



## **Disputes in the shadow of acting education in Hungary – Keynote essay**

**László Róbert Farkas**

### **Abstract**

The genre of my present study is a keynote essay. The aim of my essay-style dissertation is to start a discourse on acting training in Hungary, around the training of actors, which is so popular and at the same time treated as a negative news stream, with special regard to the administrative and legal operation of the University of Theater and Film Arts.

### **Introduction**

My idea was born to work as an actor and cultural manager for 20 years in the Hungarian cultural and artistic sphere. I have to remark, I also deal with cultural administration, I manage a museum. Maybe I can say that I have a perspective into the subject, and the problem which shows the disordered and administratively indefinable quality of the legal situation of acting studios.

On the one hand, my experiences and research so far are empirical, since - if you like - I live on a daily basis and feel the importance of the issues discussed. On the other hand, my theoretical and lexical experiences confirm the same, as well.

The practical part of my above statement is proven, as I have been working in films, on stages and dubbing studios for many years and I am the director of the József Koszta Museum. Let's review the theoretical part of the above, what has happened to me so far, which has led to the theses of my research topic, and then I will try to find evidence for them, and then I can make a summary.

## Data, knowledge on the topic

In the course of my research so far, I had the opportunity to get to know the situation of Hungarian actors between 1945 and 1956. Actors playing in dalicompanies (drama groups, private enterprises, rural company) gained social security as one of the effects of communism, but in return they found themselves in a closed, ideologically imbued political context. In 1947, the art college was founded by the artistic gremium under the leadership of Ferenc Hont, and the College of Theater and Film Arts was established. Unskilled, but in many cases professionals, individual and special value craftsmen become department heads, unavoidable narrators. The phenomenon is that Tamás Majos, an actor, sits in the director's chair of the National Theater as a real political corifeus. So an artistic aristocracy formes, by preaching Marxist principles, develops a system of higher education modeled on the Soviet model (the primacy of the Stanislavsky system). This system also survives retaliation after 1956. After Mátyás Rákosi, assessing the situation with brilliant accuracy, the aristocracy made friends with the new spiritual leader, György Aczél, the second man of cultural leadership. According to many people, he was the first man in the system in the cultural field. This platform, by introducing the principle of directing theater, also changes the quality of acting education. They're not really looking for characters, charisms, and personalities among the nebulos on the occasion of their admissions, but an element of the director's theater, suitable candidates who can implement the directives of the Major generation of directors. I do dare to say, the directors are looking for stage sets for themselves during the admissions. Like it or not: we have to acknowledge that this kind of method, and ranking, which is the internal content element of acting education, is still prevalent in the institutionalized field of actor education.

During my further research, I also had the opportunity to get to know the political and social events of the period indicated above. By thoroughly examining the ecclesiastical political events of Sovietizing Hungary, they can be perfectly recognized and we can get summary results about the political events in Hungary. The lightning-like meeting between the religious way of life and the new Marxist ideology resulted in spiritual re-education. Let's not forget that in 1938 the World Eucharistic Congress was held in Hungary. From a Christian country, a violently industrialized, spiritually and spiritually devalued "world" is born in Hungary, against the society revoltes. 1956, the outbreak of repressed spirituality in Hungary. Then comes the retaliation, the amnesty, after which people experience everyday life between fanfares, less political banners, moving within a slightly looser political framework. Secretary General János Kádár introduced one of the most envied social operations in the Eastern bloc, which we now

characterize as “goulash communism”. The period from the change of regime to the present is the most controversial and the most difficult to research. I believe that results and summaries cannot be made for the last 30 years. There is no way to create clear formulas, it is impossible. Theses and their method of proof can be put on the table, discussed, or scientific dissertations can be written on this topic, but due to recent events, political-human mergers, possible undocumentation, we can only examine segments, substituting ourselves to know exhaustively the specific topic.

In the course of my further research, I had the opportunity to learn about the features of art politics after 1945, the transformation of the theatrical world. In addition, from 1945 to the present, from this period I was able to learn about the legal forms, administrative and educational part of acting training.

I am convinced that in Hungary since 1945, Hungarian acting training has been treated in an inadequately managed, autonomous, specific form of education, a kind of “state within a state” rather specific higher education system, in connection with I will attempt to prove in the near future. So my present publication was created in the interest of it. In order not to discuss domestic acting training in the form of political messages, but to put it under the microscope from an administrative and legal point of view.

