

# VISEGRAD SCHOLARSHIP AT OPEN SOCIETY ARCHIVES

## FINAL REPORT

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### **Queer cruising in the Kádár era in Budapest**

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The 6-week research project aimed at uncovering the meeting and cruising habits of the gay and lesbian community of Budapest in the last two decades of Socialism, building on existing research on homosexuality in the Kádár era in Hungary and the collection of Open Society Archives. Cruising is a specific form of queer connectivity, the search for (sex) partners in public. In the past, I have approached the topic from several directions in my art and curatorial projects. However, Visegrad Scholarship has made it possible for me for the first time to gain a deeper insight into the history of cruising in Hungary.

The available resources—such as Anita Kurimay's *Queer Budapest* (2020), Judit Takács's *Gay Century* (2018) and Mária Takács's two documentaries *Secret Years* (2009) and *Gay Men Straight Dictatorships* (2013), that were my main starting points for the research at OSA—showed that despite its decriminalization in 1961, on a societal level, homosexuality remained a taboo subject until the late 1980s. Therefore, gay and lesbian communities operated rather underground during this period.

In the research project I aspired to explore the functioning of their hidden networks, investigating how gay and lesbian people exchanged and accumulated secret knowledges, organized themselves, and invented their own reality—where the rules of the restrictive regime would not prevail. Following an inspiring essay by Joao Laia (*Cruising as a Mode of Being and World-making*, 2021) I considered queer culture a world-making project and analysed the structure, the language, and the geography of these parallel realities.

OSA's folder on homosexuality (300-40-1:454/5), containing magazine articles and radio broadcasts from 1978 until 1993, and the exhibition *Records Uncovered: LGBTQI+ Histories in Central and South Eastern Europe* at Galeria Centralis, which is the first large-scale exhibition in Hungary dealing with the history of non-normative sexualities, proved to be good starting points. Based on my findings, I could set up a timeline that shows how public discourse around homosexuality developed in Hungary which is not unrelated to what happened secretly and hidden in the dark.

Through the archival documents, I have found a comprehensive study written in 1991 by László Tóth (*Egy földalatti mozgalom hanyatlása és felemelkedése* [*The Decline and the Rise of an Underground Movement*]), in which the sociologist lists the main cruising locations in Budapest from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. Tóth provides an extensive list of public spaces, including parks, public toilets, as well as bath houses, restaurants, and clubs, and categorizes these places based on which social groups visited them. He also points out, as the title of his text suggests, that as society became more tolerant by the early 1990s, intimate circles and subcultural codes became less important in the functioning of the gay and lesbian community.

The available documents have led me to additional resources, too, the most useful of which were the four report books published between 1984 and 1991 in Hungary with the aim of introducing the homosexual "subculture" to the wider public. Besides László Erőss's *Furcsa párok* (*Strange Couples*), 1984), János Gécsi's *Vadnarancsok II* (*Wild Oranges II*), 1987), and Attila Varga's *Csókok a gőzben* (*Kisses in the Steam*), (1991), the most interesting was *Melegház* (*Gay House*) from 1989. 20 personal stories are contained in this book, and half of them are told by women which is rare in publications dealing with homosexuality at the time. In general, the archive as well as the other resources pay less attention to female homosexuality.

During the scholarship period, I conducted research in other archives, too. I interviewed Perica Josceviski, curator of *Records Uncovered*, and visited Háttér Society's archive, as

well, to discuss the topic with archivist Sándor Nagy and Péter Hanzli. These interviews helped to structure the materials found in the archive. The scholarship gave me an excellent opportunity to get closer to the topic of cruising in Hungary. Although the 6-week period did not allow me to delve into it to the maximum, it helped me to formulate questions along which I could continue my research.

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