

On the verge of political involvement: Dilemmas of an NGO

Andrea Dömsödy & Marianna Pataki

Budapest/Hungary

Where are we from?

- We came from Central-Europe,
- from a country with **9,5 million citizens** who live on a little bit larger territory than Latvia,
- **without seaside,**
- **without the European currency,**
- but with a **systematically weakened democracy** as you might have heard in the news.

Who are we?

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 - a profession in its complexity and beauty.
 - which is more and more disrespected by leaders, unseen by lawmakers and threatened by cutback.

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What is our story?

- Our presentation will tell a bitter-sweet story of an attempt to stand up against unwelcomed tendencies in the Hungarian education and political system between 2015 and 2017.

What is school librarian professional identity?

- We are school librarians, who are actually teacher librarians, because in Hungary the person who is allowed to work at a school library must be a qualified teacher with a diploma on library science as well. We are the black sheep of this conference because our NGO is not a librarian but a teacher NGO, but allied with the Hungarian Librarian Association.

TEACHER? LIBRARIAN?
TEACHER LIBRARIAN!

Who represents teacher librarians in Hungary?

- The Hungarian School Librarian's Association had a long way to go for gaining an independent body and has a long way ahead to go in representing the teacher librarian profession.

Who represents teacher librarians in Hungary?

- **HuSLA is the only professional organization in Hungary which represents the school librarians and promotes teacher librarians with the professional advice. Inspires guides and protects the profession to the limit, or beyond.**

How did we get here?

- We met Mara Jekabson in Wroclaw back in the summer of 2017. We were invited to the section *“Library Associations in Solidarity with Civil Society - Management of Library Associations”* at the IFLA WLIC conference to present our than actual affair with a movement *“Let us Teach”* and its professional supporter Civil Platform for Public Education.

What are you going to hear today?

- - a brief **history** of our NGO and the framework of its **objectives** and **operations**
- - a short report on the **escalation of a conflict** between the government and some teachers (....) in 2015

What are you going to hear today?

- - a **reflection** on the two years long cooperation with the movement “I would Teach” and its civil platform
- - **personal reflection** of five board members on their expectations, their experiences and the way they feel about the once promising movement
- - finally we will share our **dilemmas** as well

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The independent association

- School librarians have been present in the system of education and system of libraries since the 18th century. The school libraries as they are today, **functionally separated but integrated into the school** are in line with the European tradition. It has always caused a dilemma whether school libraries are cultural institutes in the schools, or they are a different entity, with special needs and methods.

The independent association

- In the 1970-ies the position of the school librarians **improved**.
- The most **forward thinking pedagogy** from the WEST was implemented into the school librarian's society.
- The new position opened up **new dilemmas**: which section of the Librarian Association represents best the interest of school librarians?
 - school librarians who worked at primary schools joined the Children Librarian's Section
 - secondary school librarians became members of the Young Adult Librarian's Section although there common goal was to provide the best services for students.

The independent association

- School libraries have different structure, since they are **not independent cultural institutes within schools**, but integrated parts **with special pedagogical tasks** and mission.
- As school librarians became more and more aware of their pedagogical role, the **need for an independent association** arose.
- At first the previously separated primary school librarians and secondary school librarians formed the **School Librarian's Section** in the Librarian's Association.

The independent association

- The time for independence came with the change of system, after the fall of communism. In the early 90-ies the mother organization did not really enjoy the idea of a new and independent librarian's association, therefore the school librarians decided to **form a new pedagogical association**, which is also connected with the Hungarian Librarian's Association.

The independent association

- Finally in **1997** the independent Hungarian School Librarian's Association was established. Witnesses of the events say that the motive of creating a new association was fueled primarily by professional needs, but individual ambitions played significant role as well.

The way to the independent Teacher Librarian Association

- 1935 - Hungarian Librarian Association (HLA)
- 1973 - Young adult section of HLA – platform for secondary school librarians
- 1974 - Children's librarian section of HLA
- 1986 – School librarian section
- 1997 – independent teacher librarian association

Evaluation of the situation 1.

