

===== Eszter Kovács =====

/// Informal operation, formal presence

The functioning of the Friendship Art Camp in Gyergyószárhegy in the Ceaușescu era (1974–1989)

This case study is aimed at reconstructing everyday life at the Friendship Art Camp (Barátság Művésztelep, Tabără Artistică Prietenie) founded in Gyergyószárhegy (Lăzarea) in 1974.¹ My objective is to examine the functioning of the Camp, as an institution operating informally throughout the whole year, but formally an event organised just once a year by the Committee of Socialist Education and Culture (hereinafter, ‘Cultural Committee’).² The camp was a comprehensive system of reciprocity and trust, which vitalised economic, social and personal relations in particular. It included *hidden practices*, *open secrets* and *unwritten rules*,³ in other words areas that greatly determined everyday life of the era examined. In my view, quasi-publicity could not only be created in a festive way (that is, making use of the representation of social publicity), but also through informal administration and by mobilising resources necessary to complete these administrative tasks.

The operation of the Art Camp bears the marks of nationwide changes in Ceaușescu’s policy. The population restrictions, introduced in order to repay the

1 = = The study was made in the framework of „Szeklerland self-image building in the 19–20th century”. Number of the project: NKFI 128848.

2 = = When I apply the term ‘Camp’, I mean the entire institution operated by Lajos Zöld. *Art Camp* only refers to the one-month event. The Hungarian and Romanian names of the Committee: Hargita Megyei Szocialista Nevelés és Kultúra Bizottsága, Comitetul Cultural de Educație Socialistă și Culturală.

3 = = Ledeneva, *Global Encyclopaedia of Informality. Understanding Social and Culture Complexity, I.*, 1–3.

international loans taken out during the 1960s and 1970s,⁴ put a great burden on citizens and hampered everyday life. Due to the economic bankruptcy that set in Romania in the mid-1980s and to the state strategy of repaying foreign loans, cuts in public services became continuous, so it was difficult to provide for the everyday needs of the deprived population. The drastic withdrawal of electricity, heating, food and fuel supply forced everyday people into specific survival practices. The answer that the powers that be gave to the economic failure was a series of hard-line ideological campaigns and a personality cult. On the other hand, the theses formed during the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Romania on 6 July 1971 resulted in more powerful political, ideological education and indoctrination in public education as well as cultural life.⁵ It also involved the turning of propaganda into something more spectacular, the selection of cadres and a limitation of cultural and media content coming in from the West.⁶ Due to the ideological rigour, minority institutions shrank and emptied (also in contents).

As far as cultural life is concerned, after Ceauşescu came to power (1965), a new direction of socialist culture appeared: cultural policy was transformed into consumable, mass culture. Public education continued to operate under state funding and control, and the previous network of institutions was expanded to include art schools and Houses of Folk Art.⁷ In this period, public education, entertainment and cultural services came to the fore. Among teachers, so-called cultural work became mandatory, which meant compulsory cultural and folk work outside of school. The *We Sing Romania* festival was founded in 1976, it was held annually, and in this they sought to combine ‘movement-like’ national cultural events under a single unified system, divided by area and genre. It was out to foster ‘socialist consciousness’ and provide ideological lectures with a revolutionary tone. The purpose of the festival was to popularise mass culture and indoctrinate the population. All artistic manifestations in Romania—amateurs and professional alike—went under the name of the *We Sing Romania* movement.⁸ Gyergyószentmiklós and

4 = = The programme pledging Romania to repay all foreign loans by 1990 took effect in 1983. It created problems in the country, as following the oil crisis in 1979, the consumption of electricity, gas and fuel was diminished drastically, and in 1982 the rationing of food (of milk, butter, cheese, fish, vegetables, fruit, meat) forced the population to fight for survival. Novák, *Aranykorszak? A Ceauşescu rendszer magyarságpolitikája I.* 1965–1974, 84.

5 = = The so-called ‘mini cultural revolution’.

6 = = Novák, *Aranykorszak? A Ceauşescu rendszer magyarságpolitikája I.* 1965–1974, 25.

7 = = Novák–Tóth-Bartos, *Társadalmi változások a szocializmus időszakában*, 756–757.

8 = = Ernei, *A román kultúrpolitika evolúciója a Ceauşescu-korszak utolsó két évtizedében*, 428–429; Oancea, *Mass Culture Forged on the Party’s Assembly Line. Poli-*

the surrounding settlements were also active members of the nationwide public culture network, as all state units were required to participate in various national and local cultural events.

Despite all this, the Art Camp had no wish to propagate socialist culture or to attend the festival. Visual artists were out to meet international expectations and participate in the exchange of professional experience from an early age. In the Art Camp people spent free time within an official framework, but had completely different interpretations, depending on the perspective of different groups. The artists saw the Camp as an island where they could create, have fun, and exchange ideas without ideological constraints. It also provided the cultural committee and other county leaders with a space and opportunity to relax away from the public. The following analysis seeks to reconstruct this.

= = Methodological aspects and conceptual framework

In the case study, the everyday life of the Art Camp is reconstructed from semi-structured in-depth interviews,⁹ memoirs,¹⁰ archival documents¹¹ and notes of a field diary.¹² The functioning of the Camp is closely connected to the two oldest buildings of Szárhegy, the Franciscan monastery and ‘one of the peak performances of socialist restoration,’¹³ Lázár Castle.

