural labor and the incorporation of informal work. In her case risk is delegated on the city scale, while profit and decision to the supra-national level (Oanca 2017).

Rescaling is not a linear process of territorialization, regionalization, or globalization and a withering away of state but a series of dynamic historical transformations that implies the redefinition of statehood by political and economic actors. Rescaling thus can be a selective form of centralization, the reconcentration of power in a central political institution. In the context of dependent development scalar restructuring would happen by the interplay between the local and international level in which the conditions of transformations are set by the international scale (Gagyí et al. 2021; Jelinek 2021). In their analysis on the gentrification of a Budapest district, Józsefváros Márton Czirfusz et al. distinguish three periods of rescaling: “decentralization without the redistribution of resources in the 1990s, EU accession and Europeanisation of public policies from the 2000s, and recentralization after 2010” (Czirfusz et al. 2015). One can also observe a similar periodization of rescaling of governance of civic cultivation.

EU cohesion funds do not transfer direct subsidies for member states’ cultural production (Evans and Foord 1999; Barnett 2001), but through different development funds thus the landscape of EU funding for culture is generally fragmented across heritage, education, and community art (Pinton and Zagato 2017). Civic cultivation, however, is typically funded under rural economic development, civil society initiatives, or adult education programs, thus benefitting from direct transfers of European money. According to professionals, applications

require creative thinking in navigating different policy fields, bridging them, when possible, through innovative cooperation projects.⁵² That requires negotiation between different policy fields and branches of governance from the side of the policymakers to have an overview of the possible cooperation and parallel running programs. It is a form of context-sensitive knowledge and a value-added way of ordering action. This is allowed by maneuvering in everyday situations and different social contexts for which policy cannot account (Rose & Miller 1992).

After 2004 two large-scale programs happened from European Cohesion Fund, that were channeled through the state. Both infrastructural developments had long term effects on new understandings of civic cultivation. One is the building of Integrated Community Service Places, ICSP (Integrált Közösségi Szolgáltató Terek, IKSZT) 2006-2008, and the other is the Agora program of 2006-2013. The ICSP aimed to develop community centers with integrated social, cultural, and educational functions in small towns and villages. The main goal was to refurbish houses and erect new ones while adapting the program's soft elements to the fund's needs. The Agora program's goal was to establish houses of culture in cities with county-level credentials and connect those to local higher education institutions. In places where universities operated, Agoras would host public lectures, experiments, or other forms of publicly available educational activities.

These two national-scale projects tried to adapt the institution of civic cultivation to the needs of grant-based funding on the EU level. ICSP exemplifies a type of state rescaling (Brenner 2004, 193) in which the local understanding of civic cultivation adapted to the requirements of the funding scheme and policy on a local function is ordered on a supranational scale. However, the subsidy was tailored to the local actors' own interpretation of rural cultural development. The Agora shows the way urban investment is connected to political struggles.

⁵² Závogyán, Magdolna. 15.04. 2021. Interview by the author.

The funds on the new institutions are used in an environment of indebtedness by the Socialist party and compete with Fidesz to reproduce their position in the struggle for power.

3.1.2. ICSP – translation and negotiation around policy competences

In the case of ICSP these divergences between the intention of the EU level and the implementation can be described with the term translation. That is, the reproduction and implementation of state power must make locally informed decisions that modify static and constraining policy elements (Clarke 2005; Stone 2012). It means that rationalization of expectations on different scales produces different implementations than the political or professional intentions; in the case of ICSP that meant that through the writing and rewriting the fund's target, the professionals adapted the program to the goals and context of civic cultivation. The effect of rescaling here is a new function of civic cultivation tied to human resource management and social work in a rural setting. The original rural development initiative did not intend to spend it on the local understanding of the house of culture system. One of the experts who worked out the program recalls the contingency around the infrastructural development.

“there were fifty page documents [...] forty people were proud that it was part of the new rural development program [...] and there is an algorithm of these EU documents, you collect it in fifty pages and then it becomes ten rows and then when you have to elaborate that again maybe the authors of the original fifty pages are there or not and then something is born when the ten rows turned into fifty pages again [...], I do not know what they wanted originally, but we were the ones who wrote the second fifty pages.”⁵³.

The Ministry of Rural Development coordinated the ICSP. But the expertise in developing such function was in other branches of governance. The cultural and community aspects of the

⁵³ Beke, Márton. 26.02.2021. Interview by the author.

program were lobbied to be a shared task of three ministries, Education, Social Affairs, and Youth. However, other branches were protecting their resources. Thus, they did not participate in the integration of these tasks in a rural setting.⁵⁴ The initial plan to combine rural economic development and social and educational element in each building as part of the ICSP program failed. First, regulations on funding each task did not allow multiple functions. Then because of the time difference between the realization of the ICSP program and other functions that wanted to be integrated the multifunctional character of the buildings did not develop. The house of culture system was thus renovated and functionally renewed through a program that aimed to develop community centers that moved beyond the traditional functions of the house of culture.

3.1.2. Agora – politicization of scales and new palaces of culture

The Agora program, which was implemented between 2006-2013, got 23,7 billion forints (94,8 million EUR)⁵⁵ support. It aimed to modernize local houses of culture in cities that have similar rights to counties called independent cities (Békéscsaba, Nyíregyháza, Kaposvár, Szekszárd, Szolnok, Hódmezővásárhely, Tatabány). Agora pólus programs (in Győr, Szeged, Debrecen, Veszprém, Kecskemét, Szombathely) complemented the local higher education with institutions that mediate between the local community and the research and work of the universities in the given cities. These were huge palaces of culture compared to the ICSPs built for the understanding of civic cultivation as support of civil society without intervention: “The Agora [is created] for maintaining cultural services, which develops the local society and the socio-cultural environment of the cities.” (Németh 2013). In terms of architecture, however, from the perspective of the community-based understanding of civic cultivation, which fueled the development of ICSP, the Agora program was a relapse to the pre-1970s understanding of

⁵⁴ Beke, Márton. 26.02.2021. Interview by the author.

⁵⁵ The investment contracts were based on TIOP 1.2.1.

the house of culture, namely the “palace of culture”-like building of the host institutions of the community activities⁵⁶.



Picture 7: Agora in Szombathely (source: <http://szombathelypont.hu/szabadido/kulturalis-intezmenyek/agora-muvelodesi-es-sporthaz.731/> Last Accessed: 30.03.2023.)

Back then, in 2002, it was initiated by the Fidesz government to maintain Agoras, but it was imagined as run by the county municipalities as county civic cultivation centers, 2006 they [the MSZP] changed the program and then only independent cities could apply, and this way they excluded the right-wing county municipalities⁵⁷.

Although there might have been a political intention behind the shift of making the county municipalities non-eligible for the Agora program and providing an opportunity for the independent cities to apply for the funding, the long-term history of the county scale’s public deficit and perceived dysfunctional operation is rooted in the post-socialist history of

⁵⁶ Török, József 18.05.2021. Interview by the author.

⁵⁷ Závogyán, Magdolna. 15.04. 2021., Interview by the author. Of the six cities that participated in the agora program, four were also led by Fidesz, but all the county municipalities were Fidesz led that time. Moreover all of them opened after 2010, most of the Agóra Pólus programs’ places in 2015.

municipality reforms. Cities were capable of levying local taxes independently from the county scale. Generally, the intermediary level of the Hungarian municipal system was demoted to maintain institutions without the necessary financial means to do that, so apart from unconditional state support, they did not have independent incomes (Vígvári 2009, 712). The selective funding of scales thus became means of political competition.

After 2010 Hungarian governing party, Fidesz, used this feature of municipalities to reproduce its power, through building up dependent actors in the municipalities. The 2008 crisis also made municipalities extremely indebted, thus the central state was needed to bail them out, which provided the conditions for centralization. The case of Agora shows that the agreement regarding the redistribution of such resources was already present prior to 2010. The county municipalities initially struggled because of their incapability to collect taxes, and they applied for loans to maintain their tasks, then the 2008 financial crisis skyrocketed their installments (Hegedüs and Péteri 2015, 109–10).

The funding for Agora could have been spent to maintain county-level functions, but it was diverted to cities, which produced a parallel structure. The redirection of the Agora program was thus embedded in the political competition between the governing socialist faction and the oppositional Fidesz in the pre-2010 era, but conditions of competition were laid down by the post-socialist municipality reforms, Europeanization and the 2008 crisis. The adaptation to the structural conditions of the local and regional scale of municipal governance determined the field of struggle. That is, the indebtedness due to the lack of independent incomes of the county municipalities made them incapable of providing methodological support. The diversion of the infrastructural development of Agora meant that the mid-scale, county level governance did not get the funding and a new network of institutions was born which was usually much bigger than what the given town could sustain.

3.3. Civic cultivation in the cultural politics of the Orbán-regime

Centralization as a form of rescaling started after Fidesz, a conservative party in the opposition between 2002-2010, won a supermajority in 2010. They built up a durable system constructed on the satisfaction of an oligarchic and middle stratum, while through cultural and coercive means, they manage labor discontent. While this regime is often perceived as the avant-garde or the feared future of liberal democracy, the Orbán regime also fits in a pattern of the global emergence of radical right-wing, conservative, and sometimes even fascist politics (Holmes 2019; Maskovsky and Bjork-James 2020). In Central-Eastern Europe, such regimes have struggled for hegemony in the last decade (Ishchenko 2016; Ost 2018). As many analyses of these contemporary politics argued, it is a historically contingent political utilization of the interplay of global transformations and local grievances in the context of the series of attempts at managing US hegemony. I call the post-2010 political economic order, for the sake clarity the Orbán-regime. I will understand under the Orbán-regime a form of dependent development within the framework of the EU that is ideologically ethnonationalist, strengthens the national bourgeoisie, and manages multiple dependencies from the EU, China, and Russia with increasingly oppressive means of state apparatuses (Gagyi and Gerőcs 2022).

Many authors interpreted this class and politics-based complexity from different angles. The emergence of a right-wing hegemony is explained by the electoral behavior of the working class that was being disenchanted by the promise of 1990's democratization and the neoliberal reforms (Kalb 2009; 2018; Bartha 2011; Hann 2015a; 2015b; Scheiring 2020b). Others complemented this explanation by analyzing rural support for far-right politics as a response to European integration's deleterious economic effects, translating into a rise of anti-Roma racism more particularly (Kovai 2017; Szombati 2018). Gábor Scheiring argued that a state fostering capital accumulation in the context of dependent development, as in Hungary, should be expected to face overt social conflict (Scheiring 2020a). Dorit Geva proposed that Hungary's

regime embodies a new form of authoritarian neoliberalism, called ordoliberalism, that helps the flexibilization of labor, builds a loyal stratum of capital, and supports middle-class consumption, all of which contribute to social reproduction and system maintenance (Geva 2021). Critical policy analysis conceptualized the Hungarian state as a “workfare state” (Lendvai and Stubbs 2015), making social rights dependent on participation in labor. Compared to the understanding of Bob Jessop’s workfare state that makes social benefits conditional on work, workfare in this context means state employment, which is called public work. It is compensated by salary as a form of social benefit. This form of employment became the backbone of the management of labor. Research on workfare also highlighted the patrimonial nature of social relations within this system and the dispersion of power ensuing from the redistribution of public work (Szőke 2015; Czibere and Kovách 2021).

I align with the understanding of the Orbán-regime as a semi-peripheral hegemony that tries to gain relative advantages in the capitalist world system by keeping the price of labor and resources down to appeal to foreign capital and strengthen national capital in low-value-added sectors, such as construction (Gerőcs and Pinkasz 2018a; Éber et al. 2019; Gagyi 2021; Gerőcs 2021). The world-system framework considers given social processes as part of one systemic totality. The interplay between local and global histories produces effects in line with the logic of extraction and unequal distribution of power. This framework has already proven productive when looking at cultural policies and politics of the post-2010 era (Barna et al. 2019; Nagy and Szarvas 2021b), bringing forward the dual hegemonic process of which they are a result. On the one hand, heteronomous cultural sectors such as film or design contribute significantly to the national economy and are not that much subject to ideological control. Sectors on the other hand, such as literature, theater, or contemporary art, have assumed more significance concerning national identity building and, as a consequence, are subjected to more systematic ideological control.

The Orbán regime oscillates between two distinct strategies in supporting cultural actors: one consists of cultivating new intellectuals loyal to the regime, and the other of incorporating formerly hostile intellectuals through the new cultural policy infrastructure (Nagy and Szarvas 2017; 2021b). Luca Kristóf highlights that this hegemonic project is contingent upon internal informal relations within governmental administrations and the Prime Minister's office (Kristóf 2017; 2021). Similarly, to Russia's authoritarian but neoliberal cultural policies, prior to its invasion of Ukraine, competition as a way of measuring the value of culture through the market is also present (Budraitskis 2017; E. Barna and Patakfalvi-Czirják 2022). Despite the argument of conservative ideologues (Békés 2020) actors are reluctant to produce overtly ideological works. Argument about investment in cultural producers, in the meantime, usually follows the logic of popularity. That means that more significant infrastructure is provided to ideologically fitting culture, which then is more profitable and popular. That also naturalizes the consumption of products that are nationalist in their content, claiming that the general taste demands them. In a nutshell: ideology inflects cultural policy reform in significant ways in Orbán's Hungary, but its impact is contingent upon informal relations between actors and their position within a structure of intellectual factions.

When Fidesz lost the Hungarian elections in 2002, it started to instrumentalize associations with a civic purpose (Halmai 2011; Greskovits 2020) or cultural focus, such as folk-dance groups (Taylor 2021). Viktor Orbán's party in opposition effectively translated its politics to the level of everyday encounters with voters, converting cultural products and utterances into power struggles and mobilizing support during elections. Thus, they already understood the importance of civic associations and their role in building effective hegemony. Despite that the transformation of civic cultivation was a more contingent process, while civic associations themselves country wide and local ones alike, were used in reproducing support of the party.

In policies of civic cultivation, the individual actors' capacity to claim the central government's attention on their issues became closely dependent on social capital within an increasingly clientelistic state system (Kristóf 2021). My interviews with officials of the Ministry of Human Resources suggest that the number of actors able to effectively represent the cultural field's issues and interests to policy- and decision-makers are limited to just a few. The ideology of civic cultivation now presents two faces. One reflects the language of the "Europeanization" mixed with the aspects of community based civic cultivation advocated by Pál Beke and others. The other reproduces the themes of Fidesz's domestic brand of conservatism. Both converge into a new national discourse of community building and civic entrepreneurship, which resonates with Pál Beke's endeavors and the EU's social and educational development projects but with a strong presence of mythologies about Hungarian's ancient history (Hubbes 2011; A. Kovács 2013; Ádám and Bozóki 2016; F. Laczó 2020). In the meantime, civic cultivation institutions reproduce loyal intellectuals at different scales.

3.4. Outlining the institutions of the future

The administrative transformations following the 2010 period were based on two policy proposals and an implementation plan. However, the current head of the National Institute of Civic Cultivation (NICC, *Nemzeti Művelődési Intézet*), Magdolna Závogyán, oversaw the reforms at the administrative level. She became the head of Hungarian Institute of Civic Cultivation in 2010, then led after its renaming the NICC between 2012-2015 and 2015-2018, became Deputy State Secretary of Culture. Between 2018-2023 she led the NICC. At the moment of the submission of this dissertation she was appointed to the position of Cultural State Secretary in the Ministry of Culture and Innovation.

She was the head of a small cultural association in her home village in Kondoros in Southern-Eastern Hungary, then got the position to manage the county-level civic cultivation in 2006 and worked out a system that involved associations in the operation of civic cultivation

more actively. She got the assignment to lead the after this learning curve in the public sector. The fact that one person shaped the field on the policy level and followed up on the institutional changes made the transformation of the field relatively coherent. Moreover, an ethnographic, field-based knowledge centralized in the hand of the institution, a considerable amount of informational capital was also mobilized in her struggles to claim a legitimate place within the different branches of governance. While she had a significant role in realizing the current form of the administrative structure of civic cultivation, those were outlined before.

The two main programs on which the post-2010 transformation of the institutional system started were the “Our Common Future” (*Közös Jövőnk*) (M. Beke and Ditzendy 2011), which theoretically outlined the mission of civic cultivation, proposing an understanding based on the work of Pál Beke written by the members of a think tank called HROD in 2011. The second document was the “Policy Concept of the Hungarian Civic Cultivation” (*A Magyar Közművelődés Szakpolitikai koncepciója*) (Cserép and Dr. Németh 2011), which was based on a workshop series in which several directors of houses of culture, Agoras participated. It was presented in 2012 on the day of Hungarian culture (January 22). The latter represented a coherent view of the place of civic cultivation in the hegemonic process of the Orbán-regime. That means that it centers on two primary goals the development of communities and the social integration of people secluded from the labor market, such as women, Roma, and the elderly. While the “Our Common Future” highlights the cultivation of traditions as a task, the “Concept” focuses more on folklore while claiming that the Carpathian basin forms the territorial borders of the functions of civic cultivation. The civic is thus defined in the former according to the territorial borders of the nation-state, while the “Concept” bears a mark of an ethnic understanding. In reality civic cultivation, while planned to strengthen connection to ethnic Hungarians’ associations in funding and through diplomatic ties outside Hungary, namely in Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine, significant investment into these did not happen.

The “Concept” similarly centered on community-based civic cultivation extending the term civic cultivation with different socially embedded activities outside the house of culture. It propagates rural development, claiming that it cannot happen without complementing it with culture-based social development programs implemented by professionals. It concludes with the claim that the infrastructure should be used but cannot be considered the only place to disseminate cultural products and activities of cultural associations.

In comparison with the “Concept,” the “Our Common Future” advocates for a horizontal organization of the different institutions of civic cultivation complemented with localized professional associations which give accreditation to diverse groups of professionals. This network-based participative understanding is supplemented by a view that claims that equal access to cultural goods and places of cultural production can reduce the social harms of existing inequalities. It presents a picture of the civic that claims that a status of a bourgeois (*polgár*), which means citizen and implies the status of the middle class, can be achieved through individual decisions. The role of civic cultivation is thus providing the infrastructural basis. Instead of helping the individual, it should only ensure the conditions which make Hungarians capable of being active citizens and members of their nation and the local community.

Transformations of cultural institutions under the Orbán-regime are often interpreted as ad hoc and led by informal relationships. In contrast, the way civic cultivation started to be understood was outlined before actual administrative transformations. These two policy proposals advocated for a general reconsideration of the tasks of the infrastructure. On the ideological and methodological level, they followed the understanding of civic cultivation as community development. They claimed that its primary goal was to make capable citizens who are politically, culturally, and economically active. In the meantime, both highlighted the cultivation of tradition as the main task, emphasizing the support of Hungarian minorities living abroad. They bear the mark of late and post-socialist civic cultivation that propagated economic

development and embourgeoisement, referring to the people who established this conceptualization Pál Beke, Tamás Vargha, Ferenc Balipap, and other reformers. However, as we will see, the actual realization of these ideas was more contingent upon informal ties and controversial among professionals.

3.5. The birth of the NICC

3.5.1. Negotiations on the governmental scale

“The field was fortunate that it became so emptied, and the institutional and political actors did not recognize its direction. I realized that this [lack of focus on our field] is so important. When they asked us in the ministry to advertise our achievements in the intellectual workfare program, they started to shoot at us immediately. You know that it is the power to have people in each settlement. It is an invisible net. We realized that it exists because of the research we have been doing like we have done one research on game addiction, and within two weeks, we could survey the whole country. And I am not sure I want to show this kind of power; this is like nuclear power; you can use it for good and bad.”⁵⁸

Said Magdolna Závogyán, head of the National Institute for Civic Cultivation, summarizes the swiftness of administrative transformation between 2010 and 2014. She claimed that since the field avoided publicity, they could implement the planned structural transformations fully. While that can be a factor, I came to the conclusion that the process of making the new institution is a mixture of rationalization of public policy and contingencies. The governance of the new institutional setting was born from the representation of the profession’s interest through Magdolna Závogyán and negotiations within the government on the management and governance of the field. She narrated the transformation of the Institute in the following way. One of the most significant cultural investments of the Orbán-era was the building of a museum quarter in the city park of Budapest. The refurbishment of the former headquarter of NICC was

⁵⁸ Závogyán, Magdolna. 15.04. 2021. Interview by the author.

also included in the investment.⁵⁹ Parallel to that, as part of centralization in 2016, on the governmental level, several institutions were terminated without inheritors in the name of reducing bureaucracy. NICC was among the list of institutions that were planned to be closed.

These two conditions (austerity and the refurbishment of the NICC's building) provided the opportunity to build an independent place. The Ministry of Prime Minister orchestrated the centralization. Institutions responsible for public services (health, taxation, migration, etc.) but outside the ministerial structure got integrated into the ministry led by János Lázár. Sándor Lezsák⁶⁰, the Speaker of the House and Magdolna Závogyán planned to establish a foundation that would have its center in Lakitelek, where Lezsák already had the Lakitelek People's School established. Both explained the channeling of the NICC into a foundation as a way to save the governing body of civic cultivation from further changes on the governmental level.

"You know, it was a massive shock. I am there as a leader within the state institutions, and like a soldier, I cannot make an argument, which was a massive loss of prestige. Lázár told us to go into the ministry, and that task would be performed within the Ministry of the Prime Minister. Nobody could lobby against that since that kind of cultural politics was so strong within the ministry that even Halász or L. Simon was incapable of doing anything. I approached the Speaker of the House [Sándor Lezsák], and I asked him to help me. And as an officer of the state [Deputy State Secretary of Culture], I assisted in saving the Institute into a non-profit corporation. We are here [in Lakitelek] protected from the

⁵⁹ Heritage House is an institution focused on the cultivation of folkish traditions. It supports the collection, research, and display of folklore. It also runs the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble. It was established in 2001 to govern heritage-related issues on the national level. It shared the place with the Hungarian Institute of Civic Cultivation.

⁶⁰ Sándor Lezsák is the Vice Speaker of the Hungarian Parliament. He participated in establishing the Hungarian Democratic Forum, a conservative party that won the elections in 1990. Before his political career, he is a writer and a teacher. He taught at the Lakitelek Primary School and ran the local house of culture theater group between 1969 and 1985. He was released after the organization of the so-called "Anthology Evening." He asked young artists to make illustrations for the poems of several young writers, which were about national sentiments and belonging. The opening ceremony was on October 22, remembering the 1956 revolution.

transformation and can continue to provide public services. And history might prove us, but it was such an upsetting experience.”⁶¹

Sándor Lezsák as a long-time conservative politician, on the one hand, used his influence within the government; on the other hand, his local embeddedness in Bács-Kiskun County, where the Lakitelek People’s School was already operating, helped to provide a place for the new Institute. The territory where the new building was erected is the property of the Szeged-Csanád Bishopry, and it is rented through a long-term contract. The organizational and operational regulations of the NICC say that the foundation is responsible for providing public services and is contracted with the Ministry of Human Resources. All in all, the relative autonomy of the institution and thus the infrastructure, and the possibility to avoid the termination was not only through the relative invisibility of the field, as Závogyán claims, but several actors in the governing party also assisted the process.

3.5.2. Ideologies of NICC

The new NICC building opened in the Autumn of 2020, in Lakitelek, in a place that is vital in the history of post-socialist conservative thought and tradition. The Hungarian Democratic Forum, the first governing party of post-1990 Hungary, was formed in the town in the garden of Sándor Lezsák in 1987. The meeting was officially named “The opportunities of Hungarians” and has been considered one of the starting points on the way to plural democracy. At that meeting, many intellectuals represented themselves and the political groups they were part of. Csurka István or Csoóri Sándor, who have been significant in socialist and post-socialist populist⁶² (*népi*) thinking, were part of the early history of MDF and Zoltán Bíró, the writer of

⁶¹ Magdolna Závogyán interview. 15.04. 2021. Interview by the author.

⁶² Inter-war populist writers described in a sociographic manner the social circumstances the peasant population was living in with multiple political goals (Borbándi 1983; I. Pap 2012; M. N. Taylor 2020). The range of political solutions varied from communism (Ferenc Erdei), a third-wayist that is neither capitalist nor follows the soviet model of collectivization (Imre Kovács), or a compromise with the corporatist Christian Nationalist

1976 V. civic cultivation law and Head of the Civic Cultivation Department of the Ministry of Culture between 1974-80 was a founder of the party and guest of the event. The head of the Patriotic People's Front, Imre Pozsgay, who had also influenced the transformations of civic cultivation, also participated. Lezsák had been organizing writer meetings within the institutional setting of a young writer's circle in the city since the 1970s. That series of gatherings contributed to the development of rural journals and conservative thinking on Hungariannes and the post-socialist institutionalization of that thinking. After the transition, the People's School of Lekitelek⁶³ operated there, a flagship institution of the idea of *volkschule*, an organization that focuses of educational aspects of civic cultivation.

The new building was built in a neoclassicist style integrating several elements of Hungarian folk culture mixed with Christian iconography and astrology. They call this eclecticism of the beliefs system the “organic Hungarian literacy” (*szerves Magyar műveltség*). While the idea organic folk literacy, or as the inter-war folk music collectors called it, folk dance and music as a mother tongue (Taylor 2008), has been rooted in the ethnological studies of Hungarian peasant culture started in the 19th century. The term *organic Hungarian literacy* or being cultured in the organic Hungarian way has its roots in contemporary nationalist thought, which associates ancient Hungarian history with its nomadic tradition, integrating elements of the Christian history of creation and salvation (Hubbes 2011; A. Kovács 2013; F. Laczó 2020).

inter-war state (László Németh). Political representation was present on the smallholders' level (Barta 2021). However, landless peasants and the agrarian proletariat only got political representation from the National Peasant Party, established as the Satellite of the Hungarian Communist Party in 1939. Populist writers integrated into the socialist state in different ways (Földes 2021); however, while their position and practical knowledge were necessary, and many were sympathetic to the modernization project of the socialist state, their canonization fluctuated. In comparison, Zoltán Bíró, Sándor Csoóri, István Csurka, and Sándor Lezsák, while describing the grievances of the rural population, they were more interested in them as abstract bearers of Hungariannes than the social circumstances they were living in.

⁶³ The idea of Lakitelek Popular College was that it should follow the Scandinavian *Volkschule* tradition, which according to them, successfully integrated the organic peasant culture, the support of social mobility of lower social stratum, and the civic responsibility of being culturally cultivated and self-reliant members of the nation (Paládi 2018). While the People's School movement never became central to civic cultivation in several places, like Lakitelek, they operated in a stable way, getting stable state support. They could also develop new capacities through connections with German and Scandinavian People's Schools after 1990

The decoration is concentrated around the ideas of natural cycles and those in sync with nature, and the way it produces and reproduces life throughout the year. It is organic as it is a undividable feature of Hungarians, its elements carried by the “people” (*nép*), the peasants. A continuity through epochs is created through the mixture of belief systems like Shamanism, Catholicism, and Astrology. It is also implied that supernatural forces like planets or God have an actual effect on the life of people. The other part of “organic Hungarian literacy” is that it is rooted in the lifestyle of the people who were integrated into nature. Their experience of natural forces and the culture that comes out of it thus is a form of ancient, ethnicized wisdom. Identifying the rural community of Hungarians as the target of policy is, thus, ethnically defined in this part of the ideological bricolage.