It’s worth noticing that there are acting training places in Hungary outside the higher education system, which date back to the 1970s, when the internal training place of the National Theater, the National Studio, was established. Since the change of regime, several “stables” have been organized, which provided students with school-based training and professional qualifications (actor II certificate – eg. Mária Górnagy Theater, Új Színház Studio, Békés County Jókai Theater Foundation Drama School, etc.). However, although these training places providing students with the same methods and forms of training as the higher education institution, still formed a professionally dilapidated, little-recognized sectoral system compared to the study provided by the Vas Street College and later the university training place. It needs to be clarified there is and has never been difference between the two types of methods and their professionalism, only from a legal and administrative point of view. However in terms of professional, aesthetic, and later social ranking, the students who graduated from the “Acting Arts” showed a continental distance compared to their studio colleagues. The root of this is precisely that, from a legal and administrative point of view, an attempt was made to organize a “canon” academic education in the higher education institution, which the external features has only been in conformity with it. An exception and professional rank have been given to those who have graduated there, are performing, and even greater prominence to those who

have taught and are teaching there in the present. Due to legal and administrative irregularities, accreditations granted by the ministry and the maintainer, and an intricate and impenetrable situation has developed in the profession, resulting in the present situation: due to the administrative and legal disorder of acting education, the whole context has simply been demoted to the level of politics.

The above shows the theatrical professional part of my topic, the matter of factual material. I have also had the opportunity to get to know the core of the factual material, the guides related to legal issues, in my research and studies so far. It is precisely this knowledge that has led to the realization that there are aesthetic-artistic and legal problems together with the interpretation of Hungarian acting education, the understanding and solution of which can only be brought closer by an examination of administrative history. For the following summary, I use the manuscript *The Cultural Administration* from the pen of Eszter Annamária Szabó<sup>1</sup>, which in my previous studies provided a theoretical background for me to complete the training of art administration manager at the Károli Gáspár Reformed University.

We know that cultural administration is a specialized type of administration, so the general characteristics of administration also apply to it. One type of administration is public administration, one of the areas of specialization of which is performed by the organizational system of cultural administration. Cultural administration includes elements of the general concept of administration, accordingly the activity arising in the course of human co-operation, which ensures the achievement of common cultural goals, the necessary personal and material conditions, and the activities of bodies and persons cooperating to achieve cultural goals and consistency. We also know that the concept of cultural administration consists of the following conceptual elements: bodies authorized by law, in matters within their competence and competence, in order to preserve the irreplaceable heritage of outstanding artistic and historical value, partly the state itself, state bodies, partly they take decisions concerning third parties, in which they may impose obligations, restrictions, prohibitions, conditions, provide financial and professional support for the fulfillment of some of them, monitor the fulfillment of laws and individual decisions, and impose sanctions in case of violation of laws or individual official decisions. Within the field of cultural administration, several sub-areas have emerged: the issue of cultural heritage protection, the field of arts (performing and creative arts, film and

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1 Annamária Szabó: *Cultural Administration*. Manuscript. NKE, 2014.

audiovisual affairs), the field of public culture, and the issue of public collections (museum institutions, libraries and archives).

So, as we see above, we see the structure and framework of cultural administration.

As in other countries, the legislators have assigned legal instruments to the principles in order to implement them. We mean by cultural law all the legislation applicable to certain sectors of cultural administration, such as public education, higher education, scientific matters, as well as cultural heritage protection, arts, public education and public collections. In terms of its place in the legal system, cultural law is complex in nature, closely related to several rights. It is primarily and mostly part of administrative law. Reviewing the relevant regulations, the legislator does not state in any place that educational issues could be treated as performing arts issues. I will explain the focus and meaning of this in the following, which is of great importance for the topic.

We could discuss the issue of cultural protection in more detail, but from the point of view of our dissertation, it is worth highlighting only the relevant legal regulations from the larger set. In order to examine our topic and on the way to the administrative problems of Hungarian acting training, to map the problems, we need to review the art issues that can be discussed in the cultural administration.

The relevant legislation (Emtv.) deals with theaters, the operation of music and dance organizations, state support and its specific labor law rules. The purpose of the law is to promote the enrichment of the cultural heritage, diversity and values of theater, dance and music, the delivery of performances and concerts to a wide audience, the international presence of Hungarian performing arts, the development of the institutional system of performing arts, and the establishment of a support system that promotes the efficient use of public funds.