One of the main concepts of the theoretical framework of the study is *informality*, which marks the application of non-conventional patchworks of behaviour as opposed to formal rules and official procedures, activities going on behind the official scene.¹⁴ Taken in the broader sense, *informality* marks the *open secrets*,

tical Festivals in Socialist Romania 1948–1989, 54–60; Vasile, *Mișcarea artistică de amatori la începuturile regimului Ceaușescu*, 1965–1971, 140.

9 = = Some of the quotes have been anonymised.

10 = = Lajos Zöld's work describing everyday life in the *Art Camp*. Zöld, *A víz szalad, a kő marad. A gyergyószárhegyi barátság művésztelep 25 éve/1974–1999*; Recollection of Albert Májai, chairman of the one-time cultural committee of Hargita county. Májai, *Rezsimek szorításában*.

11 = = Based on protocols and correspondence referring to the *Art Camp*, found in the Hargita County Branch of State Archives, and in the Archives of Archdeaconate of Gyergyószentmiklós at the Archidioecesis of Gyulafehérvár.

12 = = The case study is part of a research conducted within the framework of the the author's PhD dissertation (Kovács, *Informality, self-organization, quasi-publicity. Culture, sport, ordinary discussions, church holidays and entertainment in the Gyergyó-basin in the 1970s and 1980s*), the main subject of which is a reconstruction of everyday life in the Gyergyó-basin during the 1970s and 1980s.

13 = = Kovács, 'Fejedelmi építkezések Erdélyben', 9.

14 = = Misztal, *Informality. Social Theory and Contemporary Practice*.

unwritten rules and *hidden practices* existing in society,¹⁵ that is the ways people deal with their issues in a variety of areas of life.¹⁶ Alena Ledeneva uses the Russian word *blat* as an example for the socio-political and socio-cultural factors of the phenomenon. Informal connections formed due to the shortage economy were called this way in the former Soviet Union. The phrase was used to denote a form of management, the way people dealt with their official issues through their personal connections, in a system of mutual favours. *Blat* helped people gain their basic necessities, like work, housing, helped the kulaks get out of prison, and even provided Party members the opportunity to baptise their children despite prohibitions.¹⁷ Ledeneva's approach—going beyond the works concentrating exclusively on economic motivations—draws our attention to the unique social practices of informal self-organisation and institutions, to the possibility of examining elements appearing in a regional, local or even individual linguistic context.

I chose Ledeneva's informality approach for the analysis of the case study. The informal dimensions and their ambivalences include the following: 1. Informal social relations are at the forefront of *substantive ambivalence*. They are characterised by the sociability of human relationships, social closeness and the instrumental nature of relationships, i.e., the difference between the interest-based use of relationships and the ambivalence of their intertwining. The ambivalence of exchanges in reciprocal relationships is also perceptible, due to their form of being 'neither payment nor gift'. The cases and their context may explain whether the given mutual assistance was for friendly, gift-giving or instrumental, interest-based attention.¹⁸ 2. *Normative ambivalence* points to the open secrets of identities. They consist in representations of identity-based belonging and in the manifestation of related consumption habits, patterns of behavior, ritual practices (religious, music, arts, etc.). Normative ambivalence places participants in the dichotomy of 'we' and 'they', signifying both acceptance and exclusion. This duality helps to see the complexity of identities by pointing to the operation of multiple identity

15 = In colloquial Romanian, the equivalent of the Soviet *blat* was *PCR*. The acronym seemingly referred to the Communist Party of Romania (Partidul Comunist Român); however, in popular terms it referred to *Pile—Cunostințe—Relații* (ties, knowledge, connections), which was required to deal with administrative issues. Stoica, 'Old Habits Die Hard? An Exploratory Analysis of Communist-Era Social Ties in Post-Communist Romania', 172–175.

16 = Ledeneva, *Global Encyclopaedia of Informality. Understanding Social and Culture Complexity I*, 1.

17 = Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange*, 11–38; Id.: "'Blat' and 'Guanxi': Informal Practices in Russia and China', 119–127; Id.: *Global Encyclopaedia of Informality. Understanding Social and Culture Complexity I*.

18 = Makovicky and Henig, 'Introduction: economies of favours', 125–127.

constructs present at the same time.¹⁹ 3. *Functional ambivalence* has been associated by authors with the informal economy, and its simultaneous supportive and destructive effects. They argue that survival strategies (in the form of the second economy) often compensated for state regulations, while by circumventing the system they depended on it. The gray zone between the formal and informal spheres shows the duality of practices brought to life by needs and the series of irregular action resulting from mere passion, the satisfaction of needs and the ambivalence of greed (need and greed).²⁰ In some cases, combinations of ingenuity, cooperation and tolerance could forge survival into a thriving business.²¹ 4. *Motivational ambivalence* refers to the characteristics of the informal exercise of power. One of the central themes of motivational ambivalence is the case-specific features of the asymmetric, vertical relationship system of patron and client. Each of the definitions highlights the continuous, long-term and short-term exchange of resources, material goods and services between the patron and the client. These relationships are vertical, where the patron has greater power, recognition and resources. The patron-client relationship refers to systems of mutual trust and involves two types of obligations.²² I only use all four ambivalences, when warranted.

Another central concept used to describe communist everyday life is the quasi-public sphere.²³ This space strived to pull out traditional, ethnic values saved in the private sphere of life and place them into the official sphere. It was physically fairly formal, official; however, it also gave space for arranging informal events. On such occasions, in order to keep a lid on it, the event was built from the elements of both spheres, in accordance with possibilities and needs. Since in that era official publicity only functioned as a representative publicity, values smuggled into the public sphere were realised in a festive context, mostly within the framework of festive events. Due to the almightiness of power, everyday life aspired after pulling out its hidden values and intruding them into the official space, or to conquer spaces thus far unknown for itself.