Picture 8: Facade of NICC (Source <https://nmi.hu/2020/10/01/hazat-hazat-epitunk-szekhazavatas-lakiteleken/> Last Accessed: 31.03.2023.)

When I visited the institution after its opening, waiting for the scheduled interviews, a trainee was assigned to me to explain the architecture and the related symbolic elements, like ornaments, wall paintings, and the exhibited archival materials in the main hall of the building.

Following the religious naming of the elements of the architecture of a church, the main hall is called the cloister (*kerengő*). In the cloister, there is the “Sun's Pathway” (*napúton*⁶⁴). One can find the twelve zodiac signs explaining the cycle of peasant lifestyle through the cyclical nature of the movement of the planets creating a parallel with the natural life of rural communities through the process of a digitalized walk starting with the visitors’ sign. This kind of integration of nature-culture as it is one and undivided comes back in the conference room named after the famous musicologist Zoltán Kodály.⁶⁵ In that room, the elements of the cultivation of the land, its relation to culture, and the effects of planets and stars come together on a wall painting. My guide explained that organic Hungarian literacy means that the life of the Hungarian peasant was guided by the changing cycles of warmth and cold, which naturally determined the activities. In the meantime, the recurring spirit of the given season is also an organic movement that creates historical continuity structured by the constant cycles of nature.

Sándor Makoldi, who planned the façade of the building, advocated for such an integral perspective of the two belief systems. At the same time, Gábor Pap, an art historian, was popular among the early nationalist, Christian-conservative subculture and folk revivalists alike (Taylor 2021, 173) was concerned with creating continuity with Sumerian and Skythic folk art, making a long-term organic history of folk (G. Pap 1999). On the one hand, among many educators, this perspective is not known, or they know it but do not take it seriously. On the other hand, the oeuvre of Pap, through the making of *napúton*, is elevated from a subcultural knowledge of the emerging post-socialist nationalist movement (Feischmidt 2014; Feischmidt and Pulay 2017; Molnár 2019) to a canonized form of perception of folk culture.

⁶⁴ The representation of the zodiac signs in the building is complemented by a website that interprets the signs according to their contribution to the nation, following the narrative mentioned earlier, which posits Catholic saints in Hungarian pre-Christian mythology. <https://naputon.hu/kezdolap>

⁶⁵ Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967) composer who advocated and produced folk music-based classical music. His musical pedagogy was an attempt to democratize music which contributed to the development of several waves of choir movements.

The building also provides the interpretation of the history of Hungarian civil society and the role of civic cultivation in that. The rooms are named after actors of community building, Pál Beke and Tamás Vargha. A registry of cultural associations, which were operating before 1945, also occupies a central place in the building. It was explained to me that this registry is central to representing NICC's approach to civic cultivation. Its symbolic placing claims that civic and cultural life has proliferated since the late 19th century, including the inter-war period. Libraries, museums, and houses of culture were erected by the well-to-do local landowners, bourgeoisie or aristocracy, or peasants who organized choirs, reading groups, and other activities.

Within that narrative, the pre-socialist associations contributing to the making of the Christian-conservative hegemony of the Horthy-regime, such as the Catholic institutions, the militaristic Levente movement or scouts, are represented as autonomous civic organizations⁶⁶. According to this history, organic development ended with the centralization of civic cultivation in 1947 and the nationalization of collections, libraries, and local cultural institutions. Although it was told to me, it is impossible to correct the faults of the communist regime, which stopped this organic development of a genuinely Hungarian civil society, these wrongdoings can be made right through the socialization of the house of culture and the related institutions. The registry thus has a central symbolic role in showing the number of cultural associations that existed before 1945 to represent the pre-socialist “organic” Hungarian history of the profession of civic cultivation as it was connected to an interrupted embourgeoisement of the Hungarian

⁶⁶ As I discussed in the introduction, these were part of the integral state, and through everyday cultural activities, they were parts of the hegemonic process. However, as they were semi-autonomous organizations, that also meant that people from other political movements could organize cultural activities within these ideological state apparatuses. Like Iván Vitányi or Elemér Muhary, communist sympathizers were organizing their folk-dance group within the Levente movement. This image of the proliferation of democratic organizations should be understood in the framework of a contemporary normalization of the inter-war Christian national conservative regime and decoupling it from the events of the Holocaust (Taylor 2020; Kowalski 2021).

society.⁶⁷ It distinguishes between an authentic development of civic cultivation dating back to the law on associations formed in 1875, when the Hungarian peasants and the population of rural Hungary, being thirsty for knowledge, established reading, singing, and theater circles.

The hero of this perspective is also Pál Beke⁶⁸. However, his take on civic cultivation only partially fits the ideological elements drawn above. He thought that the mission of civic cultivation is to produce autonomous individuals who are capable of governing their autonomous community; he was also against the centralized institutional system (as many of my informants happily quoted that he notoriously called HICC “the shitty institute”). In his view, socialist civic cultivation through the dependence on the state and top-down education took the “dignity” of the citizen. Thus, the role of civic cultivation is to support the search for such dignity of the autonomous individual (Beke 2001).

Despite the apparent contradiction between his understanding of civic cultivation and the authoritarian practices of the Orbán-regime, his role as a community developer, the open house initiative, and the methodology of community building occupy a central role in the remaking of the Institute. The approach, inspired by him, also fits how the post-EU accession history was formed through adaptations to expectations on different scales. Beke’s liberal take is thus molded with an ideological framework, i.e., the “organic Hungarian literacy,” associated with the post-socialist radical right. However, this mixture is created in a seemingly uncontradictory way. Bourgeois elements such as autonomy, entrepreneurship, and community as an asset of harm reduction of the market on the one hand and folk culture as intangible heritage on the other are preferred elements of cultural policy propagated on the scale of EU.

⁶⁷ While the interpretation of the socialist period as non-history or interruption of organic processes is a widely shared narrative among political actors in Hungary, in this case, it criticizes the making of civic cultivation as expertise and specific state activity.

⁶⁸ He had supported Fidesz before when he was approached to help build the Civic Circles (Halmai 2011; Greskovits 2020). After 2002, his approach was to build an alternative public sphere instead of means of control.

3.6. Precarization of public employment

But how do all these transformations affect the educators' everyday work in the house of culture? In short, most of my informants were calling their work unstable and hectic. Labor in the house of culture cannot be considered “flexible” as the literature describes cultural work after the 1970s since educators are employed through stable contracts. However, the post-socialist and, more specifically, the post-2010 transformation of employment within the houses of culture brought job insecurities and dependence on the local state. After 2004 grant-based funding became widespread, that put the burden of application on the educators. Moreover, as one of my informants claimed that with the post-EU accession, the learning and creative application of funding schemes also required individualized forms of adjustments from the side of the educators. It was a recurring topic among my informants that people of the houses would sustain several legal entities to apply to different funding opportunities and cross-invoice to meet the requirements of the donors.

Although different professional institutions give support, the actual way of writing and implementing grants had to be figured out by the employees of the house of culture. The status of educators as “public servants”⁶⁹ despite the demanding schedule and the sometimes risky creative solutions of spending the funds it provided long term security. This stability of employment compensated the educators for the relatively low salary. The households of educators at my fieldwork sites usually had two earners; the women are employed in this job that, while providing relatively high cultural capital economically is not that beneficial. Cultural work in those local middle-class families was considered a calling and strategy for accumulating cultural capital and, in some cases, as a hobby. However, in other cases, civic cultivation opens career opportunities at the local, county or on the national scale of governance

⁶⁹ Public servant (“*Közalkalmazott*”) is a status of the state employees which ensures a gradual raise of salary with time served but also provides specific subsidies like premiums, support of loans or book vouchers, and most importantly, their employment is secure through a long and complicated process of dismissal.

through accumulating social capital and knowledge on the operation of bureaucracy. Nevertheless, the more typical career path for employees of the house of culture is a fluctuation between the family (care work, child-rearing, and other forms of reproductive labor) and the house of culture.



Picture 9: Campaign of the UVCCPM :Without library there is no equal chance, without museum there is no national memory, without archives there is no reliable national past and without civic cultivation there is no nation (Source: <http://kkdsz.hu/>)

Katja Praznik (Praznik 2021) explains the historical study of cultural workers' employment in cultural industries can be put in parallel with reproductive work. That is, as much as unpaid reproductive work is naturalized through the feminized moral of responsibility of caring, cultural production market and state-based alike utilize the disposition of the worker who does it for the love of art, culture, or in the case of houses of culture for the responsibility felt for the community and the culture of their hometown. I would add that cultural labor is not only analogous to reproductive labor, but the division of labor within the household is structured so that women employed in the houses also do reproductive work at home.

Stability based on the “public servant” contracts was substantially changed after 2010. First, the core salary of the house of culture employees has not changed since 2006. Second, the

introduction of cultural public work programs provided an opportunity to employ a skilled workforce in the house of culture for significantly lower wages. Moreover, it contributed to the formalization of employment through dependencies on the local municipalities. In 2014 the subsidy given to the local municipalities was raised by introducing a minimal transfer per person living in the given settlement. The form of employment was gradually decentralized. Thus, we can distinguish three periods based on the experience of educators after 2004. The first is the adaptation to grants and program-based funding, the emergence of creative solutions, and individualized risk-taking to adopt rigid systems of EU funds to the local social settings. In this period, employment is relatively stable but dependent on the legal structure chosen by the municipality to run the house of culture. The second is after 2013 constant reorganization of the administrative system, and the introduction of intellectual public work brought instability and dependence on local politics. Finally, in 2020, the public servant status was taken away, meaning wage negotiations and forms of employment are decided on the local scale.

3.6.1. Public work

Cultural or intellectual public work⁷⁰ was introduced in 2013. The main reason behind the introduction of such a scheme was that the indebtedness of the infrastructure did not allow for to recruit enough workers⁷¹. Based on NICC's measurements from 2012, two thousand settlements lacked the educators to run a space of civic cultivation "I needed sixteen billion forints to fill that gap [for employment], and there were austerity measures in 2012, so it was

⁷⁰ Bob Jessops sees a wholesale transformation of states from Keynesian welfare states to Schumpeterian workfare states globally. According to him, states started to intervene on the supply side of the labor market while adapting their social policies to the demands of capital to produce a flexible workforce and structurally competitive adaptive states (Jessop 1993, 9). How he interpreted workfare back in 1993 differs from the form I am speaking of here. In his case, workfare is welfare that has a condition: employment. Workfare in contemporary Hungary is welfare the state gives in exchange for labor. It is a social benefit given as a salary. In line with Márton Czirfusz's argument, I see workfare as a historically embedded phenomenon that dominates social policies in cyclically returning crises of global capitalism for the sake of governing surplus population, which is excluded from production in these crises. (Czirfusz 2015). Regular workfare differs from cultural workfare in its target and function. While regular workfare is introduced instead of unconditional social benefits, cultural workfare is introduced to maintain state functions during austerity and fix educated youth in rural places.

⁷¹ In 2012 after the county methodological centers' integration and the existing debt of the HICC, the central governance of civic cultivation was indebted with 243 million forints.

clear that I cannot collect that money. It made me think about how to get the necessary human resources. I approached [Sándor] Pintér⁷² that you can come in with a high school degree, and my network will be strong enough to coordinate the employment of 6000 people⁷³". Cultural public work was then restarted every year until 2019 with approximately 6000 people employed by the ministry of interior and coordinated by the NICC. The salary of cultural workers employed in the program is gross between 79 0000 - 111 0000 HUF (ca. 300 EUR), depending on the qualifications of the employee. Only people with secondary school qualifications could apply, and employees with higher education, compared to "regular" public work, were overrepresented (E. Juhász 2015, 11).

It resulted from a partnership between the National Employment Fund under the Ministry of Interior and the Secretariat of Culture under the Ministry of Human Resources. Partner institutions could apply for the NICC for public workers, and positions were allocated to these institutions funded by the Ministry of Human Resources. These partners could be private or public actors. The only restriction was to have a maximum of two public workers simultaneously. Although private cultural enterprises could apply, public initiatives like the municipalities, the National Museum, the Hungarian National Archive, the Hungarian National Digital Archive, and Film Institute were the most prominent partners. Despite the variety of actors, 60% of people in cultural public work worked in a house of culture (K. Juhász, Dudás, and Furujás 2016, 29).

While in some cases, public work reportedly resulted in the re-opening of the local house of culture, according to my informants, they mostly did work related to administration or digitization providing the bureaucratic background work for the local associations and institutions. Another typical story was that other employees perceived them as "spies" of the

⁷² Minister of Interior Affairs

⁷³ Magdolna Závogyán. 15.04. 2021., Interview by the author.

local governance. In some houses they would be considered higher up in the informal hierarchy than people employed there or sometimes, they would be able to bargain with the head of the house themselves. While I could not confirm or refute that they would report in these cases to the mayor, these narratives created a general distrust and a sense of surveillance. Public workers were handpicked and were in a patron-client relationship with the mayor. While the public work scheme also banned forms of re-employment. That is, the employee is dismissed and then re-employed through the public work scheme in some cases that were also reported. It had similar effects to “regular” public work. That is, it contributed politically to the reproduction of the regime with the representation of the village as ordered or tidy and through the informalized form of distribution of positions created dependencies (Szombati 2021). That meant that workers had to lobby for positions for the mayor and the mayor had to ask for funding from the Ministry of Resources. That created an image in which distribution of positions seemed like dependent on the mayor’s generosity.

3.6.2. “Consolidating” employment

Parallel to the public work programs, the unconditional funding that could be used to employ educators by municipalities in the house of culture was gradually raised. In 2012, the municipality could get 1140 forints (2-3 EUR) after every resident. That highly affected small settlements with a population of around 1000. After 2015 minimum unconditional funding was introduced with 1,2 million forints (3000-3200 EUR) per year which were raised to 1,8 (4500-4800 EUR) in 2018 and 2,27 million (5700-5900 EUR) in 2021. While that provided stability for the employment of the staff of the house of culture coupled with the process of the termination of public servant contracts, it follows the general trend of the post-2010 transformation of public administration, which puts financial burdens on the municipalities and localizes financial gaps present on the state level.

At the 2020 yearly meeting of the Association of Hungarian Educators (Magyar Népművelők Egyesülete), the legal staff of the association helped members to interpret employment-related policy changes. They formulated this issue in the following way: “there are three levels you can negotiate your new contract: maintainer, maintainer, and maintainer”⁷⁴. That means the negotiations on the salary and other services provided for the employees, like book vouchers, are happening between the local employee and the municipality. It was shared with me that in bigger institutions, a diversified form of raise was introduced, but the actual content of these contracts was highly informalized and depended on the relation between the head of the institution and the actual employee. With the termination of “public servant” contract, a general 6% raise was promised, but that was distributed in a diversified way. In some cases, it meant a 20% raise, and in others, 0. They claimed that a more significant raise was typical in the middle management of the cultural institutions. In contrast, generally, a lower or zero percent raise has happened with the average employees.

All in all, with the introduction of workfare, which made it possible to pay lower salaries in the sector, the termination of public servant contracts, and the decentralization of the making of new employment relations precarization of cultural work was intensified. The personalized forms of time management, self-improvement, and creative adaptation to the funding opportunities brought flexibilization and informalization of the actual employment status.

3.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I summarized the most recent changes in the administrative and ideological levels of civic cultivation and showed how that effected the people working in the houses of culture. In the previous chapter, we saw the post-socialist transformation of the field. It got consolidated in understanding the profession as it contributes to the making of civil society but

⁷⁴ 15.02.2020. Budapest

does it within the institutional system. After the EU accession, we could observe a series of rescaling such as Europeanization, centralization, and, starting with 2020, a selective decentralization. Labor disputes and sustenance are decentralized, while fund redistribution and strategic planning are centralized. Community building became a dominant understanding of civic cultivation. That meant that the social and economic development aspects got strengthened, while elements of cultural organization were pushed into the background. This process of Europeanization was not just an adaptation to the supranational scale. It was orchestrated by local knowledge, and the funding got creatively adapted to the local practices. That Europeanized understanding of civic cultivation continued after 2010. However, it was tightly integrated into the hegemonic process of the Orbán-regime through the new governing body.

The NICC's transformation into a foundation and its move to Lakitelek was possible because of informal ties but was based on ideological and policy claims. It was a highly centralized process. The ideological elements of the building are part of the thinking of a rural conservative intellectual network. It integrates liberal aspects of community building and traditionalist elements, which imagines the peasant as the bearer of the nation's soul. At the beginning of the transformation, the lack of workforce was substituted with workfare. Following the process of decentralization of tasks, while the targeted unconditional state support was raised, the form of employment could be decided on the municipality scale. As my informants reported, that resulted in a more insecure way of employment coupled with the feeling of irrelevance and being expendable.

Finally, what does the case of civic cultivation tells about the general processes of cultural policy and politics under the Orbán-regime? There are three main features of the regime this analysis sheds another light. One is the embeddedness into the EU and the way institutional integration, despite the political discourses, is an integral part of the reproduction of the regime.

The other element is an informalization of decision making and the way power is provided through patron-client relations. And third we could observe the decentralization of expenses, putting more burden on the local scale. We can see a continuation of the policy competencies, but the creative thinking on local processes gives place to informality and a politicized feedback loop on implementation. From the perspective of labor, the dependence on local power relations got more severe. The regime also has to manage intellectuals, seasoned educators, who typically do not favor their politics while simultaneously produce a new organic stratum that is capable to manage the administrative aspect of civic cultivation while understands its ideologies and use them in practice.

One can also observe the development of ideologies of civic cultivation in this hegemonic process. Those are embedded in rural conservative intellectuals' thinking and rooted in the ideas of the post-socialist right-wing subcultures. They are in the meantime adapted to the Europeanized understanding of culture-based community building. In the following chapters, I will inquire about the embeddedness of educators and the house of culture into the everyday life and politics of the two towns. I will demonstrate the way these policies and large-scale processes condition the opportunities on the local scale. In these three chapters on policy, ideology, and labor, I constantly highlighted the role of the local in making the national scale through knowledge and practices. Thus, I will also demonstrate in the ethnographic chapters how everyday practices constitute the national scale.

4. Civic Life of a Post-Socialist Town: Associations, NGO-ization and the “privatization” of the house of culture in Salgótarján

*“Back then, the factory and then the union were responsible for providing means of social reproduction for the workers. After the transition [regime change], the firms and the municipality put that burden on our shoulders; the civil sector has basically [become] responsible for the fields for which the state and other social organizations were responsible before”.*⁷⁵

Mapping the activities related to the main HoC of Salgótarján, one of my first interviews in the town was with Uramecz János, the head of the Association for Mutual Help for People with Disabilities (AMHPD; *Mozgáskorlátozottak Egymást Segítőik Egyesülete MESE*). He has been working with the association since 1990. His professional trajectory is typical of people working in the non-governmental sector in Salgótarján. As an amateur club leader in the Smelter House of Culture received a club leader degree in the early 1980s⁷⁶ and he led the amateur radio club until 1990. After the transition, similarly to other former associates of the houses of culture, he imagined that his activities would serve the making of democracy. When I asked about the role of cultural associations and local civil society in contemporary Salgótarján, he recalled his studies in the Marxist-Leninist training of club leaders, claiming that the means of social reproduction are the responsibility of the private association. He meant not only leisure time activities but housing and care for the elderly or the poor. His response serves as the epigraph of this chapter since, on the one hand, it summarizes the social, political,

⁷⁵ 07.02.2018. János Uramecz interview by the author.

⁷⁶ The club movement of the 1970s-80s tried to ease the reliance of the infrastructure on educators and keep the leisure time activities within the party. Club leader programs were available for a multitude of people within the membership of the Young Communist League. Similarly, the Soviet and Polish decentralization of civic cultivation provided mostly non-ideological options, mainly hobbies such as amateur radio, photography, and video, but university clubs were famous for their film clubs and neo-avantgarde, punk or experimental concerts (Gergely, 2008; Horváth K., 2010; Kalmár, 2005).

and economic processes I intend to describe. On the other, it illustrates the positionality and self-definition of civil society actors in the town. They define themselves in relation to some unresolved, undefined past while they claim that their role is an uninterested provider of social or cultural services.

As a reminder, the general stake of my thesis is to answer the role of the HoC as a social space and institution in producing local culture and mediating between local and national scales of cultural production and politics. Organizational logic, debates in the field, and policies about the HoC are the main governing elements in decisions on programs. However, its operation is dependent on local social and political stratifications. Research and interviews confronted me with the fact that, while culture is an issue in debates about houses of culture's place in the life of the town, houses have sociological stakes in social reproduction and local politics, especially from the standpoint, of local elites. Informal relationships between the municipality and leading local intellectuals, like poets and amateur or professional historians, also inform and, in some cases, directly influence the program. Local events, thus, are not only a realization of programs planned by professionals; they operate as a battlefield on which material conditions and local politics produce and reproduce cultural practices as imagined by different elite blocs. Thus, the following three chapters, two on Salgótarján and one on Mezőkövesd, focus on the everyday operation of the houses of culture, their transformations, and their embeddedness into local social relations. I discuss more specifically what happens in and around the HoC. What kind of communities does civic cultivation form? How are cultural services maintained? How much do locals, as opposed to the institutional system itself, produce local activities? What kinds of class relations inform cultural politics, and how are those relations strengthened or challenged?

The chapter brings the “biography” of the József Attila Center for Civic Cultivation (JACCC: *József Attila Művelődési Központ*) in Salgótarján into focus. By “biography,” I mean the socially and politically ordered history of the HoC (Kopytoff 1986, 66). On the one hand,

this building is an actual physical place that hosts and conditions the possibilities of activities. On the other, its history is the sum of the social and political biographies of the actors maintaining it. Similarly, to human biography, it is fragmented and prone to creating coherent narratives (Bourdieu 2000). In this chapter, I will look at how task distribution changed between associations and houses of culture. I will describe a series of crises and solutions that the space and the actors experienced to tell how the HoC operated after 1990. First, the struggles of two educators around the organization of a music festival and then the continuous operation of the HoC illustrates how this state institution relies on educators' situated knowledge and creative solutions. Second, the debates around leadership and the theater show the struggles around the politically motivated definition of the "right" forms of cultural practices. Third, through a town beautifying project, we can see the emergence and operation of local civic associations that try to redefine Salgótarján in line with their "middle-class" ambitions.

I will call the post-1990 processes around the HoC privatization. Many of my interlocutors objected to describing the takeover of places of civic cultivation as privatization. They perceive associations as the natural actors of civic cultivation and consider an interpretation of the interwar history of civic cultivation the norm. That means the perspective I presented in the previous chapters: social groups organized their civic cultivation in the interwar period, producing a relatively democratic civil society. According to this vision, the centralized, socialist system was only a historical anomaly forced onto an organic history. The current state, the reliance of houses of culture on local associations, thus is a recovery of normality. Amateur artistic practices, charity, social or awareness-raising programs of the HoC rely on local associations' activities. The town's leadership and the direction of the house itself advocate for the organization of more profitable events such as performances and theater and music festivals. As I discussed in chapter two, outsourcing of functions of civic cultivation into associations has been happening since the 1970s, which was a selective form of austerity in the infrastructure.

After 1990 one can observe a qualitatively different process, namely the shift to increase reliance on the local civil society in the everyday operation of the HoC. This chapter theoretically reflects on this landscape through the findings and debates of the literature on post-socialist civil society.

The empirical material for this chapter is based on interviews with former and current employees of the houses of culture and related voluntary associations. I also observed discussions of new programs and participated in meetings of other local associations, such as AMHPD or “Palóc Women for the Future”⁷⁷. The latter is a women’s association overtly focusing on folk heritage. However, its activities consist of collecting and redistributing used clothes in impoverished areas and informing on domestic abuse and birth control in Roma neighborhoods. Members are by profession employees of the municipality, teachers, or former and current cultural workers. Some older members were employees of local firms in the socialist period as accountants or economists. They are close with the Miner and Smelter Association, which often promotes and organizes “industrial heritage” in Salgótarján. In addition to the above, I observed meetings of “Sakkozzuk ki!” (Check It Out!) an association of young professionals and municipality employees.

4.1. Civil society from below

Since the first anthropological studies on the post-socialist transition, it is often highlighted that Eastern European civil society might differ that what is Elizabeth Dunn and Chris Hann (Hann and Dunn 1996) emphasized in studies on core capitalist states (Hann 2003; Gagy, Szarvas, and Vígvári 2020). They suggested considering broader relations, such as family or neighborhood relations. Similarly, Kubik (2005) and Kopecký and Mudde (2003) argued that researchers should scrutinize the empirical relationship between concept and actual relations

⁷⁷ The *Palóc* tradition of the city as it is part of a folk region typical for its specific clothing and dialect.

instead of making measurements based on a fixed, normative definition of civil society. More attention has generally been given in recent work to local actors, the way changes in funding structure affect them, and local power struggles influence their social and political trajectories (Mikuš 2018; 2015; Vettters 2018). For all these shifts and corrections, local associations are still poorly understood. How do they protect and represent the interests of the local middle classes? How do they broker clientelistic ties? And how do they take over functions of social reproduction that used to be organized by the state?

According to Marek Mikuš (2018, 11) actors of international civil society, often called NGOs, in Central Eastern Europe advocate for development and Europeanization, a distinct modernizing strategy and discourse. The imaginations in policy and the westernizing endeavors of the people working in the NGOs are mutually constituted by their position as mediators of integration into global capitalism (Gagyí and Ivancheva 2017; 2019; Tsoneva 2020). As I showed in chapter two, civil society occupied a central role in post-1990 discussions of civic cultivation. This role only grew in the post-2004 era, with the centering of community development in political discourse. Civil society was a liberal middle-class utopia that served as a material tool for economic development (Gagyí 2021), and NGOs' social epistemology has been structured by the horizon of "catching up" and merging within a West-like society (Gagyí 2021, 18–19). If we focus on the town scale, like Salgótarján, we see associations with similar developmentalist visions of changing the local social relations through their work. That vision is, however, mediated through a series of context-related discourses and actions such as beautifying the town or breaking up with a form of socialist heritage. Their scope focuses on local particularities but utilizes discourses of development and modernization. We also find a more direct relationship between the market, state politics, and civic associations like associations related to economic development or others which are the umbrella organization of parties.

