Displacements. Contexts for a Participatory Media Project

András Müllner

Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest, Hungary)
E-mail: mullner.andras@btk.elte.hu

Abstract: This paper presents a participatory film intervention focused on young people, which was held within the framework of a grant coordinated by the Minor Media/Culture Research Centre and took place in the form of a summer camp in 2021. After revisiting some historical examples and definitions of participatory film, the author focuses on the concept of displacement as used in film theory and psychology, which he attempts to redefine and thereby reverse its negative connotations. The author analyses the catalyst method, one of the various forms of implementing participatory video as a visual research method, which was the one used in the research described here. The participatory film methodology based on the camera-as-catalyst is meant to foster inter-group collaboration through camera use in order to achieve a free performance and interplay of identities and ultimately to strengthen social cohesion. Beyond the emancipatory intent, the diachronic and synchronic case studies are also linked by the fact that most of the projects were also collaborations with young people, as was the case in the Minor Media summer camp. In the final section, the author analyses the films made by the young people in terms of their relation to contemporary popular culture and the performance of adolescent identities defined by liminality.[1]

Keywords: minor media, participatory video, Challenge for Change, camera as catalyst, youth participatory action research (YPAR), displacement, liminality.

Participatory Video – Definitions and Beginnings

Participatory video as a method of social research, and often of participatory action research, has proliferated over the past two decades. In their encyclopaedia entry on participatory video, Chris Lunch and Tony Roberts draw parallels with Paolo Freire's notion of conscientization, quoting others "in the process of making films about their own social circumstances participants learned to use the camera to 'read the world' more critically, reflect on the causes of social injustice, and better articulate the change they wanted to see in the world." In the authors' words, "this Freirian logic of critical voice and emancipatory intent is referred to in all of the other seminal texts on participatory video" (Lunch and Roberts, 2015, 1). Participatory video is therefore used primarily, though hardly exclusively, for participatory research and for improving the situation of disadvantaged and marginalized groups in the field of development and in participatory action research.

The definition of participatory video can be based on the degree of participation. Some would include Flaherty's ethnographic-anthropological documentary *Nanook of the North* (1922), but the origins of participatory filmmaking understood today as a research method concerning vulnerable communities can be traced back to the 1960s. The Challenge for Change/Societé Nouvelle (CfC/SN) program was launched in 1967 by the National Film Board of Canada (NFB). When Canadian video artist Katerina Cizek was asked in an interview what the program meant to her, she replied: "we don't make documentaries *about* people, we make media projects *with* people" (Miller 2010, 429; italics by me, A. M.). In this spirit, the CfC/SN has, in fact, become the prototype for development programs facilitated through participatory video methodology from the 1970s to the present day.

The CfC/SN was a series of activist participatory film/video projects; launched in 1967, it ran until 1980. Its origins date back to the mid-1960s, when the population of the fishing villages of the Fogo Islands in Newfoundland became impoverished, and the state wanted to solve the objectively untenable situation by relocating people to the cities. When the residents resisted, the NFB – chaired at the time by John Grierson, who had had a long career in documentary film – and the Memorial University of Newfoundland jointly proposed a plan to break the deadlock through a film intervention. The project, led by filmmakers Donald Snowden and Colin Low, aimed to interview villagers, film the conversations, take the footage to other villages and communicate the problems of the villagers to government decision-makers, who were then brought together with the Fogo Islanders for a new film. A total of twenty-seven films were produced in this

process of horizontal and vertical communication, which could be described as a "video bridge" (Frise and Cizek 2009, Corneil 2010). Approximately three thousand people saw the films at the thirty-five screenings held during that period.[2] Although the people involved were not yet filmmakers, which later became common (though far from exclusive), the process is nevertheless described as grassroots, democratic and fully participatory. Indeed, the Fogo process served as a model for subsequent projects: it created solidarity among stakeholders and forged a community across municipalities; it strengthened the participants' political agency, revised the power relations automatically associated with research, and fostered reflexivity and self-awareness. It also produced the important outcome that the islanders did not have to leave their homes, because they established a cooperative with government assistance, which in turn enabled them to transition to sustainable farming.

The Meanings of Displacement

As a result, one can arguably draw a parallel between forced physical displacement and non-participatory objectifying documentary filmmaking and state that the CfC/SN program could simultaneously overcome both. Migration as forced displacement, whether or not it is controlled from above, is not only a common experience of marginalized communities in the physical sense, but this is also what they experienced in terms of representation through the documentaries made about them in the 20th century. If the inhabitants of the Fogo Islands had been portrayed by documentary filmmakers in an objectifying and/or victimizing tradition in which "the social actor […] becomes the victim of a representational and institutional discourse in which he or she is robbed of voice or agency within the film" (Corneil 2012, 20), their exclusion from the process of representation, being pushed outside, as it were, may well have eliminated their chance for radical and dialogical advocacy. The negative process would have predictably resulted in their physical exclusion from the island they considered home, given that this was the government's original "rescue" plan. The quality of representation, while not in itself a solution in a complex socio-economic situation, is linked to material relations and can facilitate or hinder their development – this is one of the insights of media anthropology in the context of the linguistic or representational turn in the

---

2   On the reflective, horizontal and vertical communication used in the Fogo process, see Corneil (2012), Yang (2012, 111), and Low et al. (2012, 49).

broadest sense (Ginsburg et al. 2002). The democratic sharing of control over representation is what Corneil calls the *ethics of access*.[3]

Corneil, who analyses the CfC/SN program, including the Fogo process, as an example of the civil rights movements of the 1960s, cites Bill Nichols's metaphor, namely that the power differential between representer and represented in traditional documentary films results in the latter "experiencing displacement," because the former has exclusive authority over representation (Ginsburg et al. 2002). Let me quote the original passage in Nichols's text, referring in turn to Brian Winston: "The politics of space, the policing of boundaries, and maintenance of distancing devices lie behind Brian Winston's critique of the expository tradition in documentary as one that constitutes its subjects as victims. The position of victim recalls the documentary's preoccupation of death: victimization is a maiming or murdering of the individual to produce a typification or stereotype.) When both filmmaker and social actor coexist within the historical world but only one has the authority to represent it, the other, who serves as subject of the film, experiences a *displacement.* Though bodily and ethically absented, the filmmaker retains the controlling voice, and the subject of the film becomes *displaced* into a mythic realm of reductive, essentialized stereotype, most commonly romantic hero or powerless victim."[4] (Nichols, 1991, 91; italics by me, A.M.; see also Winston 1988.)