19 == Ledeneva, *Global Encyclopaedia of Informality. Understanding Social and Culture Complexity I.*, 10, 213–217.

20 == *Ibid.* 2, 3.

21 == Radnitz, 'Conclusion: how do tools of evasion become instruments of exploitation?', 151–153.

22 == Semeneva, 'Conclusion: do patron-client relationships affect complex societies?', 403–408.

23 == The concept is defined by Julianna Bodó in her research describing society under communism in Szeklerland in the 1980s. In her work, she discusses the mechanism of the regime and individuals along the lines of various social events. Bodó, *A formális és informális szféra ünneplési gyakorlata az 1980-as években*, 56–63, 106–107.

= = The initial circumstances of the Camp

The idea of an art camp occurred to the organisers Lajos Zöld,²⁴ Árpád Márton,²⁵ and András Gaál²⁶ who had originally imagined it to be somewhere around Csíkszereda (Miercurea-Ciuc); however, all their plans eventually failed. Recollections date the start of the Camp to the visit to Áron Márton, the bishop of Gyulafehérvár (Alba-Iulia), the time when the three organisers agreed with the bishop to rent the building of the monastery for the Art Camp. Renting it would mean restoring the building. András Gaál and Árpád Márton were in charge of the professional work, chose and invited the artists to take part. Lajos Zöld was tasked with providing accommodation, catering and the means to do art. After signing the lease, Lajos Zöld set out to restore the monastery with great enthusiasm.

During the initial phase of the Art Camp, the consequences of the ‘theses’ passed on 6 July 1971 were already significantly felt. Despite this influence, at the very start the founders agreed on the fact that no ideological impulse could stand in the way of art.

‘[...] Everyone paints, draws, carves whatever they wish in Szárhegy. In case something is not to the liking of the present authorities, it will be kept in storage waiting for better times to come.’²⁷

During the entire lifetime of the Art Camp bore the marks of the intergrown, tense relationship of the Catholic church, the Communist Party and the Hungarian minorities. Zöld took the role of the ‘moderator’ in this situation. His position at work provided him a widely accessible social space, and while performing organisational tasks, he created the quasi-publicity balancing between the private and the official spheres. Zöld obtained firsthand information about the operation of large companies and different institutions and the changes going on within them, and he was also on good terms with their leaders and managers.

24 = = 22 December 1932–14 November 2014. Zöld was a journalist originally from Gyergyószárhegy. He was the editor of *Előre* between 1955 and 1957, and later worked for the periodical *Ifjúmunkás* and the regional daily *Hargita*. Following the regime change he went on to work for *Hargita népe* until 2003. Between 1974 and 1995 he was the leader of the Friendship Art Camp.

25 = = Born on 6 October 1940, Márton is a painter from Gyergyóalfalva. He has lived in Csíkszereda since 1964 as an art teacher at the Márton Áron High School. He is a founding member of the Gyergyószárhegy Art Camp.

26 = = 9 March 1936–6 August 2021. Gaál was a painter and graphic from Gyergyóditró. Between 1959 and 1999 he worked as an art teacher at the Márton Áron High School of Csíkszereda; from 1973 he was the graphic designer of *Hargita napilap*, chairman of the regional branch of the National Association of Fine Arts, founding member of the Gyergyószárhegy Art Camp.

27 = = Zöld, *A víz szalad, a kő marad. A gyergyószárhegyi barátság művésztelep 25 éve/1974–1999*, 15.

Between March and July 1974, before the first camp was launched, they set out to restore the monastery building, the primary goal being to provide the basic infrastructure for participants. The storage director of the consumers' co-operative, the manager of the wood plant in Gyergyószentmiklós, the managers of the furniture factories in Gyergyóditró and Galócás, the director of the joinery in Szárhegy, the vice-chairman of the People's Council and the manager of the dry-cleaning workshop in Gyergyószentmiklós were all simultaneously 'moved' to support the Art Camp, to be started in August, with resources (building material, specialists, furniture, food).

'In the part of the monastery, where the building had collapsed, they placed a notice of life danger. The refectory was a total mess, so he renovated that too. He brought in members of the congregation from Gyergyó, who worked day and night, except for Saturday. From March to August they did such a great job, that thirty of us could sleep on the floor, on hay and things like that.'²⁸

Truth be told, the money for the work came from the Communist Party. They had a specific permission for the renovation, since the plant managers had helped the launch of the Art Camp for free or for a minimal pay.'To put out their eyes, jot something down there and leave the rest to me,' said the manager of the wooden engineering works.²⁹ Minor or major maintenance jobs were often performed at the expense of the state. '[...] [T]he legs of some calves in the collective farm of the neighbourhood also broke.'³⁰ The phrase refers to the fact that calves were slaughtered illegally to provide daily meals for the Camp. The pretext was, of course, illness, since in that case animals could be slaughtered and did not have to be surrendered.³¹ The above-mentioned practices could be regarded as *survival strategies*, among which, in order to fulfil needs, there was a symbiotic relation between formal rules and informal behaviour.³²

I consider the Art Camp to be self-organising for two reasons. Firstly, the Creative Camp, organised annually and lasting one month, did not officially function as an institution. It was only considered as a routine cultural event organised once or twice a year by the Cultural Committee of Socialist Education in Harghita County (Harghita Megyei Szocialista Nevelés és Kultúra Bizottsága; Comitetul Cultural de Educație Socialistă și Culturală). However, in day-to-day life it operated as an independent cultural institution. That also was one of the most

28 == Anonymous interview, code: R23.

