

---

## **Art enterprises in Hungary today regarding changes both in economy and arts (moving from the centralised system to the market economy) – status report and problem analysis**

Ágnes Tibor

### **A few examples to help better understanding**

The painter from a small town is pessimistic as he is not able to live on selling his works of art. The fact that he is the director of the local House of Arts besides puts him in a somewhat more advantageous position regarding daily contact with the local white-collars, his social reputation that goes beyond his region, and some, though very little, fix income. The latter is a must for him as academic schooling of his children consumes huge amounts of money. His duties and his financial situation do not let him refuse requests like one of the local government's to paint a picture of the freemen of the town for payment, of course. This is his greatest sorrow as he says. He feels it unworthy opportunism and he is ashamed of it.

The nursery teacher contended with her work for decades, got a new hobby a few years ago. She started creating nicely formed, appealing puppets embodying fable figures that are favoured by nursery and primary school children. Her hobby developed into an enterprise by now. She provided the necessary financial basis with the support of her family. She bought a few sewing machines, hired a shop (which functions today as a shop floor and storage at the same time), she saved money for overhead expenses, and she purchased the raw material needed. Then she agreed with two seamstresses, she thought over the expenses of advertising and PR especially, transport and accounting. Her business skills have made her known and have given her financial stability, what is more, her enterprise have become slowly profitable. She not only sells in her shop but also posts the puppets by order to schools, nurseries, puppet-shows and individuals.

The former nursery teacher does not esteem herself as an artist but she enjoys running her life this way and she does not entirely split with pedagogy either. She teaches nursery and primary teachers how to utilise the pedagogic features of puppet games and she gives lectures and presentations in nurseries, schools and international and local conferences.

The folk-art craftsman makes trappings. Three decades ago he started to learn from his uncle who was considered as a most qualified craftsman. He stroke out on his own 10–12 years ago about the time when Hungarian equestrian sport was reborn. (This was the time when foreigners realised the Hungarian opportunities like genetically promising animals, highly qualified breeders and riders, charioteers and the growing number of quality riding schools. Specialised in harness, the craftsman creates unique, exacting and finely finished pieces of work that are more in demand. His reputation is a grapevine and sometimes he can grow his income by not billing if the customer does not require...

Only architects, interior designers and graphic designers graduating from the Hungarian University of Craft and Design can easily get employed or find a job at least. The glass, silicate, metal designers and photographers have more difficulty to find jobs. Those graduating from the textile faculty (knitters, weavers and dress designers) are often not able to do what they have learnt and prepared for in school even after long years or they are forced to compromise. The prospects of industrial designers and film animators differ very much however their chance to make good in Hungary is very little. (The writer's own experiences were supported by a statistics made by the Hungarian University of Craft and Design in the summer of 2001 where 350 graduates of the previous years filled the questionnaires).

Are the careers of the professional painter, the hobby-artist nursery teacher or the craftsman mentioned above typical or characteristic in the Hungarian circumstances today? Can we draw the conclusion of these three and of the many more very similar examples that the professional artist succeeds harder? If so, what is the explanation? Do present students of the Hungarian University of Craft and Design have to count with the same prospects once they have finished their studies and want to get employed, and intend to get on both professionally and financially.

Should we expect in the long run that industrial artists (industrial artists deal with applied art theoretically) graduating from certain faculties will be able to become successful in their own fields only by great difficulties or after long waiting? It is quite certain that the problem is not "overproduction" especially if we consider that at the Hungarian University of Craft and Design the rate of students accepted and those graduating is much lower compared to other academic institutions. Also if our graduates get employed abroad or take part at international contests they compete very well with industrial artists from other countries.

What can be done then for the sake of qualified artists to be able to succeed professionally, morally and financially according to their knowledge and skills?

### Questions rising in the researcher of the succeeding of artists

1. What does "succeeding" mean to artists? In what way is financial succeeding important to them? (Experiences show that they mean professional recognition under financial succeeding rather than this recognition manifesting in credit.) At what age or which phase of their career do they declare its importance (do they admit it at all)? What is the reason of ignoring financial matters?
  - Parents supporting them longer than those of non-artist parents (because they are well-off or they appreciate their artist child or they went through the same or all these reasons together)?
  - Art students would sacrifice everything on the altar of self-realisation?
  - During their student years they have their heads in the clouds (no tuition fees, they have little) financial needs?
2. Can we generalise according to the examples mentioned in the first part that the professional (with academic degree, "real") artist can find his place harder within the Hungarian circumstances today than the artisan producing quality products?

3. If so, what is the reason?

a) Reasons can be found within the artists' personalities

- Circumstances moving towards market economy, which most of the artists have not been able to adapt to?
- Those of the "higher" artists (the ones with college or university degree) feel inferior to "peddle" in the market?
- Are artists anti-entrepreneurs by default?
- Do they feel adapting to the demand equals with prostituting?

b) Reasons might be found in the drastic change of ratio between arts (or other human values) and material well-being as not any more so disdainable value? That is, the demand for art products is decreasing in contrast to the need and demand for "practical" material goods?

c) The changed order of support cut the ground from under artists' feet (being quite stable financially before)?

