Minority and Majority: Tolerance Programs in the Hungarian Open Air Museum

József Molnár¹

The 20th century brought the greatest tragedies in the life of Hungary’s minorities. During the Holocaust more than half million people were killed, and than German minorities were relocated which meant about half of Hungary’s German population. However, racism is still present at many levels in the country, especially against the Roma and the Jewish population. The main aim of the Hungarian Open Air Museum’s Tolerance Programs is to break down stereotypes that are feeding racism through interactive games that provide students an opportunity to become familiar with the life of minorities and to place themselves in the position of a member of a minority in different situations.

The number of people living as part of an ethnic or religious minority in Hungary has dropped dramatically during the 20th due to the Holocaust and to the relocation of the German minority after World War II. During the Holocaust, ca. 500 000 Jews (of a total Jewish population of 725 000) and ca. 5 000–50 000 Roma were killed.

¹ Molnár is a museum educator at Hungarian Open Air Museum, Szentendre.
Between 1946 and 1948, around 170 000 Germans were relocated of a total population of 350 000. However, stereotypes and racist ideas about minorities are still alive in contemporary Hungarian society. The history of racism is a very long one, the motives of racism can be traditional, personal and in some periods political. Lots of Hungarian countrymen have never met Jewish people, because nowadays only very few Jews live in the countryside of Hungary, but anti-Semitism in these rural areas can still be very strong.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minorities in Hungary (Census, 2011)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledged:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roma: 315 583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German: 185 696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jew: 50 000–200 000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see from the 2011 census, the Jewish minority appeared only as a religious minority and not an ethnic minority, which is why we have no data there. The other difficult question is the aggression against Roma people in Hungary. Just a couple of years ago, armed men murdered several Roma families in Hungary in a serial killing that lasted for several months until they were finally identified and caught by the authorities. They burned the houses of families late at night, and when the parents tried to escape with their children they were shot. After the news Hungarian society was shocked. And did anything change? Unfortunately, not.

In order to sensitize students and to make them familiar with the lives of minorities in its complexity, it is important to mediate information about these personal stories, and to show different aspects of the narratives.
Why Students?

The main target audiences of the museum’s programs are primary and secondary school students, and this has a reason. This survey on Hungarian population from 2010 backs up the choice of target audience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hungarian Population, 2010</th>
<th>Prejudice</th>
<th>Sedition</th>
<th>Value-Orientation</th>
<th>Fears</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7-16 years old (not asked)</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-29 years old</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39 years old</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49 years old</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59 years old</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69 years old</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+ years old</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole population</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Political Capital

We can see in the trends that in average the older people get, the more prejudiced they become. This is a very important information for us, as it shows that even though they weren’t asked in this survey, the youngest generation may be the most open-minded and presumably they have the least amount of prejudice. This generation (from 7 to 18 years) is the main target audience of our programs, and they also represent the biggest share of the museum’s visitors.

It is imperative to strengthen this openness and lack of prejudice with the help of both school lessons and museum education programs. The other results of the survey (namely the numbers concerning seditionary attitude, value-orientation and fears) are also important, but they are not mentioned later in the paper, as I will focus here only on prejudice.
What Can We Work With?

This method and these values are very important for us, because they provide the basis for our education programs. As I mentioned I work for the Hungarian Open Air Museum, as a museum educator. Let’s see, what visitors think about our museum. They say that they visit the museum because they are interested in rural life of the past. Who lived in those old houses and how they lived, what kind of objects were used by them.

Why are our visitors interested in the past? Because they search for answers to questions in their own lives. These are important questions in Western Europe and very important ones in Hungary too. They have a romantic idea of traditional life style, when people lived without stress in a friendly environment. They could have their own animals and grow their own vegetables, and they were happy and free. In the museum we have scenes, or situations – represented in different buildings, based on the interior of a house, related to holidays, household chores or social problems – where our visitors can get acquainted with the lives of different Hungarian minorities in different ages. For example Germans in Hungary in the interwar period and after World War II. when they were relocated into Germany. We also recall the lives of Roma in the 1930s evoking their traditional professions; the traveller trough maker’s accommodation is presented in the Northern Hungarian village regional unit. Other scenes in our museum is a Hungarian Jew’s grocery shop and house from 1910; other minorities e. g. Slovakians, Ruthenians; and Hungarians as a minority after World War I. in Slovakia. Visitors can get acquainted with the life styles of people from different denominations in different social status with different professional skills. We can show the lives of different families at different places from different ages. These possibilities can we use for different aims in museum education, applying different methods.

