

COMPENDIUM SHORT PROFILE: HUNGARY

(based on the comprehensive country profile of Péter Inkei: <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/hungary.php>)

1. Facts and figures

Political system:	Parliamentary democracy with a single chamber parliament
Year of membership to the Council of Europe:	6 November 1990
Year of membership to UNESCO:	14 September 1948
Population:	9 830 485 (2016)
Non-nationals of total population:	6.5% (2011)
Official language(s):	Hungarian
Share of population using the Internet	79.7% (2016)
Public cultural expenditures per capita:	56 EUR (2009)
GDP in Billion EUR:	108.8 (2015)
Accession to Key Cultural Conventions:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>European Cultural Convention</i> (1955): 16 November 1989 • <i>European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages</i> (1992): 1 March 1998 • <i>UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions</i>: 9 May 2008

2. Historical Perspective of Cultural Policy and recent Changes

As a result of state subsidies, culture was accessible at low cost in the decades of communism, and cultural consumption was growing (reading of books, attendance at the theatre, cinema, concerts, libraries, museums and exhibitions). Under dictatorship, art acquired a specific political significance; its end contributed to the view of many that culture has been one of the losers in the transition. After the political turn of 1989-1990, shaping cultural policy was based on two main sources: national traditions from before communism and modern western examples. The establishment of an agency for financing cultural projects based on the arm's length principle, the National Cultural Fund (1993), has been an important sign of change.

Since 1990, when the first free elections took place, the pendulum of cultural policy priorities swung to the "right" or the "left" depending on the voters' choice, including as regards principles corresponding to the clichés associated with such political notions: For example, conservative administrations put greater emphasis on national heritage and pride and on the cultural links with Hungarians living in the diaspora. As well, a marked re-centralisation process occurred between 1998 and 2002, during the first Orbán government. It was during this period that culture enjoyed the highest relative ranking among overall priorities of the government in the past 30-40 years. The schism between the two "sides" reached its peak during parliamentary elections and remained a feature of Hungarian society; efforts to shelter culture from political and ideological influences have not yielded lasting and overall success.

The 2006-2010 period was characterised by an increasing economic and social crisis in Hungary – aggravated by the world crisis. A huge deficit accumulated in the state budget. Those years did not favour concerted action for culture. The elections of 2010 brought about a landslide victory for the centre right Fidesz party, with over two-third of seats in the Parliament, which led to a fundamental overhaul of the legal and administrative structure of



the country. The depth of changes was underlined by the release of a Declaration of National Cooperation, obligatory for public institutions. Work on a new constitution started and was accomplished within a year. As part of the changes, the highest level cultural administration became a state secretariat in the Ministry of Human Resources. The 2014 elections consolidated the current political setup, including its objectives and achievements in culture.

3. Overall description of the system

General context

Hungary does not fit into any of the classical cultural policy "models": If anything, it could be described as eclectic. Hungarian cultural policy has inherited two complementary features, which can be labelled as "plebeian" and "aristocratic". Historically, culture had the social mission of empowering the lower classes. This, for example, is reflected by the significant share of socio-cultural programmes and institutions in the various cultural budgets, especially at the local levels. At the same time, determined efforts serve the achievement of cultural excellence, often in the spirit of adding to the pride of the nation.

After the regime change (1989/90), decentralisation and the "arm's length principle" were important slogans. The objective conditions for the former have been set by creating nearly 3 200 local – especially municipal – self-governments in 1990, and the weight of local governments in public financing of culture soon surpassed that of the central government; however, both in the eyes and expectations of the public, and in actual practice, national cultural policy is fairly centralised. The member of the cabinet in charge of culture, currently the Minister of Human Resources, is supposed to bear primary responsibility for Hungarian culture. The running of major cultural institutions is considered to be a state obligation. Although the National Cultural Fund (NKA) was established in 1993 as an arm's length agency and has been acting in this capacity since then, its strategic role is usually underestimated – and currently challenged by the Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA).

Furthermore, Hungarian cultural policy is characterised by pragmatism instead of basic official documents. The orientation of cultural policies and practices is rarely guided by high level statements, legal acts, strategic plans or theoretical documents.