To this end, a register of performing arts organizations (theaters, ballet or dance ensembles, orchestras, choirs) was established, and a new type of financing model containing normative elements was clearly established, clearly defining the obligations and rights of maintainers. It deals with the forms of support for performing arts organizations belonging to each category, regulates the procedure for appointing the number one directors (leaders). Special labor law rules have been created that took into account the specifics of performing arts work. It also contains a provision on the National Performing Arts Reconciliation Council, a forum that ensures the right of theater and other performing arts professional organizations to express opinions and make proposals with the force of law. Grants from the National Cultural Fund (hereinafter: NKA) are not covered by the law. The purpose of the grants provided by this Act is primarily to ensure the continuous work of professional workshops, while the grants

provided by the NKA are related to a specific project or task on the basis of calls for proposals that change from year to year. Based on the right to culture enshrined in the Basic Law, every citizens has the right to use the services provided by performing arts organizations and to have access to cultural results.

The state can facilitate the enforcement of this right in two ways: by maintaining prominent performing arts organizations and by supporting non-state performing arts organizations. The rules for this support are laid down by law. Based on the law, the National Performing Arts Reconciliation Council (NEÉT) was established, which is a body preparing under the Minister responsible for culture, preparing and proposing decisions on general and conceptual issues of performing arts life. Within the framework of the Council, close contact with professional organizations of the theater, music and dance arts became possible in an institutional form, as the forum gave the organizations the right to express opinions and make proposals on the most important issues concerning the performing arts. The law defines the main tasks, number, composition, order of operation of the Council, as well as the bearing of the costs associated with its operation. The state administrative body for the performing arts was established by law, the primary task of which is to keep an official register of the performing arts organizations applying for support and to classify the performing arts organizations in accordance with this Act. The performing arts state administration body performs state administration and service tasks related to the operation of performing arts organizations, provides data provision activities related to grants, and issues certificates in connection with the corporate tax credit. These tasks are currently performed by the Performing Arts Office of the National Cultural Fund Directorate. With the registration of performing arts organizations, the law introduced a procedure not previously used in the field of art. The basic condition of registration is a prerequisite for recourse to central budget support. However, registration is not required, so it is not a condition for the pursuit of a performing arts activity. The registration procedure is initiated upon request, except for performing arts organizations maintained by the state, because in their case the procedure is initiated ex officio. A registered performing arts organization may be classified by the Minister on the basis of a proposal from the relevant committee, after considering the preliminary position of the NEÉT, as a national performing arts organization or a prominent performing arts organization in a decree issued by it. The state or the local government may enter into a performing arts public service contract with a performing arts organization registered for the permanent provision of performing arts services for at least three years. The law defines the outstanding cultural goals for the realization of which the Minister may provide tender support from the budget chapter supervised by him.

These include the presentation of children's and youth performances, the implementation of theater education programs, the performance of new Hungarian and national language stage works and musical works, as well as contemporary Hungarian dramas in the framework of new performances, the work of Hungarian performing arts organizations beyond the border, support for participation in major international theater, dance and music festivals, guest performances, and support for professional research and documentation. An important area of regulation of the law is the summary of the peculiarities of theatrical and artistic work. These rules are necessary because, although it is very difficult to confine artistic work into the rules, in most cases the employment of artists still takes place in the capacity of an employer<sup>3</sup>.

It should be added to the above that in the current Hungarian cultural administration system we can even talk about the National Cultural Council, the advisory body of the Prime Minister, whose operation and real legal function - in my opinion - is still developing.

Regarding the legal situation of Hungarian acting education and the understanding of its problems, I have managed to gather the above so far, which creates a suitable basis for me to carry out further research in the next period based on the method outlined below.

### **Hungarian acting training**

In summary, we can say that the author of the dissertation had the opportunity to get acquainted with the administrative problems of Hungarian actor education in order to explain the topic. To formulate this, let's review our previous knowledge, in points:

1. The university quality of Hungarian acting education has now been degenerated into a political scene.
2. The university actor's training place is in accordance with the applicable education laws and regulations is a higher education training place, whose legal framework and operation regulated by administrative regulations, etc. In contrast, in political proclamations, the students and teachers of the training site do not interpret their “nest” as an educational institution, but as an art institution, a kind of sacred place, and proclaiming an indefinable, administratively incomprehensible - but verbally broadly interpretable - quality of freedom.
3. The above two statements together are the center of tension. Part of my thesis is that in the present situation, the root of the problem rests on a conscious or accidental misinterpretation of the law. All this is to be written for the benefit of the members of the school, the teachers, and the students. They do not notice that if we take as a basis a

private studies, a recitation circle, or a professional circle, a workshop, their operation can be interpreted in the system of customary rights, aesthetic principles and ideologies. But a state-recognized educational institution providing accredited university diplomas operates in the legal system of the Hungarian public administration. Even if that “sacred place” qualifies as an art training place.