29 == Ibid. 11.

30 == Ibid. 17.

31 == Hunya, *România 1944–1990*. 93.

32 == Ledeneva, *Global Encyclopaedia of Informality. Understanding Social and Culture Complexity I.*, 2, 3.

worrisome problems of the Camp. Such events were to be approved by the National Cultural Council and the regional Party committee, and that was the only way to finance the event. Lacking an independent status, the Camp could neither have its own employees nor an own leadership. To put the Camp in a legitimate framework would have been a practical decision. However, this would have complicated the functioning of the Camp even more, as it was impossible to reconcile the strict financial regulations with the organisational and purchasing strategies already established. Thus the Art Camp could not be integrated into the economy built according to communist rules.³³

When the Camp opened in August 1974, time thirty artists came and stayed for a month in Szárhegy. At the end of August, they hosted the first exhibition of the Friendship Art Camp, consisting of the works created during that month. The exhibition was held in the Gólyás Bastion of Lázár Castle. The Art Camp was legitimised by the officials of various bodies, who praised it as a symbol of Hungarian-Romanian friendship. Reports of the event were published both in the local and national press.

= = The renovation of the monastery—informal ties

In the following years, just as in the beginning, the development of the Camp was determined by the intertexture of informal reciprocal connections. These covered the plumbing of the bathrooms and toilets) in 1975, the reconstruction of sections of the monastery (patio and stairs) in 1977, the renovation of the refectory, the parquet floors (1978–1979), for which in most cases ‘payment was a “thank you”.’³⁴ For the first time, works of art were given away as presents. This would happen every time they were unable to pay for the work and tools, due to the lack of funds. They would compensate help with a work of one of the painters. ‘If I was hard up, he’d sit down and paint a picture as a gift, without saying a word.’³⁵ Lajos Zöld recalls the contribution of painter József Balla.

‘Now, those who always gave something, would always receive a painting from Lajos, mainly painted by Balla or by me. Lajos would say, “Jóska, we need two paintings today, they’re bringing us dinner.”’³⁶ ‘Laji would go down to the furniture factory in Ditró and say, “I need 20 beds, guests are coming in two weeks, they have to sleep somewhere. We can give paintings in return, Andris Gaál is here, he is yours, you’ll get a painting.” His manners were catastrophic.’³⁷

33 = Szabó, *Kooperáló közösségek*, 58.

34 = Zöld, *A víz szalad, a kő marad. A gyergyószárhegyi barátság művésztelep 25 éve/1974–1999*, 23.

35 = *Ibid.* 24.

36 = Anonymous interview, code: R23.

37 = Anonymous interview, code: R47.

The examples refer to substantive ambivalences of informality disguised in giving gifts³⁸ in exchange for furniture or other fixtures. The paintings were a form of payment, embodying a bestowal of greater value, reciprocating help, in order to maintain a relationship of exchange, one meant to be long-term. So a painting given as payment functioned both as a bestowal and a compensation.³⁹

Zöld endeavoured to provide as much as possible for the leadership of the cultural committee as well, as official transfers (money for the expenses), those that could be accounted for, arrived from them. Informal gatherings, organised for the cultural committee, also served that with purpose,⁴⁰ and the parties, the food and drinks, the elevated mood were all created for the sake of a long-term fulfilment of needs, in the spirit of friendship. In this case, we may also consider the connections maintained with the members of the cultural committee to be both instrumental and sentimental. They had, however, advantages from a financial viewpoint and concerning the legitimacy of official interactions as well.⁴¹

Works of a smaller scale, like the laying of roof tiles or woodwork, were done by villagers. There was a circle friends, an active team consisting of young adults,⁴² who were always ready to help and work.⁴³ The men did the heavy work, while the girls served food and drinks at the dinner following the closing events of the Art Camp.

‘Laji’s gesture of giving us the refectory of the monastery or the Knights’ Hall for weddings or New Year’s Eve—established a system of trust with us.’⁴⁴

In exchange for their help, Zöld was willing to return favours to these young people. According to recollections, the joint efforts were already perceived as a form of entertainment, since back then recreation was largely limited to events organised by the powers that be (in the form of cultural competitions or sport movements). In addition to voluntary co-operative work, they organised small gatherings for themselves, and on New Year’s Eve they were given the use of the refectory and its kitchen, together with the cooking staff. When the Lázár Castle was ready, couples

38 == ‘Substantive ambivalence’ means that, where for the participants it was more the social nature of connections (friendly and family ties) that stood out, outsiders or observers only saw connections of interest. An ambivalence of exchanges included in the reciprocal connections can also be observed in these practices, due to their form of being *neither gifts nor commodities*. Ledeneva, *Global Encyclopaedia of Informality. Understanding Social and Culture Complexity I.*, 1, 9–13.

39 == Makovicky–Henig, ‘Introduction: economies of favours’, 125.

40 == Common New Year’s Eve parties.

41 == Ledeneva, *Global Encyclopaedia of Informality. Understanding Social and Culture Complexity I.*, 1, 9–10.

42 == They were called Young Friends of the Camp.

43 == In 1987, they adopted the name the Community of Young Friends of the Camp.