The main underlining aspect of the processes that have taken place after the landslide victory of Fidesz has been the concentration of decision-making: important single cultural issues are decided ad hoc by high level politicians. Some early examples were the appointment of a governmental commissioner for the National Opera by the prime minister (overwriting the result of the call administered by the culture ministry); the personal choice of a little known private gallery to run a large scale art exhibition in Beijing by the (former) state secretary; and the discretion of the mayor of Budapest to appoint theatre directors, which led to the controversial case of *Új Színház* (New Theatre), now led in the spirit of the radical right. Similar moves concern other positions, the most notable case being the director of the National Theatre in Budapest.

Division of tasks & main national actors in cultural policy

The single-chamber Parliament is in charge of legislation. In addition to its role in preparing laws, the Committee for Culture and Press also fulfils supervisory functions by occasionally putting various issues related to culture on its agenda. On the whole, however, the Parliament and its Committees reflect the will of the government or the dominant parties. This became especially apparent after the parliamentary elections 2010 and 2014 with its huge governmental majorities and subsequent culture related laws like the *Media Act* of 2010

(consolidated version effective from 1 July 2015) or the *Declaration of National Cooperation (Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere)*.

Since 2010 a state secretary for culture within the larger Ministry of Human Resources has been in charge of culture. However, important domains have been moved to other bodies of the government. For example, cultural institutions abroad are now supervised by the Minister for Foreign Economic Affairs, the greater part of the financing of the film industry by the Minister of Economic Development, and protection and regulation of built heritage and archaeology is shared between the Prime Minister's Office and regional (county level) Government offices. In the Prime Minister's Office, there is also a deputy state secretary for major cultural investments. In addition, the realm of the state secretary for culture has been limited by the gradual shifting of competences towards the Hungarian Academy of Arts.

The semi-autonomous National Cultural Fund remains in charge of financing projects. Other quasi non-governmental organisations which used to play important roles in the administration and financing of various cultural domains (film, visual arts, book publishing and translation) were dismantled and their functions re-channelled to new structures.

A very important reorganisation has been secured by the new constitution (The Fundamental Law of Hungary, in effect since 1 January 2012). Next to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (established in 1827), the constitution now recognises the Hungarian Academy of Arts (*Magyar Művészeti Akadémia – MMA*). From 2011 to 2016, the position of the MMA in major decision making procedures of relevance for culture has been strengthened via parliamentary acts and government decrees.

Financing of culture

- No detailed official information on the total expenditure for culture has been made publicly available after 2009. In that year, **total public cultural expenditure** was 150 917 million HUF, about 0.57% of the country's GDP. However, more general data from Eurostat (see below) indicate that, in 2014, Hungary and Estonia registered the largest ratio to GDP of government expenditure among EU countries in the 'recreation, culture and religion' function, both reaching 2.0 % of GDP.
- **Public cultural expenditure per capita** in 2009 was 15 045 HUF, about **56 EUR**.
- In that year, the **share of culture in total public expenditure** was at a high 1.69%.
- Public cultural expenditure decreased both centrally and at local level in the years after the global crisis. On the other hand, the government spent significantly more on communication (especially on public television), as well as on subsidising churches.

Public culture expenditure at all levels of government per capita, in EUR, 2005 and 2009

	2005	2009
Hungary	36	56

Public cultural expenditure by level of government in billion HUF, 2010-2014

Categories by UN classification (COFOG)	2010			2012			2014		
	Central	Local	Total	Central	Local	Total	Central	Local	Total
Cultural services	114	126	240	120	98	218	163	128	291
Broadcasting and publishing services	84	4	88	164	4	168	100	6	106
Religious and other community services	62	14	76	74	13	87	93	15	108
Other	2	1	2,5	2	0	2,2	26	7	33

Source: Eurostat COFOG



4. Main cultural policies and priorities

General context

Structural and personal changes characterised the years since the Fidesz party gained the last elections, leading to what is called the System of National Cooperation.

MMA, the Hungarian Academy of Arts, collects increasing resources and competences. Several buildings were transferred from state property into the possession of MMA. "In order to strengthen national cohesion" and consider the history of the past 150 years to (re)build *national* historic identity, a new public research institute (*Veritas Research Institute*) was set up in 2013 by the government – a challenge to the existing historiographic workshops at universities and the Academy of Science.

Currently, a main cultural priority of the government is the regeneration of two central areas in Budapest. The royal castle complex has been housing cultural institutions since the 1960s, some of which – particularly the National Gallery – will be removed to allow space for state representation and administration.