I would like to show you a few examples from our museum education programmes. The exhibition ”In the Course of History – Population Exchange in Southern Transdanubia in the 1940s”\(^2\) was opened in a house which had originally been owned by a German family. An event which influenced most people after World War II. was the involuntary relocation of different groups of people. The shocking events created insolvable conflicts among the inhabitants of the villages, living

\(^2\) Erika Vass, 2013.
together because of necessity. Germans living in Hungary – similar to Germans in Czechoslovakia and Poland – were made collectively responsible for Germany's role in World War II and most of them were relocated into Germany between 1946 and 1948. In the hope of a better future, in 1941, Seklers of Bukovina (in Transylvania) had been made to move to Bácska, annexed to Yugoslavia; however they had to leave in the autumn of 1944 because of the wartime events.

The Seklers and some of the Upland Hungarians – who had been relocated from Czechoslovakia between 1947 and 1949 because of the collective guilt – were made to move into villages in remote parts of Hungary into the houses of relocated Germans. The exhibition represents the influence of political events on individual lives; besides this, visitors can get to know the way people coped with this situation, and the strategies they used.

**Linking Programs to Exhibitions**

*Maria and Julis: „...and We Had to Leave Everything Behind“*

One of our programs, Maria and Julis: ...and we had to leave everything behind” is linked to this permanent exhibition of the Skanzen. This is a 3-hour activity for 17- and 18-year-old teenagers at different scenes of the museum. The students become familiar with stories of the German Maria Kranner and the Szekler Julis Varga. They have the opportunity to read memoirs of Maria and Julis about their life conditions, about their family and about their feelings. They can visit the house of the Kranner family and they can watch their family photos on the wall. They can feel the atmosphere of the old house; they have to imagine how the Kranner family lived in this house before World War II.

The second scene is another German house from another village, Harka, where participant students can compare properties, life-styles, religions, traditions and ceremonies of different German families. The third scene is an originally German house from Hidas where the Sekler family of Julis lived after the Germans were relocated into Germany. The students can watch the original objects, family photos of the Sekler family and the furniture in the house partly left by the German family partly belonging to the Sekler family.
At the end of the museum education program the students get to know the destiny of the relocated family of Maria Kranner and we sum up our experience. A student workbook helps the participants in their museum education program. After the team work students visit the exhibition individually and work on their project with their teacher in the school, reinforcing out-of-museum activities.

*Ráhel, János, Jákob and the Actress*

The title of my other project is "Ráhel, János, Jákob and the Actress". The focus of the project is to understand the Jewish-Hungarian coexistence through models of family histories during the 1910s and the Holocaust. There are two parts of the programme. The first part takes place in the houses of the museum. This is a three hour activity for 17- and 18-year-old teenagers. The question is how Hungarian Jewish and Hungarian Catholic families could live together and what types of questions were raised for these families in that period of history.
How do we work? About twenty students work in four groups under the direction of the museum educator and the teacher. What can the students use during the group work? A text is given with a particular observation aspect for every member of the group. They have the opportunity to watch films and listen to audio material. And they can read some texts about the house, about the owner family and about the situation in the scene of the exhibition. For the four locations we have four groups. The date is the 6th January 1914, before World War I.

The first scene is in the first part of the house from Mád. Mád is a little village near Tokaj, an area that is famous for the Tokaji wine. A Jewish grocer’s lives in a rented apartment with his family. The theme of the exhibition is Sabbath dinner. The first group works in this scene, they have to present this exhibition and the situation to the other groups. The owner – a Catholic craftsman with his family – lives in the second quarter of the house. He is a cooper who makes barrels from wood. The second group has to present this scene to the other three groups. They collect information from texts and if necessary from the exhibition guard. The third scene is a rich vintner’s house who is the leader of the Holy Cross Society. They have a meeting in his apartment in the morning of the 6th January, 1914. On the right side you can see the members of this society in their black uniform. On the left there is a nice table, because they usually start their discussion with a rich breakfast. The primary mission of this society is charity and to appear at religious events. The fourth group has to present a charming room from the second apartment of the house, which was rented by an actress of a travelling comedy troupe. She lived there for a few days when the troupe was playing in the city. You can see her personal exhibits, in her travel box her make up instruments, her music-box, the guestbook and so on.