Though not in this particular passage, Nichols invokes Freud and the Freudian concept of displacement elsewhere in his book. This is how he links two (or even three) kinds of displacement – i.e. in the local concrete and medial representational sense, and in the Freudian sense, due to psychological reasons – in an interpretation that also engages Edward Said's concept of Orientalism: "the Other does not exist in the real. Like the Orient to Said's Orientalist, it is an imaginary construct, a Freudian displacement that is written over a real being or group. The Other is pure representation and, in this context, it is the representation of the non-white, non-male, non-heterosexual, non-Western,

---

3   "The ethics of access can be understood as an approach to documentary that aspires toward greater access for audiences and social actors to the means of reproduction, whether by increased reflexivity on the part of filmmakers, or by increased access to technology and control over representation by subjects and communities themselves." (Corneil 2012, 20.)

4   Co-authors Trencsényi and Vlad, who also use the concept of *displacement*, state the following: "the so-called European 'refugee crisis' has bred a profusion of audiovisual accounts throughout the region, many of which aimed to give voice to hitherto voiceless, uprooted people. But as many of these 'untold stories' gain material expression as storylines, we are urged to consider the implications of yet another form of displacement: from the historical person to the film character, from personal stories to media representations" (2021, 117).

non-capitalist as everything we, who are everything the Other cannot be, need" (Nichols 1991, 287).

The concept of displacement can link the mutually reflecting psychological and sociological phenomena, although Nichols does not elaborate on the metaphor of "written over" in the quote, a term that complements the concept of displacement, which is our main concern here. At the risk of offering a slightly simplifying explanation, displacement as used by Freud is replacement as a defense strategy of the unconscious to enable the communication of repressed desires or traumas, awareness of which is blocked by the obstacles (barriers) of the defensive mechanism of consciousness. In other words, in the Freudian sense, displacement is an objectifying representation that, although it translates a psychic trauma into a symptom that can be treated (to some extent), it also affects the displacer, in so far as he or she is externalized and alienated as the protagonist of the displacement, being simultaneously its subject and object. At the same time, like an enigmatic and endlessly recurring dream, stereotyping documentaries (those about victimization and heroism as well as those involved in degradation and victim-blaming) also displace those they are about. Referring to Said, Nichols argues that objectifying, "othering" documentaries also indirectly represent the desires of those who control these representations, who are thus also unconsciously "trapped outside" the image they are creating. In the case of the Fogo Islands, the aim of the process was to arrest the recurring "dream" by raising awareness of social disadvantage in community discussions of the films. In terms of the analogy with psychoanalysis, this may be called a type of socio-analytical process.[5]

Once refunctioned, the objectifying concept of displacement can release positive metaphorical energies. The displacement suffered passively by subjects and communities, that is the exclusion from representation, can be counteracted by another displacement that may occur in a reflexive displacement. Displacement implies objectification and alienated communication both in its Nicholsian and Freudian senses, but the same concept can be refunctioned to refer to reflexive and effective communication between parties that are distant from each other, occupy

---

5   The use of the concept of raising awareness in action research can be traced back to Kurt Lewin (1948) in the planning–action–observation–reflection–replanning model, while its use in critical pedagogy can be traced back to Paolo Freire, among others. Transformational pedagogy is a synonym for critical pedagogy. The participatory improvisation techniques of critical or transformational pedagogy have their origins in theatre, but the relevant youth studies scholarship includes examples of improvisation techniques being used in the course of filmmaking. (See Schensul-Dalglish 2015.)

different places in the hierarchy of power or operate different communication protocols. By extricating itself from an uncanny repetition, a community is relocated through a visual intervention, steps out of the vicious circle of templates imposed on it, and becomes subject of a reflexive socio-analytical process. Of course, this not only dislocates those in a position of power, but also challenges the community itself to break out of its habitual monotony.

Participatory film community work with young people (preteens and teens) is extremely critical, because the identity of this age group – or rather their intersectional identity complex – is being formed at this time. The lived life situation of young people is a displacement synonymous with liminality.[6] The participatory cinematic process arrives at this natural transitoriness, and the question is how it can interact with it. Consequently, what is at stake in collaborative work is often precisely how an evolving identity can be captured, positively affirmed and reinforced in a process that can be described as ritual. Through its socio-analytic potential, participatory film action research can fundamentally catalyse this transitional process of coming of age, displacing its determinate character and putting identity development on a different, unconventional course. Clearly, this is always situational, relative and variable rather than something guaranteed and given. In the case of the Dunaszekcső-Tomor complex camp program, this entailed physical displacement as well as a figurative one through the displacement, relativization, and the performative acting and parodying of identities constructed in the moving image. Granted, by the standards of successfully achieving an idealized escape from stereotypically fixed identities, the results were uneven and at the very least somewhat ambivalent. At the end of my paper, I will discuss the contingencies of our own project, including limits on the free choice of identity and subject positioning.

The Catalyst Method

The professional program of the Dunaszekcső-Tomor participatory film camp was created by Sári Haragonics, in collaboration with Gábor Rumann and László Siroki.[7] Based on Haragonics's experience as a participatory filmmaker, the

---

6   Some of them are people with Roma identity, which makes them immigrants in the eyes of some
     members of the Hungarian public despite seven hundred years of coexistence, a displacement
     without any politics of recognition, which only deepens the challenges faced by Roma,
     especially when those converge with age-related difficulties.
7   For more on Sari Haragonics's individual development as a documentary filmmaker and as a
     scholar writing on participatory video, and the stages of her career so far, see her essay in this

program included the games and film genres she had used in previous projects and is discussing extensively in the DLA thesis she is currently completing, where she describes the camera though the metaphor of the catalyst. This is how she comments on the development of the method: "in the beginning, these projects were not aimed at resolving inter-group conflicts; the camera and the means of filming were used primarily to express self-representation and to improve intra-group relations and cooperation" (Haragonics 2020). She eventually began to use participatory filmmaking in order to facilitate inter-group communication, which may remind one of the concept of the video bridge mentioned above. However, unlike in the case of the Fogo Islands, where the video made participants aware of what was happening to them in a larger context through the recognition of their identical social situations, participatory film helps her create a contact zone for groups from different social situations, and it is this encounter that enables one to get to know the other and to become aware of one's own situation in relation to other.[8] In this film-based social research method, the "camera" thus plays a catalytic role in the encounter and cooperation of different groups, mainly children, adolescents or young adults. I put the word "camera" in quotes because I want to evade the lure of technological determinism: the mere presence of the camera does not catalyze, does not dissolve fears, does not dissolve inhibitions,

issue of *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* (2023 vol. 23) and her blog post on the Minor Media/Culture Research Centre website (Haragonics 2020), both of which also discuss the role of the camera as a catalyst. She is a research team member of the Minor Media/Culture Research Centre and its four-year grant awarded by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund. Gábor Rumann's and László Siroki's lectures at the Minor Media/Culture Research Institute provide more information about their work (Rumann 2021, Siroki 2021).

