

ELF PICTURES & CINEPHAGE PRESENT

KIX

Hungary, France, Croatia / 2024 / 92 min.

A film by
Dávid Mikulán & Bálint Révész

PRESS NOTES

World premiere

Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival, CPH:DOX 2024
NEXT:WAVE

SCREENING SCHEDULE:

WORLD PREMIERE
Venue: Empire Cinema
Saturday 17th March – 7:00pm

Venue: Empire Cinema
Tuesday 20th March – 4:00pm

CONTACTS

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Tagline

12 years of a young mischief turning into a public enemy.

Logline

KIX is a cinematic odyssey through a boy's coming of age. Over 12 years, it follows Sanyi from the playfulness of childhood to the conformity and grimness of adulthood. Through a lens both personal and political, we witness a rarely seen portrait of an impoverished working-class family in modern day Budapest.

Short Synopsis:

KIX is a 12-year odyssey following Sanyi's journey from a rowdy street kid in Budapest to a disillusioned young adult. Fueled by an unlikely friendship with filmmakers Dávid and Bálint, the film captures the evolution of Sanyi's life marked by family struggles, school issues, and the weight of surrogate fatherhood to his newborn sister. As Sanyi faces the challenges of adolescence, the filmmakers shift from active participants to observers in his life tumults; these culminate in a tragic turn of events forcing him to confront the responsibilities of adulthood.



Long Synopsis

KIX is a wide-ranging odyssey spanning 12 years of boyhood following a boy from Budapest as he evolves from a rowdy little kid to a rebel in adulthood.

Sanyi and his best friend live out their childhood on the streets, escaping the oppressive atmosphere at home. This is how Sanyi meets the two filmmakers, Dávid and Bálint, whose attention finally makes him feel visible. The essence of this unlikely friendship lies in joint creation and filming, a dynamic that evolves over the years as Sanyi's school and family problems surface. Through both charming and unsettling street scenes, we bear witness to the swift passage of a fast-paced childhood culminating in an increasingly disillusioned adolescence. The two filmmakers will no longer be active participants; instead, they become observers of Sanyi's fever dream-like life.

Upon the birth of his newborn sister, Timi, thirteen-year-old Sanyi is thrust into the role of a surrogate father. Bearing this heavy responsibility, he tends to her needs for prolonged stretches at times as his mother engages in arduous and demanding labour. Facing his failure at school, the imminent threat of family separation and the escalating toxicity from his father, he seeks solace among kindred spirits and a newfound girlfriend. Striving to elude the grasp of authorities by taking matters into his own hands, just as hope begins to glimmer, Sanyi faces a cruel tragedy compelling him to confront the heavy responsibility of adulthood.

Directors' Note

KIX is a multi-format odyssey following the growth of a kid, Sanyi, as he matures into a man navigating the complexities of adult life.

Emerging from an impoverished background and a dysfunctional family, young Sanyi begins to immerse himself in role-play, crafting a realm of imaginary occurrences both as a coping mechanism and an attempt to infuse vibrancy into an otherwise bleak and challenging reality. This world becomes remarkably vivid when captured on film.

KIX is characterised by video art, trash, and music videos. It's a balancing act between observational vérité and active interaction between subjects and filmmakers, displaying an incredible immediacy that tends to confront rather than explain. The film actively reflects upon the relationship between subject and filmmakers and witnessing the evolution on both sides raises the core questions of documentary filmmaking: does observation change the observed and in KIX's case, the observers? The unique relationship between Sanyi and the filmmakers goes through an evolution starting from a common ground for play, through a helper-needy connection onto a bystander position. Revolving around the age-old dilemma of breaking the vicious social circle, Sanyi, with his enduring energy, shows that he's willing to live an open-ended life. But will society reward his bravery?