As I argued in the introduction, I do not see civil society as a separate from political society (Gramsci 1971, 245) but as intertwining spheres. According to this perspective, politicization or political utilization of associations does not necessarily appear as distortion or exploitation of civil society. These political relations are rather an articulation of social relations already present in the given locality. Civil society in a former socialist, post-industrial town also exhibits this complexity. Three features of the local civic associations further contribute to understanding the region's relationship between the state and civil society. First, in Salgótarján, the emergence of associations was happening with the help of the HoC, and typically people engaged with unions, the Young Communist League, or the Patriotic People's front knew how to establish local associations. Second, the local state, the HoC, which struggles to claim autonomy, and the civic associations have a complementary but contentious relationship structured by the middle-class ambitions of the participating actors. And finally, this contentious relationship produces activities that work for normality mutually constituted by developmentalist ambitions and localized forms of middle-class socialization.

I define the middle class as a social stratum whose position in relation to capital and labor changes depending on the cyclical nature of capitalist accumulation (Poulantzas 1982; Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979; Éber 2020; Gagyí 2021, 58). Its definition of itself as being "middle" is also contingent upon the existence of professions construed as in-between, like managers, teachers, and educators (Crossick and Haupt 1984). Without stable enough property forms of capital, downward mobility is a perpetual threat. In post-socialist Eastern Europe, the middle class has also been, independent from Marxist usage (Ost 2015), a commonsense synonym for "good-life" and the objective of individual and collective "catching up" to Western quality of life (Trenholme 2007; Fehérváry 2009; Matza 2012). In line with these considerations, the middle class in the de-industrializing town of Salgótarján should not be considered a fixed position determined by income or other forms of indicators of wealth. It is

rather a set of “ideologies, material environments, and institutional and interpersonal scenarios through which middle classness becomes a lived experience and an articulated self-position’ (Patico 2016, 19) at a concrete historical conjuncture and in relation to particular structural conditions” (Crăciun and Lipan 2020, 424). I consider the employees of the HoC and organizers of the associations “middle-class” because they define themselves as such and because others around them perceive them that way. They have limited power to influence the policies of the municipality while possessing relative material stability in comparison with the town’s population. However, that stability often depends on their capability to mediate between scales of the state or capital accumulation.

4.2. From a “red giant” to a “white dwarf” or a “black hole”⁷⁸

In the 19th century, around the valley of the Salgó river, several mines were opened, and a corporation was established to process coal and iron from the region. The black coal industry picked up fast throughout the valley, with the Rimamurányi Ironworks Corporation (RIC) as one of its main corporations. The economic depression of 1873 resulted in the collapse of the English-Hungarian Bank, the owner of RIC. In 1881 the Wiener Bankverein bought RIC and the Rimamurány-Valley Ironworks Association, another already giant company specializing in steel and iron procession in the northern-eastern part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (Várkonyi-Nickel 2017, 27). The merger of the two corporations resulted in the birth of the Rimamurányi-Salgótarjáni Ironworks Stock Corporation (RSISC). The new entity controlled the mining and processing of coal and iron in Ózd, Rožňava, and Salgótarján (Berend T., Szuhay, and Pach 1973; Berend 1982).

⁷⁸ Contribution to the discussion on the future of Salgótarján at the launch of *Városlakó* periodical 02.2018. It symbolizes the city’s history, which grew into a significant industrial center and an industrial town after 1949. With the transition and the closing of the factories, people experience decline, economic hardship, and depression regarding the future of their town. In that context, a small but still living and stable town, i.e., the white dwarf, is considered to be a more promising future than the constant decline, that is, the black hole, as they interpret the contemporary state of the town.

In this early period of industrial production in Salgótarján, three companies played a role in the area's spatial development besides RSISC: the Glass Factory, Hirsch and Frank Iron Foundry, and Salgótarjáni Coal Mining Stock Corporation. Each of them established their own “colonies.” providing housing, education, and leisure time activities for the workers of the corporations. These parts of the town are still called “colonies”, and the metaphor describes a similar violent penetration of capital in that region to colonialism. Skilled work migrated to the company town from all around the monarchy. Thus, education and binding the workforce to the factories became a priority. The mines employed landless peasants seasonally, but they were living outside the colonies in wooden huts, while the miners lived in colonies and got different services from the company. This skilled workforce migrated from areas that were industrialized before (Valuch 2020; Alabán 2020).

The colonies worked as closed worlds, where all the possible means for maintaining one's livelihood could be found, but within them, the hierarchies between the subordinates and superiors could be observed in the quality and spatial distribution of housing and access to public spaces (Nagy 2016; Várkonyi-Nickel 2017, 38). Zoltán Szabó, a populist ethnographer of the time, in his major work on the region in the interwar period, describes the social relations within the factories' territory as “a mixture of feudal and capitalist relations.” He claims that capital provides the means to build up master-client dependencies. While from the outside, the means of social reproduction that the corporations provide seem generous, he saw it as a new form of dependency not stabilized by law, but by capital (Z. Szabó 1986, 133). Salgótarján thus was similar to other company towns (Wicke, Berger, and Golombek 2018; Klusáková 2018; Spurný 2020). This form of capital's spatial fix was not specific to the 19th-century history of industrialization in the region. The mixture of different forms of labor, such as slavery, wage work, and seasonal work in the industries complemented with work in the manors, are observed

in different historical moments of the penetration of capital into semi-peripheral or peripheral regions (Frank 1966; Hürtgen 2020).



Picture 10: János Blaski: *The History Socialist Culture*, 1965; *Mozaique in the JACC* (source: <https://epiteszforum.hu/ritmus-es-geometria-mint-otthon-a-tajban--salgotarjan-modern-varoskozpontjanak-epiteszete#lg=1&slide=6> Last Accessed: 29.03.2023.)

Salgótarján developed from a small village in line with the growth of the colonies; they slowly crawled down to the valley. It gained the legal status of a town in 1922 and became the most significant settlement in Nógrád county thanks to its industry. Most people lived in the colonies, the administrative functions of the town were relatively underdeveloped, and the town center was small. The town hall, the main HoC, and residential houses were planned and built in the 1970s in a modernist fashion, reflecting the importance of the industrial town in socialist development, projecting its constant growth into the future. After 1990 the firms were privatized, and factories simultaneously declined. The Hirsch factory and the two glass factories still operate today. The Ironworks closed in 2012 after a long struggle and several efforts at downsizing. Salgótarján is today one the poorest regions of Hungary, with seven territories,

mostly former colonies, considered segregated communities of Roma people⁷⁹, it has one of the lowest averages of income and contribution to the GDP.

Salgotarján is also the center of the county of Nógrád, which has another third-tier town, Balassagyarmat. The town officially harbors 40,000 residents. Officials often point out that the actual number could be much lower: many residents commute to work and socially mobile youth study in other cities. Occasionally, the rumor circulates that Balassagyarmat is about to become the new county capital. This palpable anxiety about getting stripped from the status of a regional urban center gives a good idea of the generalized feeling of decline reigning in the town. Accordingly, civic associations' claims are often of two types: how the town's future should be shaped and how the socialist and industrial heritage may be preserved, cultivated, and reframed. The struggles between local intellectuals, state institutions, and the infrastructure of civic cultivation thus are also played out through the interpretation of this history. Hence the sections below on the heritagization of post-socialist industrial history.

4.3. The changing landscape of houses of culture

The town had houses of culture related to every factory and mine until the 1980s. That means six HoCs were initially built for miners. Each factory, the two glass factories, the stove factory, and the steelworks had their HoC. In 1966 the József Attila Center for Civic Cultivation (JACCC) opened its gates and the Gerelyes Endre House of Culture of Zagyvapálfalva⁸⁰ that substituted five smaller houses of culture, including one of the glass factories built in 1978. Finally, the Miner House of Culture, built in 1880, operated until the early 1990s. That means that in the late seventies, eleven HoC provided a place for gathering, amateur clubs, and cultural

⁷⁹ Integrated Strategy of City Development 2021: 14-17. (https://www.salgotarjan.hu/wp-content/uploads/fejlesztésidokumentumok_20220629_its.pdf Last accessed: 05.01.2023.)

⁸⁰ The house of culture itself was opened to substitute for six houses of culture closed because of amortization or city planning purposes. (Municipality report on the district houses of culture 2011. [https://kozgyules.salgotarjan.hu/files/2010-2014%20ciklus/K%C3%B6zgy%C5%B1%C3%A9s/2011/2011_12%20\(december\)](https://kozgyules.salgotarjan.hu/files/2010-2014%20ciklus/K%C3%B6zgy%C5%B1%C3%A9s/2011/2011_12%20(december)) Last accessed: 05.01. 2023)

programs in a town of forty thousand people. From these, only three are left standing in the town (JACCC, Smelter House of Culture, Gerelyes Endre House of Culture of Zagyvapálfalva) and one outside of it (Bátki József Community Center of the Zagyvaróna neighborhood). The HoC of the former steel factory, the Smelter House of Culture, was privatized with the factory itself. It is now run as a private place, occasionally having cabaret shows and rented for gatherings. A dance club was opened in the Miner HoC in the 1990s, and in 2011 a company dealing in car parts bought the building and turned it into a retail outlet. Besides its industrial history, the Miner Casino is also important symbolically because of its situation at the “gate” of the town: anyone coming to the town passes the building from 1880 and is unlikely not to notice the palace-like structure that is now hosting auto-repair accessories. In the hollow glass factory, a small gas-based power plant was built. The Hirsch stove factory’s House was first rented as a disco, then demolished.

The HoC in the colonies closed at different times between the late 1980s and early 1990s. The newly erected housing blocs, built in the 1960s-70s, lacked cultural infrastructure. In these housing projects, experiments were born to provide tenants with small and approachable community places (Brunda and Molnár 1987). Those imagined as institutions of civic self-governance but did not develop into operating durable places of civic cultivation. JACCC, at the time of my research, was run as a non-profit, limited liability company. Integrating a Youth Center called Youth Information and Advise Office (Youth Office; *Salgótarjáni Ifjúsági Tanácsadó Iroda, SITI*) and the Bátki József Community Center into its operation. That means that different HoCs are under the same legal entity, but they have relative autonomy within the organization, while the budget is decided in a centralized way. The Gerelyes Endre House of Culture is still the property of the municipality. It was opened in 1978 and was also part of the council-governed system of civic cultivation. It has been operating as part of a primary school

since 1996. It was under refurbishment in 2018 as part of a town rehabilitation project and reopened its doors recently (2022), providing after-school education programs.

The number of HoCs shrunk dramatically in two stages: when the mines started to be closed in the 1980s and after 1990 when Hungary's capitalist transformation resulted in the privatization of the companies in the town. The new owners of formerly state ran firms, if continued the production, used the skilled work and equipment, but the work regime was more exploitative. People did not have the financial stability to have the leisure time to go to the HoC. As I elaborated in the second chapter the council-ran HoCs, in the meantime, faced two options: they organized more profitable programs targeting audiences with some purchasing power (in this category, for example, the project of a major theater for Salgótarján in the building of JACCC). Alternatively, they became social institutions, i.e., they organize educational activities most directly targeted against social inequalities (such as after-school teaching programs). In this process, cultural aspects of civic cultivation, like the organization of amateur artist groups or literary circles, became the responsibility of local civic associations.

Despite the mass shutdown, one new place opened. Youth Office started to operate in 2015, moving the small youth office from JACCC to a new place called Apollo centrum, where the cinema and a nightclub are. Located in a two-story big building, Youth Office represents the new perspective of civic cultivation. It mixes social and civic functions. Provides after-school assistance services to young people and hosts dance groups, associations, exhibitions, and several other activities. It is mainly a host institution: people would organize programs there while the staff helps in management and application for funding. The two thousand square meters building only has three employees; otherwise, local associations organize its programs. The slow decay of the HoC buildings around the town and the opening of Youth Office next to the town hall is a powerful illustration of the contemporary evolution of the meaning of civic cultivation.

4.4. Struggles for maintenance

Named after socialist poet Attila József (1905-1937), the main HoC was built between 1962 and 1966 according to the urban plan of 1961 (Pogány 1973; Hartmann 2022). The plan aimed at reconstructing the town center, including the main administrative buildings and the housing



Picture 11: JACC in the times of its building and now (source: <https://retropolisz.wordpress.com/2018/02/15/the-journey-begins/> last accessed:29.03.2023.)

estates. The rapidly growing town did not have enough flats to provide for the labor power of the growing industry of the town. The Karancs hotel, one of the most iconic buildings of Salgótarján, was the first landmark to emerge in the new landscape, its vertical mass counterbalanced through the horizontal glass façade of the József Attila Center of Civic Cultivation.

As was usual during the second five-year plan (1961-65), the plans for the JACCC partly followed the “palace of culture” model, with a large theater hall to host mass events and semi-professional singing and dancing ensembles. However, the theater and the gallery were complemented with smaller rooms for clubs and voluntary associations to meet. This modular logic became dominant in the 1970s since the club movement of the 1960s demanded different spatial organization. Instead of one central space, multiple activities demanded rooms that could be separated (Simon 2021). György Szrogh, the architect of the JACCC, reflecting on it at the international conference of houses of culture in 1977, put it as a matter of “free choice” in space

use: “There are no two villages or cities which would have the same expectations from its institutions. Thus, working from general norms and master plans about these institutions is not helpful. We need modules that are assembled according to local needs. We need adaptability, openness, flexibility, and to some extent neutrality – these should be the main features of these institutions [houses of culture]” (Dóri 2021, 139).

Since Salgótarján is the administrative center of Nógrád county, the JACCC had county-wide credentials reflected in its official name (József Attila County Civic Cultivation Center). While it did not have a permanent professional theater ensemble, it had a semi-professional folk dance group called Nógrád. A brass band and numerous choirs were active in the town. These were closely associated with the smelter tradition of the steel factory, so the Smelter House of Culture retained it. I will discuss them in the next chapter. JACCC was where the House of Culture Division of the ICC experimented with an open house. As I discussed in chapter two, it meant a localized understanding of civic cultivation.

One of the newspapers reported that when the JACCC joined the open house program in 1978, that was under pressure to produce numbers in the beginning, and the possibility of opening up for small communities came. Miklós Kicsiny⁸¹, head of JACCC at that time, highlighted the importance of the distinction between “passive” and “active” locations: passive were spaces for workshops, and active were the spaces for cultural consumption. This distinction outlines a concept of civic cultivation that focuses on self-organization and participation of different communities. (Dóri 2021, 142–143).

Csaba Tóth, the vice head of JACCC between 1983-1997, remembers the 1980s as a moment of emergence of the associations in the town and the surrounding⁸². In 1983, fiscal decentralization handed state competence over the HoC to local councils. In Salgótarján, Csaba

⁸¹ Pintér, Károly. A művelődés előszobája. Nógrád Megyei Hírlap 1981.09.27. p. 4

⁸² 26.05.2019. Csaba Tóth interview by the author

Tóth was among the educators who had to deal with the consequences of such reforms. The peripheral HoCs in the former mining settlements under the town's jurisdiction had an increasingly aging population. They started to give these HoC to local associations. He framed this process as a rationalization of resources that enabled them to establish associations in these settlements, which could run the peripheral smaller HoCs. In practice, associations became responsible for the maintenance, but the council covered the operating costs. Tóth commented that it was a necessary evil and a learning curve that prepared them for the post-1990 transformations: "While it was a must, this was the field we could try out how to do civic organization, apply for funding, organize a democratic institution."⁸³ Keeping a skeleton institution reduced personnel costs, but the council maintained the HoC.

The JACCC was responsible for civic cultivation in the town, organizing programs, and assisting county-wide HoCs with organizational assistance. In order to meet the local requirements through the early "privatization" of the peripheral HoCs, it eased its financial burden. However, it also helped broker the creation of the associations which became dominant in the post-socialist cultural landscape. "From this point on," says Tóth, "the relationship with these HoCs transformed into a collaborative relationship. We provided organizational assistance, and we did not let their hands go. It was for the best since, after the transition, the municipalities tended to abandon the HoCs anyway, so we arrived at that point prepared⁸⁴." Gusztáv Brunda, who worked at the county council then, saw these changes differently. For him, the HoC system in Salgótarján had already started to decline in the late 1970s and early 1980s. While Tóth considers that cuts to the civic cultivation budget made space for the growth of civil society and self-organization, Brunda's county-level views see it as a loss rather than an opportunity⁸⁵.

⁸³ 26.05.2019. Csaba Tóth. interview by the author

⁸⁴ 26.05.2019. Csaba Tóth. interview by the author

⁸⁵ 02.07.2019. Gusztáv Brunda.interview by the author.

1980s educators already experimented with market-based funding. Under Csaba Tóth's mandate, they organized the Dixieland Festival in partnership with the Karancs hotel. The partnership included state television which permitted them to invite jazz performers from Czechoslovakia and the GDR. However, Tóth recalls constant short-term changes to suit TV program requirements, which were not compatible with the organization of the festival long-term. Application for funding on the side of the JACCC was a time-consuming process that was no match for the expenses incurred through international programming musicians. Partnership with the Karancs Hotel⁸⁶ providing the required cash flow in foreign currency. The musicians would be hosted there, would perform once in the main hall of the hotel, and the hotel would pay them directly. That amounted to funding for international performers. Tóth sees this experience as the learning curve toward the managerial attitude they needed after the transition. Similarly, Brunda reflects on his early years in cultural development: “I was teaching the project perspective for managers and NGOs, on how the project logic as a perspective of accounting was invented. I realized we had been doing this since the late 1970s in the HoC.”⁸⁷

Alexei Yurchak claims that the performative elements in authoritative speech became the norm in the 1980s in the Soviet Union, and politics and actions were mainly ritualized (Yurchak 2006, 29). This is put by József Böröcz, that instead of open democratization, informalization and metaphorization; allowing privatized forms of social reproduction and performative enactment of ideology was typical in reform measures (Böröcz 1999a, 195–96). These claims are echoed in the literature on HoCs. One of the more typical description of activities in the institutions is that they were maintained only as facades, and despite their emptiness, the employees falsified the number of visitors (White 1990, 115).

⁸⁶ Karancs was part of the network of hotels called Hungarohotel that could host international tourists and had access to different currencies,

⁸⁷ 02.07.2019. Gusztáv Brunda.interview by the author.

Through a biography of one Party official, Caroline Humphrey argues that there were conflicts about the ideological enactments and the role of political claims was not only performative (Humphrey 2008). Documents produced on the activity of the HoC had performative aspects in the 1980s but equal access and democratization of civic cultivation were elements that were taken seriously. As I showed in chapter two, however, a more positive and productive dynamic informed behaviors and views at this historical juncture. The specifically economic type of governance that emerged and started ruling the field at the turn of the 1980s decentralized administrative control and converted the activist attitude into a managerial one. Brunda's professional trajectory illustrates this. He was working for multiple organizations. The Association of Communist Youth funded a project on Youth Clubs in peripheral HoCs. The National Civic Cultivation Committee funded his community development project in the housing blocks. These associations monitored the research and implementation of these projects independently from any municipal input.

Apart from getting funding from the Hotel, Dixieland Festival was also successful since the Institute of Civic Cultivation (ICC, *Népművelési Intézet*) supported the organization of festivals in the countryside. Investment into megaevents in Budapest only became more systematic after 1990. This also meant that the Dixieland festival lost its countrywide significance but stayed an important event for the town. The integration of cultural industries followed the post-socialist capitalist integration of the country. That meant that a while before 1990, the region was open as a market for the cultural goods exported from Western Europe and the US, and that openness was restricted (Szemere 2001; Siefert 2016; Nagy 2020). The transition brought cheap Western cultural products (Bodnár 2001, 137–38).

That process, however, was first mediated by networks and knowledge on the local level. The Dixieland festival, for example, was funded by ING and Amstel after 1990. These funding opportunities emerged through the connections Tóth made during his work in the national

network of civic cultivation. He could approach the Dutch ambassador of Hungary, who then connected the organizers to the different corporations⁸⁸. The Festival partnered with the “Dutch days” in 1991. The Dutch Chamber of Commerce brought firms and small retailers into a fair on Salgotarján’s central square. As “national days” started to proliferate in the early 1990s, Italian and French Chambers were invited to join. The Dixieland festival and the connections to the embassies paved the way through cultural diplomacy to a new but peripheral market for these companies. Meanwhile, the HoC and its programs had to rely on this kind of creative adaptation to support themselves.

In the summer of 1991, JACCC closed down because of the lack of operating funds for two consecutive months, a unique occurrence in the organization’s history, according to my informants. A recurring anecdote of employees says that the deputy mayor and the head of the cultural committee, desperate for income-generating ideas, considered hosting a car shop in the house of culture. The large bay windows on the first-floor façade made it ideal, they thought, for a display of new cars. It is a symbolic story for them on how the new system was not cultured, and it lacked it so much that it did not need a house for it anymore. It is also a story of the personal triumph of creativity and the symbol of overcoming adversity. From the perspective of the national scale, I already discussed how educators in the field came up with solutions to continue operating the HoC. Here the experience in decentralization and rescaling, dealing with the local market actors and grants, was mobilized.

Since the HoC was struggling, they rented parts of it for the civic organizations, later to a coffee shop. This activity solidified the position of the JACC: “but this had nothing to do with culture [...] it was a direct entrepreneurial move from our part, we counted how much profit we have to make to be able to make it. But we were quite good in that in the first three-four years.

⁸⁸ 02.07.2019. Gusztáv Brunda. Interview by the author.

During the first government, we made it.”⁸⁹ Both Tóth and Brunda had their own theoretical work on governance and the content of civic cultivation. They were engaged in community- and culture-based development, the paradigm I described in the previous chapters, but they despised the entrepreneurial management of the HoC. They criticized the perception of culture as a commodity and the pressure on the house to produce revenue. According to their understanding, culture is an amalgam of communities. And while they claim that civic cultivation has a solid relationship to economic development and that could be measured, that connection is indirect. In essence, establishing successful and durable communities should be a supporting process of sharing common experiences, knowledge, and discourse, then creating an environment for enterprise. In that context, the solutions they came up with to make the HoC fiscally sustainable was a “necessary evil” that only served to provide the material stability for the creation of communities (S. Kovács, Kovalcsik, and Kováts 1992, 53).

The late- and post-socialist transformation of JACC shows how local educators learned and practiced marketization of the activities of the HoC prior to 1990. In the underfunded institutional system, they continued and used practices that emerged during the 1980s, such as reliance on associations, grant-based funding, and involvement of market actors in sustenance. While they despised the socialist governance of the HoC as it was interventionist, the struggle to sell culture also contradicted their understanding of civic cultivation as a way of organic self-development of society that, in the end, would have economic benefits.

4.5. The target of politics: parties and the reproduction of local middle class

Immediately after the transition, a very fragile coalition governed the town consisting of Fidesz (at the time, liberal party), the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats, and the far-left

⁸⁹ 26.05.2019. Csaba Tóth. Interview by the author

Workers 'Party⁹⁰. It fell apart within two years, and a new coalition replaced it, itself succeeded in 1994 by the Hungarian Socialist Party, which governed the town until 2006. Fidesz took over in 2006 and was outvoted by an opposition coalition in 2014, in power since then⁹¹. Political turnover affected JACCC staffing almost systematically — if not directly. Layoffs were challenged in court, certainly through conflicts and resignations. The HoC is a state institution that mediates between civil and political society. In this liminal place, officers' cognitive dissonance is constant, having to adjudicate between their own beliefs about the correct form of culture on the one hand and those of the associations they serve on the other, all while negotiating with the municipality. They also yearn for the recognition of their profession while negotiating their terms of employment, which seems to be perpetually in question.

Csaba Tóth himself left JACCC because of a conflict with the municipality. The municipality challenged his competence and claimed that he was ill-qualified. He sued the municipality and won his lawsuit in 1996. These struggles were typical only after the transition in my fields, but the relationship between the head of the council and the HoC determined the capability of cultural organization before 1990. In some cases, the council saw potential political opponents in the head of the HoC (Trencsényi 2015) or the alliance of the different leaders (party, technocratic and cultural) produced a stable basis for cultural initiatives. The HoC thus was a place of the struggle for control and reproduction of the intellectuals of towns and villages prior to 1990, however, the debates and redistribution of positions did happen behind the scenes.

In the case of JACCC, the most turbulent struggle for the place happened between 2008-2009 through the appointment of two heads, Anikó Dávid, and Györgyi Hajdú. While the former was appointed as an acting director and changed to the latter, favored by Fidesz, both

⁹⁰ Worker Party considered itself the Marxist-Leninist descendant of the Hungarian Socialist Worker Party. It went through several changes and while it still exists it is mainly known for its political entrepreneurship.

⁹¹Salgótarján is called Little Moscow or the red city because of their loyalty to left-wing parties and politicians.

ended up in the crossfire of informal power struggles. Anikó Dávid started in the JACCC as a porter after graduating, then worked as an event organizer with civic and folklore associations. After becoming the Head of the Unit of Civic Cultivation, she organized theater shows for secondary school children. As she recalled, this period was dominated by the struggle with the financial management, which “basically ran the House”⁹². In late 2000, educative programs came back to the JACCC, like programs on addictions. After the former director’s retirement and the following leadership’s resignation, she got the position as the head of the HoC in 2008. Contrary to this trajectory of an employee of a HoC, Györgyi Hajdú, after graduating as an educator, worked as the head of cultural programs for pioneers. In 1990 she opened a premium clothes shop based on her professor’s advice at the department of civic cultivation “he told us that this is a moment of change and if one does not use the opportunities, they will be left behind.”⁹³ Parallel to running the shop, she held drama pedagogy workshops in the local secondary school but did not work in the institutional system after 1990. She applied to the position of head of JACCC while Anikó Dávid was the temporary head of the JACCC and got appointed in 2009. These struggles played a role in their decision of leaving the town. While Dávid ended up working in a Budapest-based HoC. Hajdú, after his work in the JACCC ran a café called Talent Alternative Art Club, which provided a venue for amateur pop bands, exhibitions and theater after several conflicts, she also left Salgótarján and started to teach drama pedagogy in Budapest.

Both directors were trying to develop the theater of JACCC, which got a permanent company just after I finished my fieldwork in 2019. However, at that moment of their operation, it only hosted theater pieces from other theaters. One of the main conflicts they had with the municipality was their reluctance to host pieces based on political alliances. For example, they

⁹² 18.01.2018. Anikó Dávid interview by the author

⁹³ 16.08.2021. Györgyi Hajdú interview by the author.

refused to choose only from the shows of the Thuray Ida Theater. It is a Budapest-based ensemble that is now highly funded by the state because of its personal connections to Fidesz. Its repertoire consists of operettas from the interwar period, representing the social mobility of some lower-class actors (peasants, servants, etc.). They usually gain status through merit, a morally superior act, or love interest but never challenge the existing social order. The music is usually folkish, and the songs in structure and intonation resemble interwar period popular songs.

