

színház-
tudományi
szemle⁴⁸

theater
science
review⁴⁸

01/02 2025

Cirkusz, oktatás, örökség

ECA nemzetközi tudományos konferencia

A 15. Budapest Nemzetközi Cirkuszfesztivál programja

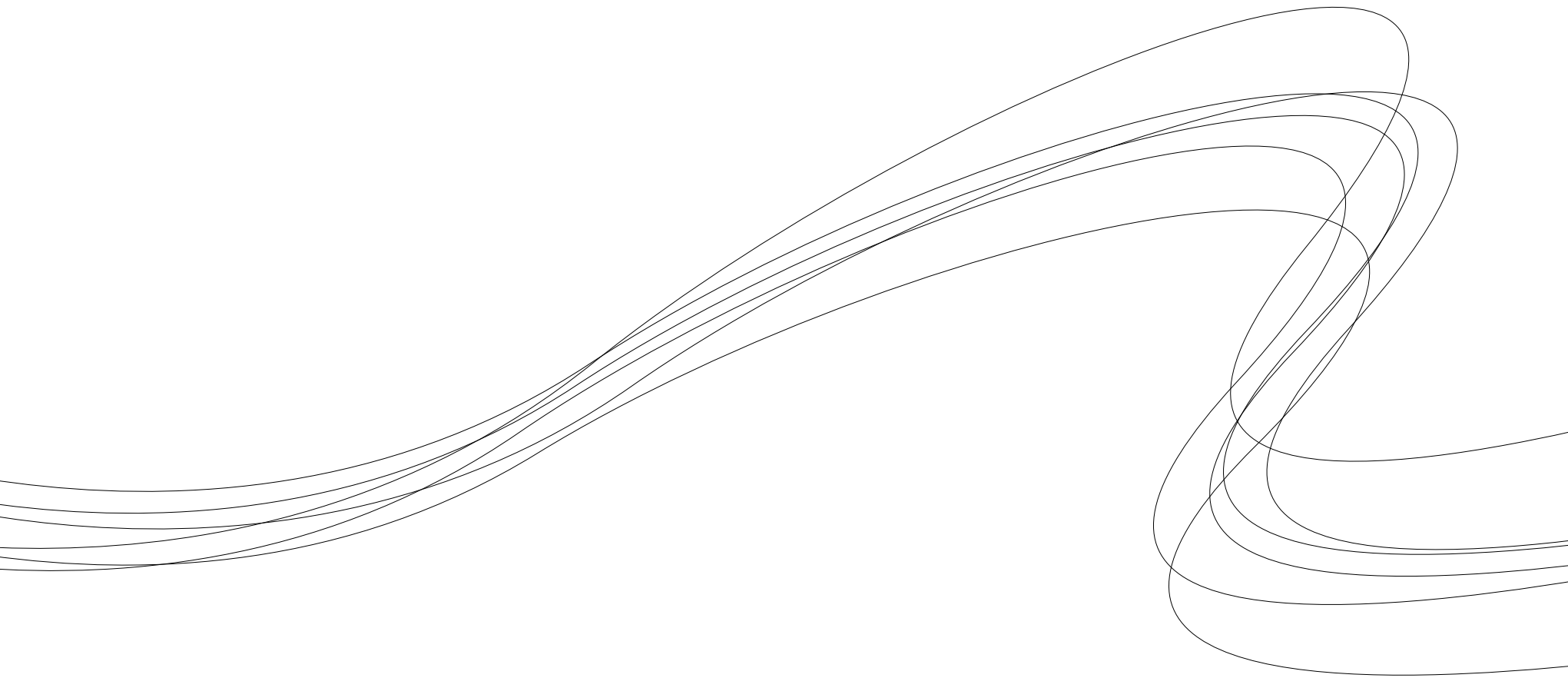
Circus, Education, Heritage

ECA International Academic Conference

Programme of the 15th Budapest Circus Festival

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Szandra Szondy



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Színháztudományi Szemle 48

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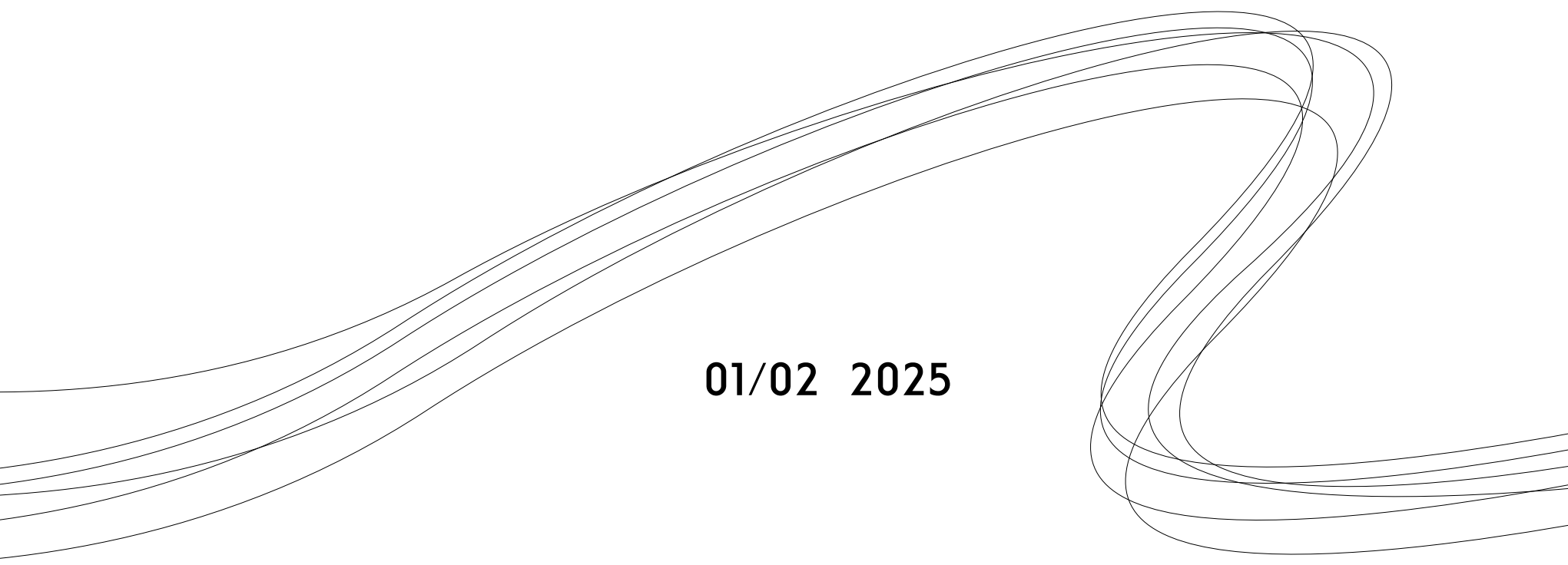
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**SZANDRA SZONDAY**

MUSEOLOGIST,
WRITER,
POET

Museum, Library and Archives of
Hungarian Circus Arts
(HUNGARY)

BIOGRAPHY

She is a Hungarian circus researcher, museologist, poet, writer, aesthetician, and blogger born in Budapest. Coming from a theatrical family, she holds two degrees from ELTE, in Hungarian Language and Literature and in Aesthetics, and chose circus arts as the topic of her doctoral dissertation. She taught circus history for several years at the Baross Imre Artist Training School, a subject on which she also wrote a book. She works as a museologist at the Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts, where she has been involved in the institution's diverse tasks from the very beginning: research, institutional development, collection development, exhibition organization, and museum education programs. She was the curator of the permanent circus history exhibition "*There Is No Other! 130 Years of the Capital Circus of Budapest*", which was on display at the Capital Circus of Budapest from 2019 to 2025. Her latest poetry collection, "*Exodus: Notes of a Hermit*", was published in 2022.

