

Touches on sensitive topics  
thought-provoking  
It gave me shivers  
Understandable  
Life-like Radical  
Uncomfortable Closeness  
Honest  
Humorous  
Different



TOM  
LANTOS  
INSTITUTE

# “New World” complex educational package



MINISTRY OF  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE  
OF HUNGARY



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The text does not necessarily represent the collective opinion of Tom Lantos Institute.

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## Introduction

The fight against antisemitism through the means of education should begin from as early an age as possible. Various informal, educational projects exist that work towards this goal, using a number of different methods. However, these projects often operate separately and on an ad hoc basis in educational institutions, hence they lack an overarching concept or idea for the students. This makes the projects less efficient, and their short and long term impact becomes more difficult to evaluate.

Generally speaking, Jewish history and religion are not part of the national curriculum in secondary schools. In the rare cases when aspects of Judaism are taught, the main focus is on the Holocaust, which often has a negative and counterproductive effect. For this reason, the main objective of the New World project was to educate students on topics such as Hungary's role in the



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Holocaust (which is still not fully accepted by Hungarian society), prejudices, radicalisation and Jewish identity.

With the professional leadership and support of the Tom Lantos Institute, a complex educational project was realised. Its components build on each other, following a single line of thought: it incorporates the performance of the play *New World*, a subsequent drama-based pedagogical session and finally, 2-3 weeks later, an informal educational class led by the Haver Foundation. Each step of the programme was evaluated using a variety of methods such as mini-interviews, participants' reports and questionnaires. Following a short literature review, this report intends to give a summary of the concept, structure, conclusions and results of the project. The report is dedicated to participants and leaders of similar initiatives, as well as to a wider audience of individuals interested in the topic.

## Theoretical framework

### A) School as a platform for (de)radicalisation

Educational institutions play a major role in shaping one's value-system. According to the findings of the IC Thinking (Integrative Complexity) research team, having a narrow, simplified value-system makes individuals more susceptible to radical ways of thinking and to the commitment of verbal or physical assaults (Nordbruch 2016). Therefore, the first, preventative step against radicalisation is through the promotion of critical thinking and of civic education<sup>1</sup>. These enable students to develop a complex value-system and identity (Nordbruch 2016). However, whilst school communities can function as a tool for the prevention of radicalisation, it can also function as a platform for sharing radical beliefs too. To illustrate this with an example (that we will come back to later on), according to the teachers of one of the participating classes, the reading of

<sup>1</sup> In Hungary, the Foundation for Democratic Youth has been focusing on the promotion of critical thinking and democratic education for a long time.

Mein Kampf, denial of the Holocaust and praise of Ferenc Szálasi (leader of the far-right Arrow Cross Party in 1944-45) have all become increasingly accepted by the class because of certain class members' influences. This is why secondary prevention is equally important, which focuses on individuals that are already affected by radical beliefs. Educational institutions have a great responsibility on this stage too, since if schools succeed in creating a platform where students can express themselves freely, teachers will be better able to detect the first signs of radicalisation in their students (Nordbruch 2016). On the other hand, some teachers do not think it is their duty, or do not possess the right set of skills and methods, to actively contribute to the sensitization of students to delicate subjects or to their potential deradicalisation-process. Even if teachers recognise the importance of this task, they often delegate responsibility to external actors. In order to change this, it is essential that teachers receive appropriate training for democratic education<sup>2</sup>, preferably during their primary training.

In order to make deradicalisation truly successful, it is important to understand the motives of the adolescents who end up joining radical groups. According to Tore Bjorgo (2002), researcher of far-right extremism and hate crimes, while a person's similar ideological belief might be a factor, a more significant reason for joining such groups is based on the desire to find an identity; to belong to a community. In many cases, this comes together with a need for self-expression against societal norms, something that is very much present in radical groups. A Hungarian representative study drew similar conclusions: it is the feeling and experience of belonging to a community that attracts youth to far-right groups the most (Félix-Gregor 2014). Bjorgo claims that exiting such groups completely is a multistep process, in which leaving the community often feels like a deprivation of one's identity. Therefore, the role of platforms that facilitate the process of deradicalisation, as well as the role of society in a wider sense, are crucial for its success.

<sup>2</sup> For example, this was achieved by the "New Democratic Education in Practice" intensive teacher training in 2014, in Hungary. They divided participants into four groups: participants, teachers, students and observers. The goal of the training was to simulate the democratic founding of a school and its further steps of operation, by means of various interactive methods, games, mini-courses and film projections.

## B) Theatre in education - drama-based pedagogy

Using theatre as an educational tool is a relatively new concept, which emerged in the 60s in the United Kingdom (Bethlenfalvy - Lipták 2008). Educational programmes using theatre pedagogy / theatre in education are defined in the 2017 edition of the Handbook of Theater Education and Pedagogy (*Színházi nevelési és színházpedagógiai kézikönyv*) as the following (Cziboly 2017: 10):

1. They are primarily designed for students of state school education.
2. They include a theatre piece or sequence of scenes. These can be built on any form of verbal or non-verbal self-expression (such as: prose theatre, puppet-show and figurative theatre, dance-theatre, musical theatre, circus, performance, etc.).
3. They have a pedagogical objective.
4. The outcome of the programme substantially depends on the contribution of the participants. In the course of the programme, they can openly react to and reflect on its content.
5. The programme can be repeated to several different groups.