44 == Note of field diary, 28 December 2019.

could use the Knights' Hall for weddings for free, again, with the cooking staff. The arrangement of these occasions of exchange were kept together by the ties of the regional village community. The integrating institutions were the primary and secondary institutions of socialisation—families and the school community—as well as the church. Also, many of them worked at the same plant or factory involving intimate, personal connections, which strengthened during the work procedure. The members of the group were proud to belong to the social institution associated with Lajos Zöld, which they confirmed by taking part in the work, following the norms required, receiving and giving gifts.⁴⁵ An exclusive group formed, in which the team was given access to the goods and social advantages provided by Zöld. They had a common ethnic, local, religious connection with the sense of belonging and commitment to the Camp. By being able to connect to Zöld's activity, they had to adjust to the norms of a group, which required conformity as well.⁴⁶ Consequently, if help was necessary, they had to be available, and those that were not attracted by that requirement gradually dropped out.⁴⁷

'It was a little privilege too, as not everyone was in this circle of friends. It brought together more skilled young people, so to say, who were more talented than others. They made up a really great circle of friends. We would obviously also get a glimpse of the art world too.'⁴⁸

'It was good to be in touch with him and belong to this company. We saw him living a higher standard of life, better than what we got, but we weren't jealous at all, since he gave a piece of it to us. Just a banal thing, you couldn't get a bottle of good wine, wherever you went those days.'⁴⁹

The relationship of Lajos Zöld and the Young Circle of Friends of the Camp was characterised by reciprocity and redistribution. Lajos Zöld gave free access to the resources of the Art Camp in exchange for the work provided by the youngsters. The other feature typical of the mutual informal assistance of Zöld and the young people was motivational ambivalence.⁵⁰ Zöld, not as a journalist, but as the leader of the Camp (albeit unofficial) exercised informal power, with the goods and possibilities for entertainment he provided, by which he engaged the youngsters in co-

45 = Szabó, *Kooperáló közösségek*, 59, 64, 113.

46 = Ledeneva: *Global Encyclopaedia of Informality. Understanding Social and Culture Complexity I.*, 10, 213.

47 = One person remembers that, although he had belonged to that circle of friends, he did not take part in the 'voluntary work' organised by Zöld, because this mutual, obligatory relationship of exchanges did not apply to him.

48 = Anonymous interview, code: Rg.

49 = Anonymous interview, code: R6.

50 = One of the focal topics of motivational ambivalence include the characteristics of the asymmetric, vertical system of relations of patron and client. All of the definitions highlight the continuous, long-term and short-term exchange of resources, goods and services between patron and the client. These connections are ver-

operation. The young people, aiming to access symbolic and other goods, fulfilled Zöld's needs. Simultaneously, a connection between patron and client lasting for several years, can also be observed. The connection was vertical, due to the political, social and age particularities of Zöld. He had access to the resources young people needed (entertainment, leisure, financial and symbolic goods), and at the same time Zöld was the one to decide on the conditions of the exchange of the 'goods'. Concurrently, we can talk about a mutual system of trust, an interdependency, within which a mutual ethnic, local and small community (the Art Camp) obligations provided a frame of reference.⁵¹

Members of the Young Circle of Friends of the Camp recall the joint potato picking and harvesting as voluntary co-operative work; however, external works also involved dozens of skilled workers. When constructing the patio for instance, in the midst of other, larger projects, Zöld brought in people from the factory. On such occasions, the workers completed their yearly labour service and the women working in the factory cleaned the building of the monastery. They were obviously exempt from their daily duties at their workplace on those days. Labour service or 'patriotic work' (*muncă voluntară patriotică*) meant mandatory community work outside working hours in schools, factories, institutions and the army, and in this case, it was done during working hours. It meant a free human labour force for the socialist economy, especially for agriculture, to ease the effects of inorganisation, bad planning and, on the whole, an ineffective economy.⁵² Feeding such a community workforce was another challenge to deal with. Secondary businesses were created for this purpose. Swampy lands near the Szárhegy railway station were used for growing potatoes, the area had previously been used as a garbage pit by the villagers, who mostly got rid of their building waste there. The potatoes were used to raise the pigs bought by Lajos Zöld, which were kept at the collective farm of the village. A deal of that kind made the operation of the Art Camp similar to that of a farm in the country, where, due to scarce income and in order to cope with the shortcomings of supply, gaps in the official farm were filled in.⁵³

tical, where the patron possesses greater power, recognition and resources. The connections are defined by original inequality. It is normally the patron who decides on the conditions of the exchange of goods. The connection of the patron and client marks a system of relationships of mutual trust, and includes two types of obligations. Firstly, it refers to obligations based on family, religious and ethnic values (or all of them) and, secondly, to official commitments, which have the client depend on the patron. Semeneva, 'Conclusion: do patron-client relationships affect complex societies?', 403–408.

51 = Ledeneva, *Global Encyclopaedia of Informality. Understanding Social and Culture Complexity II.*, 2, 343–344; Semeneva, 'Conclusion: do patron-client relationships affect complex societies?', 403–408.

52 = Dascălu, 'Modelul "Omului nou" în ideologiile totalitare din România secolului XX', 43–47.

53 = Szabó, *Kooperáló közösségek*, 188.