Before her political career, the mayor was a literature teacher and considered herself competent in advising the program. She asked Hajdú to present the planned theater pieces before choosing, which she declined to do, protecting the autonomy of the HoC. As the JACCC focused to the remaining well-to-do middle class of the town, local entrepreneurs, former engineers of the factories, and employees of the municipality having the necessary cultural capital to be willing to go regularly to the theater, both informed and educated in the Budapest based theater scene wanted to bring pieces from “alternative” or sometimes called “oppositional” theaters of the capital. Hajdú got her drama pedagogy degree in 2010 in Budapest., Her experience with the theaters of the capital led her to invite ensembles of the István Örkény theater and József Katona theater. Both were active in an open critique of socialism from the perspective of individual freedom prior to 1990. Katona was established in 1982 and kept its politically engaged character after 1990. The pieces shown there often use naked bodies, surprising, subversive visuals, and dramaturgy. While their aesthetics and narrative dramaturgy is close to classical theater pieces, their work can be shocking for people who are more used to speech-based acting and directing.

They would report similar experience with the municipality, more specifically with the mayor, as she tried to force her own politically informed taste on the JACCC, but they also had conflicts with each other. According to Dávid’s narrative, she was pushed around the institution,

first as a porter, then in the youth center, and finally in the tourist office. There she wrote an integrated tourism plan for the county, which was considered an overreach of her authority. As a result of that conflict, she resigned. In the meantime, the municipality constantly intervened in the program, as the pieces Hajdú chose were subversive and not suitable for the taste of the citizens according to the mayor. Hajdú resigned after she organized a concert of a government-critical alternative pop-rock band in the HoC, and the mayor asked her to cancel it. As an act of public demonstration against the endeavors, she did it publicly on the stage after explaining the unbearable situation in which she got. Following that, the head of the JACCC became the mayor's husband.

In this section, I summarized the debates and struggles of the two heads of JACCC with each other and the municipality. I argued that the HoC mediates between civil and political society and while it aids associations to form or translate state ideologies to the local level, its operation can be contradictory. This struggle illustrates that contradictory position in which while the HoC is an institution of the local state through several programs and appointing personnel, it protects its position. The staff can and, most of the time, resist the forms of direct influence in the form of discourses of professional integrity. In the meantime, that professional identity is informed by the contingencies that are created by a particular position of educators. In the case of Hajdú and Dávid, they tried to educate the local middle class that comes to the theater regularly inspired by the Budapest-based alternative theaters. Their taste was conditioned by these experiences related to the alternative theater, which conflicted with the politically motivated selection of the mayor.

4.6. Yearning for the “normal”

After the resignation of Hajdú in 2012, JACCC was transformed into a non-profit corporation, and in 2019 an integrated non-profit corporation was established called Center for Events and Media of Salgótarján, which contained the television, local sports facilities, and the

HoC functions of JACCC and the theater operating in the place. The former head of the branch of the Union of Workers of Civic Cultivation and Public Museums (UVCCPM)⁹⁴ told me that entertainment gained even more space in the program of the HoV. The shift in the legal body of the HoC was unrelated to the struggle between the mayor and the two former heads of the JACCC. In principle, it was rooted in the willingness to strengthen the theater among the functions of the HoC. Among people working in the HoC's social or civic branches, it was perceived as the withdrawal of functions considered part of civic cultivation, such as supporting associations and educational programs and providing background for amateur cultural groups.

My informants in JACCC highlighted the role of the HoC as a mediator and accelerator of such associations. Since the institution started to center the theater as its primary task, associations gained more space to define the programs in the JACCC. The numerous civic associations such as the Nógrád Photo Club Association, Sréter Ferenc Folkschule Association or the people around the monthly journal titled *Habitants of the Town (Városlakó)*, *Palóc Women for the Future* or the AMHPD that were filling the JACCC with programs had thus a more significant role. These events represent the privatization of civic cultivation activities that I spoke about at the beginning of the chapter. That means that the HoC is less a place to disseminate canonized forms of culture but a host institution of self-organized groups. One of the projects which involved most of the associations active in the town was funded by the Active Communities Program, an EU-funded project that facilitated an experiment to work out community development-based civic cultivation⁹⁵. They chose to do a town beautifying project that highlights a view of the town from the perspective of everyday life. Compared to discourses

⁹⁴ 18.10.2021. Attila Viszok interview by the author.

⁹⁵ The Active Communities project was implemented between 2016 and 2019 from a budget of three billion forints (ca. 10m EUR). The Museum Education and Methodology Center coordinated it in consortium with the National Institute for Civic Cultivation and the National Széchényi Library. A third of the funding was spent on civic cultivation and on developing local associations engaged with local culture. The idea of the program was to mentor local communities engaged with local civic cultivation. The Salgótarján project was part of a series of pilot projects that provide a basis for future organizations.

on decay, they wanted to highlight a form of everyday normality, perceiving the town as not a ruin or a place of loss. The project was coordinated by Sakkozzuk ki! (Check it out!), an organization that was established to make public space refurbishments. It is run by young municipality-employed intellectuals and centered around a critique of the town's image as a socialist or industrial one. They would campaign for exhibiting local artists and focus on its natural environment instead of remembering the industry or highlighting its decay. The head of the association is also the head of SITI. She got her degree as an educator and coordinated numerous grants. This position provides her and the association access to knowledge on funding opportunities and has a close-knit relationship with the municipality.

I participated in the planning and realization of two projects with the associations. The first one focused on the memory of János Balázs, a Roma painter of the town. The other was about refurbishing an underpass funded. Both activities were based on the idea that the greyness and impoverishment of the post-industrial urban environment could be changed by “coloring the town.” The participants repainted public places and made murals. The first meeting of the Active Communities program started with the assembly of all the aforementioned civic associations’ representatives. Cards were distributed from a board game that focuses on the creative association of ideas, which provided a basis for thinking about the future and past of the town. The photo club representative highlighted the town’s natural environment, claiming its natural resources are underutilized. In contrast, the Palóc Women focused on the local ethnological aspect of the town. representatives highlighted the small town-like features, like “everybody knows everyone” and strong informal relationships coupled with mutual help. After assessing the town’s strengths and weaknesses, the project developed to speak about the town as “normal,” which was realized in a painting under the train underpass. That place is close to the main square and the JACCC, connecting the “new town.”⁹⁶ to the modernist core is a place

⁹⁶ Housing blocks built in the early 1998s

of representation of the town's downward spiral, where homeless people regularly gather and find shelter from the weather. At the same time, the main square is usually full of people coming to the post office to place their bet in the lottery.

In urban studies, there is a vast amount of literature on this kind of place-making project of the urban middle class (Davis 2006; Bodnár 2015), and in this case, an unintended consequence of the centering of the place through repainting did not differ. However, there is a lack of capital inflow, and this “act of regeneration” was not preceded or followed by any investment. Thus, it is a form of misrecognition of the relationship between investment and beautification. The centering of the underpass was not followed by policing or other disciplinary measures. The struggle around framing the experience of coming from Salgótarján is mainly centered around the industry, shrinking population, and loss. Here, the project's main concern was to highlight some kind of consensus between the associations on what everyday life means in this context. The painting was complemented with photographs of the people living in Salgótarján, like shoppers, rally cars, or gatherings. That consensus of not focusing on the industry, past, or whatever future a shrinking city has allowed us to think about it as a “normal” place. This normality represented an imagined lifestyle typical to what is considered a Western European small town's everyday life, like some form of consumption and leisure time activity like biking, hiking, and skateboarding.



Picture 12: Painting of the underpass (source: <https://cselekvokozossegek.hu/wp-content/uploads/kiemelt-k%C3%A9p-1-1030x773.jpg> last accessed: 29.03.2023.)

While hosted by JACCC, this pursuit was not coordinated or realized by the HoC. Similarly, other events that directly engage with amateur and community functions of cultural practices could happen outside of the place. However, the overlap between people working in the HoC and participating in these projects is significant. This place-making attempt represents a civic cultivation activity outside the HoC. It is organized in line with the particular interest and vision of the associations and supplements the HoC's activities that are focused more on the management of its theater than civic cultivation activities. This third aspect of the transformation of JACCC and the connected spaces represents how social and amateur aspects of civic cultivation are organized under the umbrella of community development done by the

associations according to their particular vision related to their social position, a variation of middle-class normality.

4.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed the transformations of the main HoC in Salgótarján to demonstrate how civic cultivation transformed in one given locality. I showed public policies related to the field in the previous chapters. Here, I analyzed how local social relations and localized forms of state-civil society relations result in specific forms of transformation. Civic cultivation also tells a story of localized forms of class politics. In this case, we can observe a long historical transformation of the relationship between capital and labor, state and culture. In the early history of Salgótarján, industries organized institutions of social reproduction to fix labor. They also aided the process of professionalization of cultural activities of working-class civil society. Then the socialist state, until the late 1970s, maintained and reproduced this form of organization of cultural life by having multiple HoCs in every neighborhood connected to the place of housing, work, or political association. A slow, then intensified privatization started, which peaked in the early 1990s. However, a lack of state-ordered, centralized cultural policy did not mean a lack of cultural politics organized by local social antagonisms.

By studying the interaction between civic association, municipality, and the HoC, I demonstrated three processes typical to the post-socialist history of civic cultivation. Utilization of the creativity of educators in the maintenance of the HoC means that a state function is almost voluntarily maintained by actors who strive for recognition but are hardly acknowledged. I argued that the debates around the HoC are mainly political; that is, they are about the reproduction of local elites. Ultimately, these have consequences in the cultural programs they organize, but the stake is the reproduction of specific factions of the town's elite. In the end, through a realization of a project, I analyzed how associations take over functions of civic

cultivation. However, they represent a particular vision of the local middle class on the lived normality of the town.

They take up particular issues embedded in the HoC before, such as claims on local identity, women's rights, and rights of people with disability. However, local political and civil society interaction is almost exclusively concerned with the local middle class, who can run associations in their free time. János Uramecz framed that process at the beginning of the chapter as intellectuals became responsible for the institutions of social reproduction. Certain functions remain in the hand of civic cultivation, like in the case of SITI, the educational programs of the Roma youth of the town, and on the periphery of Salgótarján. The positions of spokesperson that can form claims on the general interest of the town and can practice forms of place-making are limited to a group of professionals associated with the municipality. That can change in line with political changes, as the brief history of post-socialist political and cultural struggles illustrated. However, the HoC as a place of reproduction of such stratum remains.

5. Longing for development: Cultivating industrial tradition in the Miner and Smelter Choir

“Crush the ore, refine the metal; the homeland needs it, valiant smelter.”

(Excerpt from the Smelter Anthem)

The first time I met with members of the Miner and Smelter Cultural Association was on 23rd June 2017 at the “Miner and Smelter Juniális,” a celebration of Salgótarján’s industrial tradition hosted by the Mining Museum on the day of the night of the museum⁹⁷. A smelter and miner choir and the brass band were performing newly written songs on the town as part of a competition to find the city’s new anthem for the 95th anniversary of it gaining its township. The Miner Smelter Cultural Association was celebrating the 138th anniversary of establishing the brass band, the 125 years history of the Smelter Choir, and the 130th birthday of the association of amateur actors of the Ironworks. From the three competing songs, the final winner was chosen by a jury of the representatives of the municipality in September. Later I invited the choir to open an exhibition on union-organized cultural life I curated with a group of colleagues at the headquarter of the Hungarian Metalworks’ Federation, Budapest. Eventually, I also became a choir member, and the rehearsals, shows, and tours with it structured my time in Salgótarján.

I organized my first meeting with Mária Gálné Horváth, the former head of Smelter House of Culture, for the day of the competition. While she asked me why I was interested in the HoC, we listened to the competing songs. Later the jury chose Mária’s piece. The two other songs focused on the richness of nature surrounding Salgótarján and the way the beauty of the valley and the hills were making the citizens loyal to the town. In contrast with them, Mária’s song

⁹⁷ The Night of the Museums has been a country-wide program on Midsummer Night since 2003. On that evening, visitors can access every museum in the country with one pass.

had an optimistic view of the future based on the industrial production that took place in the past. The song listed the town's natural resources and connected them to the industries and the economic progress through processing them. It closed with the evocation of the Miners' anthem⁹⁸. The original song starts with a deterministic view, which claims that the fate of the miner is dependent on the laws of nature and determined by the elements he cannot control: "Luck comes, luck goes, that is how the miner lives." It then wishes for a "miner bride." Then the song claims that this wanted bride should not be sorry for a miner when the inevitable death comes for him in the shaft since at least he flies up to the sky from the belly of the earth. Mária's anthem repeats the starting lines: "luck comes" twice at the end of every verse, but not in the submissive manner presented in the original anthem, but in a wishful optimistic way. It bases the future prosperity on the natural resources under the city, which can still be utilized in rebuilding its former glory: "your [the town's] heartbeat is black diamond, your hand is solid steel which raises us and carries to the bright future." Nevertheless, these resources must be cultivated through hard work. Thus, the anthem interpellates the town's citizens and asks them to "line up and rise to work." The optimistic view evokes the socialist workers' songs, while the song itself, written by the conductor of the Miner Smelter Choir, resembles the German miner songs⁹⁹.

In the previous chapters, I focused on the different scales of decision-making and the history of civic cultivation as a profession to understand how it has transformed since the late 1960s. Then I reviewed the activities of the associations and the main HoC in Salgótarján. Here I will focus on one specific amateur group and their motivations to cultivate the miner and smelter traditions in a shrinking (post)industrial town. The departure of the analysis is the Smelter

⁹⁸ The song known as the miner anthem was officially called that way in 1920. It is a mixture of two songs slowly canonized into the miner tradition from the early 19th century in the northern part of the Hungarian Kingdom, now Slovakia (Zsámboki 1994).

⁹⁹ By German miner song here, I mean an interpretation of the tradition with a trombone, a cheerful tone, and ideal for marching that became a typical genre among metallurgists and miners at the end of the 19th century (Katona et al., 1968; T. Szerémi, 1955).

House of Culture, which does not host events of miner and smelter cultural activities. However, its former amateur groups organized HoC, where the theater group, the predecessor of the current permanent theater, was active. The brass band of the HoC was merged with the town's symphonic orchestra and the miner brass band.

After theorizing the activities of the local associations in Salgótarján, I describe the history of making the cultural institutional system of Rimamurányi-Salgótarjáni Ironworks Stock Corporation (RSISCC). I will argue that civic cultivation was integral to capital's place-making. Through cultural means of Taylorist paternalism and social services, the engineers and stockholders of the factory attempted to level ethnic and class heterogeneity to form an industrial working class loyal to its company.

Then I will focus on how members of the Association perceived the transformations of the Smelter House of Culture and what role it played in the socialist history of the town. In the second part of the chapter, I inquire about the cultural activities of the Miner and Smelter Cultural Association. I describe how the Association operates and how its concepts of industrial labor are manifested in interactions with the municipality around the celebration of anniversaries. Then I will focus on another civic association, the public of the songs and performances. It is called the Hungarian Mining and Metallurgical Society (HMMS; *Országos Magyar Bányászati és Kohászati Egyesület, OMBKE*). HMMS is an association established in 1892 and grew out of a literary circle of the first university for engineers in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Its liturgies follow the student traditions of that university and serve as a forum to discuss issues related to mining, metallurgy, and forestry. In its meetings in Salgótarján, members of the technical intelligentsia try to come up with solutions to influence the town's economic life.

Based on interviews and my eight-month-long participant observation as a member of the Miner and Smelter Choir, I describe and analyze the cultural practices that aim to create the

town's identity. The choir consists of twenty men recruited from engineers, miners, and former workers of the Ironworks. Women do not participate. Members invite them to special assemblies organized on Women's Day (8th March) and Mother's Day (every first Sunday of May). The members are between the age of fifty and eighty. Most started working in the factories when the socialist modernist town center was built in the 1960s. Their professional career peaked in the seventies and eighties. For some, that meant that they were engineers, leaders, and managers of either the Ironworks or the mines. Most of them also participated in leisure time activities and amateur musician groups organized in the Smelter House of Culture before 1990.

The emergence of monopoly capitalism created a stratum of professionals responsible for the reproduction and production of commodified culture, argued by Barbara and John Ehrenreich. In the meantime, "cultures of professions" were created by people specialized in specific white-collar labor, which reproduced their distinction from the working class (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979, 26). Here we see how the history of the emergence of cultural professionals and the culture of profession plays out in a peripheral region of a semi-peripheral history. The main questions of the chapter are the following: what did happen with the institution responsible for worker leisure time transformed? How does its everyday operation condition its activities? What is its connection to the capitalist transformations of the region, local state, policies of civic cultivation, and hegemonic processes on the national scale?

5.1. Residual public, social reproduction and development as "common sense"

I will argue that voluntary associations focused on cultural leisure time spending, such as the choir, have symbolic and material significance. Symbolic as they represent and create a perceived narrative on the locality and material as they participate in the redistribution of goods and provide social and cultural capital through informal relationships. I analyze the choir and the related groups from three perspectives. First, what is the role of such groups in social

reproduction? On social reproduction, I will mean two interrelated processes, the reproduction of social structures (Bourdieu 1973) and the reproduction of one's livelihood (Narotzky 1997, 170–71). Second, the meetings of the Salgótarján division of the Hungarian Mining and Metallurgical Society (HMMS) provide a form of public sphere to discuss issues related to the industry, town, and tradition. It is a place where material interests are openly stated, and life, labor, and culture are handled in unity; however, it has little effect on the town's life, apart from reproducing the perceived importance of the former technical intelligentsia. I will inquire about what kind of public that is and how it is embedded in local politics.

Third, I call the form of culture produced in a group related to Salgótarján, its industries, and the culture of labor *common sense*, which is a fragmentary and incoherent worldview rooted in the actual social position of the producer of culture or knowledge (Crehan 2002, 115; 2011; 2016, 57). The choir speaks and sings about different times and politics, nostalgic towards the inter-war period, the late 19th century, and even the socialist past. Commonly, they praise development and the relative well-being it provides. Thus, I will call these heterogeneous claims part of middle-class politics in sync with the understanding of associations of the previous chapter. Here, however, we see a profession-specific culture and culture-related claims of the managers and other employees of the former metalworks: the development of normality through the development of the industries. That can manifest in different political opinions or normative statements on history. However, we see an interpretation of the past projected into the future that considers industrial production and development the solution for the hardships people experiences in the town.

In his monography on the youth organizations of the Csepel Factory, István Kürti adds to the analysis of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) that not only the educational system takes part in the reproduction of social structures, but the peer groups and other institutions, such as voluntary associations or unions, connected to leisure

time activities can play a role in selecting and valuing habitus (Kürti 2002, 9). While that resonates with the analysis of civil society as a complementary of the state in the case of Gramsci, here I would highlight the resources, such as social and cultural capital, that voluntary associations provide to the participants. Different forms of the capital of the household are mobilized in the institutional setting of education, thus not only the performance of the students within the walls of the school is being measured, but their position in the broader social structures plays a role in the reproduction of their social position (Bourdieu 1977; 1987). Similarly, leisure activities in the factory mobilize certain forms of capital and utilized certain forms of behavior, which could then be transformed into other forms of resources.

HoC is also a form of Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser 2014). These institutionalized intentions aim to reproduce the necessary labor force for the reproduction of relations of production. Historically the socialist institutional system of the choir or the brass band can be understood from the perspective of cultural reproduction as social reproduction. That means that leisure time activities provided access to informal gatherings where workers could meet engineers and party secretaries of the corporation. This way, the cultural capital could be transformed into a social one, which then helped the members to get access to education or a better-paid position. Throughout the history of the Ironworks, the Smelter House of Culture served as a place for the reproduction of labor power through transmitting knowledge and cultivating necessary behavior. Consequently, while it gave access to other forms of resources for individual members, its self-proclaimed function was a reproduction of a political and social structure. In comparison, the contemporary state of the choir can be more successfully understood from the perspective of social reproduction in the sense of reproduction of one's livelihood through care work, affective work, or networks of mutual help (Bhattacharya 2017, 11; Weiss 2018).

With the HMMS and the choir, we gathered in the Miner Museum and the Dornyay Béla County Museum, occasionally in private apartments. The primary function of these meetings was to spend time together. Events related to the community of former employees of the mines and Ironworks, like remembering a dead colleague, and discussing the history of the Ironworks, also took place. It is a form of the public sphere that resembles the plebeian or popular public sphere (Negt and Kluge 1993; Calhoun 1992; Kohn 2003, 40–41). Margaret Kohn, arguing for the usage of the term popular public sphere, claims that in worker organization, the private-public distinction is blurred since the economic and political aspects of the community's general interest could hardly be distinguished from the individual or personal interest, with the debates taking place in the union.

HMMS differs from both descriptions as the members can be associated with a well-to-do social stratum working now as entrepreneurs or employed by some of the remaining industries. The ideas presented, such as the discourses around “rebuilding the industries” and restarting production from pooled resources as the general interest of Salgótarján is also known as the interest of the engineers participating in the HMMS. So, it is a specific form of the public structured as a plebeian sphere with direct discourses of collective interest. However, there is an endeavor to universalize their particular position. These meetings and assemblies were held by people who were *organic intellectuals* of socialist modernization and had significant power in allocating resources. They are the remnants of professional strata who were active in the modernization of the town and formed its landscape and cultural life but are now only peripherally attached to the series of transformations that are happening in the town. They are not challenging the hegemonic process, nor are they strengthening but fantasizing about a future where the former branches of industry and relations of production become dominant again. In the town's cultural life, this form of *residual culture* (Williams 2005, 41) has a structuring role.

That means that these debates and performances on the importance of industry and industrial heritage, in the end, influence the way citizens of the town imagine themselves.

If I look at the content of songs and discussion, I find engagement with the nation, nationalism, or even irredentism but also praise of the socialist development and life of the town before 1990. Antonio Gramsci's system of thinking, including the term *common sense*, grabs this philosophy of the everyday. It considers how dominated, and situated knowledge develops, which varies by geography and social position (Gencarella 2010, 231; Crehan 2011; 2016). Common sense is a fragmented interpretation of the world based on experience and internalized hegemonic explanations (Gramsci 1971, 325–26). The Miner and Smelter Choir utilizes multiple cultural expressions familiar to them, from the songs they performed prior to the transition and student traditions of engineering programs to folk songs and inter-war melodies. Also, they perceive protecting the town's heritage as a miner and smelter town as their duty. Since that is the community, as we will see, they are thankful for providing a "good life."

Forms of these ideologies were present in regular performances, meetings, and tours. The persistence of multiple parallel interpretation of the world is an observation that is similar to how Joe Grim Feinberg described in his study on the Kosice "Hornád" folk ensemble in Slovakia, where liberal universalism and folklore-focused nationalistic particularism strengthened each other in claims of authenticity, he says that "cultural and ideological practices do not cease to be effective because they are logically inconsistent [...] logical inconsistency is a condition for their functioning" (Feinberg 2018, 149). William Roseberry also claims that transforming cultural expressions, which are themselves incoherent, into coherent reflections on the dominant culture tones down the complexities of the interactions between institutions, which form subjectivities and the expression of experience through cultural production rooted in the social position of the producer (Roseberry 1991, 49).

Comparing working class trajectories and politics in three post-industrial shrinking cities, including Salgótarján, Gábor Scheiring concluded that the success of the contemporary populist authoritarian right could be traced back to the incapability of the post-socialist left to represent material grievances of the workers. He claims that community in the post-socialist, populist authoritarian context is found in the nation. Nationalism is thus a localized production of community through culture by the dispossessed workers (Kalb 2009; Fábry 2019; Scheiring 2020).

The heterogeneous claims and experiments to reinterpret and create local histories I encountered would paint a more contradictory picture. While local place-making can be connected to grand narratives on the nation, working with the choir and the audience and I would say that it can be valid from the perspective of parliamentary politics, electoral behaviors do not equate with political imaginations or motivations. As ethnographies in rural Hungary highlighted, on the one hand, dependencies and informal ties overwrite systems of value or political preferences (Szőke 2015; Szőke 2012; Szombati 2021). On the other hand, rationalization about voting for the governing party does not mean that people would identify with its ideologies. Here we see a mix of managers, local professionals, former miners, and workers of the Ironworks who are disenchanted from politics. Some of them would vote for the right, some of them to the left, and some of them associate themselves with the radical right. They, however, have a common understanding of the importance of investment into industries, strengthening the local economy and their political and professional responsibilities in that process.

5.2. Worker culture in the early history of Salgótarján

The Smelter House of Culture was established in 1878 by the Salgótarján Ironworks Corporation (RIC) (Dr. Molnár 1978). In the late 19th and early 20th-century history of civic cultivation, apart from philanthropic campaigns of aristocrats, cooperatives, and after 1919 the

state, the main actors in cultural enlightenment were unions and factories. In Budapest, the Hungarian Metalworkers' Federation and other unions were building HoCs from the contribution of its members. Associations established by the corporations were present, but workers could choose to spend time in alternative forms of leisure time activities (Slézia 2005). In industrial centers outside of the capital, the corporation had more control over leisure in the company towns they built. They also provided a place for worker reading groups, schooling, a cheap barber, and food (White 1990, 57). The role of the factory in establishing local cultural services in these newly industrialized regions thus was more significant.

The Smelter House of Culture hosted the first associations established by the factory for managers and “good-behaving workers¹⁰⁰.” First, the reading association was established, and after that, a brass band and a choir were formed. For the workers, the factory erected a second building in 1894. It was utilized to create a local identity of a non-Hungarian skilled workforce while also teaching time management and a strict labor regime for the ethnic Hungarian peasants who migrated from the regions of agricultural production (Várkonyi-Nickel 2017). As the factory's leadership established these groups, they were utilized in disciplining workers, and the conditions of access were bound to productivity and to the time one served in the factory. The disciplinary intention is clearly stated in the founding declaration of the reading association: “The purpose of the association is to strengthen national belonging and the propagation of professional identity instead of harmful class solidarity.”¹⁰¹.

The number of associations significantly grew in the territory of Hungary, following the introduction of the association law in 1875. That, however, mainly supported the reading groups of conservative aristocracy and provided an institutional framework for the factories to oversee the self-cultivation of their employees (Brunda 1990). Similarly, the idea of the nation and the

¹⁰⁰ NML IV. 489. 10k 391 p.

¹⁰¹ NML IV. 489. 10. 428 p.

learning of Hungarian became one of the central efforts of these workplace initiatives. While in the 1870s and 1880s, German language books dominated the library of the HoC, called that time Worker Casino, the second-generational employees had already developed national sentiments. At the turn of the century, the international dance evenings, where all nationalities could perform their own dances, gave place to exclusively Hungarian folk-dance nights (Várkonyi-Nickel 2017, 148–49). Otherwise, the Casino mainly served as a place of leisure time activities. People were reading adventure novels, some considered even pornographic from the perspective of the factory's leadership. Access to the institution was only provided to skilled workers, which could be withdrawn anytime when the board recognized deviances in the member's behavior. This double function of providing resources such as cultural capital through education and disciplining the worker under formation performed in the place parallel.