Drama as an educational tool is not only a method for highlighting a particular issue or message, but also a way to encourage young people to appreciate theatre itself. The role of classroom theatre is to create an environment where participants can express their opinions freely, and where everyone gets heard. Thus, this educational method is non-hierarchical, where students learn both *from* and *of* each other (Bethlenfalvy - Lipták 2008).

In Hungary, multiple independent theatres and theatre companies have youth participation in their shows and educate young people on global issues through creative and engaging activities. In 2017, the *Handbook of Theater Education and Pedagogy* counted 119 national organisations that provide theatre-based pedagogy programmes (Cziboly 2017). It can be argued that Hungary is at the forefront of theatre education on an international level, regarding its diversity, popularity and quality (Cziboly 2017: 6). The first such initiative in Central-Eastern Europe was the Roundtable Theatre Education Center (*Kerekasztal Színházi Nevelési Központ*) of Gödöllő, Hungary, now operating in Budapest. For students, its performances can be attended free of charge. The

Káva Cultural Atelier (*Káva Kulturális Műhely*), "the theatre of participants", builds on similar ideas: each of their plays are centered around a global or moral problem, which has to be actively solved by the audience. The theatre company firmly believes that learning how to make a decision in a fictive situation will help in our decision-making process in real life too.

### C) Informal education against prejudices

One might raise the question of why we need such informal educational projects like New World in today's Hungary, something that directly focuses on the topics of antisemitism and Judaism. The research of Mónika Kovács (2000), Hungarian social-psychologist, sheds light on the deficiencies and problems of history education in Hungarian state schools. Her findings also provide an answer for our initial question, at least partly.

According to Kovács, the Hungarian political environment after the fall of the Berlin wall can be best described by a certain sense of "defence mechanism", due to the country's communist past and the history of Hungary's actions committed in World War II being impossible to collectively face and process. Such a passive and confused attitude to historical facts is present in today's history education as well. Although schools can choose from a variety of state-approved textbooks, there isn't enough time allowed by the national educational framework to illustrate the Holocaust through personal stories, or to show students the importance of empathy through situational games or tasks (Kovács 2016). An often obscuring, relativizing definition of the Holocaust can contribute to radicalisation gaining ground. Perhaps informal education can fill in these gaps of formal school education.

Last but not least, it is important that different institutions, groups and organisations share their knowledge and resources with each other, in order to create a more efficient educational programme (Ramalingham 2014). In the framework of New World, we aimed for exactly that: we created a cooperation of educational institutions, civic organisations and theatre-based pedagogy professionals, who worked together in order to find a multidisciplinary, comprehensive answer for a societal problem.

## The work of the participating organizations

The Tom Lantos Institute is an independent human and minority rights institute, founded in 2011, functioning as a research and educational platform in Hungary. Its goal is to build bridges between research and politics, as well as between norms and practice. Its strategic goal is to spread awareness and knowledge of human and minority rights through research, education, public debates, publications and memorials. Within the institute, four different programmes operate: the Human and Civic Rights of Romani people programme, the Hungarian minorities programme, and the Jewish life and Antisemitism programmes, all of which comprise the Human Rights and Identity programme. The New World complex education package was realised in the framework of the Jewish life and Antisemitism programme. The goal of the programme is to safeguard Hungary's Jewish heritage, inform future generations and to stand up against antisemitism through various educational and research projects and events.

The Lifeboat Unit (*Mentőcsónak Egység*) started its work within the Szputnik Shipping Company (*Szputnyik Hajózási Társaság*), and then continued to function independently, in order to create theatre pieces that are concerned with specific social issues. In the course of their work, they came to the realisation that prejudiced thinking, negative discrimination, discriminating rhetoric and hidden racism are increasingly present amongst Hungarian adolescents. This is why Lifeboat Unit has already launched several educational programmes focusing on prejudice, extreme poverty in Hungary, racism and the refugee-question. They swear by the importance of educating about discrimination against disadvantaged groups through theatre, and believe that they can increase a sense of tolerance and solidarity in their audience, especially in young people. Andrea Pass, the writer and director of New World, tackles important social and global polemics in her other plays too, with the aim to critically reflect on the world that surrounds us.

The Haver Foundation (*Haver Alapítvány*) was established in 2002. The organization's voluntary teachers give informal, interactive lessons about Judaism to high school and university students. The classes are built around specific topics such as Jewish identity, Jewish culture and tradition, history, the Holocaust, and Jewish religion and communities. Its primary objective is to dispel existing

misconceptions about what it means to be Jewish, through group-discussions and games that focus on what is behind the facts that students learn in school, as a part of the national curriculum. The aim is to make them truly think about issues that they might have already come across before, but on a purely factual level. These informal lessons also serve as a unique platform for students, where they can easily access and gain a better understanding of topics related to Jewish identity and Judaism, through the involvement of personal stories.

Both the Lifeboat Unit and Haver Foundation have experience in combining informal education with theatre-based pedagogy. In 2016, Haver Foundation and Gólem Theatre created a classroom project, which accompanied the play “Cookbook for survival” (*Szakácskönyv a túlélésért*). The project investigated the fundamental question of how events of history influence our lives and to what extent the influence of historical or public figures is present in the everyday lives of the students.