The cinematographic approach of KIX is centered around an unmediated, deeply intimate, and personal portrayal from a friend's perspective. It is born from lo-fi necessity, as it began before fully understanding what it would eventually become. The evolution of the imagery progresses in parallel with the chronology of Sanyi's life, with filmmakers tailoring the cinematic experience to the phases of his initiation into adulthood. The kinetic energy is found in a nearly tactile experience, characterised by immediate and uncompromised engagement. The sense of nowness permeates the sequences, and by being honest about its vulnerability, the film doesn't attempt to balance out burning ethical, moral, and legal questions. Instead, it seeks to counterpoint the current trend of gentrification in documentaries and display its insecurities.

Bálint Révész and Dávid Mikulán
Budapest, 2024

Context:

These days Hungary functions as an incubator of societal and political changes. Western trends are often set by this little country, a 'pioneer' of how exclusion and illiberalism can defy a whole nation and change people's mind on the ground. We grew up in a country which aspired to belong to the European community and liberal values, and now Sanyi is growing in one which openly campaigns against it. Nearly one third of the population lives below the poverty line and thus responsibility doesn't belong to the state anymore as was always the case during socialism. Homeless, minorities or people with special needs are systematically neglected by the authorities and civil society is paralysed to help. With the weakening of the middle class and the down sliding of the working class, the responsibility of ordinary civilians became a vital factor of daily maintenance. This film is an ode to that consciousness, curiosity, and openness.

How can one take responsibility if no one has ever taught them?



Filmography & Bio / Director Bálint Révész

Bálint Révész has worked in a range of roles through editor, writer, producer, director, and university teacher. He's the founder behind a handful of film related organisations: UK based production company Gallivant Film, Budapest-based production company Roughhouse Project (owned and run by Viki Réka Kiss), Kontra (a distribution company) and Kulturlink (a cross-cultural foundation focusing on impact among other things).

Bálint focuses on making films about controversial subject matter, using challenging methods such as his first feature documentary, 'Granny Project' which has been 7 years in the making. The film has received the MDR prize at Dok Leipzig, Best Documentary and Editing from the Hungarian Film Critics Association, Next Generation Award at Taiwan IDFF, Doc Alliance nomination and was featured at Hot Docs, CPH:Dox. 'Another News Story', a film produced by him, about journalists documenting the refugee crisis, across seven countries, was in competition at the KVIFF, ZFF and featured at IDFA in 2017. He's the director/producer behind 'KIX' which has been supported by HBO Max, ARTE France, and CNC. On his current projects he's collaborating with NYTimes Op-Docs, IDFA Bertha Fund and Creative Media Europe.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY:

KIX (2024) – director and producer, Hungary, France, Croatia
UPROOTED (2021) – director and producer, Germany, Hungary
GRANNY PROJECT (2017) - director, Hungary, United Kingdom
ANOTHER NEWS STORY (2017) - producer, United Kingdom

Filmography & Bio / Director Dávid Mikulán

Dávid Mikulán is an Intermedia artist and filmmaker who graduated from the Fine Art University, Budapest. He has been making films since age 12. His artistic practice is influenced by skateboarding, punk music, fluxus, video art and experimental music. His multidisciplinary work's main focus is how public spaces have an effect on social structures.

His short films and animations were presented at Vladimir film festival, Budapest Architecture film festival, BUSHO, XAFT, KAFF, OFF-Biennale Kid's Eye film festival, Early Melons, Alter-native film festival etc. He was a participant at the 'Space of uncertainty' project touring around Krakow, Budapest and Stuttgart. Amongst numerous group and solo exhibitions he collaborated with the Conceptual Sound Productions Budapest, Kolibri Theatre and the Hungarian State Opera, Ludwig Museum. As a volunteer and filmmaker he worked together with NGO's and human right organizations like Oltalom Sport Association, Alternative Communities Association, The Hungarian Anti Poverty Network, the Workfare Movement For The Future. His first feature documentary entitled KIX is being co-produced in 3 different countries, with the involvement of major broadcasters (ARTE, HBO etc.) and world-class film professionals.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY:

