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The history of the International Kodály Society from 1975 until today

Thesis of the PhD dissertation

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Introduction to the subject of the dissertation, motivation of the choice of topic

The International Kodály Society (IKS) was founded on 11 August 1975 in Kecskemét, Hungary, with the aim of becoming an international organisation of those who are committed to the preservation of Zoltán Kodály's intellectual heritage – primarily musicians and music educators.

Based in Budapest, the IKS, through its institutional and individual members, plays a significant role in the international recognition, transmission and renewal of the Kodály-concept of music education and its practical application, which was declared an Intangible World Heritage in December 2016, and a Hungaricum in March 2017. Therefore, the IKS also performs an important mission for Hungarian cultural heritage.

No work has yet been written on the history of the IKS, and personal recollections are fragmentary and mostly limited to the early years (Szőnyi, 1979; Vikár, 1985; Hein, 1992; Bacon, 1993; De Greeve, 2013; Eősze, 2015; Jaccard, 2016). This research aims to fill this gap. The primary aim of the research is to raise awareness of the existence and activities of the IKS among Hungarian music education professionals and to integrate it into the professional public consciousness. From time to time, Hungarian music and music education journals report on the Society's events, but there are hardly any examples of academic reflection on the results of international Kodály adaptations in recent years.

In 2021, the IKS had 23 Hungarian members and 77 presenters at the 50-year-old International Kodály Symposia, but only 25 of them gave more than one lecture – this is the number of regular participants in the forum dedicated to the international reception of the Kodály concept. The activities, commitment, challenges, opportunities encountered by the IKS can be an inspiration for the reinterpretation and development of the philosophy and practice of music education in Hungary, which is declared to be Kodály-inspired. This need is confirmed by research published in recent years, which has revealed negative perceptions of the music subject in public school among both parents and students (summarised in Janurik & Józsa, 2016).

A secondary aim of writing this history is to contribute to strengthening the identity of the organisation and its membership. The main reason for this is that the so-called “Kodály teachers”, who have completed their training as music teachers entirely in their own country and have recently started their careers, as well as foreign musicians and teachers who are just getting to know Hungarian music education, have no personal experience of the processes and initiatives that have helped to create the IKS.

In 2023, the Society will be 48 years old, which corresponds approximately to the “critical threshold” of communicative memory as defined by Jan Assmann (Assmann, 1992/2004, p.

51). The present is the last period before the complete generational change, when the founders of the Society, the first foreign adapters of the music education popularly known as the “Kodály method”, are still present, as are their students and representatives of young music teachers. The IKS was also the first “international non-governmental organisation” in Hungary, so its early history is of importance in the field of cultural policy. Although the essay is not oriented towards cultural policy, the description of the circumstances of the establishment of an international NGO in the Kádár era, the attempts of governmental bodies to use it for cultural propaganda purposes – and their failure – can provide information for researchers of cultural and political processes of the period.

Main sources of the research

The history of the IKS is very fragmented in both national and international literature, while many relevant documents are preserved in the processed or unprocessed holdings of geographically distant archives. There are many sources on events that preceded and facilitated the founding of the IKS and the first decades of the Kodály concept’s international adaptation: monographs, dissertations, studies, newspaper and journal articles, reminiscences, archival footages and documentaries that inform about the institutionalisation abroad, even if that is not specifically the subject of the document (Stone, 1971; Tacka, 1982; Kite, 1985; Kéri, 2008; Liu, 2008; Funkhauser, 2021; Szőnyi, 1979; Jaccard, 2016; Eősze, 2015).

There are also the privately published or manuscript writings of a memoirs or histories for some national Kodály organisations (Mayer, 2007; Daly, 2013; Shenton, 2020; Márkusné Natter-Nád, 2018).

Most of the available printed sources are reports published in the IKS Bulletin or in the publications of national Kodály societies. Among these, articles reviewing the history of the IKS, are rare and mostly related to anniversaries even in its own journal. The authors of *Reflections on Kodály* (Vikár, 1985), published for the 20th anniversary of the IKS, mainly reported on their own country and personal memories. There is little information on the IKS in the book, and it mainly relates to the founding.

In addition to the published sources, the archival material were the main source of the historical research. In addition to the IKS's own archives, I had access to a considerable number of documents in special collections held in the Archives of the Zoltán Kodály Institute of the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music (Márta Szentkirályi-Nemesszeghy, Katalin Forrai, Klára Kokas, Cecília Vajda, Jean Sinor, Erzsébet Szőnyi, Mihály Ittész). In the Hungarian National Archives, I found relevant documents in fonds of the Institute of Cultural Relations (KKI), which

described the foundation and initial operation of the IKS from the perspective of the Hungarian governmental bureaux. The material of the KKI after the early 1980s is missing from the Archives, so these sources were not available.