Similarly to New World, the Theatre for Unprejudiced Youth (*Színházzal az előítéletmentes fiatalokért*) project was also a multistage, drama- and theatre-based school project, created by the collaboration of Lifeboat Unit, TASZ and “GYERE” Chances for Children Association (*Gyerekségély Egyesület*) in 2015, with the financial support of the Norwegian Civic Grant. The programme discussed such topics as poverty, xenophobia, discrimination and racism through five stages, in an interactive way.

### The New World – classroom theatre, the starting point of the project

The play begins with the main character, 16-year-old Kata, on stage; she is holding a box and telling the audience the story of her life. She explains that after her parents decided to get divorced, she has to move from a rich residential area in Buda to a housing estate in a poorer part of the city. The play is set in the years of 1998-99, the time period when the target audience of the play, current high school students, were born. While the milieu of the play is a typical 90s-style setting, similarities with the present can be drawn, which we will come back to later.



PHOTO: DÁNIEL DÓMÓLKY

As a result of moving, Kata finds herself in a completely strange, new environment: the young guys of the block first seem hostile to her, but soon she develops friendly relationships with them. Thanks to her newly found friends, Kata develops an understanding of radical beliefs, which she can contrast with the failure of her liberal upbringing. The three emotionally vulnerable teens bond over their similar fate. Together, their insecurities and grievances transform into unstoppable anger and they do everything to find their irrationally chosen targets in order to release this. The fight against the enemy requires more and more extreme methods, which the parents are helpless to prevent. Finally, Kata’s parents tell her that she is of Jewish origins. At the end of the play, Kata is again standing next to the box symbolising the hidden past of her family, and she is speaking to the audience. She confesses that she doesn’t know where to go from here, how her life is going to continue. The play does not give an answer to where Kata’s life is headed after this, how she is going to “draw her lifeline”, as she expresses it.

New World is concerned with important questions such as the concealment of the past, which is represented by the adults in the story, and the radicalisation

that can happen for different reasons, represented by the younger generation. However, the play does not take sides regarding what is good and bad, but rather it presents several different viewpoints and the motivations of the characters.

## The results of the project

The project set out with the goal to widen and deepen the knowledge of students on topics such as Judaism, antisemitism and racism through informal educational methods. It encourages critical thinking by attempting to approach these themes from different standpoints. Firstly, this is achieved by the presentation of how a perfectly "normal" teen can become part of a skinhead movement. Thus, the participating students can familiarise themselves with the views of an "already radicalised" young person. Secondly, instead of a direct value judgement, the play leaves room for the students' own interpretation and opinion.

New World attempted to achieve this through drama-based pedagogy, which can provide a good basis for the practical realisation of democratic education. It engages in a dialogue about radicalisation with the age group that is the most susceptible to it.

## Project summary

### Stages of the project

The project was preceded by detailed research, in which we collected and evaluated the methods and results of similar educational projects, and included their conclusions in our concept. This was developed in detail in January and February. During these months, we also contacted the schools and with the help of the teachers, we gathered information about the classes. The project itself commenced in February, and was carried out in two separate time periods: from February to May, and from September to December. The documentation

of the stages of the project was done simultaneously. The feedback we received from students, teachers and organisers was summarised in December.

## The concept

*What issue does the project reflect on?*

The New World project reflected on various problems, such as on common prejudices shared among young people and, in a narrower sense, on the general lack of knowledge concerning Judaism. Moreover, it attempted to complement the knowledge that can be acquired in Hungarian secondary school education. The play also investigates the idea of adolescents' possible susceptibility to radical beliefs. Therefore, the project, together with the survey and this short report, intends to share its findings and conclusions in order to provide guidance for similar educational projects.

## Cooperation and the structure of the project

During the preparatory phase, the Tom Lantos Institute and its partners elaborated on the detailed concept and methodology of the project. This required the restructuring of the supporting Haver programme in order to reflect the ideas of the play and to form a coherent flow, as well as the project-specific preparation of Haver volunteers. The method of evaluating the efficiency of the project was developed by the Tom Lantos Institute, the Haver Foundation and the Lifeboat Unit together. In the executive phase of the programme, the Tom Lantos Institute also measured the further impact of the project, with the help of the previously developed methodology.

The project was announced in public advertisements (published on social media sites, the websites of the organising partners, and on the Association of History Teachers' website) that schools could apply to, and the organisers also contacted educational institutions from all over the country. While the age of the students that could participate in the project was fixed, there was no specific requirement regarding the type of schools that could join. However, preference was given to



countryside schools over elite institutions. In the first part of the programme, students watched the play *New World*, which was followed by an informal class discussion, based on methods of drama pedagogy. The third stage, typically 2-3 weeks after the play, consisted of the Haver programme, which targeted more specific questions of identity and common attitudes towards Jewish people. We asked the class teachers not to participate in the Haver activity, as their presence could have influenced the behaviour and participation of the students.

In planning the structure it was important to ensure that, between the second and third phases of the project, students were given the opportunity to immerse themselves in the issues raised by the play and the subsequent activity. This would allow them to further reflect on the issues and then discuss them with the volunteer educators of Haver Foundation. Hence, the project aimed to expand students' knowledge about Judaism, to reduce prejudice and increase the presence of tolerance among them, in multiple stages, by means of various educational methods. The schools and the participating organizations were in continuous contact with each other and the information collected is a result of their joint work.