REACTIONS (2010) - director, 7 min, Hungary,

ESCAPE (2014) - director, 3 min, Hungary

PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY (2015) - director, 20 min, Hungary

UNFINISHED PORTRAIT OF YOUTH TODAY (2017) - director 20 min, Hungary

KIX (2024) - director, 92 min, Hungary, France, Croatia

Filmography & Bio / Producer Viki Réka Kiss

Viki Réka Kiss is a Hungarian producer from Budapest. She has worked in a variety of international film productions in different roles for over 10 years now, including the Academy Award winning 'Son of Saul'. She started working as an independent producer in 2016 focusing on creative documentaries and author fiction films. She joined Julianna Ugrin on the exceptional project 'A Woman Captured' directed by Bernadett Tuza-Ritter. The film has been sold to 120 territories worldwide and shown by 74 broadcasters. She is a member of the EFA, a DOKIncubator, a Sarajevo Talents and an ExOriente Alumna and an Emerging Producer. In recent years she has been working with ELF Pictures (founded by András Pires Muhi and Ágnes Horváth-Szabó) and Good Kids (founded by Patricia D'Intino) on documentaries, fiction projects and commercials as well. Her projects are being supported/financed by CNC, ARTE France, HBO Max, Creative Europe, Visegrad Fund, Current Time TV and many more.

At Good Kids she is executive producer of the feature length documentary 'Cabin Pressure' to be released in 2024, they are currently also developing among others a fiction project 'My Father's Doctor Doesn't Practice' by Kata Besenyei (EAVE 2024) and participating as minority co-producers in international projects. She also started her own company Roughhouse Project in 2023.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY:

KIX (2024) – producer, Hungary, France, Croatia / CPH:DOX Next:Wave

A WOMAN CAPTURED (2017) – producer, Hungary, Germany / Sundance, IDFA, EFA nominee

Filmography & Bio / Producer Victor Ede

Victor Ede has been a publisher (In Libris Editions), chief editor, and then producer since 2014 within Cinephage productions, a company he co-founded with the awarded director Jean-Robert Viallet. Trained at workshops like Eurodoc or Emerging Producers, he has produced twelve films, including six international co-productions, a feature film and a short animated, and is developing a line of documentaries resolutely turned towards the international. His films are often co-produced with ARTE or France Televisions in France, and by international broadcasters and platforms such as RTBF, RTS, HBO Max... Victor Ede is currently a deputy member of the Cinemas du Monde commission (CNC). Member of the Eurodoc network, DAE, vice-president of the Producers union of the SUD-PACA region (LPA).

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY:

KIX (2024) – director and producer, Hungary, France, Croatia

BODY (2023) - producer, Slovenia, France

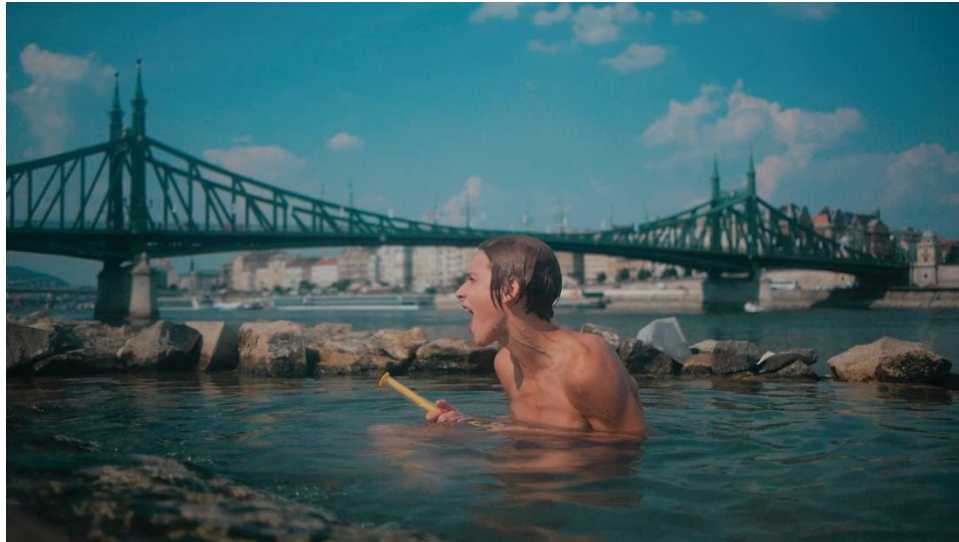
THE ORDER OF THINGS (2022), producer, France