- “The HuSLA has fought from the beginning on for the existence of the school libraries and the acknowledgement of library science in pedagogy, by being represented in the curriculum. They also fought for getting the school librarian profession recognized by the leaders of education and experts.” (Balogh, 2012, 35.)

Evaluation of the situation 2.

Strengths of the Hungarian school librarianship are:

- well operating libraries,
- committed teacher librarians
- fundamentally sufficient legislation
- library training is built into the national curriculum
- included in the information science final exam
- teacher librarian education is available at several universities
- we have journal and
- a nationwide library research skill competition
- and have the School Librarians Association as well.

However, to maintain the existence and the operation of school libraries we need more efficient professional assertiveness. The increasing number of HuSLA members reflect this tendency.

Evaluation of the situation 3.

- The education act of 2012 brought significant change to the education policy and effected the school libraries' service capacity negatively. The new clauses led to fusion of institutes, less school libraries and teacher librarian positions. The acquisition budget reached zero. Since the lawmakers decided to provide students with free course books the school libraries are flooded with them.

Evaluation of the situation 4.

- How to apply the guideline?
 - Starting point is democratic school model
 - Massive centralization contra democratic operation

HUSLA'S EFFORTS FOR FOSTERING PROFESSIONAL ASSERTIVENESS

The five pillars of empowerment our NGO offers to professionals:

1. **professional advocacy:** to empower school librarians to represent their professional interest locally by conferences, news on current issues
2. **to make policy statements,** form an opinion on draft laws, lobbying, participate in committee meetings
3. **dissemination to the general public:** gain prestige, improve the image of school libraries, gain publicity
4. **dissemination to professionals:** publicity in trade press (library and education), cooperation with other associations, institutes
5. **political advocacy:** organize protests and demonstrations

2015 - the rise of political and professional opposition

- From 2012 on many teachers protested against the new regulations:
 - the extreme centralization,
 - unpaid extra hours
 - the lost independence.

Step by step the government took away the financial and pedagogical independence from the schools. By massive centralization and bloated bureaucracy it became extremely difficult to manage schools.

2015 - the rise of political and professional opposition

- In November 2015 the teaching staff of the Herman Otto High School from Miskolc published **a treaty of protest against the changes in the education system** and many associations and teaching staffs (958)
- **35 000 civil protesters supported** it within a short period of time.
- The **HuSLA's** board decided to support the ideas and our NGO was the **33rd** organization which signed up for the treaty.

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2015 - the rise of political and professional opposition

- The situation escalated and led to the biggest ever seen protest in Budapest, the protest under checkered umbrellas with an estimated 200 000 protesters organized by the “I Would Teach” Movement in spring 2016.
- It was a real breakthrough and got reasonable amount of public attention.

2015 - the rise of political and professional opposition

- Several organizations of teachers, parents and students together with the HuSLA supported the movement, which questioned the fundamentals of the official education policy. By taking this position the movement took political stand, therefore HuSLA asked its members to vote before joining the movement's professional platform.
- Whose mission statement is:
 - “Civil Platform for Public Education (CKP) is a cooperation platform for civil society organizations and voluntary groups connected with public education sharing the same fundamental values as CKP.”

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2015 - the rise of political and professional opposition

- Since our association HuSLA is fundamentally a pedagogical association, the Civil Platform for Public Education found us easily in 2015, and invited us to the dialogue about the necessary changes we have to demand, in order to prevent our schools from being deprived of quality education and of quality library services.
- After 50% of the members and the board expressed their support, our NGO joined the Civil Platform for Public Education (CPPE), but we do not know exactly what did the other silent 50% think?

01/06/2016.	Teacher staff's open petition against massive centralization - Miskolc	HuSLA joins, signs the petition
January 2016	„I would teach” movement	
13/02/2016	Protest – checked umbrellas	members participated on their own
16/02/2016	Civil Platform for Public Education	HuSLA joins after asking the opinion of its members
15/03/2016	„ I would teach” protest 20-30 thousand people 80 organizations	HuSLA participated
December / 2016	Checkered book is published, the work of CPPE	HuSLA participated
05/02/2017	The Day of the Civils „I would teach” program	HuSLA went on stage with other organizations
19/02/2017	Gödör	HuSLA was present
30/03/2017		HuSLA's annual Spring Conference about the Checkered book's relevancy to school libraries

How the cooperation with CPPE influenced HuSLA's work?