## Documentation of the classroom activities

Working with high school students gave us an – of course, not representative – image of the students' degree of prejudice and their knowledge about concepts related to Judaism on a national level. In addition, the documentation of the discourses, debates and problems encountered throughout the educational sessions can serve as important reference points for pedagogues too, in order to engage in classroom discussions about prejudice, Judaism and antisemitism in the future.

The documentation of the project was continuous from the beginning of cooperation with schools until the very end of the project, and was carried out in the following steps:

1. *Previous information collection:* In this preliminary phase, we talked to the teachers of the participating classes. We gathered information regarding the composition of the classes and the attitude of students and teachers towards

the issues addressed by the project. This was achieved by a series of mini-interviews, based on a single set of questions.

2. *During the play:* With the assistance of the participating organisations' representatives, we monitored students' typical reactions to certain scenes of the play, such as laughter, opposition, talking or indifference.
3. *During the drama-pedagogy session:* During the group discussion, we assessed the following attitudes:
  - a) How active is the class in the session? How often do students respond to the questions? What are the topics that they pay more attention to and that they find more interesting? Can we observe direct opposition, resistance to a certain topic, and why could that be the case? Does anyone have an exceptionally different interpretation of the play?
  - b) According to the students, why did Kata's parents hide from her the fact that she was Jewish? What do they think, how could the storyline of each character continue, particularly Kata's?
  - c) Can they draw any comparisons between the present and the time period in the play?
4. *After the drama-pedagogy session:* The students anonymously completed a questionnaire consisting of three open questions.
5. *After the Haver session:* The students completed the same questionnaire as they had completed after the drama-pedagogy session.
6. *Evaluation after the Haver activities:* The Haver volunteers filled out an evaluation form about their perception of the activities.
7. *Follow-up:* We asked the teachers about their feedback and observations after the project, in the form of a mini telephone interview.

## Participating schools and classes

In 2017, with the support of the Tom Lantos Institute, the project reached five secondary schools and involved more than a hundred students nationwide. In this section, we will briefly present the participating schools and classes and discuss them from various aspects. The previously mentioned interviews with

the teachers before and after the programme (see attachment 1) provided the basis of this short report.

#### *The participating schools*

Balassi Bálint Secondary School - Balassagyarmat (1 class)

Neumann János Technical Secondary School of Computer Studies - Budapest (1 class)

Gönczi Ferenc Secondary and Technical Secondary School - Lenti (2 classes)

BMSZC Petrik Lajos Bilingual Technical Secondary School of Chemistry, Environment and Informatics - Budapest (3 classes)

Wesselényi Miklós Technical Secondary School and College – Nyíregyháza (1 class)

#### *The type of schools*

The majority of the participating classes came from technical or traditional state secondary schools. One of the participating classes was a class reserved for 18-20 year-old students, who had already obtained a technical qualification.

#### *Geographical disposition*

Two schools from Budapest and one from each of North-Hungary, West-Transdanubia (Dunántúl) and the North of the Great Hungarian Plain (Alföld) participated in the project. A significant part of the students attending the schools in Budapest commute from the countryside or live in dormitories. The students attending the schools in Balassagyarmat, Nyíregyháza and Lenti come from these towns or from the surrounding villages.

#### *Social class*

The social and family background of the students was rather heterogeneous. In two of the countryside schools the majority of students came from the lower social class, while in the school in Balassagyarmat, the composition was mixed. The majority of the students from Budapest came from a middle-class background. According to the teachers, extreme social differences or class-related conflicts within the individual classes were not common in any of the schools.

#### *Socio-demographic variables*

The target group of the project was 16 or older secondary school students. The majority of the participants were aged between 16-17, but in Nyíregyháza, some of the students were 19 or 20, as they belonged to a special class, which is completing the high school leaving certificate (Érettségi) in two years.

Within each group, distribution of the sexes was relatively equal, with a slight (1-2 students) majority of girls. One class was an exception, where out of 31 students only 4 were female.

The number of students of Roma origins was maximum 2 people per group. Overall 4 Roma pupils participated in the project.<sup>3</sup> One of them lives with a non-Roma stepfamily.

#### *Attitudes*

According to the responses of the teachers, the students' interest and general attitude towards political and social topics can be divided into 3 categories:

- a) Political and social problems are not at all manifested in the daily communication of students: 1 school
- b) Political and social problems are manifested rarely and typically not in a formal setting in the daily communication of students: 2 schools
- c) Current political and social issues are actively present in the lives of the students, and students often voice their opinions: 2 schools

Nonetheless, several teachers found it important to highlight the fact that most of their students are not aware of the meaning of certain notions of politics and public life. It follows that most of their expressions regarding these topics are based on information that they hear from their parents or see, read or listen to in the media. All teachers claimed that they are not aware of any existing serious conflict or division between students concerning political or social issues.

<sup>3</sup> We inquired specifically about the number of Roma participants and their social status within the class because potentially offensive racist elements are present in the play. Therefore in the classes with Roma students the post-performance sessions focused especially on these.