‘[...] [S]uch an amount of work could not be done without a glass or two of wine or pálinka. I exchanged potatoes for wheat, which is where the pálinka came from.’⁵⁴ Potatoes grown on the land of the Camp, as well as those granted by Zöld’s friends were taken to Buzău in exchange for wine.⁵⁵

The Cultural Committee of Harghita County paid the daily allowance of the invited artists, their travel costs and the materials necessary for artwork; however, the daily allowance itself often did not even cover the cost of meals.⁵⁶ So they came up with another source of income: candlemaking.⁵⁷ An additional, alternative source of income for the Camp was the Beauty-Creating Co-operative Work, started in 1978, which suited the phenomenon of folklorism, that had emerged in the 1970s. It was an official requirement to build public cultural education on the foundation of folk culture. The symbolic characteristics of villages and the countryside were widely visualised and thematised.⁵⁸ As the building of the monastery became habitable even during the winter months following its restoration, every year in October folk artists occupied the rooms. They wove, sewed, carved wood, made wrought iron tools. János Kardalus, director of the House of Folk Creations gathered the folk artists of the region, who worked there for a period of one month. The rooms of the monastery and the refectory were furnished with these items of furniture, textiles, and they even sold hundreds of objects. Despite the fact that Zöld and his partners had an argument over the necessity of the Folk Art Camp, it generated a lot of income for the Art Camp. The objects they made there were given as presents to visiting Party delegations.

‘I said we didn’t need folk art, he said we did. There was an artist who said “Laji, all we need now is toothpicks”; however, the women wove vast numbers of rugs. I didn’t even go there when it took place in October.’⁵⁹

The secondary farms operating next to the Art Camp did have official connections to some extent, but the goods were not sold through official channels. According to Töhötöm Szabó Á., from the moment the powers that be are no longer able to control an exchange, regardless of whether cash is used in it, then it becomes informal.⁶⁰ ‘[...] [T]he affairs of the Camp were almost always in-

54 = = Zöld, *A víz szalad, a kő marad. A gyergyószárhegyi barátság művésztelep 25 éve/1974–1999*, 105.

55 = = The first exchange occurred in 1984, when three carts of potatoes were exchanged for wine.

56 = = Májai, *Rezsimek szorításában*, 179.

57 = = It was co-operative work of making candles with the involvement of local women and the workers of the village telephone exchange. They produced decorative candles, which were wrapped and sold.

58 = = Demeter Csanád, *Rurbanizáció*, 135.; Ștefănescu: “Cultură tradițională” în România în perioada comunistă. O analiză din perspectiva studiilor culturale’.

59 = = Anonymous interview, code: R23.

60 = = Szabó, *Kooperáló közösségek*, 191.

extricably hazy.⁶¹ The Cultural Committee confirmed the sources of income at the Camp with official receipts, and Zöld requested payments from the Committee, but they were not always approved. On several occasions, the local plant managers would submit receipts concerning supplies and materials they had donated to the Camp, expecting the Cultural Committee was to pay.⁶² Another point of connection to maintain the appearance of officiality can be read in the reports of the cultural committee, according to which the Camp gained almost as much money from work on the side, as it cost to maintain itself; however, its own its own income cannot be compensated by funds transferred by the Cultural Committee. Consequently, reports mention the Art Camp having its own sources of income, but besides mentioning one or two examples, these are not discussed more broadly. Thus, the secondary farms operated by the Camp were to some extent legitimated. Starting the restoration of the monastery in the 1970s may not have entailed a financial crisis, but the funds transferred for the Camp were not enough to cover the costs. It should also be mentioned that the ‘church-building’ ideas of Lajos Zöld greatly exceeded the financial limits and ideological restrictions. For that reason he was forced to work out strategies to save capital.⁶³ It became an essential part of the Art Camp—not unlike any typical mass sport event in Szeklerland during the 1970s—to accumulate community capital, as well as to create a background of connections of trust.⁶⁴ These bonds at local level unfold in connections maintained with other villagers and the elite of the village (Party secretaries, plant managers, leaders of institutions, teachers, priests, etc.), and a broader level of locality is found in contacts with the managers of plants in the neighbourhood. The next level was a good personal relationship with the county Party committee and Cultural Committee (including the leaders of the intelligence of Transylvania), publishers, editors of periodicals, writers, poets, etc. Systems of connections formed through different social spheres also served to improve one’s personal economic situation. Official institutions provided legitimacy for cooperating, which can be defined as a moral act against the hostile state.⁶⁵ By contrast, the Art Camp, utilised the resources of the regime and was considered collective success. The operation of the Camp, its vision and net of connections show that an informal institution of public

61 = = Zöld, *A víz szalad, a kő marad. A gyergyószárhegyi barátság művésztelep 25 éve/ 1974–1999*, 51.

62 = It must also be mentioned, however, that in comparison to the receipts submitted, the human and material resources weighed a lot more. Májai Albert, *Rezsimek szórításában*, 178.

63 = = Szabó, *Kooperáló közösségek*, 188.

64 = = Péter, *Forbidden Football in Ceausescu's Romania*. 19.

65 = = Szabó, *Kooperáló közösségek*, 194.

utility functioning under communism was operated by means of complex human contributions simultaneously possessing more worldviews and identities.⁶⁶

= = The restoration of Lázár Castle—the use of informal political ties

In 1981, restoration works of the building of Lázár Castle in Szárhegy began in a stricter social atmosphere.⁶⁷ It was a period when renovating and rebuilding a Hungarian monument in the name of preservation was not only impossible but also dangerous.

The restoration of the castle was assisted by managers of plants and factories in the neighbourhood, who also provided help during the renovation of the monastery. Nevertheless, from the point of view of cultural heritage management and from an economic viewpoint, it meant an investment of a much bigger scale. Therefore, in the description of this period, the emphasis concentrated on the exchange opportunities accumulated from the relationship with the Party apparatus and higher bodies in general. I aim to reveal the layers of power, connections with which determined these years, and how and with what purpose the occasions of exchange took place.