Latest developments:

- NGOs receiving foreign funds are under scrutiny, in particular those financed by Hungarian-American investor and philanthropist George Soros. In early 2017, a draft law has been presented that would require leaders of non-governmental organisations to publicly declare their personal financial assets.
- Manda has created the concept of the National Filmhistory Park to be built in Ózd with a budget of nearly 1 billion HUF, thus reconstructing the abandoned industry zone of the town, hoping to attract tourists and provide locals with employment. The interactive exhibition project is to cover Hungarian and Eastern-European film history.
- The Pan European Picnic Memorial Park is among the sixteen sites that were awarded the European Heritage Label in 2015 due to its role in European history.
- The latest report of Mahasz, the Association of Music Publishers, establishes that by 2016 digital sales surpassed physical ones in Hungary. The turnover of streaming practically doubled in 2015, reaching half a billion forint.
- As of 2016, French and Israeli co-productions have been prioritised; these bilateral inter-governmental agreements are based on the 2005 UNESCO Convention and on the Hungarian-Israeli cultural-scientific agreement of 1990 respectively.
- Changes on the media market are heavily influenced by the political division in the country. On the one hand, with the rupture of a rich former ally from Fidesz, his media outlets (radio, television, press, web portal) turned critical about the government; on the other side, a major event in 2015 was the buyout of the nationwide commercial channel TV2 by a pro-government investor with credits from a state owned bank.
- In 2015 a minimum contribution of the normative cultural support for towns was introduced. This means that a village or town – regardless to its population – would receive a minimum of 1.2 million HUF (ca. 4000 EUR) contribution for culture.
- The state of the new minorities (immigrants) and, particularly, their cultural rights are marginal issues in Hungary. On the state level, culture-related projects for the integration of migrants are absent. As for inclusion policies or strategies, it is the civil sphere's activity that merits attention. The oldest and best known NGO for intercultural dialogue

is Artemisszió Foundation, currently focusing on the migration crisis. In 2015, a new grass root activist organisation of volunteers was formed: MigSzol. Their language courses, regular gatherings include intercultural exchanges.

- In 2016, the government established a non-profit company with 150 million HUF (about half a million euro) for talent nurturing in the Carpathian Basin. The main axis, and the first projects are focusing on young writers.
- The National Institute for Culture, the methodological centre of the network of community houses of culture, is now placed under the charge of the Lakitelek Folk High School, a conservative non-governmental foundation in the countryside.

5. International cooperation

General context and main actors

International cultural co-operation is administered by the Balassi Institute (*Balassi Intézet*, named after a 16th century poet); a public institution managed directly by the Minister for Foreign Economic Affairs as of 2016. "The Balassi Institute's main objective is to project a quality-oriented image of our nation, thereby increasing Hungary's prestige in the international sphere, while strengthening and preserving all facets of Hungarian culture both within and outside of Hungary's borders."

Today the Balassi Institute operates 23 institutions in 21 countries. The oldest one was established in Vienna in 1924, the latest additions were Istanbul and Beijing in 2013, Zagreb and Belgrade in 2014, and Ljubljana in 2016. There are considerable differences between the institutes, with some having facilities for providing scholars with fellowships, while others are just offices for cultural co-operation. In 2016 the Hungarian institute in Brussels set up the first Art Saloon of its kind in order to help Hungarian artists living in Belgium to cooperate with each other and with Hungarian cultural policy actors.

Bilateral cultural agreements, usually in conjunction with educational and scientific co-operation are managed by the cultural state secretariat of the Ministry of Human Resources. Bilateral agreements are recorded with over 100 countries, about 50 of which are active. The exchange of experts is still of importance in the agreements, especially in the heritage field. In the arts, most co-operation projects are realised through other channels.

European cooperation

Although public cultural investments continue to be dominated by payments from the European Structural and Investment Funds, the issue of culture's role in the 2014-2020 planning period (*Széchenyi 2020* programme) is almost absent from public discourse. The Partnership Agreement signed with the European Commission in August 2014 foresees further investment into cultural heritage in the context of regional development, and socio-cultural services are referred to in connection to human resources development. Most of these are supposed to be financed through EFOP, the human resources development Operational Programme which represents over 11% of all EU support for Hungary in 2014-2020 via the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

During the period of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (January-June 2011) the cultural administration was actively involved in managing topical EU matters, such as the preparation of a European Heritage Label, and organised a conference on the place of culture in Europe 2020, the long term strategy of the Union.