## Feedback

### Students' feedback of the play and the drama-based pedagogical activities

Following the activities, the participants completed a questionnaire consisting of three questions. When assessing the answers, we established three different categories. This grouping was created according to what the most common, recurring themes were, and we created a separate category for the most "extreme", exceptional answers.

#### *Taboo no. 1: The topic*

One of the recurring themes was "taboos" and pushing the envelope. Almost all students mentioned that the play spoke about certain topics in a way that they could not, or that they would not expect in a traditional theatre. It was clear from the answers that a significant part of the respondents did not even dare to write down the topic of the play explicitly, instead they used such expressions as "this kind of topic", "social question" and "important problem". Moreover, it could be observed that for some students, even writing down the words "Roma" and "Jew" could be considered a taboo in itself.

#### *Taboo no. 2: Space and form*

Additionally, for most students the space and form created by the theatre was something they had not experienced before. Some liked the fact that there wasn't any decoration, while others missed it. It also surprised them that the actors played so close to them: they enjoyed that they could observe the actors' reactions and that they used chairs from the audience – the students felt that somehow they were part of the performance too. According to some pupils, sometimes this intimacy was rather annoying, and that actors even "shouted too loudly". This sense of proximity can be understood not only in a physical sense, but also figuratively; the play presented problems from multiple angles, in a manner that

was easy to follow and in a language that is similar to that of their own. Instead of approaching the topics of antisemitism and racism from the tragic point of view of the Holocaust, they did it through an ordinary story, which also contributed to the students' acceptance of the play, according to the questionnaires. Some people commented on the form of the performance, specifically about the box that had a key significance in the play as it represented the concealed past (it contained the concentration camp diary of the grandmother), such as "it was in the foreground all the time, but still no one really paid attention to it". Nevertheless, the majority of the comments suggest that perhaps a less didactic representation of the Holocaust past, which was in this case symbolised by the closed box, can make just as much or even more of an impact than its explicit portrayal.

#### *Continuity-discontinuity*

A sense of duplicity could be discovered in most answers. On the one hand, several people thought that the play showed a reality completely distinct from their own, a time period that can be entirely separated from the present. Many of them believed that in 1998 a lot of people were racist, but today this problem is less significant. The fact that students were distancing themselves from the play comes across in answers such as "This is how a radical right party could have started", "I got an idea of what the world was like before I was born". On the other hand, even though the play is set 20 years ago, its message still holds today. This can be also related to the fact that many students felt close to the characters given the similarity of their age. For others, this kind of representation of their age group was strange and made it more difficult to empathise with the play. Interestingly, some also raised the question "why do they have to bring puberty into the discussion of such topic?", which also signifies that certain students treat the questions of antisemitism and racism as distant problems, that cannot concern them, because of their age.

#### *Personal opinion*

According to the students, one of the main themes of the theatre piece was "whose opinion should be followed". There is a certain observable difference between the

viewpoints of parents and adolescents in the play, which was highlighted by many students. The importance of honesty and communication within the family came up in many instances. Several students disapproved of Kata's parents hiding information from her, for example, the fact that she was Jewish.

The participants appreciated that no one tried to persuade them to think in a certain way and that they were not pressured to form any kind of opinion about the topic. The way they behaved after the play suggested the same: they were more eager to share their opinion when they saw that there were no right or wrong answers.

#### *Extreme answers*

Some students drew conclusions about the content of the play that were somehow different from the rest. An example for this could be that "Perhaps I am a Nazi, without even knowing I am one". Another person wrote, "Nationalism is important, and if someone acts against the society, he/she has to die". According to one person, the conclusion was that "no one wants to reach a common ground with anyone, they are just spitting in each others' faces". This opinion could relate to the content of the play, as well as the activity that followed it – the debate with their classmates.

It is also important to point out that many students found it crucial to note how much they were shocked by the jokes present in the play: "I am bringing home some racist jokes", "They were a bit harsh, but good". This might suggest that the way the play spoke openly about "taboo" topics left a long-lasting impact on the participants.

#### *Impact*

The majority of students drew some kind of conclusion from the play. A significant number of the respondents noted that it made them think and perhaps even changed their point of view in relation to certain topics. The general conclusion was that we should not be prejudiced towards anyone; we cannot know for sure what others have gone through or what their stories are.

#### *Some adjectives used by the students to describe the play*

These words were the most commonly used in relation to the students' overall view of the play:

- » understandable
- » thought-provoking
- » realistic
- » "made me shiver"
- » uncomfortable proximity
- » outspoken
- » funny
- » radical

### The conclusions of Anna Szepes and Tímea Török, leaders of the drama pedagogy activities

Generally speaking, the students were often afraid of speaking in concrete terms about touchy subjects and some did not have a clear opinion on these topics or were not interested in them, however, when it came to more general questions, they were happy to debate. Some of the subtopics of the play that are closer to their individual lives, such as divorce (interestingly, they mainly blamed the father for it), trust in parents, or love were very much of their interest.

The lengthiest discussions built around the concepts of vice and remorse, in which it was often argued that these terms are too subjective, and that in a society we need an objective criteria of what counts as a crime or wrongdoing. In relation to the play, the students mostly condemned the actions of the skinhead boy, Robi, who committed physical violence against a Roma teen because he allegedly stole a bike. Additionally, there was some condemnation of the victim, because most of the students believed that he was the one to steal the bike. Even though the story does not offer an answer to the question of who stole the bike, nor to what happened in the stairway (the audience cannot see the action

itself; we can only hear some noise and see Robi running back to the others), the students did not question whether it was really the Roma guy who stole the bike, or started pushing Robi.