LIVELY DISCUSSION (2022) - producer, France

WOMEN PREFER TO LAUGH ABOUT IT (2021) - producer, France

BREAKPOINT, A COUNTER HISTORY OF (2019) - producer, France

PRIVACY OF WOUNDS (2018) - producer, France



INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTORS DÁVID MIKULÁN AND BÁLINT RÉVÉSZ

“The playground is a nerve-wracking place. There are a lot of assholes. We fight a brotherly fight but it’s nothing serious. Sometimes we beat each other up. We train ourselves for real life and we’re real tough.”

– Sanyi

Hungarian intermedia artist and filmmaker, Dávid Mikulán (DM), remembers the day in 2011 when he first saw three kids climbing through a fence on a bridge. Since the age of twelve, Dávid has done circuits on the streets on his skateboard with camera in hand. While attending Hungarian University of Fine Arts, he continued to indulge in this practice, photographing and filming the people that caught his eye on his journeys through the city. After a while, the boys he had photographed came up to him, fascinated by his skateboard. Dávid says that: “Skateboarders hang out together no matter what their age – the younger ones and older kids together. It’s a close network. There’s a certain trust.” It was normal for brothers, Victor and Sandor, and their friends, to have lots of unsupervised time to roam the streets, making up games, causing mischief, and generally just having the time of their lives, letting their imaginations run wild and free. Dávid and the boys lived in the same neighborhood and soon they became fast friends. Sanyi was only eight at the time and Dávid would end up filming him and his family – grandmother, mother, father, and three kids, all living together in a thirty square meter flat – for the next decade.

Bálint Révész (BR), who is also a Hungarian artist and filmmaker, encountered the short experimental street documentaries that Dávid had been making in 2017 and promptly fell in love with the material. A street artist as well, and former wild child, Bálint promptly contacted Dávid and persuaded him that they should work together on making a feature-length documentary about Sanyi and his friends and family. They filmed for another six years until Sanyi reached the age of twenty-one.

Q: When you first met the eight-year-old Sanyi, Dávid, what was it about him or his circumstance that resonated with you?

DM: These kids I met when I was twenty-one and still in school myself were rural kids in a sense, even though we all live in the city. What I mean is that I found that they weren't just copying things featured in the media. They were the inventors of their own games. If you don't have a PlayStation at home and the parents are away working, you go outside and have fun with your friends and that was their situation. Sanyi and Victor, his older brother, spent portions of every day without parental supervision. The streets in Budapest have lots of playgrounds and stuff like that. It's very romantic to play football in Boráros tér, the square where we met. Aesthetically, it's nice but it's also very dirty and can be a very rough zone. I eventually met the whole family. It became a regular routine where we would "babysit" the kids because the mother knew and trusted us to look after them since, even to this day, she works three jobs to support the family. The creativity coming from these kids was stronger than some of what I was encountering in art school. Most of the time I just followed them and from time to time would bring crayons, games, art supplies. We also bought them skateboards. We even called ourselves "Fax Csapat", an artist group whose mission was to bring back public spaces to the people with "Art and Sports"! It was beautiful when they were young. When they became teenagers, a lot changed.

Q: Filming for 12 years is an impressive project. When and how did your commitment to documenting this long-term become apparent to you?