8   This is how Gábor Biczó describes the contact zone from the perspective of cultural anthropology: "the physical contact zones of different cultures are conducive to the creation of zones of interaction and influence, so-called transition zones, spaces of contact, in which the characteristics of the cultures involved are mixed and mutated. To put it more generally or in more modern terms, the zone is a transcultural and multicultural place" (2014, 91). The combination of cultural and media anthropologies allows the inclusion of virtual-imaginative spaces in the discourse of the contact zone, which can also benefit from the theory of the "third space." In addition to the nearby (physical) first space and the distant second space, we must also take into account the virtual third space that connects the two when we build "video bridges." These video bridges operate as contact zones in more than one way. The films are contact zones, and they also transform the distant spaces into which they are embedded into contact zones (or create another contact surface within those spaces). Our cases demonstrate that web-mediated popular culture can be one of the links between cultural zones, in this case between those of a segregated or self-segregating minority culture and a majority culture that tends to self-segregate itself. No doubt, these two are themselves contact zones to a varying extent. The point of the participatory film camp is to combine the two by hybridizing the imaginary-virtual and the physical-actual. Separate zones are transformed from distant to close by the inclusion of a third space and the concrete encounter of different groups. So the qualifier "physical" in the passage above may well be combined with "virtual:" "the physical and virtual contact points of different cultures," etc.

boundaries, prejudices, stereotypes, etc. – all this happens, if it happens, in the situation involving multiple participants. The camera is a necessary technical condition, but what actually catalyzes it is human intervention, with regard to which all participants have equal weight, from members of the communities involved, through academics and researchers, to film experts and those representing funders and sponsors. In other words, the metaphor of the catalyst somewhat deceptively fetishizes the camera, though this "deception" is ultimately an intrinsic feature of metaphors as such. [9]

At first sight, the "camera as catalyst" method does not belong to classic participatory video methods used in action research in the field of development. One of the major distinctions, for instance, is that the young people participating in the two locations of the Dunaszekcső-Tomor camp did not make films about problems that adversely affect their respective communities, often mutually reinforcing each other and thus escalating in intersectional situations (themes recurring globally include housing poverty, limited or no job opportunities, the climate crisis, school or street violence, disadvantages of women, etc.). Instead, they made short films on themes set in advance in the professional program with the aim of making contact and gradually getting to know each other and, above all, playing together.[10]

Another related difference is that the videos definitely did not aim at vertical communication of the sort discussed in the case of Challenge for Change, that is contact with decision-makers; metaphorically speaking, what we built was a "video bridge" rather than a "video staircase." This may be taken as cause for self-reflection or even self-criticism, as we may seem to be avoiding pressing social problems at hand, such as a lack of opportunities for employment and the resulting deprivation in Tomor and the surrounding small villages, the segregation of schools and settlements, the anti-Roma attitudes constantly

---

9   A well-known historical precursor to Haragonics's method is the film *The Human Pyramid* by Jean Rouch, considered the first representative of shared anthropology and audiovisual reciprocity (Rouch 2003, 44). The term catalyst also has a historical antecedent. In his 1974 book *Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film*, Eric Barnouw lists "catalyst" among the many types of documentary film or rather filmmakers (explorer, reporter, painter, advocate, etc.). He includes the filmmaking practice of Jean Rouch and the visual anthropology filmmaking project of Sol Worth and John Adair (and Richard Chalfen, an MA student at the time) with young Navajo filmmakers. Catalysts (directors, films) may stimulate social change: "As members of the community saw themselves and others in discussion, subtle shifts in opinion took place. The tapes thus stimulated and improved intra-community communication, as well as serving as a bridge to officialdom outside the community" (Barnouw, quoted in Corneil 2010, 391).

10   The videos are in a playlist on the Minor Media/Culture Research Centre's YouTube channel, though they are currently not listed as public.

cropping up in the interviews, the dissatisfaction with local (municipal) power politics, the disadvantaged position of small villages in terms of health care (with direct consequences for the physical and mental health of the population), the lack of or difficult access to institutions (such as a store, clinic, cultural center, pharmacy, post office, sports facilities, sports grounds, cinema), the disastrous state of public transport, etc. However, this is not necessarily the evasion it might seem at first glance: addressing problems by foregrounding the topic explicitly may not be all that effective when one works with young (preteen and teen) communities. Another consideration is time, as a problem-centered approach predictably takes a long time; one week would not be enough.

The professional development of the camp focused especially on play and themes likely to encourage young people to open up to each other on an individual and community level. Therefore, despite the fact that no specific social problem was identified, the camp was to address a problem all too familiar to the organizers and Hungarian youth today: the atomization and segregation of groups from different ethnic and other backgrounds, the lack of an integrative social imaginary, and the result that some citizens cannot or will not imagine a diverse community. Even if specific social problems were not exposed during the filmmaking process, the camp nevertheless fulfilled the expectations of traditional participatory video development in this respect. The young people more or less learnt how to use the camera and microphone, practiced cooperation through filming, and became interested in the situation, life and cultural specificities of the other. Even though no specific social problem was thematized, comparable results were achieved, as a society of solidarity and inclusion was being constructed on the micro level.