The person they did not find guilty of anything at all, and did not blame for anything, was Kata, the main character of the story. The most severe accusations against her were that she was naive and can be influenced too easily. In general, they sympathised with the skinhead boys for a long time too, especially with Áron, who they found particularly intelligent, attractive and less aggressive than Robi. However, even when they had to predict Áron's future, they often described it as miserable and unsuccessful. Moreover, participants found it easier to relate to the future of the characters than to the global issues the plot tackles. Occasionally, they mentioned current political parties, and the fact that thanks to the Internet, radical movements can spread even faster than before.

Generally, those individuals that held more radical views expressed their opinions rarely and only in response to very specific questions. Normally, they were aware of the fact that only a narrow minority shared their views, however, when they spoke up, their opinion often included concrete elements of radical attitudes. In these cases, only a couple of students were willing to confront radical views openly, or to argue against the radical approach in detail.



Generally speaking, it became obvious that the students do not participate in a lot of debates like this; often they did not respond to what others had said, but continued to explain their own view.

We believe that due to the time constraint of the activities, the discussion could not change the mind of those with a strong opinion already. For this reason, our goal was instead to think critically together and enable students to approach their own ideas in a critical and focused way. Overall, the educational session was most likely to influence those who did not have a firm opinion on these questions yet.

## Feedback from the Haver session

After evaluating the questionnaires that students filled out after the Haver session, it can be said that the participants had a similar assessment of the session as of the play *New World*. However, this time they were much more specific about Jewish-related topics in their answers. One of the recurring themes in the answers was Jewish religion and culture. Several students mentioned that they learned new information about certain Jewish customs and traditions. It was novel to many that "religion isn't everything in Judaism". Another typical reaction was a sense of shock when they learned how many people living in Hungary identify as Jewish.

The topic of family origins was raised at multiple occasions too, for example in the form of "it isn't written on someone if they are Jewish", and that they were surprised to discover the Jewish identity of many famous or public figures. As Monika Kovacs highlighted (2000), Hungarian history education does not give the students a comprehensive idea of what it means to be Jewish. This is why the idea that being Jewish isn't "only" about the religion, and that a lot of people aren't even aware of their own Jewish heritage, could have been shocking for the majority of students. According to Kovacs, most history books approach the topic of Judaism from a purely Christian perspective. The effects of this can be unmistakably noticed in answers such as "as a Christian, I have not heard a lot about what Judaism is like".

Again, many students acknowledged that the Haver session created a "safe" and "free" space, in which they had a chance to talk about issues they consider as sensitive, without taboos. Consequently, the question may arise as to whether they do or do not consider school as a safe space, where they can discuss such topics.

The number of answers that can be considered as "extreme" was significantly lower than after the performance of New World. According to the responses, most students found the session interesting, where they could learn new things about Judaism. No one came to the opposite conclusion. The question of social prejudice played an important role in the answers too, it was a common conclusion that "Judaism isn't what the media and people paint it to be".

While we received some less specific answers too, such as "we shouldn't be prejudiced", responses such as "I am more and more interested in my ancestry" or that "I genuinely need to re-evaluate some things" suggest that some of the students did not only comprehend what they heard at the session, but thought further about these subjects.

## Feedback from teachers

In January 2018, we contacted teachers again in order to conduct another mini-interview, in which they could share their remarks and feedback of the project.

It can be concluded from their answers that the programme had a great impact on all participating classes: for most of them, it meant an unforgettable experience. It is important to note that multiple students had never been in a theatre before the programme. Some classes suggested that after their experience of New World, they would like to go to the theatre together again.

After the programme, most classes discussed what they had seen and experienced as part of a Hungarian literature or class teacher's lesson. According to the teachers, students found Kata's character the most thought-provoking, particularly the scene when she finds out about her Jewish origins. In this context, they mostly talked about the topic of ancestry and about the importance of communication within a family. The open question concerning what Kata's future will entail often captured their imagination, but some found the open

ending annoying and would have preferred a "real" end to the story. Judging from the discussions, there were great differences in what students "took home" from these activities, or in which characters they found likeable and disagreeable.

While the performance was a memorable experience for almost all, the subject of their enthusiasm was mostly the *form* of the classroom theatre and the educational sessions. This is of course important, as it gave us the framework in which we could talk about actual social issues or topics that concern them personally. The teachers mentioned with great enthusiasm that several students formed and expressed their opinion during these sessions, who otherwise would not be considered as active participants of the class. This shows that the programme achieved one of the chief goals of democratic education: it encouraged critical thinking. There was one student who even wrote a short article about the programme in a local newspaper.

The topics of antisemitism and racism did not come up in some classes explicitly in group discussions. Again, this can be partly due to the fact that teachers were not present at the discussions. At the same time, most teachers claimed that other sensitising programmes would be needed, in relation to Roma culture and Judaism. In one of the participating classes, it was clear that students did not relate to the questions of racism and antisemitism on a deeper level, they were concerned with topics closer to their personal lives (for example: family, community, the walk of life).