Each colony had its own HoC, and the groups rarely performed in the institutions of each other. One of my informants, who grew up in a mining colony and later became an employee of the HoC there, told me that during the operation of the theater group, they never visited the HoC of the glass factory, which was less than two kilometers away. The amateur groups were providing entertainment for the local community, and the colonies were sealed from each other. This division was so strong that even when I participated in the burial of a miner from the Miner and Smelter Choir, his courage was represented by the story of choosing a bride from the colony of the Ironworks in the 1970s, risking his life by sneaking in to visit her.

These restrictive measures regarding the everyday life of the people living in the colonies in the meantime gave the possibility of organizing close communities and raised the cultural capital of the workers, providing the necessary conditions for union organizing. In 1919 during the council republic of Hungary, Salgótarján had one of the longest-lasting councils in the

country.¹⁰² In a similar vein, in 1944, after the German occupation (Páles 2005), politically motivated anti-fascist strikes happened with one mine occupation in Karancslejtős, where the miners refused to dig coal for the German military¹⁰³. In 1946, an anniversary still celebrated, the town won the “coal battle” since it managed to restart excavation as early as January of that year thanks to the strong presence of union representation that was mobilized by the Hungarian Communist Party and the Hungarian Social Democratic Party to restart the mines. During the revolution of 1956, Salgótarján’s workers’ councils held their power until the beginning of 1957 (Horváth 1989). This history of local worker organizations is well known. The anti-fascist strike and the coal battle are still celebrated. However, the class aspect is blurred into the general history of industrialization and development. This early history of the Association has a role not only as a predecessor of the existing one but as an imagined ideal past where the factory provided care to its workers and a sense of community could be experienced. Citizens of the town also despise the modernist town center and are more prone to share pictures from the inter-war period in Facebook groups focused on history. Therefore in memory of the local industrial development, this history of capitalist integration with restricted welfare is normalized instead of the socialist development that made the town in the 1960s.

5.3. Post-socialist transformation of the Smelter House of Culture:

During my research, there were three independent groups in the Miner-Smelter Association: the choir, the brass band, and the artist group. The choir is led by János Diósi and was established in 2003. He restarted it after ten years of hiatus since, with the transition and the dissolution of union-led civic cultivation, the choir of the factory stopped rehearsing. When

¹⁰² It has still the only monument of the Council Republic standing in the main square in Hungary. In contemporary historiography, the council republic is remembered through the “red terror,” that is, only the violent aspects of the council republic are highlighted (Csunderlik 2019). However, the red soldier standing in the square is not representing the social reforms or other political aspects of the republic either, as it remembers the successful campaign of the Hungarian Red Army against the Czechoslovakian troops between May and June of 1919. The local Worker Party still organizes memorial tours to Radzovce to commemorate the campaign.

¹⁰³ “A béke hadserege” *Szabad Nógrád* 1955.9 IX (77): 4.

Dr. Horváth, István and Kriskó Lajosné. 1979. “Karancslejtős 1944” *Nógrádi Szemle* X (1): 82-85.

they reformed the group, they only planned to meet, sing and drink in a friendly informal circle. János insisted that the function of the choir is not to perform. However, when the town asked them to sing at the celebration of the EU accession of Hungary, the members voted to attend the event. After that, their presence at every major local and national holiday became regular. It started as an exclusive smelter organization, but in 2005 they extended its membership to miners since the lack of active workers and professionals did not make it reasonable to run parallel organizations.

The brass band is a semi-professional group. Some of the amateur members of the Ironworks' brass band play in the current one, but mainly teachers of the music academy and talented seniors of the wind instrument classes are recruited to perform. It enjoys the municipality's support as a field of practice for music school students. The third group is the artist group, led by Ildikó Losonczy, an art teacher and local painter. The painter group was active in the oven factory since it provided material for cloisonné pieces of the workers. In the 1980s, a nationally recognized and known cloisonné camp grew out from the group. However, in the 1990s, the factory stopped providing raw materials for them, and it was transformed into a drawing and painting circle and then became hosted by the Association institutionally.



Picture 13: The Smelter House of Culture (source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Salg%C3%B3tarj%C3%A1n,_Koh%C3%A1sz_M%C5%B1vel%C5%91d%C3%A9si_K%C3%B6zpont.jpg Last Accessed: 29.03.2023.)

The Smelter House of Culture is at the end of Salgó street in the northern part of Salgótarján. The building was refurbished in 2002, but if one passes it when leaving the town, it seems abandoned and hard to distinguish from other industrial ruins on the outskirts of the town. The place is mainly closed. Its significance is only signaled by the copper plates on its side. One of the plates remembers the establishment of the Smelter Choir and Band, while the other was installed for the 70th anniversary of Salgótarján becoming a town. The status change was announced in the HoC back then, Worker Casino. Half of the house is a pub called Blue Steel, where former workers of the Ironworks go to drink and play billiard. The pub was opened after

2002 when the buildings were sold to the factory's new owner. The place itself is barely open to a broader public. Once every two months, there is a stand-up comedy show.

For a short time, one faction of the Faith Church organized its assemblies in the place. The two main streets of the colony of the Ironworks constitute one of the many Roma segregates of the town. It is the target of discourses regarding abandonment and impoverishment. It was under a process of urban regeneration during my stay, which meant that the town demolished the houses in the worst condition and introduced social elements of the rehabilitation, like giving legal support to the residents. At the same time, educational programs were also provided (Jelinek 2017). One of the places for these soft elements was the Smelter House of Culture.

The history and the function of the HoC are bounded to the privatization of the factory. The amateur artistic groups were recruited from the factory workers, while the Ironworks Corporation covered the groups' expenses and maintained the building. It owned the Smelter House of Culture and got funding from the National Council of Unions. After the transition, the HoC was struggling, and the Ironworks decided to cut its heating in 1994. Then the previous head of the HoC resigned, and Mária Horváth Gálné got the position from the committee of the local chapter of the Union. The Association was established in 2011 and continued to work in the HoC but started renting it.

The factory was first divided in line with the profitability of the production of different goods. For the cold rolling mill, a Hungarian-Italian mixed corporation was established. At the same time, the production of another symbolic product of the factory, the *Dexion-Salgó* shelf, was organized in a Hungarian-Austrian mixed corporation. *Dexion-Salgó* is a system of modular shelves produced for warehouses, pubs, and libraries. Their patent of the production was bought from Chingford, England, in 1968, and János Diósi, the current conductor of the choir and a hunting horn player of the brass band, was among the people who were responsible for studying the technology and launching the production in Salgótarján. After the

renationalization and bankruptcy of the Hungarian-Austrian mixed corporation, he and another member of the band, Zoltán Patakfalvy, established a company that continued the production, distribution, and reparation of the shelves.

As Zoltán framed the company's establishment with János, they were forced to be entrepreneurs. The production stopped, and János struggled with the Austrian-Hungarian mixed corporation since they sued him. It was claimed that he was not reporting the profit the company realized, thus stealing from them. He was proven innocent in court. The Hungarian Development Bank sold the renationalized factory complex to a private entrepreneur in 2002, the factory was still operating with a shrinking number of workers until 2012 when it was closed for good, and the machines were sold as scrap metal.

After 1994 activities were still organized, but sometimes groups would do rehearsals in the primary school nearby. The Smelter Cultural Association was using the place, organizing memorial balls, dinners, and singing performances for former workers of the Ironworks. Zoltán and János, when they established their company in 1990, included cultural activities as the main profile of it. Through that, they organized a small bar with two employees running the place. Their idea was that the bar's profit could complement their other leisure activities, such as choir gatherings or public lectures. They also tried to buy the HoC but could not cover the price of the institution.

The Association, in the end, was forced to leave the building after the owner changed the locks and sold the library and the infrastructure. Mária, who had been the head of the HoC and the chief editor of the journal of the factory, was struggling to acquire the lost assets but without success. Her story is like many educators who worked in union ran HoCs: she said the porter was not allowed to let them in when they arrived on the day for work. After calling the owner, it became clear that the rent was revoked and the Association's library, computers, and other belongings are the property of the owner of the HoC. It was a personal tragedy for her, as she

got a stroke after the day's happenings and could not work for more than a year. When I was in the field, she was constantly working for the Association and still helps the three amateur clubs.

5.4. Calling for cultivation: industry, culture, and good life

The budget of the Association comes from three different sources: Mária applies for funding to the Regional Association of Associations for Civic Cultivation (RAACC). The municipality gives stable support to the associations operating within the town. The members also contribute 500 forints (1,2 EUR) monthly. The events and tours are funded through János and Zoltán's company. They would claim that their understanding of their role in making and maintaining the choir comes from three sources: its importance in their personal career paths, the idea of the responsible, active citizen they learned in socialist institutions and their socialization in the protestant church.

The brass band occupied a central role in their professional development for both. Both grew up in smelter households and became the first ones with a university degree in their family. As János recalls, he never really wanted to study and had a hard time understanding math, which was required for the entrance exam to engineering schools. When he applied for a job on the line, the man responsible for hiring told him that they did not need any more workers. Going to the rehearsal, the conductor asked him why he was so sad. After explaining that he had not got hired, the conductor arranged for him to meet the man responsible for hiring. With his support he got a job next to an oven. He remembers this episode as a defining moment and why they, with Zoltán, continued investing their time and energy into the brass band and the choir. He got to know the managers and members of the directory board in the band. He says that without that institution, he would not be able to get into university or not even get hired at the factory. According to his narrative, his regular attendance at the rehearsals and the shows made his superiors recognize him. This led to an offer that the factory would cover his education if he continued to work there after graduation. Similarly to Kürti's description of the Csepel factory,

the institution of civic cultivation granted the cultural capital to access spaces where the social borders between the leadership of the factory and the workers were blurred. Thus, social capital could be accumulated, which then provided other resources for the members of the choir or the brass band.



Picture 14: Rehearsal of the choir (photography of the author)

As both János and Zoltán are active members of the protestant church of the town, they also explain their motivation to “give joy” through performances as a religious calling. This is summarized by Zoltán in a way “when I was working on the line and went to tours with the brass band, older engineers always paid for my drinks. When I wanted to pay, they said that I will pay instead of the younger ones when I have money to spend. That is what we do through the Ltd. now¹⁰⁴.” János extended this picture with that his knowledge accumulated during his

¹⁰⁴ Patakfalvy, Zoltán 07.02.2020. Interview by the author

life “either came from god, work, family or the union¹⁰⁵.” That is the workplace and political socialization and their religious commitment to serve complementary and interchangeable motivations when they speak about the support of culture.

They also think that this reproduction of the heritage of the Ironworks is their responsibility. This makes them struggle with the municipality from time to time. They usually argue that representatives are incapable and willing to devote enough attention to the traditions of the town. Therefore, they are the ones who must do that work, even if it is overwhelming. As many of the people were part of the technical intelligentsia of the town, they also had the power to enforce specific symbolic demands on the municipality. After one of our rehearsals, we went for drinks, and at the height of the discussion, it turned out that since the sponsor of the miner days is a pálinka¹⁰⁶ company, the next one will be called “pálinka days.” The last name, “*bányarém*” (miner witch/monster) days, was already considered diminishing. However, the miner witch, compared with “*pálinka*,” is an integral part of miner myths. It is the lady luck that takes away lives or gives precious materials. Thus, they did not have a serious conflict over that¹⁰⁷. When it turned out that they wanted to rename the miner days, the conferencier of the choir was asked to make a call because of his pleasant baritone and rhetorical skills. With our anxious support in the background, he persuaded the mayor to call the celebration “Pálinka and Miner Days.”

The first time I participated in a rehearsal of the choir, we met in the flat of Zoltán, the office of their company and the headquarter of the choir, brass band, and wind instrument quartet.

¹⁰⁵ Diósi, János 17.05.2018. Interview by the author

¹⁰⁶ A strong alcoholic drink made from fruits.

¹⁰⁷ In miner folklore, this figure in different shapes has a recurring role of externalizing the force of nature. It is called in different regions different names, from fairy to spirit. In Salgótarján, the witch or monster, which has feminine connotations, is the central figure of this mythology (Püsök 2022). However, “*bányarém*” is also a diminishing word for women looking different from the beauty standard. Thus, naming the festival after this figure also carries the danger that people unfamiliar with the folklore would associate with its everyday usage of an “ugly woman.”

Zoltán grew up in the flat as a third-generational employee of the Ironworks. The flat is on Ironworks Street on the way to the factory. Thus, the place is full of commemorative mugs that his father and him owned. I explained what I intended to do with the collected material at the introductory meeting. My acceptance followed the institutional script of every applicant, except I did not need to present my singing skills. After telling my intentions, I was sent to a separate room and the choir accepted me as a new member of the choir with secret consensual voting. As János explained, the choir's primary function is to provide a sanctuary and friendly environment for the people working at the mining facilities and the Ironworks. Even one objection is enough to reject one's application since even one strained relation can disrupt the group dynamics enough. This idea of the sanctuary is also represented in the choice of songs and how they sing. Although several trained musicians are in the group, they always sing in a single voice to make participation as accessible as possible (Turino 2008). A guitar sometimes accompanies the singing and when needed, by a bell that imitates the sound of a hammer.

We participated in events and festivals almost every month. In consequence, between September and June, we had weekly meetings. Our repertoire consists of songs coming from three sources: first, the student songs of the engineer programs of Miskolc or Sopron, the miner and smelter songs written in the 19th and early 20th century, and the songs the people they perform to require (like the anthem of Salgótarján or other well-known melodies). The student songs come from the Austro-Hungarian engineering programs of Selmechánya (Banská Štiavnica). These tell the fun parts of the students' life, the way youthhood fades away, and one becomes an integral and valuable member of society or the nation. The worker songs are the ones that speak about the hardship of digging coal or working on metal and steel. These, as I described in the early history of the cultural associations of the town, mainly strengthen and highlight profession-based solidarity and the importance of building the industry from the

perspective of nation-building. The smelter anthem¹⁰⁸ for example, centers this element in the following way: “*crush the ore, refine the metal, the homeland needs it, valiant smelter.*”

Overtly nationalist songs barely get into the repertoire. There were two inter-war militaristic melodies in our repertoire: “*Wing carries the clouds away*” and “*Soldiers are marching on Stefánia street.*” These speak about the heroism and patriotism of the soldiers through the eyes of a loved one who was left behind. The songs became popular again after the nationalist rock band, Kárpátia covered them. Both these songs got rehearsed because the major of Karancslejtős asked them to sing at the anti-fascist commemoration. While the members did not like the idea, they performed it in the end. However, they were most reluctant to perform because of the lack of challenging tunes and the fact that it was a melody that did not fit their repertoire. Songs are also collected from other miner choirs. Some miner burial songs, like “*Miner’s heart,*” focus more on the work and the profession. Despite this wide variety of songs, the main body of the repertoire is related to the reenacting of their youth. Selmecebánya songs carry back the members to two separate periods. First to the time of their education and second when these songs were canonized as part of the student assemblies of engineering departments, which were just born parallel to the making of the industry in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

Despite the commitment of János to only perform for themselves, drinking and singing together, now the choir performs at every major local and national commemoration. Although many trained musicians are members, their role in these events is not to provide a perfect aesthetic experience for the listeners. One of the rehearsals after the Karancslejtős show started with a speech by János. At the show in front of the town hall at the commemoration of the anti-fascist resistance, some members made a mistake in following the song’s lyrics and started to laugh and whisper to each other. He commented on the mistake in the following way: “we are

¹⁰⁸ Merging two smelter songs, it was written in 1933 but became the official anthem in the 1970s.

not only here to sing, we are symbols, a bio-scenery, nobody would expect us to pull off a perfect show, but we have to keep our dignity and stay loyal to the miner and smelter uniforms we are wearing.” As he explained, the mistake on their part was not that they forgot the lyrics, which can happen as they are amateurs, but they were not able to discipline themselves in that situation.

The choir in the socialist period served as a leisure time activity that also occasionally provided a place of meeting for workers and managers. As a controlled channel of social mobility, that delivered a career for several young workers who got influential positions at the factory. For the main organizers of the current choir, this served as a motivation to continue their work. The songs they sing are mainly nostalgic towards their youthhood but also signify a past that is considered a period of development and flourishing. This common sense of development can be associated with investment into the Ironworks, industrialization or national governance that promises these ideas of economic prosperity.

5.5. HMMS – the public of development

The HMMS meetings differ significantly from the general meetings of the choir. The songs they sing are embedded in a tight dramaturgy of the events. While at the choir, the anthems of the miners, smelters, and foresters would be rehearsed in loose order after each other. Here they are sung standing at the end of the assembly. First, they celebrate the members’ birthday, and those who are celebrated can choose a song that would be sung for them. Then they discuss the organizational issues like who would represent the local assembly in the national meeting or list the missing members and inform the others about their health and well-being. Afterward, they would share stories from their common past and tell jokes. The people who regularly come are primarily pensioners, and here couples or female members also show up. Thus, they usually debate the lack of new members and recruiting strategies. They would always conclude that it

depends on the presence of the industries in the town, and the recruitment of new members is beyond their control.

I learned the types of songs allowed to be sung through two mistakes. The first time I attended the assembly, I was also involved in the circle of requesting songs, and I chose the miner anthem as I was unfamiliar with the songs they knew. Silence fell in the room Zoltán, who invited me to the event, explained to me in an embarrassed way that here they value the song and do not sing it for fun. However, they made an exception in this case and sang the song for me.

On another occasion, I chose a song we usually sing for fun in the choir, a pop song from the 1960s. The assembly and the choir sang it unwillingly, and my neighbor, the head supporter of the Miner Football team of Salgótarján¹⁰⁹ turned to me in an educative but grumpy way, saying, “as you could observe before, we do not choose these kinds of songs. You have to come up with your song. It is usually a folk song, which not many people know, but you are attached to that. For example, as you see, the current one reflects on the place this person comes from (Szeged), and his longing for his childhood is in the song, you should find your one”. The songs, in this case, are performed as knowledge of folk culture and emotional attachment to the region the song was born.

While in most cases, the center of the narratives is performing the generational attachment to the town, i.e., the history of one’s family in relation to the industry, it allows the people who migrated to the town when the industry was booming in the 1960s and 1970s to tell and integrate their biography to the part of the group which was born in Salgótarján. After these songs, they usually talk about familiarization with the town and how they became locals. As both of my mistakes demonstrate the members of the HMMS assemblies have a more intimate relationship

¹⁰⁹ The team plays in the county division, which is also a representation of decay for many, as it was a division one football team, along with many miner and smelter football teams in the 1950s and 1960s.

with the songs, they are singing. First, the anthems have a functional, liturgical role of closing the event, and second, the personal attachment to the songs is also highlighted and told. Compared to the ones we sing in the choir, folk songs have a significant role, as they also demonstrate geographical mobility and constant reassurance of the attachment to the town.

Drinking songs and heavy drinking also have a more central role here, while with the choir, we rehearse drinking songs, and when the line says we drink, people are barely drunk. We would go out for drinks after the rehearsal. In HMMS, spirits like pálinka or vodka are also served together with the wine. At the assemblies in the factories or universities, the drinking made a liminal carnivalesque event as workers and engineers of the factories, or students and professors in the case of the university, organized them together. The assigned roles of the people here were different than in the factory or mine. It allowed me to have a moment that disrupted the hierarchy that was present when working next to the line or in the shaft.

The drinking is so much integrated into the structure of the events that all major assemblies have their cup, which everyone can take home. In a similar vein, when we organized a memorial assembly for a passed colleague, the meeting ended with everyone breaking their cup in the end through hitting the cup through the table in a way that only the handles stay in one's hand, saying that "we emptied this cup only for this occasion and cannot be used for any other." According to János, heavy drinking provided an opportunity to collect opinions on how the factory is led without fear of repercussions. The carnivalesque atmosphere was also an opportunity to show one's social skills and other talents (like singing or giving a speech), which would have gone unnoticed in other ways and that could provide mobility within the company.

Apart from the general assemblies, the HMMS organizes memorial assemblies. In Salgótarján before 2018, for four years, only one major assembly was organized, while in another former big inter-war corporation (Hungarian Coal-Mining Corporation) in the three main mining cities (Tatabánya, Ajka, Várpalota) there are memorial assemblies in every town

in every year. The Salgótarján memorial event occurred during the miner days on 6th September 2018. The assembly started with unveiling the memorial plates in front of the metalwork factory and on the wall of the miner museum remembering the foundation of RMISC. The memorial assembly followed the script of the Selmecebánya student meetings. First, the officials of the meeting were elected (the president (*praises*), the lead performer (*major domus*), etc.). The structure of the assembly was divided between songs, speeches on the state of the art of the ironworks in Hungary, and drinking dictated by the *major domus*. During the four-hour event, everybody became extremely drunk, and the contributions to the discussion became more and more passionate. Despite all the organizers' efforts, the one hundred participants became harder and harder to control.

The two central tropes of the speeches were integrating the young professionals into the HMMS and debates on whether the industry could have been saved in Salgótarján. The tipping point of the assembly was when Dr. László Szabó, the last director of the Ironworks, stood up and passionately made a speech on the way how the operation of the cold rolling mill could have been saved even in 2002. He claimed that shutting down the factory was a political decision to strangle Salgótarján, as it was always a leftist stronghold. The representative of HMMS from another mining town, Várpalota responded to his speech, saying that even if it is true, there is no reason to speak about the past anymore, and we have to think about the way production in these cities can be restarted. He explained the system they tried to revive the local ironworks factory. Apart from the three memorial assemblies they usually organize in the major cities of the mining territory (Tata, Ajka, Várpalota), they held a fourth one in 2018 in Várpalota. The event was opened for a wider audience than the membership of the local HMMS. Entrepreneurs and employees of the municipality were invited. Usually, the entrance fee of the assemblies is paid to cover the commemorative mugs and the alcohol. However, in this case, the fee was much higher and used to raise capital for the relaunch of the steel processing

branches of the company. Every participant could buy stocks from the company and contribute to its making. Some members of HMMS, as engineers and directors of the former factories, know how production should be organized. However, they lack the capital which is needed for the remaking of the industry.



Picture 15: My table at the HMMS memorial meeting (photography of the author)

It was the only event where I met people the same age as me. While active, still-working-age people were participating in other meetings, they either had command over their free time since they were entrepreneurs or worked for the Miner Museum - hence their job covered hosting the assemblies. In the memorial assembly, people working for other companies (Bosch in Hatvan, Mercedes in Kecskemét), who do not live in the town anymore, came and advised on how new people should be recruited. Their main concern was that since people come from all around the country in these cities, it is hard to build communities, and they asked the help of the older generation to come and explain the importance of representing the profession.

The general assemblies also provide an opportunity to distribute and share resources and provide care for former older colleagues. Since most pensioner members live alone or with their

spouse because of the massive emigration from the town, people need help with work in the garden or general maintenance around the house. Usually, one or two points on the assemblies are focused on asking for contacts of good repairmen or each other to help. Institutionally speaking, these networks were established in their active age, and these informal relationships are strengthened through the meetings and events but with a more significant focus on health and well-being. They not only focus on the material part of helping and caring but organize rites of recognition to celebrate the lives and achievements of their members.



Picture 16: Singing in the Catholic Church of Rodna (courtesy of Ákos Ujj)

Despite all these significances of the HMMS in the life of the town and its members, it is an institution that is an organic element of a previous stage of capitalist development of the country, which also became important as an element of the socialist civil society. The quasi-aristocratic status of the engineers in the paternalist Taylorist history of the Ironworks and the allocative capacity of the manager in socialist industries both diminished. Their enterprises, as the Zoltán's and János's attached to the lowest added value level of the value chain in the automotive industry. They supply shelves and fix storage spaces. Other engineers are setting

up and overseeing production processes with little to no capacity to participate in innovation. HMMS, first, allocates significance to this diminishing position. Second, remains essential as a way of pooling investment, redistributing resources, or just having a community of people with similar experiences. As a place of innovation, social mobility, and recognition or as a place of debate on the future, it does not bear the same weight anymore but allows to reproduce of a symbolic element of the history of the town for the sake of the reproduction of the position of the former technical intelligentsia.

5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter focusing on one specific voluntary association, I analyzed the varieties of cultural practices that can be present in civic cultivation, specifically in civic cultivation related to former worker leisure time activities. I argued that while coherent claims are culturally expressed about the locality's state, they cannot be understood only from a functionalist perspective like it mediates suppression and orchestrates consent. The Smelter House of Culture and its descendant association, the Miner Smelter Cultural Association, occupied a role in the control of labor and now serve as a place of reproduction of middle-class claims and social position through various social and cultural processes.

Through analyzing the shows, I claimed that cultural performances could be described through the term *common sense*. That is a series and collection of politically significant culturally expressed claims related to the actual situation of the performers, which are heterogeneous as the social biography of these actors is also a reflection of several waves of modernization and disinvestment in the town. Nostalgia related to the socialist past is also present, and an intimate relationship with the geographical origin of folk songs tells the personal story of the social trajectory of the performers. All these points in middle-class politics that speak about development in the framework of the nation trickled down to the level of the town.

Organizationally the choir and the HMMS provided social mobility for the workers within the factory through diminishing hierarchies by focusing on skills outside the line, like singing, making jokes, or playing an instrument. For many of my informants, this was a way to get out from the shop floor level of the Ironworks. That reproductive function was continued in the form of care work provided for the members of the choir and the HMMS. These forms of material and emotional support maintained the close-knit relationship between the former technical intelligentsia and employees of the Ironworks. They allowed them to play a significant role even after their retirement in defining the content of the celebration of various anniversaries and festivals.

HMMS served as an example to show an alternative form of the public sphere which is created within the institutions of civic cultivation. Within that public, they discuss grievances and potential future plans about the deindustrialization of their respective localities. Following the Selmecebánya tradition in a carnivalesque atmosphere, they produce a liminal situation that disrupts hierarchies and allows the participants to contribute with potential innovations. The example of Várpalota collecting small investors to restart the Ironworks also suggested HMMS itself can have an economic role through informal connections to the local propertied class. However, in Salgótarján, in the context of disinvestment, HMMS mostly has a symbolic role through which the former socialist engineers seek recognition.

6. Between market and nation: authenticating folk heritage – Civic Associations and House of Culture in Mezőkövesd

“Matyó is a folk dress, the rose itself, the folk dance, the furniture painting, being catholic, and a form of life altogether.”