The author recommends drinking
chili-spiced raspberry tea
while reading her study.

The author recommends listening to
Electric Light Orchestra's album Time
while reading her study.

The circus is an international performing art: its centuries-old terminology reflects this. Different sources often refer to the genres and categorize them in many different ways. The aim of science is to create a consensual, well-defined circus vocabulary, a language of circus science – which already exists for other arts – to enable circus phenomena to be professionally defined, described clearly and accurately for all, and thus linked to other disciplines.

What is an Equestrian Juggler Like?

Developing a Circus Genre Classification System



ETHE FOUR DUNAIS, EQUESTRIAN JUGGLERS.

PHOTO:
MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

The Scientific Repository of the National Circus Arts Centre – the Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts – has been engaged for years in the systematic collection and study of circus genres. This work includes the selection, recording, definition, and interpretation of both traditional and contemporary circus terms, primarily in Hungarian and English.

The long-term aim of this research is to develop a complex and applicable classification system that can be used across the performing arts, education, and public collections such as museums, libraries, and archives. The professional description of collection objects requires the development of

specific special dictionaries. A museum artifact, for example, can be described using the following categories:

- Circuses: Capital Circus of Budapest
- Events: e.g., festivals
- Circus workers: performer, acrobat, acrobat on horseback, untermann, obermann, ringmaster, groom
- Persons: Mrs József Picard, Ferenc Picard
- Groups: The Six Picards
- Props: panneau, bit, bridle
- Animals: horse
- Acts: animal acts, equestrian acts, acrobatics, equestrian acrobatics, jockeys, pas-de-deux



THE SIX PICARDS EQUESTRIAN ACROBATS.

PHOTO:
MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

CONTORTIONIST RICH METIKU BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE CAPITAL CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST IN 2015.

PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN

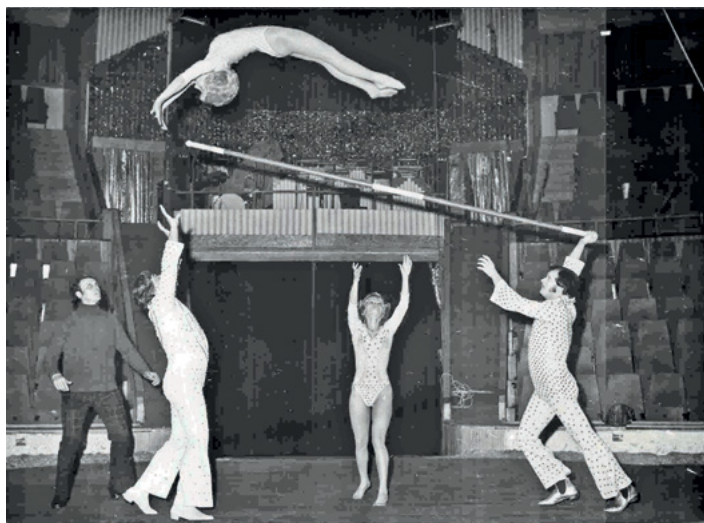
However, the goal of the research extends beyond producing a simple list of genres or a dictionary. It aims to develop a coherent taxonomic system. The first step in this process is to define each genre and identify its key features. Comparative analysis of international examples and existing classification initiatives plays a significant role.