## Case study of one of the schools: feedback and remarks

We have carried out a short case study about one of the schools that participated in the project, documenting the course of the activities and attempting to monitor the class after the end of the programme too.

Among other factors, we chose to focus on this group because one of its members described himself as "radical", and his classmates confirmed this too.

We found it important to investigate how an already radical "skinhead"<sup>4</sup> student reacts to the programme. We were given information that the friendship circle of this student consists of individuals outside of the class but mostly from the same school. While most of his classmates do not share his radical views, they accept him "for what he is", and he belongs to the more "popular" boys of the class.

#### *General characteristics*

The examined group consisted of 10th, 11th and 12th grade students of a capital city school. The participation of boys and girls was mixed. For the most part, students were children of middle-class families, but some came from a more modest background. Students were mostly from Budapest. One student of Roma origins participated in the activities. According to one of their teachers, the students are open-minded and interested in social questions, but their lack of knowledge often constrains their ability to form an independent opinion about these. Radical views are occasionally expressed in class, but the vast majority of students can be convinced with rational arguments.

#### *The New World educational session*

In the activities following the performance, students actively participated and had an opinion that they were willing to share. One of the first themes of the play was the fate of the stolen bike, which the drama teachers asked about in each group. In this particular group, the discussion was based around the term "gypsy crime". One of the tactics of the students here was to argue that "it exists, because the local Roma leader (vajda) acknowledges its existence as well" - an argument often used by the radical right, too. On the other hand, the topic of racism divided the group; for example, one student argued "those who come from a family where extreme-right views of reuniting Greater Hungary are shared, are more likely to become "radical patriots".

<sup>4</sup> We have concluded this from his own identification, his classmates' opinion and the type of clothing he wears that typically belong to this subculture (bomber jacket, Martens boots, white shoelaces)



In the course of the conversation, an interesting topic arose, which was discussed in great detail: *What is a deed? Is it only something that we feel guilty about? Or can we feel guilty about something that isn't even considered as a crime?*

This theme appeared spontaneously and the participating individuals expressed a lot of opposing views. Some argued that something that we do not feel guilty about couldn't count as a vice. Others responded by asking if that was the case, why do we feel guilty about so many things that are not even "real" crimes. These kinds of questions appeared throughout the play and the plot reflects on them from multiple angles, thus it is of key importance to discuss it. A part of the group seemed to be very self-reflective in relation this question, and admitted that they did not feel bad for the injured Roma character for a long time, but when they realised that it was probably because he was Roma, they felt ashamed and recognised that prejudices are present in their own way of thinking too, without even being aware of it. Other definitional and identificational questions came to light too, for instance, what it means to be Hungarian or Greater-Hungarian, racist or liberal. These questions initiated interesting conversations, however, there wasn't enough time to thoroughly

discuss them. Nevertheless, it was clearly expressed that for most students, radical liberalism and extreme-right are ideologies not so different from each other, and exaggerated "political correctness" was consensually rejected. This can be illustrated by one of the predominant opinions cited below:

*"I have never met a "liberal" in real life, but I've heard that it exists, that someone says that you are racist. My real problem with them is that they blindly promote an ideology."*

It was interesting to see that while students had a distinctive opinion on certain identities and ideologies, they were often using these terms in the wrong form (for example: libertarist, libertaristic).

One of the students who participated in the group discussion had openly radical views. In the course of the debate, a part of the class and he represented opposing poles: one of the students told him that they were arguing for no reason, as they wouldn't be able to reach a compromise with someone who is racist. The student in question otherwise enjoyed the play; in the discussion he claimed that he could completely identify with the two skinhead characters, he liked the fact that they were presented in a realistic way. After the discussion, the leaders of the educational programme faced the question of whether the play could reinforce the radical beliefs of this student, given that it does not give a clear value-judgement, or judgement of the skinhead characters.

#### *The Haver session*

In the course of the session, one of the tasks was to create a "line of opinion", in which students had to stand next to an imaginary scale and decide how much they agree with certain statements. One end represented "full agreement" and on the other end stood the people who "completely disagreed" with the statement. One of the statements was, "If someone was born in Hungary, they count as a Hungarian". This evoked a lot of different opinions, but they were more specifically concerned with the case of Hungarian Roma. According to one of the boys in the group, "Gypsies don't count themselves as Hungarian either"; "They'd rather say, *dikh má more* (Roma slang)" and "The gypsies of Hős Street aren't Hungarian either, they receive the benefits and that's all". Others mentioned that Chinese people who were born in the country are not

Hungarian either. However, these views were contested by a great percentage of the group: according to them, "we have to feel Hungarian inside".

At one point during the session, the volunteers asked the students about the box in the play, what they thought it could possibly symbolise. The answer to this was unequivocal: the box was life-changing for Kata, as it represented her family history, which was until then concealed from her. At the same time, the students did not know much about Judaism, and what they did was mostly based on stereotypes. Such stereotypes would be that "Jews focus more on mental development, rather than physical", or that one of the Haver volunteers cannot be Jewish because "Jews have a whiter skin". The skinhead student did not participate in this discussion (he was at the doctor's during this time). His classmates clearly thought that he asked to go to the doctor at this time, as he did not want to participate in the session.

#### *Post-project feedback*

In January, we conducted a mini-interview with the accompanying teacher of this group.