(Speech of the MP of Mezőkövesd on the Celebration of Matyó Rose)

After leaving Salgótarján, I spent four months in Mezőkövesd studying the HoC and a cultural association that grew out from that place in 1990. My first encounter with the town was a three-day conference organized by the Matyó Cultural Association. The Association focused on preserving and displaying the folk heritage of people living in the region called “*Matyóföld*,” an ethno-region that consists of three settlements, of which Mezőkövesd is the biggest one. Debates throughout the conference focused on whether local folk heritage can be maintained and developed simultaneously. As one leader of the Association put it, the local folk culture is in double danger: “commercialization and being forgotten.” This seemingly contradictory statement, being too popular, and losing people who can practice the craft, was a recurring topic during my stay. The Association is one of Hungary’s most successful private civic cultivation initiatives. They initiated and managed to add local embroidery to the Intangible Heritage List of UNESCO. The town commemorates that achievement yearly in the HoC. The Association relies on the revenues coming from tourism in the meantime and is also funded by different programs that aim to support folk practices all over the country. It has more than two hundred members, owns its headquarter in the historic center of Mezőkövesd and runs three folk dance groups, and has a mid-scale Mezőkövesd Folklore Festival. In the headquarter they also have a sewing workshop that produces dresses for groups in Mezőkövesd and sells to other folk-dance ensembles in the country.

I initially chose Mezőkövesd as a field because, in contrast with the industrial Salgótarján, it participated in the regional division of labor through its agricultural production and thus represented a different history of capitalist integration. It also had a highlighted role in the heritagization of folk culture; thus, I assumed that comparing the houses of culture of Mezővesd and Salgótarján would bring out contrasting elements of the relationships between local culture and state institutions. The political-economic profile of the town, in fact, produced a different structure of civic cultivation. It was a settlement that was part of the land of the king from the 18th century until 1877. The town has been populated mostly with agricultural laborers and some wealthy peasants. After 1949 the collectivization was slow, and until 1961 when a more coercive wave started was insignificant. It peaked in 1976 when it gave birth to one of the biggest cooperatives in the country with the merger of its four collectives. That made the local civic cultivation initiatives more focused on peasants and the cultivation of folk culture.

In the post-socialist history of the HoC, I observed similarities that resulted from the relatively homogeneous transformation of the house of the culture system. One of the main differences was the presence of the Matyó Cultural Association and its highlighted role acknowledged by the state and a supranational institution, UNESCO. In this chapter, I continue to interrogate the transformations of the HoC and its place in the life of an agricultural town. More concretely, I ask what the HoC does to the production and reproduction of local heritage. Who are the main actors valorizing artifacts and performances? How did their position change concerning political and economic changes, and what did these changes mean to cultivate local and national belongings?

The ethnography I conducted in Mezőkövesd differed from the one I did in Salgótarján. The leading cause was that the associations were more specialized and professionalized, and even the ones focused on leisure time activities required some knowledge, such as dance and sewing acting. Instead of being part of one association and participating in meetings of others, I spent

my time in the HoC as a spectator. Thus, I did not establish a place of participant observation like in Salgótarján. My method of inquiry mainly was based on interviews with the members of significant voluntary associations in the town and employees of the HoC. I conducted interviews with members of the amateur folk ensemble, amateur theater groups, employees of the HoC, and members of the Matyó Cultural Association. The difference in the method also shows the difference in civic cultivation initiatives between the two settlements. A more professionalized form of cultivation of tradition was typical in Mezőkövesd compared to the one that was less specialized and more accessible in Salgótarján. In Mezőkövesd, an agreement exists on the importance of local folk culture and calling for local intellectuals to preserve it. Compared to Salgótarján, where the adaptation to funding opportunities determined the program more, in Mezőkövesd, activities of civic associations are already more subsidized with a specific focus on local folk practices. Consequently, choices of programs are less contingent upon the funding opportunities.

In many ethnographies on folklore, authenticity, and ethnic and national performances, the HoC occupies a central role in the arrival and work of the ethnographers (Kaneff 2004; Todorova and Gille 2010; Cash 2011; Feinberg 2018, 4). Mary Taylor, for example, devotes an entire chapter to the institutions of civic cultivation in her monograph on the Hungarian dance house movement (Taylor 2021). In her work on Bulgarian folk performances, Deema Kaneff writes about the Bulgarian house of culture (*Chitalishte*) as the “buffer zone” between tradition, folklore, and the contemporary world, as a place of experiencing different temporalities (Kaneff 2004, 153). Studying the transformations of conceptualization of “local culture,” Alexandra Urdea claims that the *Cămin Cultural*, a Romanian equivalent of the HoC, is a place of peasant utopia, a shared home and “hearth” of the modern village, but also the institution of homogenization of folklore into a national culture (Urdea 2020, 667). Similarly, the research group on the contemporary social significance of the HoC in Russia found performances of

ethnic identity and belonging, cultivation of tradition and folklore (e.g., Joachim Otto Habeck, István Sántha and Tatiana Safanova, Alexander D. King). Habeck goes as far as claiming that folk performances in the Koriak HoCs are tailored to the context. Consequently, the institution itself (the stage, the audience, and other spatial variables) condition the way “authentic” folk performances would be enacted (Donahoe and Habeck 2011, 67). Thus, the HoC itself modifies the actual performance or how it is played. I would complement it with the claim that the HoC not only spatially but also institutionally contributed to the making of “authentic” folk culture.

These observations tell another aspect of the HoC we did not see in the cases I demonstrated in Salgótarján. The József Attila Center of Civic Cultivation was a place for producing civic associations and reproducing local political factions and cultural capital of the propertied class and municipality employees. In the meantime, the Miner and Smelter Cultural Association was symbolically ensuring a managerial position that did not play a role anymore in the development of the city, thus reproducing a position through the reproduction of a *residual culture*. Both forms of civic cultivation were connected to economic development and civilizatory projects that intended to foster post-socialist democratic development. In Mezőkövesd we will encounter a HoC that primarily plays a role in authenticating local folk practices; however, it is emptied from that function with the privatization of folk culture-related activities, and the Matyó Cultural Association took over this role. Therefore, I will interrogate the role of the HoC in the heritagization of local folk practices and the role of different cultural associations that gather in or grow out of that place.

6.1. Mezőkövesd, the town of peasants

Mezőkövesd is situated in the Eastern-Northern part of the Hungarian Plain. Its history is structured by agricultural production and the cultural goods produced there. The town is known for its sewing and embroidery, born from status competition between families. People in Mezőkövesd were living in a tight place, organizing their housing in a clan-like family structure

called “*had*¹¹⁰”. The landed aristocracy got parts of the land for rent, and the local serfs were direct subordinates of the king until 1877. Waves of land distribution provided small lands for the families, but most of the population were cottars living from daily labor and shepherding. They were selling their work for goods on the estates of the king. People who live there are called *Matyó*. The origin of the name is a subject of debate. The legend says that the village got township rights under King Matthias in 1472, and the name *Matyó* comes from the nickname of the people who loved him so much they named themselves after him. Some would claim that the name *Matyó* had a pejorative meaning that they got from the neighboring people.

Since the early institutionalization of Hungarian ethnography, the lives of these people have been the object of study. The first systematic research was done in 1894 (János Jankó) for the millennial exhibition in Budapest that celebrated the one thousand years of the Hungarian state among twelve Hungarian and thirteen non-Hungarian ethnographic regions – a small *Matyó* village was erected on the Heroes Square of Budapest (Kósa 2001, 3). *Matyó* dance, ball, and clothes had a central role. Even a *Matyó* wedding was organized in a downtown church (Fügedi 1996, 369–360). In 1904 based on a fourteen-month fieldwork Kálmán Kóris planned to publish a three-volume monograph. Although that did not happen, the hundreds of photographs he made became important source material for future research. In the inter-war period, István Györffy, one of the first professional ethnographers in Hungary, conducted extensive research on festivities, clothing, interiors, and spatial structure of houses. After 1945 research was done in three waves in the region. The first one was in the fifties with the participation of Edit Fél and Vilma Dietz Dalaszászné. The latter contributed to the making of the Cottage Industry Cooperative. This enterprise sold folk objects in Hungary and abroad, by providing materials for the embroideries, which were then produced until 2004. In the early 1980s, a working group

¹¹⁰ The direct translation of the word would be the army. It meant that the extended family was living together in multiple houses, and the head of the family was the oldest male capable of working.

was started by the Museum of Ethnology to revisit the transformation of traditions (Fügedi 1997, 118; Fejős 1984), and the last wave happened in the late 1980s with the leadership of Tamás Hofer. In that case, the local folklore was approached in relation to national belonging (Fejős 1991).

Local practices became the archetype of Hungarian peasant culture among aristocrats and the urban bourgeoisie parallel to early research. In the elevation of *Matyó* to a model Hungarian ethnic group, several factors played a significant role. First, the strength of religious Catholicism in a region where Protestantism was strong. Second, the local folk art was interpreted as untouched since Hungarians started to live a settled-down life after roaming the Steppe as nomads prior to the tenth century. And third, their image as loyal and hardworking people who respect authorities.

Religious civil society was, in fact, strong in the town. That priests and catholic institutions could even influence the folk dresses the people wear (Fügedi 1975). Daughters of the wealthy peasants would join the *Maria-congregation*¹¹¹, which helped them to access education and marry among themselves. Rituals displaying daughters of marriageable age, called “*karolás*” were also happening after the Sunday mass. But the choir or reading circles were also organized by the Church.

Local embroidery was born among the shepherds as their vests became more decorative through a series of cultural exchanges in the 18th century. *Matyó* culture was framed as a Hungarian art form rooted in the peasants’ activities, a popular class untouched by modernization (Hofer 1995; Taylor 2021, 32). Many travelers, artists, and urban intellectuals would frame it as an organic art form that habitually developed in these people who had the

¹¹¹ Religious organization for girls between three and fourteen years old. They would wear a white version of a local folk dress, and nuns and priests would oversee their moral education.

most profound connection to their Asiatic heritage¹¹². These forms of othering bear the mark of western forms of orientalism that romanticizes the East as a means of control but also colonial pride that finds the elements of perceived barbarism a virtue. Othering here has a role in class distinction where the peasants, while virtuous, are qualitatively different from the civilized upper class and aristocracy.

Their capability to stick to the “natural habitus of Hungarians” and make aesthetically superior objects made them representatives of Hungarian cultural superiority in the region. Local small entrepreneurs sold embroideries, and the village became a popular tourist destination as early as the late nineteenth century. Entrepreneurs employed local embroiderers and sold clothes, puppets, and bedsheets in markets of urban centers¹¹³. Zoltán Szabó, an inter-



Picture 17: *Summás* statue (source: <https://archivum.mtva.hu/photobank/item/MTI-FOTO-b0h3MXh6VmdUvJjVV1IEUUiWUZTZz09> Last Accessed: 29.03.2023.)

¹¹² In articles and traveling journals, one can find a language of othering similar to orientalism (Said 2019) and balkanism (Todorova 1997). Travelers and writers describe the *Matyó* as a noble savage, comparing them to other forms of colonial subjects like “Indians” of America. The *Matyó*, as others in this context, serves as an example of purity in habitus and race. In this narrative, the modernized cities lose their morals and dignity while even in hardship, the *Matyó* protects traditional values of respecting hierarchy and having an extraordinary eye for beauty. That also helps to create the idea of cultural supremacy of Hungarians in the region. According to this narrative, Hungarians naturally developed their capability to produce aesthetic purity.

¹¹³ Associations are established to protect the *Matyó* against exploitative practices, but the members of the local intelligentsia who take part in these themselves were also profiting from the embroidery. The anti-exploitation campaigns and the sensitization on the miserable payment of the embroiderers as a protectionist campaign were orchestrated by local employers.

war populist¹¹⁴ writer in his sociography titled *Gaudy Misery (Cifra nyomorúság)* highlights the contradiction between the symbolic importance of the *Matyó* from the perspective of intellectuals, nationalist narrative, and the actual material conditions of the peasants living in the area. However, his damning argument on the discrepancy between the material hardship of people and their willingness to spend as much as possible on their clothes' decorations also strengthens the argument that the *Matyó* is irrational or savage (Z. Szabó 1986, 80–83).

This commodification of local folk art happened parallel with the concentration of land in the hand of some prominent magnates. The population of the region was forced to become seasonal wage workers (*summás*) in other latifundia. Twenty thousand people regularly migrated to Western Hungary and even to Germany. On the main square, a statue remembers the people forced to participate in this seasonal migratory work. While organized labor among them was not uncommon, the *summás* from the settlement was depicted as loyal, hardworking subject who respected social hierarchies.

¹¹⁴ As I clarified in chapter three, I call *népi* the inter-war political and intellectual stream of thinking populist. Szabó's understanding of the peasants in Mezőkövesd and the neighboring village Tard was that the proletarianization of the freeholder peasants because of the lack of available land makes the basis of their livelihood unsustainable. At the same time, their way of life is adored and commodified because of the impoverishment slowly disappearing. His thinking on social policy targeting the peasants was not supporting capitalist integration nor the Soviet kolkhoz model (Borbándi 1983; Vidács 2015; Vigvári and Geröcs 2017; M. N. Taylor 2020)



Picture 18: Matyó couple from the second half of 1910s (source: <https://neprajz.hu/hirek/2020/muternek-1.html> Last Accessed: 29.03.2023.)

With the growing national sentiments within the spheres of the urban bourgeoisie and landed aristocracy, clothes became popular (Fügedi 2000, 15). In 1911 three hundred sewers were working on clothes exported to urban centers to be worn by the upper strata of the society at representative balls. The clothes of the *summás* workers and the wealthy peasants who got rich and managed to rent or own land in the town started to differ in the inter-war period (Fügedi 1997, 104). For agricultural work, only one piece of clothes was brought apart from the working clothes. In the meantime, the dresses of families who stayed in the town remained decorative.

In those families, the female members had the free time to do embroidery or had the purchasing power to buy them. The modernization and the egalitarian politics of the post-1945 period made the everyday usage of clothes rarer. Although the socialist state put effort into keeping embroidery alive through knowledge production and the support of the artisans in the 1950s, people did not wear those clothes anymore. That is usually referred to as *undressing* or *outdressing*.

The intensive organization of agricultural cooperatives started in 1961. That gave birth to four major state farms. In 1976 these merged into one called the Matyó Agricultural Cooperative. The organization of the cooperatives happened in a campaign-like manner between 1960-1961. In January of 1961, hundreds of educators (*népnevelő*)¹¹⁵ were sent to the town to persuade the peasants to join the cooperative. According to later reports (Árvai 1976), half of the educators were from Mezőkövesd the other half was “borrowed” from the industries of northern settlements of the county. From the early seventies, the cooperatives’ portfolio was extended to light industries, such as carpentry or textile, as part of the geographical restructuring of production (Barta 2002; Czirfusz 2021). With the post-socialist transition, the cooperative remained intact and was transformed into a joint-stock company in 2007 with around 150 mainly local owners. 98% of the stocks were bought in 2018 by a company close to the governing party and started to modernize the 5500 acres of big agrarian industry.

¹¹⁵ See the introduction and the second chapter on the transformation of the profession. In the context of cooperative organization, activist-like ideological work was utilized. At that time, the work of the educators resembles how Bruce Grant describes cultural work in the case of Buirat cultural workers (Grant 1995). In the history of agricultural collectivization, I differentiate three waves (1948, 1955, 1959) in which the two formers, while through administrative and coercive means, managed to nationalize one-third of the lands; the last wave, through its massive campaign and coercion put 95% of the lands in state property (Lampland 1995; Varga 2014). Since there was a massive lack of cadres shorter courses provided the necessary number of agitators and in the case of employees of houses of culture were primarily teachers. The term *népművelő* (cultivator of the people) and *népnevelő* (educator of the people) was sometimes used interchangeably (T. Kiss Tamás 2000, 61) former covered cultural organizer. At the same time, the latter was a non-professional activist, agitational work (C. Halász 2013, 19). In the case of the organization of cooperatives, *népnevelő*’s had a role. They differed from the employees of the house of culture, who worked on a wide range of political and cultural issues. The work of these activists was politically motivated and aimed to “enlighten” the people, in this case, about the merits of cooperatives.

6.2. Commodification and civil society

Display and performance of local cultural practices were also an integral part of the organized tourism¹¹⁶. Artifacts made in and around the town were sold internationally and nationally from the late 19th century. After 1949 production of embroideries and furniture, coupled with the display of dance and cityscape, further solidified the image of Mezőkövesd as an archetypical peasant town. In different historical periods, different elements of the life of the people were highlighted as authentic. Inter-war tourism was based on the performance of everyday life, such as wedding ceremonies, then the authentic *Matyó* became restricted to the goods people produced there. In our case, the authentication process was overwhelmingly done by state institutions, like the National Ethnological Society, the Institute of Civic Cultivation (ICC, *Népművelési Intézet*), or the Heritage House¹¹⁷. This creation of folk culture was part of modernization since it was created by antagonism between the industrial and the authentic or local (Appadurai 1996). Lucien Karpik argues that singularity and uniqueness only make sense in the market compared to mass-produced goods and commodities. Thus, the commodification of folk objects and debates about their authenticity cannot happen before the incorporation of rural communities into the capitalist relations of production. Singularity also means in their case that the labor it contains is highlighted and displayed (Karpik 2010). These embroideries, for example, are extremely labor intensive, it took months to put ornaments on one shirt sleeve.

Arguing with the perspective of *invented traditions* applied through the analysis of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Rogers, Marshall Sahlins claims that the fact that traditions are invented, and their birth can be traced back to distinct historical periods, sometimes to actual

¹¹⁶ In the 1930s, the Hungarian Railways Services invested in a hostel dressed in folk embroideries and furniture. Researchers of the region date back to the beginning of organized tourism to this time (Fügedi 1997, 129).

¹¹⁷ Heritage House (*Hagyományok Háza*) is an institution established in 2001 as a separate organization from HICC. It focuses on research and collection of folk practices.

dates, does not mean that they cease to exist as socially significant symbolic or ritualistic acts, events or performances (Sahlins 1999). Even if they are commodified and embedded in unequal distribution of power or domination, they still signify, express, and structure social relations. If we look at Eastern-European folklore and in that the Hungarian history of folk art, dance, and music, it is common among practitioners to make the distinction between folksy (inauthentic, epigon folk culture) and folk (authentic, which comes from the pure source, the peasant) (Taylor 2021, 84). Folksy is usually associated with a populist or a politically utilized folk culture that is used to create an overtly nationalistic culture of a political movement or party. Alternatively, it can refer to kitsch or inauthentic remaking of a folkloristic object or performance. Socialist modernity's folk performances are often questioned in their authenticity and narrated as simply a tool of ideological control. According to this account, they would base their legitimacy on popular classes and transform folk culture into folksy. That folksy culture would carry messages on the bright future and socialist modernization through the aesthetic tools of folk culture. The HoC would participate in the production of “folksy” and ideological performances.

Socialist folklorism, however, was not that utilitarian in supporting folk art. It was based on the understanding of inter-war socialist folklorists and experimented with making an organic popular culture from folk (Feinberg 2018, 54; Ignácz 2020). That means that socialist modernity also created the institutions of classification of popular culture to study and order the cultural production of the workers and peasants. The folk revival of the 1970s “discovered” new dances and songs through new endeavors. The “*táncház*” that was also included in the intangible heritage list of UNESCO in 2012 is usually narrated as an act of dissent against the folkish culture, a revolt against an ideologically used, thus inauthentic folk culture (Balogh and Fülemlé 2008). It is considered a place where folk dance became a non-performative social event with experiencing community and an organic attachment to a common culture (Frigyesi 1996, 62–63).

The interrelation between state-organized civic cultivation and the dance house movement was more complex. For example, the Institute of Civic Cultivation started its dance house leader course in 1976 (Taylor 2021, 150). It was not only a process based on the cooptation of dissent. Amateurism and folk culture as popular culture have been a cornerstone of civic cultivation since 1945. The club and amateur movement facilitated the making of local dance and singing groups. For example, the TV show titled *Röpülj Páva* (Fly peacock) in 1969 aimed to display local traditions on television that contributed to the formation of singing-based ensembles called *Pávakör* (Peacock Circles). The Budapest-based intellectual revivalism also transformed and happened parallel with the revival of folklore in village sites (Frigyesi 1996, 55). Compared to the urban folk dance practices, in Mezőkövesd, the local *Pávakör* was formed in 1982 as part of the state-initiated choir movement, while the dance ensemble was already established in 1947 from the *bouquet of pearls*¹¹⁸ ensemble active in the inter-war period (Taylor 2021, 60). They continue to operate until now in the Matyó Cultural Association. These multiple reinventions of folklore on the national and local scale produce a situation where authentication can happen on multiple scales. The political stances or situated knowledge of the producer of tradition would selectively use the different times of the canonization of folk culture.

In places such as Mezőkövesd, the commodification of folk objects and performances also have a significant role in creating wealth. The constant recreation of the ritual or the object structures social relations. Currently, it is integrated into globalized forms of tourism and the flow of capital. Yet, these are not the only processes contributing to the marketization of identities and related cultural products (Lau 1999; Pulay 2014). While the intense commodification of ethnic identities can be traced back to the 1970s, the singularity of the local concerning the national or the global, as the early commodification of *Matyó* demonstrated it,

¹¹⁸ Bouquet of pearls (*Gyöngyösbokréta*) was an inter-war movement of folk-dance groups. Villages would perform their dances in festivals and theaters narratively with tight dramaturgy.

has been structured by the incorporation or subsumption by the capitalist world system of the given regions before (Wallerstein 1990).

In the history of Mezőkövesd, the state is one of the main actors in valorizing the region's folk art. In the inter-war period and after 1990, it was done by civil society actors, but they were utilizing state resources and infrastructure. Their interest in that process was historically changing and contingent upon the local and national alliances. The HoC is mediating in that process, first as a place where the semi-autonomous logic of civic cultivation protects folklore from direct political usage and second as a place of the local state that lends symbolic capital to the artifacts displayed there. Before 1990 the HoC as a state institution was a place of incorporation and validation of practices of popular culture which changed with the transition and became a shell, a place of local associations, where the state-approved but privatized process of authentication is happening.

6.3. Cooperatives and house of culture

The HoC of Mezőkövesd was established by the developmentalist socialist state to provide the necessary educational means for the cooperatives and to oversee the authentication of the local folklore in 1963. Earlier on, institutions of public education and civic cultivation were run by actors such as the Catholic Church and the Bourgeois Reading Association. In Salgótarján, the socialist history of HoCs is intimately connected to the history of the industries; in Mezőkövesd, the agricultural cooperatives and the so-called cottage industry cooperative (*Háziipari szövetkezet*) had a significant role in shaping the functions and programs of the HoC. Cottage industry cooperatives operated in ethno-regions where significant forms of material folk culture could be found (Ament-Kovács 2019). In these places, primarily female workers made embroidery, needlework, or other folk artifacts. The cooperative collected that and sold

them in Hungary or abroad. Prior to 1990, Hungarocoop was responsible for the export of these artifacts.

The Matyó Cooperative of Home Industry was established in 1951¹¹⁹ with 42 members. And in 1980, it already had 535 members with 1800 seasonal workers. (Fügedi 1997, 69). Even in the 1950s, it employed mainly female workforce seasonally that would otherwise not work in the agricultural cooperatives. Seasonal workers were paid after the pieces and produced with the tools that could be found at home. These forms of cooperatives contributed to the household's income through a cultural production focused on folk art (Ament-Kovács 2020). The Matyó Cottage Industry Cooperative was one of the biggest ones in the country. It realized one-third of its revenues in foreign currency (Árvai 1976, 269; Galambos 2018; Ament-Kovács 2020, 196).



Picture 19: House of Culture of Mezőkövesd (source <https://archive2021.nmi.hu/intezmeny/kozossegi-haz/> Last Accessed: 29.03.2023.)

The country-wide governance of these cooperatives rigorously inquired about the authenticity of the produced objects. The cottage industry cooperatives' alliance worked with the Institute of Civic Cultivation and employed ethnologists to collect and supervise patterns.

¹¹⁹ The first cottage industry cooperative was established in 1912 by the chief cantor of the Catholic Church and operated until 1932. The cooperative exported goods to the US, Sweden, Switzerland, and the Netherlands (Fügedi 1997, 57). In 1920 a cottage industry corporation was established called Drim Cottage Industry, which operated in the Crown Hotel, which in the 1950s became the headquarter of the Matyó Cottage Industry Cooperative. A catholic association called Heart of Jesus Girls of People was also trading folk artifacts. Jewish traders were excluded through aesthetic judgment. The embroiderers worked from the material brought by the trader, and the local Jewish traders provided duller colors for their embroiderers, called by a local art teacher "rotten color."

The cottage industry cooperatives were built around informants, who could develop the portfolio of the local cooperatives. In Mezőkövesd Bori Kis Jankó¹²⁰, was the central figure of the cooperative. The main repertoire, patterns, colors, or material was collected by Vilma Dietz Dajaszászné, an ethnologist who lived in Mezőkövesd from 1950 until she died in 1965. The development of the light industry around folk objects, knowledge production, and the production of ethnographic subjects, as we can see, was an integral part of socialist modernization. The authentication process was made through a jury that approved the object, which can be mass-produced. The production was happening with the hand; thus, the quality of the objects could differ based on the experience of the actual worker¹²¹. Scientific, ethnographic management of the production and the approval of different patterns oversaw the authenticity of the products which were made for the market.

The mission of the newly established cooperative was also based on the claim that the commodification during the inter-war period devalued the embroideries¹²² and the “capitalist trade” should be fought by returning to the traditional, authentic style. This history of cottage industry cooperatives shows the way the contradictory process of authentication and commodification played out. While in the inter-war period, the entrepreneurs fought with copies based on claims of the place of origin during the socialist history, ethnographic knowledge, and legitimacy based on the informant’s involvement in the production provided the aura of the authenticity of the embroideries in the region.

From the moment the HoC opened, it gave place to the Kisjankó Bori Embroiderer Competition. The Applied Folk Arts Council and the Institute of Civic Cultivation, in

¹²⁰ She died in 1954 but was a founding member of the cooperative.

¹²¹ That changed in the 1980s as machines imported from Japan produced some of the embroideries. However, the production was never fully automatized (Varga Marianna 1981; Fügedi 1997, 69).

¹²² In fact, many “copies” or “imitations” were produced worldwide. In the United States, an entrepreneur from Mezőkövesd sold it as Indian style. In Marienbad, it was sold as “Egerländer” style and in the Czechoslovak Republic as Slovak style (Fügedi 1997, 65–67).

cooperation with the county council, established the competition. People could apply with folk embroideries, which were displayed in the house. Its goal was to collect the still living but unknown patterns and acknowledge the embroiderers of the cottage industry cooperative. The competition was a place of authentication but also a place of innovation. Participants could creatively use the given patterns, make slight modifications, and apply them to new materials. This competition is still organized every four years. It facilitates the involvement of young people in making *Matyó* embroidery. However, my informants regularly complained that embroiderers from Mezőkövesd are underrepresented or nonexistent. People from other parts of Hungary would bring *Matyó* patterns, or there would not be any *Matyó* represented.