It soon became obvious that the Cultural Committee would never foot the full cost of restoration, meaning that other sources of income had to be found, as well as an official building permit. Lajos Zöld's official job as a journalist of *Hargita* and his informal job as director of the Camp, embody a passage between the 'upper' and the 'lower' world. He straight away turned to the highest bodies for help: first to Imre Pataki,⁶⁸ president of the regional People's Council, who transferred 180.000 leus, on the condition that he would for no more help. Despite the fact, that the sum was only a tenth of the total cost, it gave legitimacy to begin restoring a Hungarian monument, which could only have been otherwise achieved with great difficulty or not at all. 'The money I am transferring will be good as a sign-board, indicating that the project is official.'⁶⁹

66 = = Ledeneva, *Global Encyclopaedia of Informality. Understanding Social and Culture Complexity I.*, 213.

67 = = Chronologically: restoring the gate bastion of Lázár Castle (1981), renovating the Knights' Hall (1982), turning the attic above the Knights' Hall into an exhibition hall (1983), tidying up the courtyard of the castle, continuing construction and roofing works of the north-western bastion of the castle (1985) and restoring the Renaissance battlements (1987).

68 = = Imre Pataki was the vice-chairman of the regional Party committee in the 1970s; however, later he was not included in the leadership of the communist Party. Novák, *Holtvágányon. A Ceauşescu-rendszer magyarságpolitikája II.* (1975–1989), 122.

69 = = Zöld, *A víz szalad, a kő marad. A gyergyószárhegyi barátság művésztelep 25 éve/ 1974–1999*, 78.

The birthday party of József Szász, first secretary, thrown in the refectory of the monastery, was also a fund-raising event. After he was greeted with a painting by András Gaál, Lajos brought up the plan of restoring the castle's gate bastion. József Szász promised to support the restoration of the castle to the best of his abilities. While the birthday party was clearly about asking for help, the invitees had not been informed about this.⁷⁰ This was yet another case in point of exercising informal power. Firstly, Zöld achieved his goal through thoughtfulness driven by interests, and, secondly, by laying on pressure.

'The point is, that comrade Szász was regional Party secretary, and they made a big fuss about him. Lajos Zöld then invited the managers of the foundry, the I.U.P.S.⁷¹ and all the factories, and he said, "you will do this and that, won't you?," and everyone looked at him "like at a bloody knife" because no one dared to say "no" in front of comrade Szász.'⁷²

Construction promptly began a week later. Works were suspended for the duration of the Art Camp; however, the male participants of the Folk Art Camp (together with the women they were a hundred and twenty) were already working on restoring and furnishing the gate bastion.⁷³ The wages of the construction workers were paid for by the managers of the Gyergyószentmiklós Mechanical Plant and the Wood Plant and the oak boards were paid for by the Cultural Committee. The Szárhegy bricklayers and electricians worked for free at weekends. The renovation of the castle could only be realised with help from high-ranking Party officials at regional level, so being on good terms with them was crucial. The first task was always to legitimise the activity and single out someone who could be turned to in case of trouble. Imre Pataki, József Szász, Albert Májai, Maria Cofas, János Kardalus—all strengthened the official status of the Art Camp's activities. Not only did the Camp operate in an informal way, but it also provided space for organising other informal events, such as weddings, baptisms, graduation banquets, etc. This formal space was a tool of legitimation of informal events. The regional leaders and the members of the Cultural Committee that appeared at the opening and closing sessions of the Camp served also tools tools of legitimation. Furthermore, it was considered to be a place where identity could openly be expressed.⁷⁴

70 == The plant managers believed that József Szász wanted to meet them. Szász assumed the contrary, so they were all surprised by the gathering and did not dare to refuse the future contribution to the restoration works of the castle by providing material and human resources. Ibid. 78.

71 == Woodworking factory.

72 == Anonymous interview, code: R34.

73 == Ibid. 78.

74 == Bodó, *A formális és informális szféra ünneplési gyakorlata az 1980-as években*, 60–64.

In 1982, they set out to renovate the Knights' Hall in order to make a room for exhibitions, meetings, to have meals and sleep in, to organise conferences, so that after the contract signed with the owner of the monastery expired, the Art Camp and the Folk Art Camp could be continued. Works in in the Knights' Hall went on in 1983. This time the aim was to turn the attic into a hall for exhibitions. The conversion costs and the timber blocking were paid by the Cultural Committee. József Szász, regional first Party secretary paid a visit to Szárhegy again, where, following a friendly discussion, he promised to provide for the restoration of the gate bastion, sketches of which had already been approved by the National Committee of Cultural Heritage Management, and they were only waiting for an approval from above. The visit served as an 'encouragement' for the Cultural Committee concerning the approval. The restoration works of the gate bastion were proceeding with incredible speed, since, as Zöld had suspected, the success of the work could mean a promotion for József Szász.⁷⁵ With this in mind, they even managed to finish restoring the Renaissance battlements within the next two years, by 1987. In his recollections, Zöld describes the people helping him accomplish ideas—that is, members of the regional Party Committee, leaders of the regional Cultural Committee, local plant managers, intellectual leaders of Transylvania—to be members of one community, sober individuals willing to take risks, with a strong identity. Before the wave of dismissals, in addition to Imre Pataki, József Szász was the 'bastion' of the Art Camp. The main role of the regional first Party secretary was to prevent conflicts, and to make sure the regional Cultural Committee approved the events going on at the Art Camp. The ideological rigour—which left no room for compromise—reached its peak in 1989. Under orders from the regional Party committee and the Cultural Committee, the Friendship Art Camp was disbanded. By then, Ion Oancea was the president of the Committee. In November, the Folk Art Camp was organised nevertheless, albeit with very few participants. The 1972 Party conference set out a rotation of cadres, meaning that important county leaders were to be changed every 3-5 years. This percolated down to in Hargita county in waves, and in the 1980s it did not leave the Art Camp untouched. In 1986, Aurel Costea was brought in from Máramaros, replacing János Csorba. Within a few months, first secretary József Szász was moved to Krassó-Szörény county and his position taken over by Aurel Costea. For the first time, a county with a Hungarian majority had a Romanian Party leader.⁷⁶