During this interview, we received the feedback that it would be better if the activities happened during school-time. By this, more students "who need them" could attend, and not only those who are already interested in different societal issues. For some students, the fact that the two educational sessions happened after the official time of lessons, took away from the experience – while they seemingly enjoyed the activities, they were not happy about the fact that it takes away from their free-time, compulsorily. The group had already participated in similar programmes before, but according to the teacher, their attention was gripped by New World the most. Overall it was a positive experience for them, which initiated several discussions and debates in the subsequent weeks, both during class and outside of the classroom. However, one part of the 12th-grade participants expressed to their teachers that they did not want to participate in more programmes like New World, they had already thought about these subjects and "their opinions could not be changed anyway".

We also inquired from the teacher whether the class' view of the skinhead student changed following the programme, or if any kind of change in the class



could be observed. According to the response, there was no such change in the class; while debates emerged after the programme, they did not evolve into serious conflicts.

A concern that might arise is whether the programme can be counterproductive if it is not appropriately processed afterward. It makes the process more difficult if someone already shares radical views in the class, as secondary deradicalisation is a longer, complex process: a three-stage project cannot make a significant impact if the school cannot discuss these questions further and deepen students' knowledge in relation to such sensitive questions.

## Conclusion

One of the strengths of the New World project is that it evoked some kind of reaction in everyone. Presumably, this is due to the fact that it did not approach the topics of prejudice and identity in a didactic way. Through presenting themes that are easy to relate to for a teenager, it grabbed students' attention and provided them with an opportunity for thinking about social issues. **On the basis of this, it can be argued that external educational programmes, such as New World, play an important role in the process of social sensitisation.** However, given the feedback we received, we feel that in order to make not only a temporary but a long-lasting effect, the active participation of school teachers in this process is key. This is, however, hampered by the fact that the formal school framework isn't sufficient for sustaining the impact of these programmes.

In addition, students should not feel obliged to participate in such activities, concerning either Judaism or wider social topics. Often these programmes receive the criticism that they are not needed on such a regular basis - this was the case for New World too. **Hence, early communication and often cooperation are crucial between teachers as well as between leaders of similar educational programmes.** If they regularly consult one another, their programmes can

**build more on each other (which we attempted in the case of New World) and students will have less of a feeling that they again have to hear/talk about the same matters. Moreover, the more multidisciplinary an educational programme is, the more the students are going to enjoy participating in it. The positive effects of this could be observed in the course of the New World programme.**

Regarding the questionnaires given to students after both activity-sessions, we came to the conclusion that the three questions asked could have perhaps been more explicitly linked to the issues raised by the play New World: maybe, students would have been more inclined to share their views about these. **Because the open questions did not give enough of a clue for the participants to reflect on what happened in the play and during the discussions, in the course of giving a response critical thinking was too easy to avoid.** However, we believe that over-documentation and an overly detailed questionnaire would not encourage students to really think about their answers. Thus, we see that the impact of such programmes should be "measured" with a great deal of caution, and with the fact in mind that an overly-complex structure can easily make it counterproductive. **We find the documentation, evaluation and publishing of similar projects hugely important and useful, as they will help other organisations and pedagogues.**

If teachers talk about minorities and related questions in an open and natural way in the classroom, they can significantly contribute to reducing prejudices. In addition, it can be a contributing factor if they are at ease with naturally using terms such as "Jewish" and "Roma" without taboos. In no way do we want the conclusion of this report to be that it is the fault of teachers that an education in human and minority rights, against discrimination and for democratic values, is often not part of formal education. Again we would like to highlight that this does not only depend on the enthusiasm and good intention of the teacher, but often on other factors. We see, however, that even if teachers make programmes such as New World happen in their school, the "follow-on work" is equally important, to make students feel that what they heard can be integrated into their everyday lives and is not only valid during and immediately after the programme. **If communities participate in similar**

educational projects, it might be helpful if teachers make reference to the play and the discussion later on. In that way, students will not only think of the experience as something external from their ordinary lives.

According to Hannah Arendt (1963), the "banality of evil" can only be avoided by critical thinking. The experiences of the programme, and the feedback of teachers, students and volunteers all show that in Hungary, there is a priority need for developing critical thinking, for initiatives of democratic education, sensitising, interactive discussions and the continuation of already existing programmes with their outreach to more schools. The New World Complex Educational Programme therefore plays an important role, enabling young people to recognise the dangers of radicalism and providing incentives to act up against them.

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## Annex no. 1: Questionnaire for teachers prior to the programme

1. Tell us about the composition of the class! (Gender, social class, ethnic background) Are there serious social differences in the class, and if yes, does that cause a conflict between students?
2. Where do the students come from to school? Are there any who come from a different town or village? If yes, how many and from where?
3. Are there serious differences in ability and motivation within the class? Is there a greater than average faction or a conflict that has a severe influence on the class community?
4. If there are any Roma students in the class (or any other minorities), what is their “status” in the class? Does that have to do with their ethnic background?
5. In your point of view, do the students have a strong political opinion, what topics are they interested in? Is the manifestation of prejudice towards certain groups common in the class?
6. In your opinion, what topics are especially sensitive or should be important to come up during the Haver session (in relation to Jews, Romas, refugees or something else)?
7. Is there anything else that you would like to add?