DM: During those younger years of mine, I was basically filming everything. I always had my camera with me. My skate videos became more and more experimental. The social aspect interested me as well because we just met so many people on those streets. I almost stopped filming when they got older. We lost one another because they stopped skating and were in their own little world. But they only lived three blocks away so I would still show up at their flat and the friendship continued. During that time, I started to do more research, learning new techniques of filming. In terms of Sanyi, what I noticed is that he didn't care about the camera so much – in other words, it wasn't really a "thing" between us; it was part of me being there for him and not so much that I was making a film about him or his family. They weren't that media-savvy to begin with. We did not want to over-control things. We were looking for locations and situations where they could freely move and create their own world. It was kind of a community project I started with my childhood friend David Gutema, also an artist and a maker of the film, and there were other friends of mine that joined the "adult crew" who also met the kids' circles.

Q: What were some of the struggles of coming up with the dramaturgical devices you had to invent to fit a decade of filming into its current incarnation of a 90-minute feature, particularly with all the ethical dilemmas you faced when things change irrevocably for Sanyi?

DM: We first did a 20-minute short that played at festivals. So, the core of the story was there. There was also a thought of making a second episode after this first short. As the years went by, I grew in my artistic practice and the footage as well just kept growing because I always felt like there was something still missing. The struggle was also how to tell the story in Sanyi's distinctive voice, all the beautiful and clever voices of the children. Any plastic kind of interview questions are boring as hell to a kid. I realised when he impersonated his superhero alter ego, he could express himself very well because it's playful, there are no wrong answers, that's how this philosophical experimental narration was born, which was used throughout the first chapter of the film.

I didn't really have the courage for quite a while to shoot with the family. It took much more time with them, but I kept showing up and shared in a lot of things that were happening with them, when the

youngest, Timi, was born, for example. When Bálint joined, as he said, Sanyi was this ugly teenager with all these serious issues that required some action. He had skipped school for a month so then child protective services started to intervene. The family was told they needed to renovate the house. It could be said that the whole artistic practice felt like it should be trashed because it wasn't working anymore.

Both Bálint and I have always played with the grounding elements of street art and filmmaking that we still share to this day. With Sanyi, his attention was all over the place. He didn't realise his own growth and talents, instead burying himself in his phone in some kind of hypnosis, like most kids these days. I believed that there is an ultimate way to tell his story, but this is just one way; it was all about making good compromises. We tried to make every scene representative – when Sanyi goes to the basement, his private space, what in the film is a five-minute scene could represent four months of his life where he searched for his own space to work out and be by himself. We tried some filmed interviews and consultations with the social workers or other professionals but the essence, for me, was always the intergenerational atmosphere and exchanges where we, as adults, spend time with the kids, where Sanyi spends time with his baby sister. And then life hits hard in a way no one expected.

BR: As Dávid said, there was this edited material in the experimental short documentaries and versions of Sanyi that resulted in this artistic collective he and the kids had formed back in 2012, 2013. For the diploma work, there was a need to aggregate or summarise the work that had been done up to that time. That's where this "super hobo" voiceover, when Sanyi puts on this sort of gangster persona, came in to bring all the footage together, to create more of a continuous flow. When I joined the project, the notion of a more traditional feature-length edit was then agreed upon. Some of the members of the group around Sanyi, those kids had equally amazing stories. In the beginning, we created an episode for each character so that Sanyi is just one boy in the crowd and then slowly orientated the film towards him and allowed him to lead the narrative. The result of that experiment was a three-and-a-half hour cut.

Then the decision turned towards making him the lead character throughout and figuring out how we could insinuate the older brother, Victor, back into the narrative in the beginning portion. We also wanted to look at the teachers, the social workers, and the other actors around Sanyi's life to give their accounts in a kind of talking head treatment to provide context. That was dropped as well until we decided that we would stay, almost exclusively, with Sanyi. There was also talk of including ourselves much more heavily. That started to feel a bit too exhibitionistic to some extent, so we kept our presences more subtle. And finally, to figure out how and what to include about the accident, particularly the societal coverage and response of it in Budapest and how not to let that overshadow the rest of the film.