After the presentations of the groups we all together continue the programme in the wine cellar under the house. The groups have to imagine the characters of their scene. Every member has to imagine a person from their scene and introduce them. For example they can imagine an 18-year-old boy from the Jewish Klein family, Jákob or his sister, Ráhel. The members of the second group have to imagine and create the Catholic family. The 18-year-old son, János, or his 51-year-old father. Or the guest without information. They have to imagine and create the members of the Holy Cross Society, the leader, the secretary and so on. The fourth group has to visualize the characters of the troupe. The young beautiful actress, Margit whose accommodation can be seen at the exhibition, the assimilated Jewish playwright and
so on. As a next step, the students have to imagine their created characters in different situations.

What could be the reaction from the members of the Catholic family, when János, their son, said that he wanted to marry the neighbour, the Jewish Ráhel? And what could be the pros and cons for the members of the Jewish family, when Jákob told them he didn’t want to be a rabbi, but he wanted to join the comedy troupe. The members of the third group have to discuss whether János’ father can join the Society or not, if his son wants to marry a Jewish girl. And what could be the pros and cons for the members of the troupe about Jákob’s entry conditions? At the end of the museum education programme the groups have to present their works and we sum up our experiences. Before they leave the museum we discuss what to do at home and in the school.

In the second part of the programme – at the school already – the students have to create the story of their imagined characters during the Holocaust. A few facts: the Jewish population of Mád in 1914 was 30 % of the whole population, nowadays no
Jewish person lives in Mád. Nobody from the Klein family returned to Mád after 1945. We don’t know what happened to them. And we don’t know what happened to the Krivián family either, with the troupe or the members of the Holy Cross Society.

Participants have to reconstruct some personal documents of their characters. They have to write a fictional letter or some diary excerpts. Some of them are asked to write a fictional eyewitness testimony or anything else about their characters. In the school the students have to present their stories and fictional documents. They discuss decision-making possibilities and choices and the consequences of the decision making of their characters. They send us their work, we collect it and we show them on our website. According to the feedback from the students, creative work, team-work, and the life-like situations were important to them.

Some important things about the project. This is not a drama pedagogy project. They don’t play their characters, they think about these questions as their imagined characters. If they speak as a racist person, their classmates will tell an opposite opinion, not the teacher or the museum educator.

These Youths! – Lifestyle Under Socialism in Hungary

The last museum education programme we developed is connected to our temporary exhibition "These youths! – lifestyle under Socialism in Hungary”. This museum education activity has been made for a temporary exhibition. The exhibition showed objects of everyday life under socialism. Visitors could see furniture, toys and designs of that period. What was their parents’ and grandparents’ youth like? How did they live, what were they longing for, how did they have fun? This workshop lets the teenagers experience their parents’ and grandparents’ lifestyle. In the contemporary furnished room students can touch the equipment, try on clothes, read newspapers and books, and choose between singles and albums.

We work simultaneously in different groups. We observe the "youth problem" through contemporary readers’ letters published in newspapers, and we analyze the economic situation. You can read a readers’ letter from 1951: "The newest rumour in the village is that after the 15th everything will cost double and money will get devalued. In order to stop this rumour we were holding a meeting to educate the people where people educators received ample instruction about how this should be
explained to people. There is no shopping fever as the article the shopping fever would aim at, cannot be bought” (January 1951).

We analyse texts of Hungarian pop songs from that age, we write slogans for contemporary commercials, and send a postcard from a youth-camp or from your family journey. After activities, this is what the participants have to choose at home or in the school.

– Dad, you were teenager too...!
– Mum, what were you doing when...?
– Write a reader’s letter about...!
– Improve the exhibition!

They could choose to interview their father or grandfather about his everyday life, his entertainment activities, his favourite music, book, film and so on. They could interview their mother or grandmother about her conflicts at home or in the school. They could write a letter for a newspaper about an outrageous event from that age. They could collect family photos, documents or other objects from that age. The point is to help initiating dialogue between generations.

Some Final Thoughts

To sum up this article, our aim is that participant students of our museum education programmes become less prejudiced. There are some important comments about our experiences with these projects. If the museum educator or the teacher argues with the students the results are negative. If the students have to imagine and feel empathy with different characters and they collect pros and cons, if they have to identify with them, the result can be better. They have to debate with each other about these important and true questions. We have to show them these questions, but the students have to answer. They have to choose from the possibilities, and they have to know consequences. Our main aims to educate empathic, tolerant, open-minded and independent adults, who can stand for democratic ideas, and they can take a stand for human values.