4. The other part of my thesis is that the present situation arise from the past. In the absence of legal disorder and a consistent administrative outlook, we must say that it is to be found in the socialization of its school teachers, the leaders of the pre-foundation period. So, our problem is raising a public administrative historical concern.
5. In the next period, I intend to specify this problem of administrative history, going through the legal path that led to the current situation.

In Hungary - perhaps few people know - the Hungarian higher education actor training was literally created from nothing, and its legal “pillars” are still not organized today. Perhaps the statement is not an exaggeration when looking for a method to explain this. After World War II, dozens of actors playing in private theaters in Dali companies, even at the State National Theater, were known and celebrated for practicing their profession without schooling, in addition to those who graduated from the Academy of Drama. But the number of those with these degrees was negligible compared to those mentioned earlier. Even before the nationalization of film companies and private theaters, the new political system gathered around itself creators who were politically reliable in the hope of creating a new society. These persons, among whom many continued to earn their bread without a degree, became heads of departments, teachers, lecturers, associate professors, and then professors at the same time. The Hungarian public administration was so permissive of the sector that teachers and students could have been citizens of a higher education institution without a proper degree for decades. We can list examples: head teachers taught without a professional, theatrical qualification, but there are also those who do not even have a bachelor's degree as a professor. Someone was immediately admitted to the four-year training in the second grade, and there are those who were admitted to the second semester of the first grade without admission<sup>4</sup>.

For the above, it is necessary in the near future to review in detail the legislation whose weaknesses may show us the administrative situation of the period between 1945 and 1956, in relation to our topic. A legal examination of this period is essential, since the administrative operation of “Performing Arts” can be interpreted from 1947, more precisely only in its external features.



## Questions

Further: The legal status of why classes have been and are being compiled on the basis of customary law is also unresolved. From a legal point of view, why is the admission system incomprehensible, that is, why is the admission system individual and subjective? In my opinion, the answers to this should be sought by examining the legal system of admission of other Hungarian art institutions (music, fine and applied arts, singing) and contrasting the method of admitting the actor. I consider it necessary, because in other art admissions in other institutions, at least a achievable, administrable, legitimate recording system has been performed decades ago. In contrast to the Institution under discussion, where to this day the category of astrology and esotericism is included in the admission system. So it is intangible, subjective, impenetrable and legally illegitimate.

The same question applies to teachers who start a class. How, and why it has been emerged that an academic degree — which allows teaching in a capital institution — is equivalent to the highest state recognition, the Kossuth Prize? Can this award entitle artists to advertise themselves as teachers, creators who know pedagogy, psychology, the psychological part of teaching to the same degree as acting? Empirically, it can be substantiated with accounts, oral histories that this is not equivalent. So there is a legal problem here too. It also raises legal issues and needs to be investigated in the near future as to how and how they can get into school to teach. How does it work to obtain an academic degree, and how did the doctoral training start in Vas Street, at all? It should be demonstrated by sources, comparative analysis (as opposed to other foreign examples - Romania, Serbia, Ukraine, England, Austria) how the same training works in other countries. In connection with the result, it may turn out that “Performing Arts” is a closed system institution with serious, authoritative features in its appearance, the internal operation of which, both in terms of higher education and the doctoral school, is far from the Education Act, and be interpreted in the system of domestic public administration on the basis of other relevant laws? It should be clarified: do not all these phenomena arise from the fact that this art institution (SZFE) cannot be interpreted in public administration in its current operation? Maybe the internal system is uncontrollable, as a result of which they keep themselves concreted, elevated to a high social rank, and based on individual and subjective positions, educators defend themselves arm in arm?

Of course, these are just questions. But, if we get the results, it might show: Do they want to run for themselves - and this has been the case since 1947, when the school was established - state-funded jobs, and do they maintain a privileged, aristocratic status in the

domestic theater world? To do this, we should do research with the methods of science. We need to go through the relevant legislation and, as I wrote above, we need to compare the operation with other countries.

### **Summary**

Until research on the topic is initiated on the basis of the above, dialogue is not started with the tools of science, the issue will remain only at the level of politics, which would otherwise determine the cultural life of the future. We do have a responsibility. Let's live with it, take care of the Hungarian culture of the future.

**Literature sources:**

Annamária Szabó: Cultural Administration. Manuscript. NKE, 2014.

Personal, professional reports, oral histories