[SPOILER: The accident referred to happened when the teenaged Sanyi and a friend were roaming the streets one night and a seemingly innocent prank took a tragic turn resulting in involuntary manslaughter and several million euros' worth of property damage.]

DM: It was very interesting to work with our editors, both of whom are parents. Their children were the same age at the time as teenage Sanyi. We had many real talks in the edit room, discussions of their situation with their own kids, and there were many common issues and dilemmas Sanyi was facing. We can say the scenes went through a mother and a father filter. As far as the language used, when Sanyi would say the word "fuck", it often meant love, when they fight it's often play, so it's a very intimate connection. Imagine you're holding your father in a wrestling position – have you ever been that close to each other? But viewers often come prepared with their own stereotypical ways of seeing these things. We've gotten used to seeing violence in films, but when you edit a documentary showing certain

things it can be very risky and easily misunderstood. I am not saying they are the most innocent angels, but that's the challenge to see the love beyond the surface. It was also hard to avoid pointing fingers. It's not that we would turn away from anybody's responsibility in the film, including ourselves. But part of our agenda is to let the viewer feel responsible too. Anyone can start action anytime. It's always easier to criticise the system – many times for good reason, of course. In the meantime, we are all programmed to be passive in these kinds of encounters.

Q: Maybe *KIX* is the last true portrait of unfiltered childhood? Everybody's a brand now, honing their image, usually for profit, even little kids. Even though you guys are still young, there's a sort of cavernous generational divide that emerged during the decade of making this.

BR: Yes, but besides this ode to childhood or a more organic portrait in the way you're describing, it's also a social study of the society we grew up in. You really see how things work in Hungarian urban areas. I'm not a sociologist or anthropologist, but I can resonate with a lot of people that use the same language and understanding we used with Sanyi and his family.

DM: Education is really on the edge now in Hungary, the whole system. I live in Denmark now. We would always hear about how great schools and the educational system were here in this country. I was just in Malmö and I was at a skatepark that was part of a high school. The students can skateboard as part of their PE requirement. There are two groups: one for the skaters and one for filmmakers. There are free flowing art programs like the one we created on the streets in Budapest with those kids. Play is an *essential* part of childhood.

What if the schools would be so good and the children so well-orientated? The kids then wouldn't rage against things they do not agree with? I don't think so. Schools should teach kids how to stand up for their ideas. If things are far from ideal, with a counter-cultural attitude, there is a chance that you become stronger, but until there are equal chances for every kind of kid, it's not really a fair fight. The educational and social systems in Hungary, the police force, all these officials, create fear. When people need help, the reputation of these various authorities is so bad that people feel they shouldn't call on them for assistance when they need it. I certainly wouldn't have let Sanyi repeat a school year three times. Why? Let him find his way in life in his own way. Or not.

Interview made by Pamela Cohn, 2024

Credits

Directors:

Dávid Mikulán, Bálint Révész

Producers:

Viki Réka Kiss, András Pires Muhi, Victor Ede, Bálint Révész

Co-producer:

Rea Rajčić

Co-producers ARTE France:

Fabrice Puchault, Anne Grolleron

Executive Producers HBO Max:

Hanka Kastelicová, Tereza Bóna Keilová, Anna Závorszky

Cinematographer:

Dávid Mikulán

Editors:

Yael Bitton, Károly Szalai

Sound Designer:

Ivan Zelić

Composer:

Csaba Kalotás

Production Company:

ELF PICTURES & CINEPHAGE

Broadcasters:

ARTE France, HBO Max

Co-production Company:

ECLECTICA

WITH THE SUPPORT OF

Centre national du cinema et de l'image animée

Région Sud Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur in partnership with the CNC

The Creative Europe Programme – MEDIA of the European Union, Procirep Angola

Croatian Audiovisual Centre, The Hungarian Film Industry Tax Incentive

Készült a Médiatanács támogatásával a Magyar Média Mecenatúra Program keretében

Current Time TV and the Visegrad Fund

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