- 1. **Professional advocacy** has always been the most important part of the work of HuSLA. The cooperation with CPPE set the agenda of the upcoming conferences and programs. I had the privilege to host the spring conference of 2017 at my school, where key persons of the Platform were presenters. The cooperation did not affect significantly our professional advocacy.

How the cooperation with CPPE influenced HuSLA's work?

- 2. **To make policy statements**, form an opinion on draft laws, lobbying, participate in committee meetings. Probably the work on this area is the most time consuming activity. While working with CPPE the need for giving expert opinion on draft laws has increased. On short notice we volunteers are expected to give an opinion on new bills, laws, bylaws. The fact that we worked with the Platform of the opposition did not help us to tighten our bonds with the ministry of education. We can assume that it affected our lobbying efficiency negatively.

How the cooperation with CPPE influenced HuSLA's work?

- 3. **Dissemination to the general public:** gain prestige, improve the image of school libraries, gain publicity.
- The work with CPPE brought us publicity, made us known to key persons of the education who published about us.
- We attended events where we had the opportunity to present ourselves to wider community. On this area our cooperation with CPPE was the most beneficial.

How the cooperation with CPPE influenced HuSLA's work?

- 4. **Dissemination to professionals:** publicity in trade press (library and education), cooperation with other associations, institutes. New doors opened to us, because we started the dialogue with other associations like the association of history teachers, and the organizations of parents and students as well.
- These groups our key partners of our work but we did not have opportunity to cooperate with them. We can assume that we stepped into limelight and were acknowledged by important organizations.

How the cooperation with CPPE influenced HuSLA's work?

- 5. **Political advocacy:** organize protests and demonstrations. We promoted the demonstrations of „Let us Teach” movement. We went stood with them under checkered umbrellas in freezing cold. We did our part.
- Unfortunately when the power of demonstrations seized the intensity of the professional cooperation got to a standstill as well.

Dilemmas:

- our most important aim is, to have a dialogue with everybody:
 - from the organizations of the students and the parents through professional teacher and librarian organizations to the government
- on the one hand we do not want to risk our reliability in the eyes of the governing body – therefore our political stand should not be our main drive in joining a civil cooperation which seems to have political ambitions
- our aim is to advocate school librarianship everywhere to everybody
- we work for professional school librarianship
- work for and not against something
- we want to cooperate with the governing body and would like to be heard by them and work together for the benefit of the students and the teachers
- we believe that good school libraries can make a difference in education to the benefit of the whole society

Subjective reflections 1.

What did you expect at the beginning of the work with the Platform?

1. Former president of the HuSLA

- Believed in the **power of collaboration**. I was **impressed by the devotion** of the intelligent experts. I liked the discussions about the problems, the openness to find solutions together. The courage to put pressure on the government and the ministries.
- It was visible from the beginning on that **only half of the organizations took part actively in the common work**.

Subjective reflections 1.

What did you expect at the beginning of the work with the Platform?

2. Actively participating HuSLA representative

- Discontent with the directions of education. Enthusiastic about the possibility to take action.

3. Actively participating former HuSLA board member

- The participation of great experts gave hope for a real change. Hoped that quality theory can change the practice too. The Checkered Book was a real possibility.

Subjective reflections 1.

What did you expect at the beginning of the work with the Platform?

4. Joined later to the cooperation with CPPE current president
Expected collaboration between professionals. The organizations of CPPE communicated intensively, therefore believed in real change.
5. Joined later to the cooperation with CPPE board member
Hoped for a greater change based on the intellectual greatness of CPPE.

Subjective reflections 2.

How did it work? 1.

- In the beginning I was **anxious** because many famous experts participated in the work of the Platform. They were able to see things from a different angle. I enjoyed the sparkling conversations, new points of views. To discover the complexity of the issues inspired me. The contribution, to read the pile of letters was time consuming. Looking back, I am happy that I supported the Platform and fought for the freedom of choice of course books, which is an essential and ethical question.