75 = = Zöld, *A víz szalad, a kő marad. A gyergyószárhegyi barátság művésztelép 25 éve/1974–1999*, 111.

76 = = Novák, *Holtvágányon. A Ceaușescu-rendszer magyarságpolitikája II. (1975–1989)*, 75.

== Summary

The case study sought to sum up the sixteen years of the Friendship Art Camp in Gyergyószárhegy, focusing on the interactions of the regime and individuals. The emphasis was on reciprocal relations (taking the form of cooperation), informality, quasi-publicity and the systems of relations accomplished within.

No history of the Art Camp would be complete without discussion of the person of Lajos Zöld. He was very well connected and well informed on the non-public aspects of public and cultural life. He became acquainted with architect Jenő Németh at the inauguration of the furniture factory of Gyímesközéplak. The construction work could not have been accomplished without his expertise and his workers. The old furniture and carpets were given to him by the manager of the bath company in Tusnád, which would otherwise have been thrown out. He learned from Sándor Bertalan, regional secretary of the People's Council, that the council building was being fitted with a central heating system, meaning that it would no longer be needing its old stoves. Zöld had the stoves disassembled and taken to Szárhegy.⁷⁷ He knew who to approach with requests for help or advice, and was well acquainted with the whole region and local elite.

'[...] [A]s a journalist he knew whom to turn to if he needed fuel, specialists, material, people, as he had visited large local businesses and plants as a journalist, and there were like-minded comrades in the county too.'⁷⁸ 'He also had good connections with the university. Géza Domokos, the director of Polis publisher in Kolozsvár, and Gyula Dávid used to come here a lot, too. They would talk a lot. He also came to meet Károly Király, who spoke of him fondly, saying that although he was a communist, he knew that he was Hungarian and belonged here, and would do so that.'⁷⁹

He considered himself to be an adaptable man in his work, referring in particular to his relationships with the regime. 'I have always been a man of compromises, I have always preferred a dialogue at a white table to bravado.'⁸⁰ However, he never let his ideas be disrupted, and he would not accept refusals of any kind. This involved tough behaviour, though, which often elicited aversion in others.

'I cannot claim that with my dictatorial manners and firm conduct I didn't create a great number of enemies for myself.'⁸¹ Despite these manners, he received appreciation for the institution he ran and the cultural values preserved and created.

77 = = Zöld, *A víz szalad, a kő marad. A gyergyószárhegyi barátság művésztelep 25 éve/1974–1999*, 12, 23, 51, 94.

78 = = Anonymous interview, code: R12.

79 = = Ibid.

80 = = Zöld, *A víz szalad, a kő marad. A gyergyószárhegyi barátság művésztelep 25 éve/1974–1999*, 11.

81 = = *Ibid.* 104.

‘If it was not for Lajos Zöld, it would have long been ravaged.’⁸² ‘I don’t know if anyone else could have accomplished all of this. He had connections, he talked to the artists in one way, with the others in another way. What remained, though, is very valuable, for sure. He exploited his journalist background, as he could have attack, or publish an article that could have caused trouble, but everything he did, he did it for Szárhegy.’⁸³

The objective of this analysis has been to observe the possibilities of those operating the Camp, in relation to the ideological procedures. It can also be established that the social structure of the communist system of Romania cannot be simplified as a dichotomic system of those in power and those lacking power. The same person would possess formal power, and in the same time local elements of identity confined to the private sphere.

Zöld operated a well-functioning second economy, not only for survival and to meet needs, but also for a larger source of income. On the other hand, Zöld and his social circle represent a specific patron–client relationship, revealing his informal methods of exercising power. He was able to convince the factory managers, plant managers and leaders of the Cultural Committee, especially in the cases that proved to be difficult, by approaching people from the county Party committee or asking them to put pressure on the local leaders. He and local leaders like him in the examined period, as Katherine Verdery puts it, were bureaucrats in close contact with the highest layers of the power elite. They prioritised the interests of the community, and were also characterised by a kind of careerism. Their activities attested to personal influence, efficient allocation of resources, and reciprocal relationships, which enhanced their reputation, and they enjoyed a kind of prestige, which was recognised locally as well.⁸⁴ They were also able to use this prestige among locals to carry out new cases. Their activities influenced cultural policy in the opposite direction that of the power.⁸⁵

82 = = Anonymous interview, code: R34.

83 = = Anonymous interview, code: R22.

84 = = Verdery, *Compromis și rezistență: cultura română sub Ceaușescu*, 54–55.

85 = = Kiss Ágnes, ‘Informális gyakorlatok a romániai kommunista cenzúrarendszerben’, 185–221.

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==== **Interviews** ====

Transcripts and recordings available from author on request.

Personal, anonymous interview, code: R6, 9 July 2020.

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Personal, anonymous interview, code: R34, 23 October 2020.

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