The HoC also hosted a Museum of *Matyó* folk art until 2005, when the town purchased the former Cottage Industry Cooperative's headquarters and opened the *Matyó* Museum in the place. The modern HoC provided the necessary place for these events from its opening. It is a socialist modernist building that can host six hundred people in its theater hall. On the two sides of the stage, József Takács's mural paintings represent different moments of the everyday life of the town in a romantic style¹²³. Károly Kruzseley, the first director of the HoC, governed it for twenty-nine years from 1963 to 1992. As Kruzseley recalled, apart from displaying works of folk artists and giving place to the folk-dance groups, the HoC had a very close connection to the agricultural cooperatives and the related industries. When we were discussing the early history of the HoC and the effects of different reforms, he listed mostly workshops and educational programs related to the development of the workforce in Mezőkövesd¹²⁴. That meant a stable position for the HoC in the town's life and the surrounding settlements. The folk-

¹²³ József Takács was a painter born and raised in Mezőkövesd. He was one of the most prolific church painters in the inter-war period. His style was based on a mix of realism, historic nationalist romantic paintings, Art Nuovo, and folk motifs.

¹²⁴ Kruzseley, Károly 15.11.2018. Interview by the author.

related programs were unaffected while new functions were introduced related to making the necessary knowledge on specific labor processes.

The HoC, in those terms, supported the light industries relocated to the town. In the 1970s and 1980s, one of the main activities of the HoC was the so-called professionalizing workshops. If the economic governance required certain workers to hold a degree for their employment, the job of the HoC was to organize educational programs. There were specific tracks like the sewing, shop retailer, tractor driver or crane handler, and the related service members. The HoC was also obligated to help get school degrees, like finishing primary school or secondary school. The educators would look for teachers in the county who held a degree in the related profession and organized the track for the students. This also generated income. Kruzely would tell stories on lengthy negotiations with the surrounding firms or the cooperative about the agreements on how many people should be taught in the given profession. Those could be paid by the cooperative and the individual who participated in the workshop. Recalling the legislations¹²⁵ on the individual budget of the HoC, Kruzely claimed that the HoC could sustain itself from

¹²⁵ The altered funding of the houses of culture in 1983 was discussed in chapter two, and the effects in Salgótarján in chapter five.

these orders from the cooperatives and the related light industries. That relationship between the HoC and the local productive capacities was institutionalized in “socialized leadership.”



Picture 20: The Interior of the House of Culture, refurbished during COVID-19 lock-downs (source: <https://www.facebook.com/mezokovesdi.kozkincstarnonprofitkft/> Last Accessed: 29.03.2023.)

That meant that the cooperatives and plants interested in the educational programs and leisure time activities participated in the leadership of the HoC. They not only paid directly for the educational programs of the workers but, in the meantime, also contributed to the folklore, theater, or choir festivals through subsidies.

With the post-socialist transition, the local HoC lost its significance concerning folklore performances. In the previous chapters, we saw directors finding new alternative funding forms. Here the director following Kruszely did not find such options while the more lucrative element of the HoC, such as the folk-dance groups, left the institution. Many of the clubs and associations formed before 1990, however, remained active. That meant that the professionalization workshops and the programs organized by the educators barely happened, but the associations started to fill up the schedule. Similarly, Salgótarján people would recall this period as decay; however, in contrast with the József Attila Center of Civic Cultivation (JACCC), I did not encounter such open struggles between the municipality and the HoC. In Mezőkövesd, the relative strength of the associations in relation to folk culture made them influential in forming the program of the HoC.

After 2003 the municipality decided to make the HoC governed by the local civic associations. That meant they established a foundation that collected all the civic associations and representation of the municipality. That foundation monitored the activities of the staff, and it was also responsible for the organization of certain programs. As we saw in chapter three, Pál Beke, an advocate of a community-based civic cultivation, governed the Hungarian Institute for Civic Cultivation. His program aimed for the “socialization of the house of culture.” In other words, he claimed that institutions of civic cultivation should be governed by the local civil society and reflect the needs of the local citizens. In this case, the legal entity of the HoC was terminated in 2003, and the labor contracts of the educators got terminated. The new head of the HoC was brought in from a village called Noszvaj. She governed there a “folk house”¹²⁶ together with the local families specialized on entrepreneurship in folk practices. It was a process that significantly differed from the JACCC in Salgótarján. There the HoC supported

¹²⁶ These houses in Hungarian “Tájház” display how people lived in given settlements as peasants. It is usually an open-air museum that shows objects from the material culture of the locality.

the civic associations, but despite its focus on developing a theater and abandoning its community development work, civic associations never entirely took over. Here the associations had been dominant before the takeover and ended up running the HoC, realizing the idea of the socialization of the HoC.

This foundation-based operation, however, was short-lived, and it was transformed into a non-profit corporation in 2009 (Mezőkövesdi Közkinestár Non-profit Ltd.). Chris Hann frames the transformation of institutions of civic cultivation in another town, Kiskunhalas, as the corporation serves corruption and accumulation for the loyal capitalists of the governing party (Hann 2018, 14). In contrast, I would argue that the transformation of the HoC into an Ltd. is rooted in the institutional history of civic cultivation. In other words, Ltd.'s can be a means of accumulation and provide political influence, but first of all, they enable the flexibilization of funding and employment. That means the municipality can pool leisure activities into one legal entity, and that would then provide certain services related to civic cultivation. The mode of employment is decided in the corporation. While that can fuel, as Hann points out, redistribution of resources for the local elites, it has a more critical role in cheapening the otherwise compulsory tasks of the municipality. That means that these corporations can avoid employing people in the HoCs as public servants, which would ensure several benefits such as extras beyond salary and job security. In addition, this marketized form of governance, in comparison with the foundation, takes away a form of democratic control. While the previous legal entity controlled the HoC directly, with the transition to an Ltd., the municipality started to run the HoC as a business which excludes decisions based on the reconciliation of differing interests.

In Mezőkövesd, the HoC was established quite late compared to Salgótarján. Yet, the town had a lively cultural and civic cultivation life run by entrepreneurs interested in commodifying material culture. The Church, wealthy peasants, and forms of agrarian proletariat political organization were present. After being established, the HoC became an integral part of the

economic development in the town since it provided education for people working in the collectives and for workers employed in light industries and through displaying and authenticating the embroideries, also participated in the commodification of local folk objects. The state and the local state fostered activities related to folk culture, which could then survive in professionalized form. After the transition, it continued providing a place for local associations, which took over in 2003. Then in 2009, the municipality took back and formed a non-profit company to run the place. These multiple forms of transformations of the HoC and civic cultivation illustrate that this institution was not only embedded but also actively formed this agrarian town's spatial transformation. It did not only serve the industries, but as an institution of the ideological state apparatus, it did foster their birth.

6.4. Doing civic cultivation outside the house of culture



Picture 21: Matyó wedding in the Dance Barn (courtesy of the Matyó Cultural Association)

During my fieldwork in the town, I was staying in the basement of one of the members of the Matyó Cultural Association. As a local amateur historian and researcher of folk art, he built

a “*háromszéki*¹²⁷” room, filled with furniture from the Transylvanian ethno-region. I was sleeping under a quote from Albert Wass¹²⁸, a Transylvanian writer liked and cherished by the Hungarian right because of his romantic depiction of Szeklers and the national identity associated with land and nature. The quote said, “one should always be loyal to family and nation.”

My host’s social trajectory was somewhat typical in the Association. As a former member of the Matyó Ensemble, the folk-dance group of the HoC, which the Association now runs, he became interested in folk art at a very early age. His family lived on the land where his workshop and house are now. He would say that they have been working in agriculture in the surrounding lands for hundreds of years, complemented by subsistence farming on their own. He had a particularly damning narrative on socialism as he claimed the collective took their lands, and as a son of peasants, he was sidelined in the different firms he worked for. He studied as an agricultural mechanic and worked in the garages of the long-distance bus company Volán. As the transition came, he utilized his skills as an amateur carpenter and machine builder and started an enterprise. He put together tools to make wainscots in family houses. Later in the mid-nineties, he was pushed out from the market when the big home depots gained their foothold in the country. Then he started to make folk art-inspired woodwork. In the end, he specialized in fences and doors. Based on his research, there was a tradition of decorative doors in Mezőkövesd before the 1950s, like the Szekler-gates¹²⁹.

Although he would position himself as conservative and traditionalist, he was disenchanted with the governing party. He would share narratives with Fidesz, such as refugees destroying

¹²⁷ Szekler ethno-region with a decorative furniture painting tradition in Covasna County, Romania.

¹²⁸ Because of his association with the inter-war right and fascism, Albert Wass is a contested figure in the Hungarian literary canon. However, since 1990 quite a cult has developed around him, and after the 2010 takeover of Fidesz, cultural politics has been attempting to canonize his work.

¹²⁹ Highly decorative gates usually have one big and one small entrance covered with a small roof. It is popular in Szekler land, however among wealthy right-leaning people.

white European culture and György Soros being a mastermind behind their relocation. His position on folk art was more complicated about national culture. According to him, the regional motifs and objects of the styles of different ethnic regions are distinguishable and separate. He and many other people in the Association narrated it in a particular style that, while representing Hungariannes, does not equal national culture. He also criticized how embroidery in the *Matyó* heritage was centered since it pushes out other elements of local tradition like his woodwork or the wood painting, which are underrepresented in folk performances related to local traditions.

The Association was established by Zsuzsa, who had worked in the HoC since she was eighteen under Károly Kruzsely. In the early 1980s, she already attempted to turn the folk-dance group into an association. She thought that the form of an association looked like something that would provide more flexibility for the group, so she approached the council and the director. They, however, refused her request. She recalled this attempt in the following way: “Different journals were coming to the HoC regularly, and there was this booklet on the association law, and I took it and read it many times. [...] I gathered all my courage and asked the responsible person (rapporteur of civic cultivation) in the council what would happen if we did it for the folk-dance groups. He told Kruzsely, and he pushed me down like a stamp¹³⁰.”

The fact that they could utilize the association law of 1981 in Salgótarján, while it met refusal in Mezőkövesd can be understood through the different structures of the amateur cultural associations in the two places. In Salgótarján, the associations were tools of austerity; the municipality wanted to get rid of the peripheral HoCs, while the former miner communities themselves had the capacity to organize the associations. The HoC was cutting the budget since the responsibility of its maintenance was imposed on the council after 1983. In the case of Mezőkövesd, the folk-dance group, which Zsuzsa planned to run as an association, was the

¹³⁰ Zsuzsa Bereczné. 28.11.2018. Interview by the author.

leading ensemble of the HoC. It was a spectacle of organized tourism in the settlement, and the subsidies came from the cooperatives for activities to support folk performances. These activities were rarely de-centralized if they were economically or symbolically lucrative or served an ideological purpose. That demonstrates that the 1981 law, while presenting the opportunity to establish associations, could be applied selectively and still needed a central decision from the side of the council or the Patriotic People's Front.

In 1990, when the council and the House of Culture could not restrict the establishment of the association Zsuzsa and Bernadett, another educator in the HoC together, launched the Matyó Cultural Association. In the first years, their focus was solely on folk dance. They broke up with the HoC and took the two active folk dance groups (adults and children) with them. While they still did rehearsals in the HoC, they got the so-called "dance barn" from the municipality. They also got baseline funding from the municipality. As Zsuzsa recalled this period, the funding was barely enough for the expenses, as they had to cover the salary of four former employees who had just left their jobs in the HoC. They also had to provide the dresses and repair the existing ones for the members of the groups. Thus, they started to work with organized tour agencies, which brought tourists by bus to the town. The Matyó wedding ¹³¹ performance was well known among the people interested in folk art, so they started promoting it. In the summer, they would organize a weekly wedding in the barn. Complementing the performance with dance teaching and catering service, which the dancers did, they managed to provide a stable income for the Association in that early period.

Although this folk entrepreneurship was necessary for the Association's sustainability, their main goal was never to "commodify" folk dance or *Matyó*. They considered the structure of the HoC inflexible, which did not provide the necessary institutional framework for innovation

¹³¹ The wedding itself was also a well-known choreography since 1896 and has been a cornerstone of what people consider "Matyó culture".

within the context of what they consider traditional *Matyó* folk art. In the early 1990s, when associations in the name of democratization got more funding and the HoC system's position in the new political regime was not yet solidified, such legal and organizational structure provided a more stable solution than continuing the work in the HoC. An entrepreneurial attitude was also promoted. Folk-related material culture and performances, especially those with international recognition and national significance, had more chances to be profitable outside the HoC. Therefore, instead of being an employee of the local state that was said to provide more opportunities.

While the teaching and performing of folk dance remained a focus for the Association, with time, folk artisanship also became a primary activity of the members. Currently, 60% of the members are folk dancers, and 40% are artisans. The cottage industry cooperative went bankrupt in 2002 because of the collapse of its resale network maintained by the Hungarian state. Individual artisans started to be represented by the Association. After acquiring their own headquarter in the Hadas district, they also opened a sewing workshop that fixes and makes dresses for the performances. Potter, wedding headpiece makers, and several embroiderers are among the Association's ranks.

The historical process of authentication and usage of the *Matyó* as a distinct Hungarian clothing style is well known for the actors, but that does not devalue or diminish their understanding of it as heritage. The main front they opened is with the tourist industry, which uses *Matyó* as a generic Hungarian style mixing it with different styles of sewing all around the country. Distinct styles of regions are strived to be maintained in the struggle for authenticity even though actors are highly aware of the distinction between the original piece and the role of folk in the modern. Maintaining the purity of regional culture is a way of valorization.

“C[re]ation of cultural value follows a communicative and strategic path” (Kowalski 2011, 82) on the level of global or supranational governance writes Alexandra Kowalski on the case

of negotiations around the World Heritage Sites. The same can be said about the local level of heritage making. Strategic claims and distinctions are made to differentiate *Matyó* from the cacophony of practices under the national culture's umbrella. That regionalization is a form of boundary making which makes them capable of marketizing the authenticity of the style. In 2012 the Association initiated integrating *Matyó* culture into the intangible heritage list. The logic of the list demands choosing one specific custom, rite, or any other form of cultural practice or creation of cultural good. In the case of *Matyó*, they chose embroidery. With the help of the Hungarian office of UNESCO, they pushed through the selection process. They would need to collect different recommendations from the community or a town proving that the given heritage is still in use and cultivated. Zsuzsa would tell me that it was her most complex challenge but also a rewarding one, experiencing a kind of unity behind the embroidery¹³². It is often put in contrast with the inability and sometimes unwillingness of the actors in the municipality to support the reproduction of heritage. In comparison, the state ran and ordered the cultivation of heritage with actors like the Cottage Industry Cooperative and the House of Culture, where the state authenticated and commodified *Matyó* on different scales. This process is much more centralized in the hands of private actors, and the authentication is happening on a scale above the state but with the help of state actors.

To celebrate the success of making embroidery part of world heritage since 2012, the Association, together with other local civic groups, organize the celebration of “*Matyó* rose”¹³³, the most recognizable ornament of *Matyó* embroidery. It is the biggest celebration which regularly fills up the HoC. On that day, every cultural association participates in a performance usually choreographed by the director of the Amateur Theater Group of *Matyó*land Association

¹³² Berezné, Zsuzsa. 24.01.2022 Interview by the author.

¹³³ Since the “socialization” of the house different civic associations are responsible for the organization of each event. The *Matyó* Easter is organized by the Tourist Association of *Matyó*land the “Day of the Town” by the two amateur theater groups, and the “Folklore Festival of *Matyó*land” by the *Matyó* Cultural Association (*Mátyus* 2003a).

(MASZK). The *Matyó Pávakör*, an amateur folk choir and dance group, the three folk dance groups, the town's brass band, and the two amateur theater groups are all on the stage tied together in a loose dramaturgy organized around a topic or a theme.

The celebration of the “*Matyó rose*” is an event that shows the continuities and ruptures of the way the HoC participates in the town's cultural life and serves as a “buffer zone” in performing different temporalities. The “*Matyó rose*,” while organized around the same claims as the early commodification of the *Matyó* folk art in the 19th century, turns international recognition and a new form of valorization a rite. That means that celebrating the recognition of a local cultural practice becomes a tradition through communally experienced performances. It also reproduces the status of the *Matyó* Cultural Association as the organizer of folk-related cultural life and an actor of authentication.

The Association is a specific form of civic cultivation initiative: it privatizes and voluntarily puts the local scale of heritagization. It consists of semi-professional dancers and folk artisans. They practiced a function that two institutions organized during socialism: the production of artisan pieces which was done by the cottage industry cooperative, and the propagation of the craft that was done in the HoC. The HoC itself now does not participate in structuring authentication processes. However, it works as a shell for the private display of a commodified form of peasant culture that has been canonized in the inter-war period. It helps members represent interest through educational practices and also provides forms of capital like the craft of making a *Matyó* object and knowledge on ornaments that can be transformed into profit.

6.5. Conclusion

Mezőkövesd's HoC had an integrative role in displaying the town's culture and supporting the local folk art, which had been marketized and commercialized since the late 19th century. While the Smelter House of Culture in Salgótarján was repurposed from the pacification of

workers to ensuring professional identity, the JACCC, as a part of the socialist modernization of the town, first provided large-scale events tailor-made for the emerging technical intelligentsia then contributed to the making of post-socialist civic associations. In comparison, in Mezőkövesd the HoC was not present before 1962. We can observe the emergence of a much more scattered landscape of institutions of civic cultivation prior to 1945. In line with the class composition of the town, bourgeois, peasant, and catholic reading groups in their respective places were operating. The early socialist state, while diminishing this associational life, also repurposed the groups and places. However, the activities of the HoC and the centralization of civic cultivation-related activities started parallel with the intensive collectivization of lands after 1961. In that ideological work related to the virtues of cooperativism, labor-related educational programs and the display and authentication of local folk art were parallel presents.

The Hungarian socialist state considered folk as the culture of the people modernist form of art that is the mass culture of the future. In the case of Mezőkövesd, the market value of folk art was also considered significant and valorized through the activities of the cottage industry cooperative. Consequently, the HoC was not the only venue to display the folk but also participated actively in the selective authentication process. In comparison, as the main association engaged with folk culture currently operates outside the HoC, their functions are limited to hosting amateur groups and operating as a theater.

Since 1990 with the privatization of these practices to associations, these groups slowly took over the HoC. Similarly to the Salgótarján case, associations form an exclusive circle from the town's middle class. Instead of national usage and cultivation of local folklore, interested professionals take over the authentication process. It is still overseen by the state and scientifically measured by juries on folk objects and art. However, the control over the production of these artifacts is centralized in the hand of local associations. Their perception of the double crisis (commercialization or being forgotten) of *Matyó* embroidery and folk art

evokes the inter-war period nationalization of the local practice, i.e., popularity threatens authenticity while local practitioners disappear. In that, the Matyó Cultural Association operates as a “guild” which protects the interest of local artists and, through valorization, the authenticity of their artifacts.

Conclusion: who owns the house of culture?

“One must speak of a fight for new culture, that is for a new moral life, that cannot but be intimately connected to a new intuition of life, until it becomes the new way of feeling and seeing reality [...].” (Gramsci 1985, 98)

On the day I was notified that my application was accepted to the Sociology and Social Anthropology Ph.D. program of CEU, I was working as a member of a jury awarding a sizable prize on behalf of a contemporary art foundation that wished to open its funding to civic cultivation initiatives. The award was advertised throughout the country, facilitating the applications from actors and venues who are not usually considered part of the field of contemporary art. That campaign and the award ceremony unfolded in 2016, at the onset of Orbán’s second term as Prime Minister. At that point, political opposition to the regime by the former liberal intelligentsia was on a steep decline, and oppositional actors started to think about long-term institution-building (Nagy & Szarvas, 2021b; Nagy & Szarvas, 2017).

In light of the successful institutionalization of the ethnonationalist, conservative hegemony in Hungary, many looked at the houses of culture as a “non-elitist”, autonomous location in which opposition might be organized, where cultural workers might work with or address “common people,” where freedom of expression could be practiced. The concept of the award was worked out with this horizon in mind and the best intentions. It was rationalized in the following way: “Contemporary art is secluded from the public; nobody protects it from the ‘damaging’ takeover of Fidesz because the field was elitist. Artists should embed their art in society and make their activities a general societal interest in order to protect themselves from such political takeovers”¹³⁴. Applications flew in from many “traditional” corners of the civic cultivation world, from a miners’ association in an Eastern Hungarian village, to suburban

¹³⁴ <https://hu.tranzit.org/hu/katalizator-dij/0/2016-02-22/katalizator-projekt-2015> (last accessed: 05.03.2023)

houses of culture in Budapest, to town-beautifying associations, and to projects focused on after-school education. It looked as if the organizers had successfully opened their call to a public beyond the field of contemporary visual arts.

As a member of the jury however I could observe how the applicants' language differed from artists'. These projects proved ultimately not to be eligible because of divergent understandings of public engagement, and because of their inability to include what was considered "contemporary art" from the perspective of the jury. Despite everyone's efforts, the award only reproduced the boundaries between the field of contemporary art and other forms of cultural production. A Budapest-based collective of artists won the prize, and the exhibitions they made for two houses of culture had little audience and impact.

The concept for the award was indexed on two common representations of the house of culture in the legitimate cultural field. First, it was seen as a place where the intelligentsia and cultural movements could freely express themselves and their opposition to a "totalitarian" state from within the state's institution itself. Second, the HoC was seen as a place of democratization of culture, where free or cheap high culture could be accessed by people with little cultural capital. The first idea is rooted in an idealized, nostalgic image of HoCs or in some actual, but ancient experience of the liberal intelligentsia. The second representation aligns with Enlightenment-inspired self-definitions of the HoC system by its historical practitioners and professionals. The HoC lives in the political imagination of urban intellectuals as a place saturated with state representations, a place where relative freedom could be exerted. This perspective was propagated across the social body by former dissidents who already organized their cultural and political events against the socialist regime in the HoC. For any student or scholar of art history and other institutionalized cultural practices, these places bore the memory of politics and culture under late socialism. There is abundant evidence that the HoC is commonly understood as a place of resistance or cultural innovation. It is the scene of

transitology and hagiographies of resistance. Hungary's only Golden Lion (Andreas Fogarasi curated by Katalin Tímár) from the Venice Biennale was given to an art work that processed this cultural memory and contemplated over the contemporary emptiness of HoC. Punk emerged in HoCs (Horváth K. 2010), and HoCs are where oppositional circles and theaters formed (Szarvas 2016; Nagy and Szarvas 2021a). I wrote myself an MA. thesis on one of these groups, the radical left-wing Orfeo, that used cultural critique to highlight the contradictions of socialism.

Some scholars and artists engaged with houses of culture¹³⁵, share a question with the organizers of the contemporary art award: can the HoC be considered a common good or a commons? By commons, I mean “(1) a pool of natural and/or human resources, (2) a community of people with reciprocal and sharing relations, and (3) acts of working together towards the reproduction of the community, neither private nor public” (Mollona 2021, 9–10). Other theorists of the commons highlight the processual character of commoning (Taylor and Brenner 2022) or its vital function in the reproduction of life, by contrast with the necropolitics of production qua extraction and exploitation (de Angelis 2017, 11; Federici 2019, 94). Another scholar of the HoC, Irina Boatea Bucan, has like myself been looking at the institution from a perspective of democratization of cultural production. As an artist working for social and political democracy, she aimed to understand how one should reengage their context-dependent and contradictory history. Her piece also ends mostly in a mount of questions about the potential of the house of culture and its past ability to host “progressive” art (Botea Bucan 2022, 51).

Although I do not have definitive answers about the future in general of the HoC in Hungary or anywhere else in the world, I wish to pause and reflect at this end of a long process

¹³⁵ I refer here to a group that attempted to make the “British-Greek-Czechoslovak-Swedish-Yugoslav... Glossary for A Culture House” in the institutional framework of Konsthalle MINT, Stockholm.

researching and writing a dissertation on the subject. The specific question that preoccupies me concerns the HoC's relationship to future or hypothetical commons.

The question about the future of the HoC is usually asked with several preconceptions in mind. One of them is that the house of culture is empty; another one is that it does not have a guardian or caretaker—the educators are quite simply most often erased from the equation. Finally, despite all its contradictions in reproducing and contesting hegemony, the HoC is imagined as a democratic and democratization factor in culture, whereby “high culture” is something to be disseminated for social hierarchies to be lessened through equal access to cultural capital. HoCs are still grasped through the modernist prism once heralded by André



Picture 22: Tímár Sára: József Attila House of Culture, Rudoltelep

Malraux and others since the first decades of state-socialist modernity: cheap high culture has civilizational potential.

Through my main and most basic empirical research question: “what is happening in the house of culture?” I wish to look beyond these doxas. I ask if it is the place of culture for a

world based on social and natural sustainability and whether it is a place of political organization. The history of chartered in this dissertation may help us at least get a grasp of the constraints and conditions for the future of this institution.

Summary of the thesis

To understand the roles of the HoC, I used historical analysis to tell this specific transformation, since many of the current processes could not be understood without the series of metamorphoses the institutional system went through after 1990. I argued that the period between 1968 and 1990 witnessed the economization of civic cultivation. While HoCs always engaged with labor issues by fostering a certain imagination of the ideal worker and citizen and the formation of political subjects, things took a different turn after 1968, as series of policies reframed civic cultivation as a contribution to economic development. This in two ways: directly, through the commodification of certain cultural products, and indirectly, through the consolidation of productive communities. These factors contributed to the emergence of civic cultivation as an independent profession. Professionals started to grasp society as a collection of subjects and communities that produced and consumed culture, and themselves as an integral part of a system of governance providing a basic social services.

The intensive development of the socialist economy and its bridge position which resulted in growing indebtedness, brought administrative restructuring, which in turn provided political liberalization. Paradoxically, the profession already saw itself in crisis at its birth. I argued that these factors (the sense of crisis, the understanding of the profession as a means of creating an amalgam of society, and the social position of educators recruited among lower-class families) crucially produced a specific habitus. Contrary to a widespread understanding of civic cultivation as top-down ideological control, I argued that its governance was based on ethnographic knowledge focusing on people's cultural habits and on the everyday operation of the institution itself. Thus, activities were adapted to their contexts. In the 1980s, the HoC

became a place of experimentation with politically less centralized associational life and an entrepreneurial understanding of culture. Reformism emerged from these late-socialist developments, which largely determined how post-socialist civic cultivation would later be reimagined. The corresponding chapter helped us understand that civic cultivation is not only a “socialist institution,” nor is it a site of pure dissent. It is a place that, while historically rooted in “really-existing socialism”, is more generally and fundamentally a place of state-organized modernization.