Participants from Tomor and Dunaszekcső, in fact, mentioned difficulties and expressed criticism of limitied life opportunities implicitly or explicitly in the course of the playful filmmaking process. I will discuss these in the final chapter (film analysis). This was combined with the evocation and re-enactment of popular culture, which allowed young people to perform their identities through music tracks, virtual games, technical gadgets and other objects.[11] As Mitchell suggested, quoting others: "where practicable, children's own unique filmic subculture should prevail over researchers' conventions, which are traditionally aligned with documentary film or scientific observation" (cited in Mitchell et al. 2012, 4). The same principle underpinned Luttrell et al.'s research on young people's strategic impression management online, i.e. the way in which research participants

---

11   On the inclusion of the (popular) cultural perspective of children and young adults in research, see Piemontese (2021, 180–181).

shaped their self-image and identity through their online communication, primarily through video. Seventeen-year-old research participant Danny (quoted in the epigraph) admittedly grew up watching YouTube videos and it was natural for him to start filming as he saw it in other videos when he got his first camera (Luttrell et al. 2012, 164). The researchers did not want to interfere with this process by bringing in an external topic, so they simply asked the young people to make a video about "what matters most to you" or "make a video about your, your world, or your life." Even when researchers outlined a fictional situation in more detail, there was also a sense of wanting to leave the framework wide open: "You have a cousin who is moving to the Worcester area. Take pictures of your school, your family, and your community that will help them understand what to expect" (Luttrell et al. 2012, 166). There are obviously drawbacks to a broadly defined task or a lack of directions, but in this case the priority was self-definition through moving images without external interference. When compared to the research described above, the Dunaszekcső-Tomor film camp shows two differences. Firstly, unlike the resarch by Luttrell et al., the Dunaszekcső-Tomor camp was community filmmaking rather than an individual one, which in and of itself imposes constraints on individual ambition; secondly, the topics offered were more specific. That said, we chose topics that would allow the young people to express themselves playfully and lend themselves to the free performance of their identities linked to ethnicity, gender, location and age group.

The Research[12]

This intervention is part of a four-year research process, which focuses on the history and current state of participatory filmmaking, and includes a variety of actions in the form of online challenges, weekend workshops, and summer camps. While the current paper focuses on the films made during the summer camp of 2021, the process actually started earlier than the camp organized in August 2021. Since we were aware that our four-year time frame would be too short for collaborations started from scratch, we worked with organizations and professionals who had been organizing film camps for years or were more or less continuously producing video content with children. Our research began almost simultaneously with the Covid pandemic, so our participatory filmmaking working group started an online filmmaking action in spring 2020, which began with the facilitators' films about their quarantine experiences, and, upon their invitation, challenge videos

---

12   See Müllner (2020) for the research plan developed into an essay.

by three geographically distant groups of children in Dunaszekcső, Hűvösvölgy Children's Home (Budapest) and Tomor. The facilitators of the series, entitled *The Way of the Mask*, were Gábor Rumann, Nándor Grosch and László Siroki in the three locations. One of the aims of the filmmaking process was to get to know the young participants, as we were planning to organize a camp with them at some point, hopefully in person, a plan we shared with them early on. We were able to maintain intensive contact with two of the three communities (Dunaszekcső, Tomor) and started organizing the summer camp in spring 2021. Since the catalyst methodology required us to start the camp with a schedule and at least a rough plan for the film projects, we wrote a detailed professional program, led by Sára Haragonics with contributions by Gábor Rumann and László Siroki, representing the two locations. The catalyst methodology guaranteed the participatory nature of the filmmaking activities in the camp: the film scripts were devised by the children in small groups, facilitated by group leaders; they chose the filmmaking roles they wanted to learn and take on, and which side of the camera they would like to be on. They chose the music, the interviewees from the village and the locations. In most cases, they did the filming and were actively involved in the initial and final editing process. There were two layers to the educational process, because group leaders included not only the experienced film professionals, but also students who had learned the participatory filmmaking method in a university course and had practiced it over a pre-camp weekend workshop. There were intensive discussions about the films being made during the camp, as noted in my research diary. In the spirit of the methodology used, the set games, film topics and genres were all aimed at fostering the young participants' collaboration on a broad spectrum. The single-take videos involved team play through jointly choreographed movement, the "generations" type films involved creative dialogue between people of different ages and cultural experiences, the "eight object" films involved young people interacting through their favourite objects, and the "postcards" involved the formulation of a message to a distant other. These events justify calling the activity in the camp participatory and reflexive, insofar as we took every opportunity to discuss the events that were taking place and the films, which we were constantly re-watching.

We wanted the time spent together at the camp to help deepen the online relationship through in-person contact, but as something to be continued in the research process. After the camp, however, we were unable to maintain a long-term sustainable relationship with the (children's) communities and at best managed to do so sporadically. The reasons include the following: the Achilles's

heel of all participatory film projects is financial sustainability. The cost of equipment, trainers' fees, accommodation, travel and board make it very difficult to maintain the relationship. In this case, there were two additional contributing factors: the distance between the three locations, where the participants lived, and the pandemic. The latter resulted in the postponing of a screening in Tomor to February 2022 (six months after the camp), because the hosting institution cancelled the program scheduled for autumn 2021 due to the pandemic. That said, the camp can be considered part of a process: not only was it preceded by extended preparatory work culminated by the actual encounter, it is also intended to serve as a prototype for the next camp, which is already being planned. Yet, an expert in action-oriented participatory research may well ask why we call our research participatory – the brevity and delimited nature of the six days spent together question this categorization of the initiative. This criticism is understandable, since participatory action research tends to last for months or years, and applying the name of this method to the present experiment may seem a misappropriation in this respect. Without intending to dilute the definition of participatory action research indefinitely, I suggest that the following considerations may lead to a possible compromise (or further constructive discussion). Although Sol Worth and John Adair's (1972) three-month film project with Navajo indigenous youth in 1966 is considered one of the great precursors of participatory film, its duration seems shorter than the common duration of an anthropological research project expected in academia at the time, yet longer than a typical contemporary participatory film action. The examples of social anthropologist Michael Stewart's study of participatory film thematic weeks in London schools (2013), or the global projects of the participatory film organization Insight Share, which lasted a few days, may also evoke the criticisms mentioned above – both of which are relatively short projects in which researchers and filmmakers work with disadvantaged groups.

From the 1960s onwards, film was increasingly put at the service of participatory social research, which also meant that the traditional timeframes of research were transformed, precisely because of the nature of the filmic intervention. Of course, long-term programmes have not disappeared, but they have been joined by those of shorter duration. Filmmaking is always a high-intensity, dense activity, and it is therefore advisable to concentrate on a short but uninterrupted period of time together. Here, one of the results of the intervention, i.e. participatory action research, is the film itself, which can be used for further purposes. Indeed, there may be some doubt about the emancipation that is attempted in such a short time. In our case, the emancipatory nature of the action lies both in the filmmaking

process (learning to film and the possibility of producing one's own image) and in the reconciliation of different social groups. Yet, the tension between a short-term participatory media project and a long-term participatory development project is also clearly visible in the light of our own participatory film action. This tension can, in my opinion, be resolved by combining the two approaches. Cinematic film actions can be considered legitimate in themselves, but they can take on a deeper participatory character if they are implemented in action-oriented participatory research as a kind of communicative prosthesis. Such a collaboration with the Siklósbodony site is also taking place in the framework of our own OTKA research.