Subjective reflections 2.

How did it work? 2.

Widened perspective, got even more discontented with the situation. It felt good to do something and to work with the big names, their thoughts widened my sense of responsibility for the profession and for the society, became more passionate about advocating it.

How did it work? 3.

Was a coordinator and mainly listened and learned the culture of reasoning, finding new aspects. I helped them not to be too idealist. I was not too idealist in mobilizing teachers and unfortunately I was proven right.

Subjective reflections 2.

How did it work? 4.

It was great to see the passion of the participants and their readiness to act, which is atypical to Hungarians. It was rousing to hear similar ideas about the end of Prussian type of education, about the importance of bridging the gap.

Conflict avoider therefore naively believes in the power of the dialogue. In the beginning participated but got overburdened to carry so many tasks.

How did it work? 5.

Some occasions opened up the possibility to speak to people who we cannot meet otherwise. It was inspiring to see that people care for school libraries. Teachers appreciated HuSLA's courage and zeal to work with CPPE.

Subjective reflections 3.

What is the result? 1.

- It slowly died away, because the majority of the participants got weary, and most sadly many are afraid.
- Devoted teachers are so overburdened that they were unable to maintain the intensity and fervor. Active teachers fall into apathy for a reason, and only retired professionals tried to keep the movement alive.

What is the result? 2.

- Run out of steam. Precious professional papers. Became widespread that people can count on teacher librarians.

Subjective reflections 3.

What is the result? 3.

- It was difficult to form an organization of 50 partner organizations. Nobody knew what the work in CPPE really meant. The board of HuSLA did not know either how far they should go public with their work with CPPE, since the board must represent the opinion of the members and the moderates were afraid that the work with CPPE is regarded as a political stand. On the one hand they wanted to protect the prestige of HuSLA and on the other hand they were afraid of losing members.

What is the result? 4.

- Tried to participate, but after a time it became difficult to keep up with the pile of information. Gave in also because the members lost interest in working together actively with CPPE.

What is the result? 5.

- The movement's power faded partly because it became too theoretical.

Subjective reflections 4.

What are your feelings about it at present? 1.

- Sadness, anger and helplessness but nevertheless we have to be active we have to share the Platform's ideas. I believe in making a difference is possible if everyone does his best.

What are your feelings about it at present? 2.

- Remorse, lack of power, it is annoying that I cannot take part in it anymore.

What are your feelings about it at present? 3.

- Embittered. The majority of teachers lost interest in CPPE before it could reach its peak, achieve critical mass. Everyone should take stand, because no one can hope to get away with compromises. With this attitude it is not possible to make a difference.

Subjective reflections 4.

What are your feelings about it at present? 4.

1. Mixed feelings, does not want to be an accomplice in amortizing the system of education, but still maybe naively believes in the power of dialogue and professional cooperation. The future of the movement is not promising since teachers are overburdened and frustrated, they are waiting for getting retired and some of them are really close to it. Teachers are growing old and there are few young teachers.

What are your feelings about it at present? 5.

- Much work lying fallow, it is sad.

The decay of the movement and the Platform

Factors:

- the government stepped back and decentralized slightly
- volunteers worked, who after a time reached the limit of their capacity
- teachers fall into apathy, they are overburdened and hopeless

The enthusiasm and the belief that we can make a difference burnt out. Despite the decline of the movement we as a group and as individuals could learn that we are responsible for the system of education and the political system. Our view got broadened and we recognized that we are responsible for democracy.

What did we achieve from the civil collaboration?

- new partners from the field of education – we did not have many before
- we got to know organizations of students and parents
- school libraries appeared in the debates and papers
- we became more aware that libraries serve democracy
- our teacher identity increased

What did we achieve from the civil collaboration?

- we became aware of our responsibility
 - since the school library belongs to the school, what happens there influences our work directly or indirectly, therefore we have to take bigger responsibility for the whole organization, and the whole system of education
 - we have to have a stand-point about those issues of the school which do not affect the school library directly
- we stepped out from our comfort zone – from our usual circle of partners
 - we got new possibilities to advocate for school libraries, and the prestige of school librarianship has increased