

Interview with Viktor Pósa, the leader of Kocka Association of Designers



kocka
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History of Kocka

Kocka Association was founded in 2003 by ten designers, as a professional organization with non-profit scope. Viktor says that the founding members knew each other from university, and had similar ambitions – applying for funds to make exhibitions and projects that cannot be realized by a for-profit organization.

The association is connected to designing, although its members often do volunteer projects. Originally, the organization aimed to become a regional centre for applied artists, but as Viktor says, this didn't really work out, although they managed to build up good relationships with designers of neighbour countries.

Activities

The main activities of Kocka Association are exhibitions of design artists and different projects connected to applied arts. They have regular workshops, and apply for funding sources to the Hungarian state. According to Viktor, there are periods when not much happens, because of lack of funding and personal involvement. This is due to private issues of members, and the fact that some people also got involved in other organizations and projects.

Kocka has a few founding members and a new group of young artists, who recently joined them. Viktor says that they have some conditions for newcomers, because many similar guilds don't set any requirements, which influences the quality of their work. At Kocka, new people mostly have to prove their abilities by working with them. However, he says, "Kocka has always been open."

The most important project for Viktor was *Formál* design exhibition in 2004. This design exhibition lasted one year and was also taken abroad. Four members took part in the organization, and twelve artists exhibited. "This project got the most resonance, and mobilized the most people", he adds.

Motivation

When asked about his motivation, Viktor starts explaining the current situation of his profession. As he says, the designer guild in Hungary is underdeveloped. Among with a few young professionals, their mission was to further this issue, and to add a different point of view. "I think that people need to know that fine arts and applied arts are different – and I wanted to do something about this." He says that the association gave him a forum that a single designer could never get. His personal motivation was to get experience in working in an association, and though he thinks applied arts will remain on the periphery, he will continue to work.

Leadership

Viktor thinks that a leader has to include everyone, that's what makes him a leader. He was elected as president, because the members thought he can oversee most issues. There are some hardships for the leader of a non-profit organization, he says. "You really need to have a dictatorship, but then what about democracy." On the one hand, members volunteer freely, out of willingness and

good fun. On the other hand, someone needs to get them through the projects, he says. "When it comes to dividing tasks, things can get a little funny. If someone pulls out the whip among a bunch of equals, there will be resentment and hurt feelings." Viktor says that not everyone can accept a hierarchy, which is natural in a for-profit company. He says it's good if everyone has an own project to manage, to see how they fare as leaders. He adds: "It's good that people put in the maximum out of good mood, and because they get something in return. A leader has to accept what people contribute from their heart."

Viktor says he basically learnt leading skills, project management from A-Z, application writing and management while working for the association. "As an employee or simple designer I wouldn't have met these tasks." He reckons he wouldn't really do things differently, only as regards team work. He says that Kocka could use some cultural managers and project leaders as members, so that projects could be done in a team.

Members and trainings

Getting new members at Kocka is not a regular activity, and they don't have measures to do that. The new members - that he mentioned before - wanted to organize their own projects. They needed an association for that, so Viktor suggested them to join Kocka. They were introduced to older members, and as they saw more advantages to join than disadvantages, these young artists were taken up. Now this young group has become active, representing Kocka at festivals and exhibitions, and Viktor says they are pushed forward, so that they can connect to a wider, professional circle.

At Kocka, trainings are professional meetings, conferences or workshops. Members can provide for their own trainings: they can apply to scholarships and use the background of Kocka Association that can give them an advantage, Viktor says.

Characteristics of successful non-profits

When asked about successful organizations, he first talks about the socio-economic background in Hungary. "All organizations are tied by the financial and social structures. Not only because there's no money, though this is an important milestone. People have no money for quality free time, as most of them are busy with making ends meet, so not much time is left for civic activity. Only few have a capacity to care about the community." He thinks the right attitude to be successful as a non-profit organization is relentlessness, patience and endurance. "If a leader gets tired mentally, then he can't expect anything else from members either. Enthusiasm has to last."

Viktor reckons that the atmosphere at an organization always has to be positive, maintained by the leader. The leader has to bridge the problems and tensions which come from the differences of people. "Especially in an NGO, everyone has to feel good, otherwise they turn bitter and leave."

He thinks that it's not enough if members work together on projects, but they need to get together in other activities as well. "It's a basic human trait that we get on well with those that we know and trust." He says there should be an opportunity to meet up for a chat any time with anyone from the organization.

What to teach young members

According to Viktor, the question of young people is often "how do I start?", so they need an impetus to make the first and second step. He also thinks that activists of his age have to teach young people to communicate with the older generations, to show what to learn from them. "A task of Kocka Association is to sponsor young professionals, and to bridge the gap between youngsters and older people of our profession."

About the role of NGOs

Viktor thinks that civic organizations, or NGOs have a strange situation in the Hungarian society. They cannot work properly, partly because of the economic situation. "A non-profit organization forms people's attitudes, forms more open and cooperative people, so that they recognize that they have power and rights." Viktor thinks if people are trapped in a pressing situation, they only think of themselves, and can't contribute to civic society. This, he says, is a socialist incrustation - not to speak up and be visible in public. Viktor says although non-profits should not be involved with changing attitudes, they still need to take up these tasks, if they want to keep on working.

Interview by Marta Czibik, 2008