

Interview with Nándi Varjú
Leader of Révai theatre group, Győr



The first interviewee of the Hungarian research was Nándor - alias Nándi - Varjú, 30, an active youth leader of the Révai theatre group. The group belongs to Subvenio Association, but is an independent, informal circle of students. They are connected to Révai, a local secondary school of humanities, where many theatre groups have been working for more than ten years. These groups rehearse regularly, and perform at local and national festivals. Nándi's group is a close-knit circle: they travel, go on trainings, and spend much of their free time together. The group currently has 11 members, roughly between the ages of 16-25.

Nándi started off as a student actor in the Révai theatre group in 1994, he became a youth leader in 1999, and now he also participates in managing various activities. When he went to university to Budapest, he started to see things differently, and decided that he too can lead a group and direct a theatre play – so this ambition motivated him. Besides this, he didn't only want to meet youth within education and lessons, but in informal situations as well. (Nándi has a degree in teaching Hungarian language and drama pedagogy.)

The activities of the theatre group stretch from September to May, adapting to the school year. The autumn period means they practise the basics once a week, then they choose a play and start rehearsals. During school holidays they have sessions with the other groups, in spring there's festival season, development of the performance, workshops, and finally performances in different festivals.

The group goes to trainings regularly, sometimes abroad too. There are acting and drama pedagogy courses in town, where members can take part. Sometimes they organise an open day, so that students who come and see the lessons become interested in acting. This year Nándi would like to step further, and start a basics training within the group, for those youngsters who intend to pursue acting.

Nándi says that difficulties – just like with so many non-profit and youth organisations – lie in the lack of funding. He says they don't even give it a try, because it is virtually impossible to find resources for youth theatre groups. Apart from that, he says that applications mostly take more effort than success. (However, in the meantime, they got support from EU Youth initiatives.)

"It happens that one thinks: I have to give it up, I've run out, empty, it doesn't make any sense."

Nándi has reached this point a year ago, when he stopped most of his youth work, but stayed with his group as a leader. ***"It is a big investment, mentally and emotionally."***

Experiences? People skills, group dynamics, of course conflict solving, he says. In a theatre group, young people firstly learn how to communicate, to speak up, to make friends. Besides that, there's an old circle of friends, a community where members can always go back to. As Nándi is an amateur actor and director, he uses his skills and knowledge every time.

According to him, there are a lot of mistakes he doesn't commit as a leader anymore: he learnt to treat situations routinely. An example: a big question of theatre groups is who stays and who goes. Now he doesn't force members to stay. ***"If they feel that participation is a must, then rather don't. If youngsters feel they have a choice, it's much better."***

At school, in Révai, getting new members is easy, because acting has a long history. The students seek out Nándi that they want to join. **"If there's a channel, you don't have to move a muscle for the youth to come. Whispered propaganda simply works."** There's a contact person at school, a teacher, who provides youngsters with all the information. At the beginning of the year, the first date and time of the theatre group is published. Apart from that, says Nándi, students already see acting and theatre in the freshmen's camp.

Yet when he had to get theatre group members in another school, it was much harder. The age groups of students were different, he was unknown, and had a tight deadline. Nándi had to contact people in person: he went to classes, class teachers, parents' meetings, put out posters and flyers, and had an open lesson. He tried to involve teachers, but they didn't want to help, saying Nándi should do it on his own. **"I'd rather assess the community and the environment better."**

"The question is always if we need a crowd, or efficient people." According to him, six determined people work better than fifteen who don't know what they want. Nándi says that regular work and opportunity to act are important, and that youngsters get what they expect from the group – these are essentials. **"Those who are serious about acting will stay, those who come and go will drop out – this is the natural selection process. After a while, all youngsters will go towards a goal."**

"Maximum empathy is important towards personal issues of the members." Nándi says a leader needs to be patient, reliable, and listen to the youngsters' problems. This is quasi a father-role, because he is available in and outside the rehearsals. A leader has to be a qualified and skilled professional, and consistent with planning. **"It doesn't work without devotion, because this is not a job, rather a part of our everyday life."**

He says the most important is that everyone finds their own role in the group. He thinks a good leader is not one who does everything well, but one that distributes tasks well. **"Theatre is the most democratic dictatorship, as it needs a charismatic person who determines it, yet if everything is about him, the members won't have a good feeling."** Nándi says that a group should be together outside "work" too, because if the leader can handle the members privately, the work relationship will also function. In the theatre group, everyone understands that he's the leader, he knows how to get somewhere, and therefore accepts his opinion.

According to Nándi, Hungarians understand youth work differently than in Western Europe, and it cannot be separated from money matters. **Here we can talk about youth movement, self-organisation, not youth work.** There are lots of youngsters in Hungary who want to do more, but youth work is a movement, or self-initiative, as there are no resources for professional youth work in Hungary. If youth work existed as a job, it would be a very different setup. From the point of view of young people, youth work has a bad taste: "we have to do it, cause they said so". This really influences them, because youngsters don't understand the point, only when they see results of youth work. An example: last year, Mediawave (a local film foundation) did a film-making workshop for youngsters. Nándi says the youngsters had to be "kicked" until they finally managed to make a few films, and now they have 2-3 festival awards. The youngsters couldn't even imagine this, because they aren't taken seriously anywhere. **"Adults have the word in conferences, they say what's what, but young people rarely have the chance to talk about their opinion and experience."**

Interview by Marta Czibik, 2008