Structure of the dissertation

The overarching question of the research was to explore the process of establishing the International Kodály Society as an international organisation of music education based on Kodály's principles, and to explore the scope and possibilities of the organisation, both intended and actually realised, in relation to the interpretation of the respective identities of the IKS:

In what way and under what conditions-limits can the organisation carry out the tasks set out in its mission statement and statutes – “the world-wide propagation of the musical, educational and cultural concepts associated with Zoltán Kodály”?

The essay is divided into three main sections corresponding to the three main lines of research that emerged from the Society's mission statement:

“The aims of the International Kodály Society shall be the [1] world-wide propagation of the musical, educational and cultural concepts associated with Zoltán Kodály for the benefit of music generally and in particular for the educational advancement of children and youth. The Society shall serve as [2] an international forum for all who are active in the [3] spirit of the Hungarian master as composer, scholar and educator.”

In accordance with the sections indicated, Part I (Chapters 2–11) presents the history of the Society as an institutional activity in pursuit of the objective of “world-wide propagation” Kodály's ideas and the challenges and opportunities it presents. Chapters 2 to 3 review the events leading to the establishment of the organisation, while Chapters 4 to 11, following organisational history approach, describe the activities of the IKS in a coherent structure during each presidential term: members of the Board of Directors/Executive Committee, the functioning of the IKS, its membership, its working groups, its relations with national member organisations and its wider professional-political environment, and its professional activities (programmes, publications, events, symposia).

Part II (Chapter 12) focuses on the “international forum” function of the IKS, presenting its professional forums: the Bulletin of the International Kodály Society and the International Kodály Symposium.

Part III (Chapter 13) explores the discourses on the interpretation of the Kodály concept in the Society's bulletin to give substance to the meaning of the work done “in the spirit of the Hungarian master”.

Research methods and questions

In the first part of the thesis, I used the method of source analysis in the tradition of historiography, supplemented by interviews with former members of the IKS Board of Directors.

The structure of the research was guided by the following directions:

- The professional events leading to the creation of the IKS
- The circumstances of the founding of the IKS from the perspective of the founders and the Hungarian governmental bureaux – The First and Second International Kodály Symposia (1973, 1975)
- The socio-political, cultural diplomatic and ideological aspects of the Hungarian governmental bodies and the IKS
- The activities, successes and difficulties of the ICS under the presidents

The second and third parts of the essay summarise the qualitative content analysis of the IKS Bulletin and the International Kodály Symposium. In the research, I followed the steps of Mayring's (2014; 2022) eight-step model.

1. Forming the research questions
2. Establishing the theoretical background of the study
3. Designing the study
4. Gathering textual material, sampling
5. Choosing and constructing adequate methods
6. Conducting the study, presenting the results
7. Discussing quality criteria
8. Reflecting on research implications

Research questions in the second part on the specificities of IKS professional fora:

1. How did the Bulletin's current image evolve? How was the programme of the symposia structured?
2. Who were the most frequently published authors? Who were the most frequent speakers?
3. Which countries were the authors/speakers from? What was their professional background? What was the percentage of IKS Board members among the authors/speakers?

4. What was the proportion of male and female authors? How did the number of co-authored papers/presentations change?
5. What proportion of symposium/conference papers were also published in the Bulletin?
6. To what extent are different aspects of Kodály's oeuvre present: musicology, ethnomusicology, composition, music education?
7. What are the main themes and what are their proportions and chronological distribution?
8. Are there any identifiable gaps that might provide new research directions for those working in the spirit of the Kodály concept?

During the research I built a database of original papers published in the IKS Bulletin between 1976 and 2020 (n=396) and of the lectures of the International Kodály Symposia between 1973 and 2021 (n=914), on which I performed descriptive statistical tests using the SPSS software. In the third part, I investigated the interpretation of the Kodály concept as mediated by IKS in the papers published in the IKS Bulletin using Atlas.ti qualitative text analysis software, following the specific questions below:

1. Based on their writings, what interpretations of the Kodály concept characterize the membership of the IKS in a given period? When are which elements of the concept of Kodály's conceptualization of music as a conceptual language emphasized?
 - a. The presence of Zoltán Kodály in the IKS Bulletin: which of his writings were published; which of his writings are quoted by the authors and what themes do the quotations cover?
 - b. How is the concept of Kodály defined? Which elements are emphasised?
2. How do they try to update and reinterpret the Kodály concept according to current social and professional expectations?
 - a. What made the Kodály concept attractive to the authors and what problems did they find it suitable for?
 - b. What challenges and difficulties do they identify and how do they respond to them?
 - c. What challenges and problems do they identify for the international community working in the spirit of Kodály?
3. Are there changes over time between the themes?