As for the Dunaszekcső-Tomor cooperation, organised within the framework of the ELTE Minor Media/Culture Research Centre's OTKA research, the process is not closed, but is in a suspended state waiting to be continued, first with screenings in Budapest and across the country, talks, short weekend film actions, and the next camp in summer 2022. With the camp itself, we have thus set out to bring together two communities of children, distant from each other in terms of space and social background, and to create the conditions for them to make films together. In the light of the above, I consider this research to be a participatory media project.

Film Analyses

In the following, I will distinguish types of films and set up specific thematic and genre categories for their qualitative analysis. As this individual process is not collaborative, it may seem to be an instance of appropriation, whereby the collective analysis and evaluation of the works produced at the conclusion of participatory film projects are then channelled back into the research process (see Sawhney 2012 on participatory evaluation). Although my analysis does include the young people's views from time to time, this does not turn the interpretation into something shared, communal or organically participatory. Consequently, the following analysis lays no claim to anything more than an individual researcher's account and awaits supplementation by further shared interpretations. What I consider significant in the following analysis, however, is that certain analytical categories can be set up, such as intersectionality, parody as reinterpretation, location based identity, hybrid genres, influences of popular culture, or challenge interpretable as interpellation. Such an analytical approach through conceptual categories in not unprecedented the tradition of participatory film.

In the making of single-take videos, participants had to agree on a song which would be the soundtrack of their clip, which required compromise. At first glance, the Tomor group's choice of Ignác Rózsa's party song, *The Gypsy Kid was Caught by the Police*, seems to be a variation on the topos of the gypsy criminal, even if the lyrics show a transition between third-person accusation, second-person address and first-person claim of innocence.[13] In the intricate and dynamic movement captured on camera, the actors performed in four teams (four to five members per team) of innocently caught "gypsy kids," "policemen," illegal "apple thieves" and peepers from behind trees. The entire story is embodied in a single take of a precisely choreographed music video, in which the relevant lines of the lyrics are sung or rather lip-synced by a member of the group plus a narrator (the filming was done to music, and the music track was added to the video later). The faces, the gestures (e.g. the spectacular throwing of apples [Fig. 1]), the forms of movement (an unexpected cartwheel – literally called "gypsy wheel" in Hungarian – during an escape), the route taken (running around the statue of Pál Tomori while fleeing) [Fig. 2], the props (the lurkers' sunglasses), and especially the comic chase, give the short film an ironic burlesque quality. The racist topos appears, but the liberated play keeps its distance from it through the use of parody.[14]

In the "postcards" category, the young participants had to make a film about their own living space and send it to the other camp; then they were to respond to the clip received, engaging in a dialogue with it. Three short films were produced in this category in each camp. The presentation of people, landmarks and important places introduced the recipient to the personal and spatial frame of reference of local identity. In Dunaszekcső, for example, there was an ironic tour of the playground and a serious one with the Danube in the background, the latter also mentioning the camp in addition to the village. [Figs. 1–2.] In Tomor, the guide rode a bike along the main street of the village and invited comments from people standing in popular places, who spoke about the places and the events taking place there as stakeholders (playground, Andi's shop, statue of Pál Tomori, kindergarten, Calvinist church), and then the rooms of Romama, a Roma apartment restaurant (social cooperative and community center) [Figs. 5–6.]

---

13   These are the lyrics of the song: "The gypsy kid was caught by the cops / though he knew nothing, / it happened so suddenly. / Catch someone else, may my Mother die if I did something. // Gypsy kid, you're in trouble, / 'cause they've blamed it on you, / Someone said you were walking around. / Lord, what am I gonna do, what's gonna happen to me. // No matter how I say I'm innocent, / the cops are taking me away, and I'm all alone."

14   Single-take films belong in the NER (i.e. no editing required) type of films.

were shown by the young people of Tomor, reflecting on current events there, thus establishing contact with the people of Dunaszekcső ("we are watching your film" in the dining room, which is confirmed by the camera focusing on the screen). The short films include numerous examples of interpellating, addressing or otherwise embedding the other in one's own video, and thereby initiating and continuing the dialogue. "They addressed us as 'Tomor people,' so we addressed them as 'Dunaszekcső people'", said one young person from Tomor. The Tomor group's "postcard" *Field Circus* was answered by a similarly funny, playfully acrobatic and ironically staged "postcard" from Dunaszekcső.

The "generations" category called for a similarly dialogic quality, as the documentary materials (primarily interviews) filmed in one place were supplemented by fictional interludes (mainly re-enactments) in the other. The interviews were conducted by the participating young people as interviewers, camera operators, sound recordists or directors. In their capacity as interviewees or at times co-players, local residents also became participants in the course of the filmmaking, so this may be a genre that calls for an especially conscious policy of sharing and public access. We saw warning signs of this during the filming. An elderly participant from Tomor, the grandmother of a little girl from a camp, who had been involved in several film shoots and was extremely helpful and involved, approached us after one of the shoots and asked the crew not to upload the film to the Internet under any circumstances. She actually only meant the interviews, apparently unaware that the purpose of the category was to playfully mix and hybridize the categories of documentary and fiction, which are clearly separated in public consciousness. She became a "victim" of this, for example, when she had to recall a mobile phone story anachronistically as a childhood experience ("we always spent the money we got for cinema on phones" – *Childhood in Reverse*), but also by having her appearance in another film (*As Long as There is Health and Internet*) dubbed over by Bëlga's song *Back in the Day* (*Bezzeg régen*) ("Back in the day the neighbour invited me over [...] back in the day no one planted cedars," etc. as a foreign voiceover.) All this raises the ethical question of how far the game can go in depriving someone of their own voice, to what extent one group's voice (that of the young) can parody another's (that of the elderly), repeating clichés ("studying is what matters"). This is an ethical question, but it should be approached situationally and deliberatively rather than dogmatically.