The post-socialist transition brought about a major reworking of civic cultivation: it became one of the formulas for fostering the emergence of civil society. I showed the different ways in which different political factions defined civil society. The right based its borders on ethnic belonging, and the liberals on citizenship. Therefore, they imagined the role of the post-socialist HoC differently. Both would argue for civil society-based HoC, while the trade union of educators and the socialist party were advocating for state control. In the meantime, educators adapted to the circumstances creatively, which sustained the institutional system. These processes excluded the workplace organization of leisure time activities and focused only on the bourgeois and folk aspects of civic cultivation. Here I intended to show that the lack of coherent cultural policy did not mean a lack of class politics in and through cultural institutions. That means that anti-labor measures and the HoC as a place of developing bourgeois subjectivity were dominant in the HoC. That did not mean that former union-based HoC disappear. They were pooled into an association that aimed to privatize their assets. Although that institution is still active, its membership is shrinking, as associations of former union-owned HoCs primarily consist of pensioners who are sometimes unable to continue their

activities¹³⁶. In a similar vein, the grant-based funding and association-based organization of civic cultivation resulted that the HoC becoming a place of reproduction of local elites.

We arrived at the EU accession of 2004 with an institutional system that redefined itself and managed to adapt to the requirements of the post-socialist capitalist state, namely in its educational activities focusing on producing adaptive workers and self-reliable citizens. However, funding was still scarce, and the decentralization of the institutional system produced a variety of legal and practical solutions for running the HoC. I analyzed two large-scale investments into the infrastructure. I told the emergence of Integrated Community Service Places as the story of the creative adaptation to EU-level institution, the community places, and that investment served rural development projects, but they ended up contributing to the maintenance of the house of culture system. The other investment was the Agora project. This analysis served to illustrate how competition between left-liberal and conservative factions was played out on the administrative level. In addition, the lack of income at the county level, coupled with its indebtedness after 2008, meant that the coordination of the organization of civic cultivation on the county level could not be realized.

After 2010, while in the cultural politics of the Orbán regime, civic cultivation did not occupy a highlighted role, series of significant investments happened. I argued that one of the main traits of cultural policies was that through informal relationships, one could further certain causes they worked for. Magdolna Závogyán, the undersecretary of civic cultivation, managed to push through the centralization of county-level bureaucracy in the National Institute of Civic Cultivation, introduced cultural public work to provide cheap labor for cultural institutions, and started a new subsidized vocational training to fill the shortage of professionals. I claimed that the transformations follow policies and base the understanding of contemporary civic

¹³⁶ 01.03.2023 state funding was terminated that targeted RAACC, the association responsible for redistributing funding to formerly union owned houses of culture.

cultivation on community development worked out in the 1980s. However, a romantic picture of the folk, religious, magical beliefs, and post-socialist radical right-wing knowledge production is also integrated into that image. The result is a centralized authoritarian management that mixes a bourgeois understanding of the responsible citizen and community as a source of economic development with an ethno-nationalistic mystical image of the peasant as a source of the Hungarian soul. However, EU funds dictate more the program on the national level of planning than any other factors.

In the meantime, the people in the HoC experience precarious work conditions. That means that public employment is terminated, and the educators are contracted by various bodies, each providing different benefits and conditions of work. Non-profit ltd.'s, municipalities', and state-run "strategically important" institutions' budgets, salaries, and ways of employment would differ. The informal way of distributing positions in these institutions, patron-client relations between the municipality and the employees makes representation of interest hard. Moreover, Hungarian union laws that only allow work stoppage concerning workplace disputes, which makes these workers' representation fragmented.

In the two chapters about Salgótarján, I showed the history of civic cultivation that was attached to industrial production. The fifth chapter told the long history of associational life in and outside of the József Attila Center of Civic Cultivation (JACCC), the town's main HoC. The sixth analyzed the everyday activities of one group, the Smelter and Miner Association. On the side of the educators here, I inquired how decentralization and competition for grants made them the main actors in reproducing the institutional structure of the HoC. This reliance of the institutional system on their entrepreneurial attitude was further intensified after 1990. I added here that during transformations, the house of culture reproduces the loyal intellectuals of an elite faction. These processes I illustrated through the transitions of political power and their effects on JACCC.

Through a town beautifying project and the everyday operation of the miner smelter choir, I analyzed place-making through cultural means expressing an ideal future of the city. I argued that the HoC gradually became privatized, basing its programs on the activities of local associations. However, those have their own interest, alliances, and agendas that then influence the everyday operation of the HoC. Associations also express a local middle-class imaginary. Their actions and understanding of beautifying the city reproduce a developmentalist discourse of creativity but also looks for idealized everyday normality that is not experienced in a shrinking peripheral post-industrial town.

In contrast, the miner and smelter choir utilize the industrial history of the town. The members as former engineers, miners, and employees of the ironworks socialized in the 1960s and 1970s club life. That socialist institutional system provided them access to education and, in some cases, promotion. Through examples of some of the leading figures of the choir, I argued that before 1990 cultural capital could be exchanged into positions in the ironworks. I called the way members interpreted the state of the art of the world *common sense*, an incoherent collection of knowledge that reflects on the world and their own social trajectory. I added that the choir and the related association, the Hungarian Miner and Smelter Association had a double role, one was aiding the social reproduction of the aging membership, and the other to provide a form of a public sphere where politics are discussed from the perspective of people working in different forms of industrial production. I also argued that such a choir still possesses forms of capital, social and cultural, with which they can effectively influence local politics.

Finally, I contrasted Mezőkövesd, a town with a solid agricultural profile and a long history of commodified folk culture, with the industrial Salgótarján. Here I claimed that since the folk tradition provides revenues, symbolic capital, and recognition, the stake of civic cultivation is the ownership of such heritage. I sketched that the ethnographic subject of the *Matyó* was ingrained into the region's integration into the capitalist world-system. Furthermore, the

heritagization of local folk culture and the proletarianization of peasants were mobilized in the making of the Hungarian nation-state's culture in the early 20th century. I continued by telling the relationship between the HoC and the Cottage Industry Cooperative. I claimed that the HoC served as a place of valorization and authentication between 1963-1990, and then the folk-related activities were privatized by former educators. In the end, I added that new forms of authentication are happening through UNESCO and that give birth to new rites in the HoC. Those rites outline the universality of a specific form of folk culture in relation to a global and national belonging but also underline the particularities of local practices of artisanship.

Apart from apparent differences between the cases: in one case, I spoke mainly about industry-related culture, in the other, about folk culture and artisanship, I found several major similarities and differences. In both cases, post-socialist associations grew out of the HoC, organized by former educators. This was partially the result of the late socialist austerity in civic cultivation. While in Salgótarján, in HoCs of the former miner colonies, associations could be established in Mezőkövesd when the current head of the Matyó Cultural Association came up with the idea of establishing an association, she was rejected. I claimed that the late-socialist association law thus was selectively used to establish a “private provider” of cultural services in places that the council could not afford. In their contemporary activities, I found that the main audience and the group of organizers consist of people with high cultural capital, such as teachers, municipality employees, or entrepreneurs, people one could call a local middle-class. They have a relatively large amount of property, and compared to others in the given settlements, they are perceived as influential. Functionally they also mediate between the national government and the towns. Salgótarján is a town that is governed by the opposition of the Orbán-regime. I claimed that the reliance on civic associations there is a necessity because of the lack of resources the municipality has control over. Thus, the HoC mainly participates in the reproduction of the position of mediator.

What does civic cultivation do for theorizing of state-culture relationship?

The spatial and temporal varieties of conceptualization and practice of civic cultivation enabled an additional level of analysis: the way civic and political society participates in the production of culture and norms of what we perceive as legitimate forms of cultural production. I added that it is not a direct translation of policy or only a selective incorporation of local practices, common sensical forms of culture, or folklore. However, intellectuals participate according to their interest and situated ways of conceptualizing culture. These interests were rooted in the reproduction of cultural capital through the reproduction of institutions. Their job, similarly, to many other forms of contemporary labor, is not distinguished from their everyday life. If educators engage with labor issues, usually, they aim to save the institution in some form. In the second chapter I used the notion of a *spokesperson*, from Pierre Bourdieu, to describe this form of actors who borrow their symbolic capital from class, a coalition of actors, or an institution. It produces structures as much as they are the product of them. Educators' position as a *spokesperson* highlights how certain intellectuals represent the abstract needs of the multitude while speaking from a particular position.

The term *professional-managerial class* also aided in telling what this particular position is. The educator is a mediator who usually borrows their cultural capital from the system of civic cultivation and aims to develop people through culture. Its position was produced by different waves of modernization but was professionalized by developmentalist socialist state, which utilized ethnographic knowledge to make people productive citizens. Paradoxically, civic cultivation's making and operation are based on the premise that peasant and worker civil society is absorbed into a national one, and everyday culture became practiced as a tool of propaganda, hobby, spectacle, or leisure time activity. It contains an element of enlightenment, an idea that a collective belonging to a universal culture, adding each specificity to that will

civilize the cultivated. That is a feature that, despite all the transformations, is still present in the form of normative understandings of culture and its utility.

In many ways, the house of culture system could adapt to the post-socialist capitalist, then the authoritarian neoliberal state because of this disciplining role of the institution. Civic cultivation was restructured according to the needs of capital and the political society. Simultaneously, as a part of the *integral state*, educators and civil society actors were capable of influencing policy and state structure in a way that integrated the house of culture system to reproduce them as mediators. It is also important to note that civic cultivation-like activities which condition morality and citizen behavior are numerous in different venues and places. I focused here on the HoC since it is the most extensive state infrastructure participating in cultural production. Other forms of creating a corporate culture, like team building, are the backbone of international companies' management of skilled workers. People might do them as reluctantly as they did certain elements of civic cultivation before, during, and after socialism. However, they take time from organizing and create an idea of the community, one without common material interest and solidarity.

Starting his introduction to the edited volume on ethnographies of the Russian HoC Joachim Otto Habeck quotes a thesis of an educator who speaks about deprivation, deculturation, and general decay (Donahoe and Habeck 2011, 1). The description he quotes could be written in Hungarian. Many practicing educators' thesis would start with almost the same description of deculturation. These perceptions of decay would make comparisons explicitly with the period of "open cultivation" (1944-1948), the struggle between multiple hegemonic projects, or implicitly to late-socialist the period I analyzed in the second chapter (1968-1990). These institutions themselves, from the perspective of the profession are abandoned by the audience but they have sociological importance. They reproduce symbolically and culturally local elites, who might not have the material basis to order contemporary transformations.

Commons, anti-systemic politics, and the house of culture

Apart from general interests and analytical goals, the aim of the work I have accomplished over the years of researching for, and writing this dissertation was to reflect on culture and its possible place in anti-capitalist movements and post-capitalist futures. The larger question I hope to answer was whether the house of culture can be considered a “common” in the sense of a shared resource, or if it is instead ingrained in the operation of the state so irrevocably that it cannot be a place of anything else than the reproduction of state power and of labor for capital. The answer I want to bring to this question is a perhaps unsatisfactory “yes and no”.

Yes, the HoC is still a place of sharing resources, but no, because it is now utilized in the reproduction of middle-class subjectivities and positions of cultural elites. Apart from some instances, it was part of many forms of extractive modernizing processes. It aided the industrialization of agriculture in the form of collectivization and general processes of “internal colonization” (Weber 1976). In Stalinist industrialization, it was utilized in creating urban working-class habitus, then consumers of culture and adaptive labor force. After 1990 its history is, in fact, a history of decline and decay. At the same time, it is a place for the management of disinvestment and more exploitative labor regimes by maintaining imaginations about local middle-class trajectories and cultural consumption.

In its early history, from the late 19th century up until 1945, however, HoC and house of culture-like places were part and parcel of workers’ and peasants’ lives and movements. They were, first of all, built up by members of trade unions. Secondly, they were part of a long-term organizing project, whereby members were provided with a public sphere tailored for their needs. Thirdly, HoCs appeared at a time when the early penetration of capital called for forms of skilled labor that were working in one place and had the power to negotiate. The context was very different from that of contemporary Hungary and its authoritarian neoliberalism, which builds its industrialization more and more on non-skilled, “foxconnized,” migrant labor

(Meszmann and Fedyuk 2020). Apart from this early history of trade union-run HoC, which I



Picture 23: Tímár Sára: VOKE Intersection House of Culture, Szolnok

consider approach the model of the commons, HoCs could be, at various brief moments of their history, homes for alternative practices (Williams 2005, 43). Having been incorporated by the state, however, and in certain places by bourgeois “civil society” as exemplified by the early history of the Smelter House of Culture in Salgótarján, they are not any longer places from which hegemonic processes can seriously be challenged. As with other kinds of public properties, it was integrated into the reproduction cycles of state power and the circulation of capital.

The commons can be a place of reproductive labor which is necessary for the making of new lives and maintaining one’s livelihood through non-waged work in the household (Dunaway 2013). But it can also mean an extended family which becomes a resource for labor extraction through different means of capital (Weiss 2014; 2019). The HoC is defined by the same ambiguity. It is has been a commons, but it was also coopted into processes of

modernization. Even as a symbol of the revolt and organization of opposition from the late 1960s on, even as it enabled the development of alternative culture in a “velvet prison” where control and material support fueled urban youth culture (Haraszti 1988; Szemere 2001), it remains an ambiguous reality. I personally do not consider the above as anti-systemic practices, since their very condition of possibility was the widespread cultural infrastructure of the socialist state, and the welfare provisions that enabled even for unemployed intellectuals to maintain a good quality of life.

Despite its problematic structural position, several elements suggest that civic cultivation as an understanding of culture and the position of educators in the system provide a good departure point for reflecting on post-capitalist practices. The way culture is defined by the educators I encountered during my fieldwork contradicts bourgeois views that emerged with modernity (Bürger 1989; Kowalski 2019; Fabiani 2022). Culture is understood as something coming from and utilized by communities; as leisure time, pleasurable activity pursued by amateurs for its own sake; or as decommodified folklore practiced for the sake of being with others. Performances in this context are not just spectacle, but process in which participation is the goal itself. As a practice and concept, civic cultivation integrates many possible activities, which are different material or mental elements of a way of life. As to educators, they are imagined as ordinary intellectuals, someones with a school education, mainly a facilitator, and who does both manual and mental labor. Taken together, these elements distinguish practitioners of civic cultivation from other professionals of culture and creative workers. If we look at community centers, considering them a specific form of a HoC, and observe their work with Roma, refugee, and migrant children, and their endeavors to host and organize communities in a diverse environment, we see a place that, while in many forms serves systemic integration also provides access to goods that are more and more commodified in contemporary capitalism. The integral perspective of production and dissemination, folklore and art, leisure, and profession also help

to work out an understanding of cultural production beyond dichotomies rooted in the division of nature and culture that are part of extractive forms of patriarchal capitalism.

Elements, such as a working-class organization and the self-cultivation of agricultural laborers cannot be brought back for obvious reasons. However, if we look beyond the narrowly defined place, we see a multiplicity of endeavors to establish commonly owned and managed places beyond the organization of the urban middle class that is engaged with non-restrictive, non-professionalized anti-colonial forms of cultural production that supports social reproduction (Zibechi 2010; Gago 2017; Tan 2022). The affirmative character of culture (Marcuse 2007) meant a division between the material and the spiritual world, an understanding of culture that is a distraction, that gives joy, and distinct from other parts of everyday life (Williams 1959, 44). Antonio Gramsci's interest in art that contributes to anti-systemic movements prompted him to claim that new art needs new culture. But forms of culture already exist (Gramsci 1985, 98; Merli 2013b). One needs only to build on it. This view suggests that engaging with the HoC first, "commoning it" based on the blueprint of some abstract political imagination would be a mistake. Considering it as an abandoned place that needs to be reopened for the local community is also mistaken, neglecting existing usage with which one should seriously engage. One of the main takeaways from my thesis is that any house of culture-like place is dependent on the actual, material, political, and cultural relations it is embedded in and built on. If some social organization already exists, it can utilize place-making practices through house of culture-like places. If one engages with existing houses of culture, one has to approach them from the perspective of the maintainer: the municipality and the educators so those may become truly public spaces, filled not only with existing social relations but also with a culture of the future, one that remains as faithful to everyday life as possible.

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ANNEX 1. Glossary of Names and Institutions

Young Communist League: Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség: “KISZ” After the 1956 revolution, both the Party and its communist youth organization were reorganized. Hungarian Young Communist League is the Youth Society that was the inheritor of Workers (DISZ). It operated between 1957 and 1989. State socialism paid great attention to the ideological education of youth from an early age: for children in elementary school. KISZ clubs, however, most of the time gave possibilities for alternative or even oppositional cultural practices. From the 1960s onwards, the youth clubs of the KISZ (like university clubs) were given relative freedom regarding their programs.

The Patriotic People’s Front (PPF): Hazafias Népfront (HNF) was established in 1954 with the aim was to forge links between the different branches of the Party (then: Hungarian Workers' Party – MDP) and other organizations working quasi-independently of it. PPF did not have individual membership but was created as a “grassroots” mass movement of organizations (the state party and various social and cultural organizations). PPF was intended to allow non-members of the Party to contribute to political and public affairs. It had its daily newspaper, the Magyar Nemzet, between 1954 and 1989. Its most important task was to prepare and conduct parliamentary and council (municipal) elections. Although the PPF's monopoly on the nomination of candidates was abolished in 1970 (meaning, in principle, anyone could nominate anyone as a representative) until 1985, only those who accepted the PPF program could be candidates. In addition, cultural programs were often organized on PPF district premises.

National Council of Unions (NCU): Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa (SZOT) was established in 1948 to oversee and control unions. In practice, it was a hierarchical organization that was part of the socialist state’s ideological apparatus. It organized competitions and oversaw the realization of plans but also provided political and general courses. Many leisure

time opportunities were provided for workers through SZOT, such as holidays, trips, and hikes. Houses of culture and other cultural venues were part of their portfolio.

Institute of Civic Cultivation (ICC): Népművelési Intézet (NI) in 1946 as Institute of Folk Culture (Népművészeti Intézet) and focused on collecting and disseminating popular cultural practices supporting the growth of the network of houses of culture. After 1956 the Institute was renamed to Institute for Civic Cultivation (Népművelési Intézet). Instead of folk art, it aided the development of the pedagogical practices and methodology of civic cultivation by publishing three journals on the topic, methodological advising, and research on houses of culture. It was divided into ICC and a separate research institute called the Research Institute of Civic Cultivation (Művelődéskutató Intézet). In 1986 they were renamed and merged into the National Center of Civic Cultivation with a separate Civic Cultivation Information Center that mainly focused on new technologies such as video. The Information Center became privatized, and its equipment was used to make the media projects of the post-socialist conservatives. In 1992 the Hungarian Institute of Civic Cultivation was established, which was merged in 2009 with the Fine Art and the Applied Art Lectorate. That institution was terminated, and the National Institute for Civic Cultivation (Nemzeti Művelődési Intézet) got its current form in 2012.

Conference on Houses of Culture: (Művelődés Otthoni Konferencia): After 1956, three conferences on houses of culture were organized usually directed some change. On these, representatives of different institutions and the Party operationalized directives. In 1959 the conference aimed to consolidate the directives introduced in 1958. In 1972's directives of the National Conference of Civic Cultivation (NCCC) (Országos Népművelési Konferencia) of 1970 were operationalized for the houses of culture and finally in 1984. The last one, while significant, its organization was mainly symbolic as the large-scale transformations that

followed it were mainly directed budgetary cut backs and were not motivated to re-conceptualize the operation of the profession.

National Civic Cultivation Fund: (Országos Közművelődési Alap): established in 1974, it was responsible for the funding and infrastructural investments until its integration into the Ministry of Civic Cultivation in 1986.

National Council of Civic Cultivation: (Országos Közművelődési Tanács): Established in 1974 aimed the vertical integration of civic cultivation work going on in the local councils (municipalities). It was a body working outside the Ministry of Civic Cultivation and had the role of commenting on and critiquing decisions. It was merged into the Ministry in 1986.

Pál Beke (1943-2009): educator and community developer. He worked in several houses of culture and led the Józsefváros House of Culture in Budapest. He worked in the ICC from 1975. He was responsible for working out several reform ideas about the house of culture, such as the open house and the village house-building programs. After the transition, he stayed in leading it between 2001-2004. His work solidified the understanding of civic cultivation as community development, which was institutionalized in the Association of Hungarian Community Developers, which is still active. He became the head of Fidesz in the VIII district of Budapest and, after 2006, the MP of the Party.

József Kovalcsik (1932 – 2002): Researcher of civic cultivation and historian. He started to work in the Society for Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge (TIT), an institution that organized courses in the houses of culture. One of the early comprehensive research on houses of culture is tied to his name titled Sixty house of culture 1971-1972. Between 1969-1976 he was the head of the division of research in the ICC. He resigned and started to write the Halls of Culture, a comprehensive study of houses of culture-like places in Hungary, France, England, Russia, and the Soviet Union. He claims that his goal with it was to show that during socialism,

a one-dimensional cultural life was created compared to the inter-war period and capitalist countries. He was part of the formation of the Democratic Union of Academic Workers, the first union independent from NCU, then was part of the formation of MDF, the Hungarian Democratic Forum, the first governing Party after the transition, and became the Head of the Division of Civic Cultivation in the Ministry of Culture.

János Vadász: (1951 -) educator since 1969 in HoCs, libraries, and museums. He was among the people who initiated the making of a separate union for people working in the state-funded cultural sector, such as museums, archives, houses of culture, and libraries. It is called the Union of Workers of Civic Cultivation and Public Museums (UWCCPM). He was elected as the head of it. Also, he was a founding member of the Association of Hungarian Educators in 1979 and the Cooperation Forum of Unions, a coalition of the different unions of mental workers in state positions. He was the head of UWCCPM until 2002. Between 2002 and 2006, he was an MP and then retired from politics.

Iván Vitányi (1925-2021): Sociologist of civic cultivation and cultural politician. Apart from a year in 1957, when he was forced to leave his job in the Ministry of Civic Cultivation, he was part of the cultural life of socialism. He was part of the early experiments of putting folk dance on stage and systemized its teaching and learning with the Muharay band. Between 1958-1972 he worked for the journals "Muzsika" and "Valóság," then led the governing body of civic cultivation until 1992. He became a member of the Hungarian Socialist Party after the transition. He was a member of parliament under their banner until 2011, when he joined the Party of the former prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, the Democratic Coalition.

ANNEX 2. List of Pictures

- Picture 1: Library of the Vág Street People's Home 1910s (source: <https://hu.museum-digital.org/object/386039?navlang=hu> last accessed: 29.03.2023.)..... 13
- Picture 2: Vörösmarty House of Culture, Fót. Built by the local branch of the Hangya Cooperative in 1932 (source: <https://vmh.hu/> last accessed: 29.03.2023.)..... 14
- Picture 3: Klára Kokas's Music Pedagogy Workshop in the House of Culture of the Capital (Fővárosi Művelődési Ház), 1975 (source: Fortepan.hu 195323) 22
- Picture 4: House of Culture, Orgovány, winner of the 1967 "Upgradeable House of Culture Competition" opened in 1969 (source: https://index.hu/kultur/epiteszet/2019/11/05/orgovany_muvelodesi_haz_jurcsik_karoly_varga_levente/ Last Accessed: 30.03.2023.)..... 53
- Picture 5: Village Center in Zalaszentlászló planned by Imre Makovecz (source: https://makovecz.hu/terkep/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/13706-STAT_2-1981-CONT_6-CC_HUN-KOZ-HIV-F-7.jpg Last Accessed: 30.03.2023.) 67
- Picture 6: De Meerpal in Dronten (Source: <https://architectuul.com/architecture/de-meerpaal> Last Accessed: 30.03.2023.) 68
- Picture 7: Agora in Szombathely (source: <http://szombathelypont.hu/szabadido/kulturalis-intezmenyek/agora-muvelodesi-es-sporthaz.731/> Last Accessed: 30.03.2023.)..... 108
- Picture 8: Facade of NICC (Source <https://nmi.hu/2020/10/01/hazat-hazat-epitunk-szekhazavatas-lakiteleken/> Last Accessed: 31.03.2023.)..... 120
- Picture 9: Campaign of the UVCCPM :Without library there is no equal chance, without museum there is no national memory, without archives there is no reliable national past and without civic cultivation there is no nation (Source: <http://kkdsz.hu/?> 125

Picture 10: János Blaski: The History Socialist Culture, 1965; Mozaïque in the JACC (source: https://epiteszforum.hu/ritmus-es-geometria-mint-otthon-a-tajban--salgotarjan-modern-varoskozpontjanak-epiteszete#lg=1&slide=6 Last Accessed: 29.03.2023.).....	140
Picture 11: JACC in the times of its building and now (source: https://retropolisz.wordpress.com/2018/02/15/the-journey-begins/ last accessed:29.03.2023.)	144
Picture 12: Painting of the underpass (source: https://cselekvokozossegek.hu/wp-content/uploads/kiemelt-k%C3%A9p-1-1030x773.jpg last accessed: 29.03.2023.)	158
Picture 13: The Smelter House of Culture (source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Salg%C3%B3tarj%C3%A1n,_Koh%C3%A1sz_M%C5%B1vel%C5%91d%C3%A9si_K%C3%B6zpont.jpg Last Accessed: 29.03.2023.).....	174
Picture 14: Rehearsal of the choir (photography of the author)	178
Picture 15: My table at the HMMS memorial meeting (photography of the author).....	186
Picture 16: Singing in the Catholic Church of Rodna (courtesy of Ákos Ujj).....	187
Picture 17: Summás statue (source: https://archivum.mtva.hu/photobank/item/MTI-FOTO-b0h3MXh6VmduVjJVV1lEUUdiWUZTZz09 Last Accessed: 29.03.2023.)	196
Picture 18: Matyó couple from the second half of 1910s (source: https://neprajz.hu/hirek/2020/mutermek-1.html Last Accessed: 29.03.2023.)	198
Picture 19: House of Culture of Mezőkövesd (source https://archive2021.nmi.hu/intezmeny/kozossegi-haz/ Last Accessed: 29.03.2023.).....	204
Picture 20: The Interior of the House of Culture, refurbished during COVID-19 lock-downs (source: https://www.facebook.com/mezokovesdi.kozkincstarnonprofitkft/ Last Accessed: 29.03.2023.).....	208

Picture 21: Matyó wedding in the Dance Barn (courtesy of the Matyó Cultural Association)	
.....	211
Picture 22: Tímár Sára: József Attila House of Culture, Rudoltelep	223
Picture 23: Tímár Sára: VOKE Intersection House of Culture, Szolnok.....	233

ANNEX 3. List of tables

Table 1 Overview of the historical transformation of the house of culture system A..... 37

Table 2: Overview of the historical transformation of the house of culture system B..... 38