Limitations

Missing sources

The validity of the research results are affected by missing sources. Some of these documents are lost or unknown, the location of others are known, but due to geographical distance I have not had the opportunity to research the collections. In addition, documents may be found and/or become available in the future which may further clarify the information presented in this thesis, possibly opening up new avenues of research and interpretative frameworks.

Although I did not use traditional oral history method, the disadvantages and dangers of oral history as a research method have also been raised in connection with the analysis of the interviews and the memoirs, which were previously prepared in a similar way: it provides incomplete, biased data or may conceal details. The narrative told by the interviewee is itself the result of constructing, which also limits its validity.

Epistemology and methodological limitations

The research adopts a post-positivist approach, which accepts that the researcher's theories, hypotheses, background knowledge and value judgements may influence her observations and findings, and that social reality – and events of the past – can only be imperfectly known because of the limitations of sources, methods, possibilities and the researcher himself. It is committed to objectivity but reflects the limitations of research, which may arise from the methods chosen and the personal biases of the researcher.

Following Szabolcs (2011, p. 90), I had to take into account the following limitations in the historical research summarised in Section I: the reconstruction of the past can only be fragmentary, depending on the availability and reliability of the available sources; it is not possible to examine the validity of the image of the past that is revealed in the reconstruction process; the process of human behaviour, of historical modelling of the past, cannot be carried out in only one way, i.e. it is not possible to take into account the researcher's subject (background knowledge, attitudes, individual interests, etc.); the interpretation of the past is done with the thought material of the present.

The narrative created in this way is not “completely independent of the cognizant person's personality” (Gyáni, 2010, p. 14), in this case the researcher who formulates the research questions, analyses the available texts (written, oral and audio-visual sources) and creates the historical narrative from them. Consequently, it cannot claim to be the only possible interpretation. The narrative I have chosen has an organisational-historical orientation, strives

for objectivity, taking into account the limitations mentioned above, and relies primarily on written sources.

The main limitation to the validity of qualitative content analysis described in Sections II and III, stems from the fact that all textual analysis – reading and categorisation – involves an interpretative element: the creation of categories and classification of items, as well as the interpretation of the results, depend on the researcher's judgement. This is particularly salient in the case of the present thesis, because not all categorisation steps had data sources (keywords, databases created by others, external coders) that I could have used for so-called personal triangulation (inter-coder agreement), which involves multiple perspectives to minimise the bias inherent in the subjectivity of qualitative inquiry.

Main findings of the research

Part I of the dissertation reviewed the processes and events leading to the establishment of the IKS, followed by the history of the IKS. Beginning in the 1960s, the international interest in the Kodály concept first generated local movements and institutions (conferences, training courses, Kodály organisations), which by the 1970s created the need for a formal international organisation, which was established in August 1975 after two years of preparation.

The first years of its operation were marked by the IKS's search for an identity: to find the Society's place among international music and music education organisations, and to formalise the conditions and guidelines for its own functioning. It launched its journal and the International Kodály Symposium, which has been held every two years since 1973, was established under the auspices of the Society. To achieve its professional objectives, it has organised working committees based on areas of interest, invited contemporary composers to write choral works, organised the Singing Youth Choir Competition series and published monographs, score collection.

Established in 1984, the scholarship programme continues to promote the Kodály concept and to support the education of young choirs: 125 applicants from 25 countries have been awarded grants.

In order to cooperate with national Kodály organisations in different countries, affiliation guidelines were drawn up in 1981 and an affiliation agreement in 1995, which, once adopted, make local organisations part of the worldwide network of organisations brought together by the IKS. The IKS, however, has neither the legal nor the infrastructural means to supervise or professionally qualify its affiliates, and therefore defines itself as a partner and forum,

renouncing to be in practice the main guardian and spiritual leader of the international Kodály movement.

The founders initially made membership of the IKS subject to recommendations, which ensured a selection of applicants. The condition was relaxed in the 1980s, and in 1993 membership was opened up to all, allowing anyone interested to join.

By the 1980s, the influence of the Hungarian government bureaux that had financially supported the IKS in its first two decades – the KKI and the Ministry of Culture – had waned: in addition to the general crisis of the Soviet bloc, it had become clear that the Society could not be used for cultural diplomacy purposes promoting socialist music education.