Some of the "Generation" films deal with intersectional themes, portraying the victims of the depicted conflict as gypsies and women, though within a parodic framework. In the documentary of the same title, *Father, Food is Ready,*

Sir chant the girls in a chorus in the eponymous docufiction film, holding hands and wearing flower-patterned shawls and aprons. We have work to do first, come and help, the father replies. But we don't want to help, we want to learn, say the girls. The father insists, however, and the girls start working around the house. [Fig. 7.] The black-and-white images are replaced by colour images of a boy with an XP controller; a combine harvester is working the land in the video game on the TV screen [Fig. 8]. The boy is called to lunch, but he keeps playing (working?) instead of going. A lonely drum solo soundtrack both accompanies and estranges the film. Once again, the ironic treatment of the generational conflict is apparent in the parodic staging of the (supposedly) traditional Roma roles (of daughter and father) and the video game as virtual work, with the colour scheme and the soundtrack supporting (or undermining) the interpretation. This short film begins with an excerpt from an interview with a mother from Dunaszekcső: "Old people sometimes forget they were once young and they keep saying, Back in the day it was different! But they used to have the same conflicts with their parents or grandparents." In addition to the idealization of the old days, there are other recurring motifs in the generational films, such as *Star Wars* as a significant pop cultural reference point, which appears in both the Tomor and the Dunaszekcső narratives; in the latter, it appears in the context of remembering the Dunaszekcső cinema and its heyday (in the form of an old poster), and in the former, it appears in another memory, in which the narrator recalls a specific *Star Wars* re-enactment in his childhood. Classic *Star Wars* characters appear in the current re-enactments (in which interview narratives filmed in one location are re-enacted in another), and in various ways an ironic morality play is created in both cases: whoever does the right thing gets into the cinema, and whoever wants to be the greatest of them all is the bad example in the priest's sermon, who advises his parishioners to "co-operate and make participatory film camps" instead. Granted, the parishioners are asleep on each other's shoulders.

The explicit aim of the so-called "eight object" films was to create a story that could include one object from each of the eight crew members. The implicit aim was more ambitious, however: the objects brought by the young people would tell something about them, or rather they would tell a story about themselves through the objects while making the film. From the magical fairy tale frame (*Andriska's Tale*) to the silent film (*Family Secret – Iza's Secret*) and the gypsy magic fantasy and mafia film combo (*The Godfather*) to the commercial infotainment hoax (*Family Secret – Iza's Secret*), several genres appeared in films, which also included cameo glimpses of the facilitators (*Anything but the Cat!*, *Andriska's*

Tale, *Godfather*) and the camp stories associated with the instructors (*Anything but the Cat!*, *Godfather*). The genres evoked and the stories told suggest that the "eight subject" films can be considered at first sight as feature films and form a distinct group alongside the single take clips, "postcards" and generational films. The latter three genres are also permeated and fertilized by fiction, so the difference is not in terms of fictionality but rather in terms of the feature film. The single takes address fan identity through the preferred soundtrack, the "postcards" expose local identity through the representation of the home and its environment, while generational films ironically defend preteen and teen identity in a nearly universal confrontation with the educational intentions of the elderly. By contrast, the eight-part films use objects to show involvement, which facilitates engagement and connection. Most importantly, the young participants from Tomor and Dunaszekcső made the eight object films together, in mixed crews, and they reflect generational proximity rather than any regional, ethnic or any other cultural difference. Without any further clue, to which community would we attribute a magic wand, a guitar, an XP controller, a Rubik's cube, a helmet, a medal, a football, etc.? [Figs. 9–10.]

Earlier in this text, the choice of free identity and subject positioning was mentioned as an open possibility to be exploited through participatory film as a visual research method, and to counterbalance the burden of determined identities (projected by the majority, but often internalized by the minority in question) and the burden of representation. The history of participatory cinema includes numerous such emancipatory practices; it needs to be ascertained how far our project could go in playing a liberating game with fixed identities. The young participants of the camps organized in the framework of our research defined themselves and each other in space and time ("Tomor people" and "Dunaszekcső people," as well as "generations"), as committed to art and culture ("film and music fans," "performers"), and as balancing on the border between imagination and reality (when making docufictions), etc.

At first glance, it may seem that ethnic identity designation, which is used nearly exclusively by the majority in Hungary today, was one of many possibilities in our camp, although it was clear from the beginning that a group of children with Roma identity would encounter another with a non-Roma identity. Yet, there was/is another side to the liberating identity game that one experienced as soon as one stepped out of the gate. According to my research diary, it was difficult to find a filming location in Tomor because there is virtually no free space. The young people's stories reveal that movement in and around the village

is fundamentally determined by private land and its protection, whether it is the land and forests on the border or the lake in the area. Thus, although the opportunity to play with identities could be taken advantage of in some private houses or in the community space called Romama, the limiting nature of the wider site could not be ignored. The young people also placed themselves in the category of the "unauthorized" as residents of the village. They linked this circumstance to their own Roma identity in different ways. In any case, the fact of exclusion as an external constraint was a determinant and, in my opinion, a defining element of subordination (judging by the number of times it was discussed among ourselves). To this we can apply Bill Nichols's description, which I have already quoted in an earlier part of this paper: the politics of space, the policing of borders and the use of exclusionary procedures may be a trigger for "being on the outside" in a negative sense as an identity-defining constraint. But we can also give the example of identity pressures that are represented by the very pop culture that young people prefer, or at least that allow them to place themselves within a certain restrictive framework. The question may arise why a mulatto song about the conflict between the "gypsy kid" and the "policemen" was chosen by vote as the background music for the single. This is very similar to the discussion on the participatory film about young people's engagement with deviant and criminal themes and how the development practitioner can address this internalised identification.[15]

Conclusion

Errors in a research process can be corrected through Kurt Lewin's spiral progression (Lewin 1948, 205–206). Firstly, there was a long delay before we could interpret the films together in an organized setting and archive this interpretive conversation for later study in the research process. Of course, we kept discussing the films made and any partial results throughout the camp, both with the young people and among ourselves (the latter happened several times after the camp), but this was ad hoc rather than comprehensive and planned. Participation was also left somewhat to chance, and some (such as the elderly in Tomor) could not participate at all due to their absence. In the end, the discussion took place in Tomor six months after the camp. Secondly, although I tried to prove in the film analysis section above that a playful and less problem-oriented

---

15   On "gangsta imagination" in relation to Roma immigrant youth in Madrid, see Piemontese (2021, 181).

approach to filmmaking can also have the problem-posing potential of a classical participatory video method, it would be worth trying a more guided topic selection and combine it with the catalyst method in the remaining research process. To this extent, action research could give rise to a more multi-faceted intervention, and film education and getting to know each other (beyond the clichés) could be supplemented by immediate or distant concrete goals. In other words, there is room for enriching the "activist imagination"[16] through the conscious use of media, and doing that while moving up, rather than down, Hart's ladder (Hart 1992, 8; Hart 2008): instead of having to work on issues proposed by professionals, the young people should use video to formulate the most important issues that concern them to ensure a more intense participation.