- Is financial stability a must for artists to be able to create?
- Did the appreciation (sometimes right, sometimes not so justifiable) of the professionals and qualified juries provide artists with a more convenient background to create in contrast to today's more erratic world?
- Has the order of support for artists really changed or simply the target group is different now?
- If the order of support changed, in what ways? Did it happen or it has been changing continuously?

4. If poorer succeeding of professional artists in the new circumstances of the market economy is not typical then

a) Which are the features of market economy complicating the succeeding of artists:

- growing expenses of artists (even with low financial needs) including money spent on their cultural needs and schooling of their children
- growing prices of materials they need to continue artistic work
- the mentality of non-materially thinking and creating artists in a world with totally different values (at least at the present)
- the judgement (right or wrong) of the market instead of only of the professionals'
- the spread of cheap culture coming from the media generated by profit-oriented multis, forcing back the representatives of higher cultural values
- set-back of financial stability mainly among the white-collars who have higher cultural needs
- tougher competition as a result of the open market.

b) Which are the features of market economy facilitating the succeeding of artists (in contrast to the non-market circumstances of the past):

- chance to broaden their ken regarding easier acquaintance with works of other artists' and easier placement (and applicability) of their owns
- market economy is more general, exact, long-term, legally clearer, has more exact conditions (these features have strong influence on purchasing and selling in the lives of artists as well)
- coherence between income and market prices and its perspicuity

- those artists with economist skills, ambition and capital have better chances than earlier when they were tied up by ideological reasons.
5. Artists are creative-minded. Can they be creative in other fields as well (e.g. in building and running enterprises)?

## Developments of the past few years – attempts for art enterprises

### *Artists sought for in the economy*

First of all we must mention those had become successful earlier, whose reputation comes from the past era ensuring continuous and well-paid orders. There are many others succeeding as freelancers, others again work together with their professional partners and companions, or with talented colleagues. These are searched for by the multis even from abroad. Their political relations also support (a smaller group of them if the actual political party is in charge).

Another group of them consists of those very talented, young artists who managed to make a name for themselves early in their careers by winning tenders, working abroad or through family connections. Many of them are employed by the new millionaire generation gifted with a good taste for art and they also get a number of orders from abroad. One, maximum two artists work in such enterprises normally who are also practised (though not professional) in the economical matters of their own businesses.

A third group “has been called to life” by growing demand in the economy. This group includes graphic and web designers, architects, interior designers and industrial designers in a smaller amount. They usually work in 4–12 person enterprises, share the tasks so they can better utilise their capacity and complement each other professionally. Their greatest problem is the lack of a manager. In the first place it is because of the small number of qualified art managers in Hungary. In the second place these small groups are uneasy to accept anybody not from their profession, and in the third place if one of them is gifted not only in arts but with manager skills and knowledge as well, s/he is hardly ever willing to deal with financial and administrative matters.

Family businesses that are formed to provide the young artists with a professional role to develop and renew the enterprise by their work.

### *Artists who realised the truth in the saying “do-it-yourself”*

Most of the time professionals join in groups behind which are great ideas and desperate persons. Their economic knowledge and financial background is shaky, their existence is risky.

Those who try to raise money for their existence by tenders and sponsorship come from the same circle. They often do not have a clear idea of how to manage an enterprise this way in the long run. Sponsors and won tenders take these small businesses to a different direction from what the original “dream” was in many cases (if they manage to get these supplies at all).

### *Enterprises coming into existence by the active help of art mediating institutions*

It is mainly about a lucky encounter of institutions, lost their former functions and searching for legitimacy (small town halls, cultural associations), and artists looking for a manager. The artist wins the competition/tender in which the institution gave him help by providing the infrastructure and in organising matters. In return the institution partakes in the money gained by the artist. These are almost exclusively local examples.

### **Conclusions**

As a teacher of economic studies I consider as my prime task to make my industrial designer students acquainted with those economic conditions determining their creative work, living and professional success. During the past one and a half years (since I have been working with them) my students have gone through great changes individually and on the whole. The essence of this change is in their realisation of the fact that artists (even if they might stand above society) live in this world and they have to succeed here. (Being famous in one's death is great, however it cannot compensate for the misery of life). More and more of them show concrete interest in how they might become a more active ruler of their own lives. This year, for example, 60 students applied for the Design Manager Faculty as they want to learn how to manage themselves and their own products beside artwork.

I would like to believe my researches, sharing the results of these with my students, and my teaching work also helped this change a little.

### **Epilogue** (which might be called prologue or source description as well)

Above mentioned have all been written without the claim of completeness. They might be seen as the blueprint of an examination called "the economic and moral succeeding of artists within the local community and with the help of it". Professional materials in connection cannot be found today in Hungary. The only exception is the previously mentioned survey made by the Hungarian University of Craft and Design in 2001 "The situation and chances for development of design in Hungary", in which the writer of this paper took part as co-author.

The materials of this paper were collected from interviews made by about a dozen of Budapest and another dozen of provincial art entrepreneurs, full time design manager students taking part in the graduate and postgraduate training of the Hungarian University of Craft and Design, and teachers of the school.