After the regime change in 1989/1990, the unfavourable economic situation in Hungary meant that by 1995 the funds received from government bodies had ceased altogether and the IKS had to ensure its survival entirely on its own. Membership fees are the only secure income, so expanding membership is a constant challenge for the IKS leadership.

Since its foundation in 1975, the Society has had a total of 4,077 registered members, with a stable annual membership of between 400 and 500 members. In total, there were members from 67 different countries, but in any given year the number of countries did not exceed 38. This figure illustrates the extent of the international spread of the Kodály concept and the visibility of the IKS: it is present on all continents, albeit to very different degrees.

A review of the history of the IKS suggests several possible ways of achieving the objectives set when the Society was founded: 1) a closed, select society with the capacity to qualify and possibly coordinate activities under the name of Kodály pedagogy; or 2) a community open and supporting all those interested and committed to the Kodály concept, providing an international support for local representatives. The first path proved unworkable in just a few years.

The cultural policy and cultural diplomacy function that Hungarian political actors wanted to use at the time of foundation of the IKS was abandoned by the governmental bureaux by the 1980s, as members from the Socialist bloc had not been involved to the extent that the IKS was suitable for such purposes. Rather, the existence of the IKS counteracted the narrative that sought to present Kodály pedagogy as the success of the socialist system: the multitude of international adaptations and followers proved that the Kodály concept was not only a socialist/communist “product” but a universally valid philosophy and system.

In Section II of the thesis, I have explored the following gaps and opportunities in the IKS's professional forums – the Bulletin of the International Kodály Society and the International Kodály Symposium – which may provide new directions for research for those working in the spirit of the Kodály concept:

- 1) In terms of music education at each educational level, the presentations and the Bulletin are not balanced: in relevant cases, i.e. information on a specific age group, early childhood (0–6) and primary school music education make up two thirds of the papers. The training of advanced music students and professional musicians, amateur community music-making are also part of the Kodály concept, and professional forums, whether by publishing thematic issues or by choosing a symposium theme, could help to change this perception and encourage theoretical and practical research in this area.
- 2) There are few papers on instrumental music education (n=8) among music education topics, with a higher proportion of workshops and presentations at symposia (n=49). Investigating and presenting the applicability of the Kodály concept to instrumentalists could open up new areas of research and application in contexts where instrumental music education in schools is instrument-based.
- 3) There is an almost complete lack of studies and presentations on the inclusion of ICT tools. This can be explained by the Kodály concept's preference for active music-making and the overall paucity of papers on practical methodology in scientific journals, but the latter does not justify the only 9 papers in the symposia. The use of digital tools is now common practice and an expectation for schools and teachers, so the number of such studies is expected to increase, especially in the wake of the experiences of the 2020/2021 pandemic and the distance learning imperative.
- 4) Over the last two decades, there has been little focused research on the international application of the Kodály concept and its adaptability to the specific and (changing) music education contexts of different countries, which would be a useful resource for understanding the state of international Kodály pedagogy.
- 5) Research on music education for children with special needs is relatively scarce.
- 6) The number of studies and lectures that examine Kodály's ideas in relation to other philosophies, theories and ideologies, especially in the present day, is negligible. The examination and positioning of Kodály's ideas within – or as an alternative to – popular philosophical and ideological trends of our time has become particularly important in recent decades, when the Kodály concept's value is frequently questioned.
- 7) The most striking shortcoming, however, is the paucity of research carried out through international cooperation, even though the IKS forums provide the opportunity for such professional contacts, and indeed should be their primary function. The results of international collaborations and comparative studies would provide valuable data and experience for the Kodály community, and the IKS could encourage, initiate and support projects in this direction.

In Section III on the interpretation of the Kodály concept, following the messages communicated in the Bulletin, I found that for its dedicated followers, the primary attraction of Kodály pedagogy is the ethos attached to it. One of the greatest challenges and tasks facing the IKS, as an organisation of the Kodály community, is to preserve and transmit this ethos to a generation growing up in a value-relativist age, no longer under the personal influence of Kodály and his immediate disciples.

The IKS can only be relevant and viable if it successfully transmits the ethos of Kodály's principles in an ever-changing socio-economic-ideological context, without insisting on a dogmatic interpretation of Kodály's concept - and especially of its practical application - but allowing room for different perspectives, facilitating the adaptation of Kodály's principles to the prevailing geographical, social, economic and cultural conditions, and the constant renewal of a practice based on principles that are considered permanent and universal.

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