The greatest challenge of participatory filmmaking with respect to the event of displacement analysed above is how to make it a genuine and positively experienced performative event for the participants. Moving to an actual distance from one's home by traveling is no guarantee for displacement, though the novelty of a changed location may offer a chance for something exciting and constructive to happen. For the participants from Tomor, the change of scene entailed both a removal from their familiar environment and admission into an unfamiliar but friendly one. For the participants from Dunaszekcső, members of the majority without any direct experience about Roma youth from a remote settlement in Borsod, it was an opportunity to step outside the ideas they had likely had about them and also to join the social circle of guests. Similarly, the actual participation in image making offers insight into the practical, yet also meaningful, conceptual nature of filmmaking, which process once again has the potential to move one beyond of a passive relationship of being merely the subject of the film. The films, in turn, open to transgressions of familiar constraints of genre through re-enactments, subversions, appropriations, ironic adaptations and parodic invasions, and also allow the young people to bring a part of their own lives into the film in the form of a story or object, alongside similar parts contributed by others. Adopting Worth and Chalfen's terminology, I would like to propose a combination of the two types of participatory genre, namely a combination of autobiographical documentary with community documentary, which was, in fact, the case in the films made at the camp. In this sense, the Dunaszekcső-Tomor participatory film camp can be considered an example of private or civic social

---

16   Marcus describes activist imagination as media use by subordinated groups for traditional identity politics and representational purposes, highlighting recent issues related to citizenship and the public sphere driven by utopian desires for emancipatory projects (quoted in Ginsburg et al. 2002, 8).

---

science, insofar as the young people conducted "research into themselves," however playfully, and this research was carried out in a participatory way. It is too early to tell if this participatory film research has genuine transformative power and manages to displace socially fixed identities from existing templates (both of others and one's own). In some respects, the research described here is still in the state of a media project, something decried as a negative trend by Corneil, who was quoted earlier in this paper. Yet, if these films are viewed as forms of play with local, gender, ethnic and generational cultural identities that are performed in them over and over, this may imply resilient and reflective distancing, as a type of displacement.

References

Biczó, Gábor. 2014. Az asszimiláció, a kontaktzóna és az interkulturalitás néhány elméleti kérdése a kárpátaljai etnikai együttélési helyzetek vizsgálatában [Some Theoretical Questions of Assimilation, Contact Zone and Interculturality in Research on Situations of Ethnic Cohabitation in Transcarpathia]. In *Szellem és tudomány 1*. 85–96. Miskolc: Miskolci Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar Szociológiai Intézet, Miskolc-Egyetemváros. *https://atti.uni-miskolc.hu/docs/SZT2014_1.pdf*. Last accessed 23. 06. 2022.

Corneil, Marit Cathryn. 2010. Winds and Things: Towards a Reassessment of the Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle Legacy. In *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada*, eds. Michael Brendan Baker, Tom Waugh and Ezra Winton, 389–403. Canada: McGill–Queen's University Press.

Corneil, Marit Cathryn. 2012. Citizenship and Participatory Video. In *Handbook of Participatory Video*, eds. E-J Milne, Claudia Mitchell and Naydene de Lange, 19–34. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

Frise, Heather and Katerina Cizek. 2009. The Seven Interventions of Filmmaker-in-Residence. *National Film Board*. *https://www.nfb.ca/film/seven_interventions_of_filmmaker-in-residence/*. Last accessed 23. 06. 2022.

Ginsburg, Faye D., Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin. 2002. Introduction. In *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, eds. Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin, 1–36. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Haragonics, Sári. 2020. A kamera mint csoportkohéziós és csoportközi katalizátor [Camera as Catalyst of Intragroup and Intergroup Cohesion]. *Minor Média-blog* (25 July). *http://minormedia.hu/haragonics-sari/*. Last accessed 23. 06. 2022.

Hart, Roger A. 1992. Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship, *UNICEF Innocenti Essays* no. 4. Florence: International Child Development Centre of UNICEF. *https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/childrens_ participation.pdf*. Last accessed 23. 06. 2022.

Hart, Roger A. 2008. Stepping Back from "The Ladder": Reflections on a Model of Participatory Work with Children. In *Participation and Learning. Perspectives on Education and the Environment, Health and Sustainability*, eds. Alan Reid, Bjarne Bruun Jensen, Jutta Nikel and Venka Simovska, 19–31. *https://link. springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4020-6416-6_2*. Last accessed 23. 06. 2022.

Lewin, Kurt. 1948. Action Research and Minority Problems. In *Resolving Social Conflicts. Selected Papers on Group Dynamics*, 201–216. New York: Harper and Brothers.

Low, Bronwen, Chloë Brushwood Rose, Paula M. Salvio and Lena Palacios. 2012. (Re)framing the Scholarship on Participatory Video. From Celebration to Critical Engagement. In *The Handbook of Participatory Video*, eds. E-J Milne, Claudia Mitchell and Naydene de Lange, 49–64. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

Lunch, Chris and Tony Roberts. 2015. Participatory Video. In *The International Encyclopedia of Digital Communication and Society*, eds. Robin Mansell and Peng Hwa Ang, 1–6. John Wiley and Sons, Inc. *https://insightshare.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Participatory-Video-C.LunchT.RobertsInsightShare. pdf*. Last accessed 23. 06. 2022.

Luttrell, Wendy, Victoria Restler and Claire Fontaine. 2012. Youth Video-Making: Selves and Identities in Dialogue. In *Handbook of Participatory Video*, eds. E-J Milne, Claudia Mitchell and Naydene de Lange, 164–177. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

Miller, Liz. 2010. Filmmaker-in-Residence. The Digital Grandchild of Challenge for Change. Interview with Katerina Cizek. In *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada*, eds. Michael Brendan Baker, Tom Waugh and Ezra Winton, 427–442. Canada: McGill–Queen's University Press.

