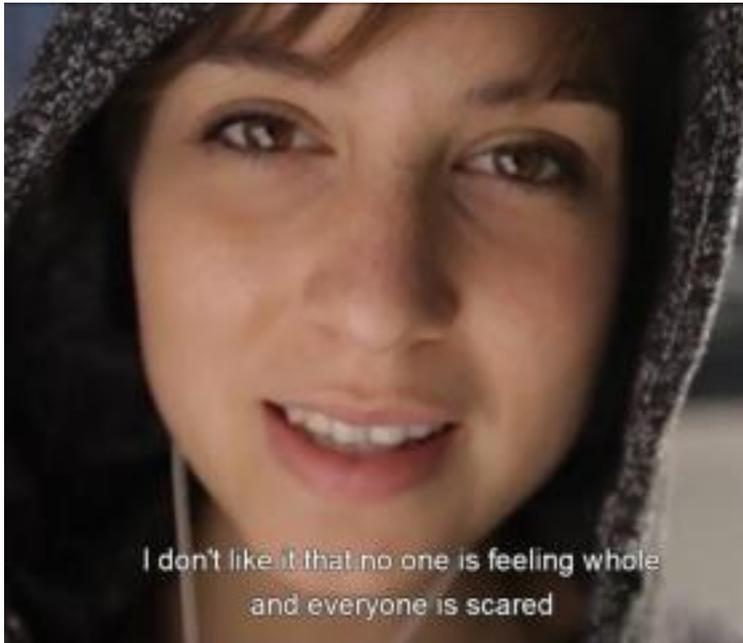

Mobilize the people - talk with Karsay Dorottya



Karsay Dorottya was interviewed during re:publica, European conference on digital society held in Berlin (Germany) on May, 2012.

Along with many other EU Southern and Easter European countries, Hungary was forced to seek help from the International Monetary Fund for its debt woes. But there weren't only the financial issues starting to worry Hungarian society. The conservative government took a pretty controversial path that triggered the protests of thousands of citizens that flooded the streets. On that occasion, the demonstration's call taking place in the fall of 2011 in Budapest - coinciding with the 55th anniversary of the 1956 Revolution— included a soundtrack that quickly became a massive hit on Youtube. "I don't like, I don't like, I don't like the system". An open collaborative video urged people to take part in the demonstration, and got around a half million views just on its launch

day. The main face among the dozens of Hungarian faces taking part in this video-intervention, is Karsay Dorottya.

Karsay Dorottya: I actually wrote the song while biking home. It was a first version, it was a friend of mine who was active in the movement who said „Hey, why don't we write a song?“ He knows that I like to sing and he knows that I'm an activist in many groups, and I was like „Okay, let's write a song!“ We already had the slogan for the protest. I wrote the first version and then we worked with a really great poet, who is also in the video -in the last bits he does rap— and we also worked with another guy who also write lyrics, yeah so that's how we put it together. We had no idea it would get this huge. The numbers just kept growing on Youtube. It was a shock for us too.

Mašta: It looks like you reached quite a mainstream audience. Was it also your goal, to reach a big mass of people?

K.D: Absolutely! When we wrote the song, it was to mobilize people to come to this protest that we had on the 23rd of October, 2011, which was actually the largest protest back then since the political changes in Hungary. So the goal was to mobilise people, to tell them „Come! This is important!“ It's because we are protesting against the system, not only the system built by the current government, but you know, the current political system. And against an elite which has created a situation in which 60% of Hungarians are not able to vote for anyone. So, yeah, the purpose was to get the message out there to a mass audience. But because it's on Facebook or Youtube, it does have limitations as well. It doesn't reach people that don't have access to Internet, who are not on Facebook and I think that's a great drawback.

Hi my name is Dorottya Karsay, I live in Budapest, Hungary, and I am a grassroots activist in various movements, I work with Budapest pride as their spokesperson; I also work with feminist, queer and anti-racist initiatives. Yeah, that is what I do.

Mašta: I have the feeling that, in general, activists reach other activists, but the message often doesn't go out to a wider audience. Why do you think it was successful in your case?

D.K: It came as a surprise! I think it was a message that spoke to a lot of people, a lot of people that were disillusioned with the system. Also, this tool had never really been used in Hungary before. We made a cool video, even though the budget we had was zero (everyone worked on it voluntarily), we did have professionals in the group: the people who made the music, –the people who shot the video,... Everyone just put in whatever talents and resources they had because they believed in the message.

Mašta: Maybe it also had to do with the combination of a difficult and harsh situation with a really poppy song and video? Showing a strong popular culture image...

D.K: The group itself is pretty popular. A week after they created the page they got 70.000 likes, which is a pretty great number in Hungary. So yeah, it was a great platform, which is one of the goals of the movement, to provide this platform for different actions and similar groups.

Mašta: During your conference you also mentioned this thing of basically “selling the message” or borrowing commercial and/or advertising strategies. Were you thinking about that when you started planning the action?

D.K: We actually didn't. And I really hate looking at activism and causes as products to be sold, but it definitely happens... I don't like it and if it's possible I don't participate in it because I don't think causes or people's rights are products you have to sell, and put in a package-able format - but - yeah, this is what ended up happening.

Mašta: You also were speaking about a competition which was based on an open call for people to participate sending their own videos to run for President and then get voted by the rest of the cyber community. With this campaign it looks like you managed to create a space for other people to say something and to vote. How did you manage to spread this and how did it work in practice?

D.K: Ehm, I wasn't actually working with the group when they did the campaign; I was one of the faces at the beginning of the campaign, trying to encourage people to apply. We used semi-known activists and people that shared their messages and that was the starting point to encourage them. Also the fact that it was just really open, it was on Facebook, on the website, on our blog, ...

And the message was simple „State what you would do if you were president!“ And interpreting the meaning of president was also alternative, you know, it was really free: as prime minister, as president, as an alternative to the person who was holding office back then or like as an alternative to the whole institution. It was all up to people, so they interpreted it the way they wanted to, which was great.

Mašta: You are an activist working a lot in the style and methods of classical activism (blockades, protests, cooperating with minority communities... But as well through new methods and the Internet. Would you say that there are new opportunities and ways of doing activism in a more creative way?

D.K: Yeah, I definitely think that the Internet can be used in very creative ways, to support the things we are working on, but as an activist I don't think it's the only tool, I mean I like actions on the ground, you know. It can facilitate the process, helping to organize, to mobilize, to get the word out. Using videos and music, it definitely brings you closer to people, because they can put faces to the message, or show personal stories like in blogs. People can identify with it more, they learn from it in a very direct way, and I think they are really useful tools. But they're definitely not the only tools that I support or use or believe in.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSP81Che1X0>



Visuals by:

Screenshots from the video