Mitchell, C., E. J. Milne and N. De Lange. 2012. Introduction. In *Handbook of Participatory Video*, eds. E-J Milne, Claudia Mitchell and Naydene de Lange, 1–18. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

Müllner, András. 2020. A magyarországi részvételi film története és jelenlegi helyzete. Vázlat egy kutatásról a Minor Média/Kultúra Kutatóközpontban [The history and current practices of Hungarian participatory film culture, with an emphasis on the selfrepresentation of vulnerable minority groups]. *Jel-Kép*, no.

2. *http://communicatio.hu/jelkep/2020/2/JelKep_2020_2_Mullner_Andras. pdf*. Last accessed 23. 06. 2022.

Müllner, András. 2022. „To be continue…" Reflexiók a kortárs részvételi videós projektek egy példájával kapcsolatban [Reflections on an Example of Contemporary Participatory Video Projects]. *Replika* vol. 124: 73–102. *https:// www.replika.hu/replika/124*. Last accessed 28. 12. 2022.

Nichols, Bill. 1991. *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Piemontese, Stefano. 2021. Combining Participatory and Audiovisual Methods with Young Roma "Affected by Mobility." In *Visual Methodology in Migration Studies. New Possibilities, Theoretical Implications, and Ethical Questions*, eds. Karolina Nikielska-Sekula and Desille Amandine, 177–196. Springer. *https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67608-7*. Last accessed 23. 06. 2022.

Rouch, Jean. 2003. The Camera and Man. In *Ciné-Ethnography*, 29–46. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Rumann, Gábor. 2021. Dunaszekcsői Webtévé. Előadás az ELTE Média és Kommunikáció Tanszékén, a Minor Média/Kultúra Kutatóközpontban szervezett „Mozgóképes részvételi kultúra" című kurzuson [Dunaszekcső WebTV. Lecture at the Department of Media and Communication, ELTE University, "Film-based Participatory Culture" series, organized by the Research Centre for Minor Media/Culture] (11 March). *https://www.youtube. com/watch?v=-7mQIWCKovQ*. Last accessed 23. 06. 2022.

Sawhney, Nitin. 2012. Making Sense of Participatory Video: Approaches to Participatory Content Analysis. In *Handbook of Participatory Video*, eds. E-J Milne, Claudia Mitchell and Naydene de Lange, 178–193. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.

Schensul, Jen and Campbell Dalglish. 2016. A Hard Way Out: Improvisational Film and Youth Participatory Action Research. In *Participatory Visual and Digital Research in Action*, eds. Aline Gubrium, Krista Harper and Marty Otañez, 115–128. London, New York: Routledge.

Siroki, László. 2021. Előadás az ELTE Média és Kommunikáció Tanszékén, a Minor Média/Kultúra Kutatóközpontban szervezett „Mozgóképes részvételi kultúra" című kurzuson [Lecture at the Department of Media and Communication, ELTE University, "Film-based Participatory Culture" series, organized by the Research Centre for Minor Media/Culture] (15 April). *https://www.youtube. com/watch?v=lg_zHn9-53c&list=PLQnuoI9oD6qoOCdj-w7vPdHa6Pc2OGttd& index=2&t=134s*. Last accessed 23. 06. 2022.

Stewart, Michael. 2013. Mysteries Reside in the Humblest, Everyday Things: Collaborative Anthropology in the Digital Age. *Social Anthropology/ Anthropologie Social* vol. 21, no. 3: 305–321. *https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/ doi/abs/10.1111/1469-8676.12041*. Last accessed 23. 06. 2022.

Trencsényi, Klára and Vlad Naumescu. 2021. Migrant Cine-Eye: Storytelling in Documentary and Participatory Filmmaking. In *Visual Methodology in Migration Studies. New Possibilities, Theoretical Implications, and Ethical Questions*, eds. Karolina Nikielska-Sekula and Desille Amandine, 117–140. Springer. *https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67608-7*. Last accessed 23. 06. 2022.

Winston, Brian. 1988. The Tradition of the Victim in Griersonian Documentary. In *New Challenges for Documentary*, eds. Alan Rosenthal, 269–287. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

Worth, Sol and John Adair. 1972. *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration of Film Communication and Anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Yang, Kyung-Hwa. 2012. Reflexivity, Participation, and Video. In *Handbook of Participatory Video*, eds. E-J Milne, Claudia Mitchell and Naydene de Lange, 100–114. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

List of Figures

Figures 1–2. Single-take video from Tomor: flying apples, running away from the scene.
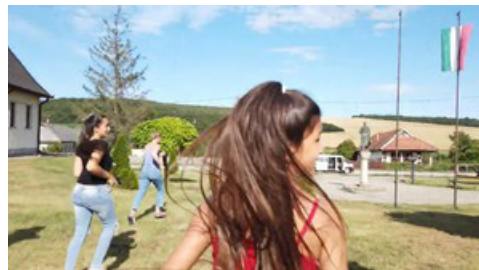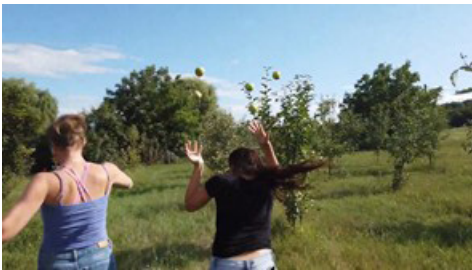
Figures 3–4. "Postcards" from Tomor and Dunaszekcső: introducing the local playground.
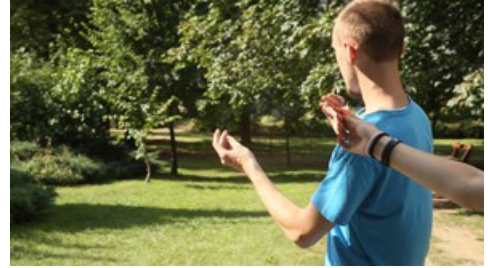
Figures 5–6. "Postcard" from Tomor: introducing Romama, the local community house.

Figures 7–8. "Generations:" stills from the film, *Father, Food is Ready, Sir!*

Figures 9–10. "Eight object" films *Anything but the Cat!* and *Andriska's Tale*, objects used: a magic stick, a camera and a photograph.