Across the systems examined, genres were typically categorized using the following criteria:

1. Skills: What skills are required to perform the genre?
E.g., flexibility, sense of balance.



2. Movement types: What kinds of movements or elements constitute the act? E.g., jumps, throwing or balancing objects.



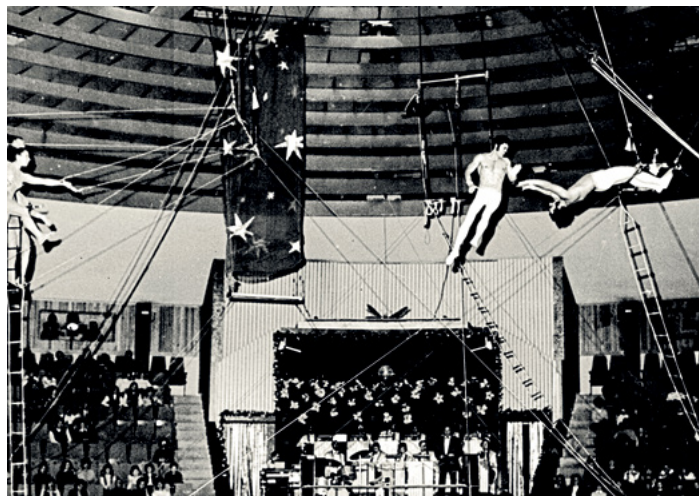
THE RUSSIAN BAR ACT BY THE FOUR EÖTVÖSES.

PHOTO:
MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

3. Location of the presentation: Where is the act performed? E.g., on the ground, in the air.



4. Props, apparatus: What props and tools does the performer use? E.g., clubs, unicycle, trapeze.



THE FLYING TRAPEZE ACT BY THE FOUR HUNORS.

PHOTO:
MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

LEVENTE HELLENPÁRT'S TIGHTWIRE ACT AT THE CAPITAL CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST IN 2024.

PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN

5. Style: What characteristic feature does the act have? E.g. lyrical, comical, elegant)



**THE TWO NÉGYESSYS'
ACROBATIC DANCE DUO.**

PHOTO:
MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

6. Animals: Are animals involved in the act, and in what way? E.g., dog training, acrobatics performed on animals.



**THE RICHTER TROUPE'S
ACROBATIC ELEPHANT ACT.**

PHOTO:
MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

7. Level of risk: How dangerous is the genre for the performer? E.g., ball juggling – low risk; high wire – high risk.



**CHRISTOPH, THE FRENCH HERCULES,
ALSO KNOWN AS
THE STRONGMAN ISTVÁN KRISTÓF.**

PHOTO:
MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

8. Relating arts: What other art forms are integrated? E.g., theatre, singing, dance.



Based on museum requirements and an analysis of international genre systems, the following proposed genre system was developed, combining aspects of both:

I. CIRCUS ACROBATICS – Any genres requiring acrobatic skills or knowledge:

- 1) Floor acrobatics: a) Performing figures on the floor or starting and finishing on it. b) Performed with apparatus fixed on the floor.
- 2) Aerial acrobatics: The figures are presented on apparatus fixed at high altitude.
- 3) Equilibristic (balancing): Balancing plays a key role in the presentation of the figures.
- 4) Object manipulation: The presentation is based on throwing and balancing with objects.

II. ANIMAL ACTS – All genres involving animals:

- 1) Animal training – The emphasis is on the performance of the animals and the skills of the trainer.
- 2) Circus acrobatics performed with animals – The emphasis is on the acrobatic performance presented by the performer.

THE THREE COLIBRI MUSIC PARODY TROUPE.

PHOTO:

MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

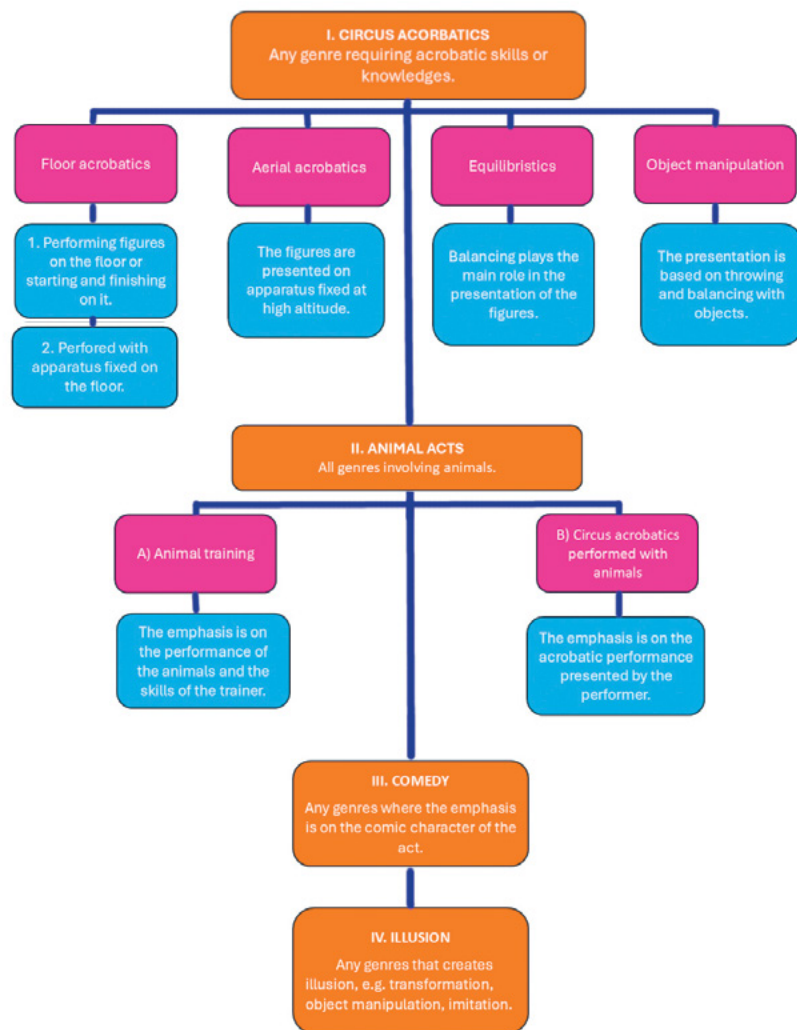


DIAGRAM OF THE CIRCUS GENRE SYSTEM - MAIN CATEGORIES.

MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

With this system in mind, the question arises: how can the genre of equestrian juggling be classified, considering that it combines animal training, equestrian acrobatics, and juggling?

Suggestion:

II. ANIMAL ACTS ► 2) Circus acrobatics performed with animals ► Circus acrobatics ► Object manipulation



THE FOUR DUNAIS, EQUESTRIAN JUGGLERS.

PHOTO:
MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

III. COMEDY – Any genres where the emphasis is on the comic character of the act.

IV. ILLUSION – Any genres that creates illusion, e.g. transformation, object manipulation, imitation.

Although these areas have received relatively little attention in most existing classification systems, it nevertheless seems necessary to introduce two additional categories:

VI. DRAMATIC UNITS – Dramaturgical elements of a complete act which cannot be classified as one of the above genres, e.g. parade, charivari, finale.

V. OTHER CIRCUS PERFORMERS: Other actors in the circus show and their performance, e.g. master of ceremonies, band, dance troupe, ringmaster, assistant.

The suggestion is, of course, still under development, and a number of further considerations require careful and systematic examination. One such question concerns the degree of detail with which individual genres should be distinguished – for instance, whether it is necessary to differentiate as finely as between cradle and double cradle, or between trapeze and triple trapeze. Another aspect that must be taken into account is the system's suitability for describing historical collection items, which makes it essential to include genres that have become rare, such as the liliput act or the human fly. It must also be considered whether borderline areas of circus art – such as the menagerie, cabaret, or sideshow – should be incorporated into the taxonomy. In addition, the spelling and definitions of genre terms need to be standardized, and it must likewise be assessed how foreign genres that are less familiar in Hungary can be integrated and how appropriate Hungarian equivalents can be developed for them, as in the case of daredevil acts (vakmerő mutatványos) or side show (mutatványos).



PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN

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- (Includes review of Lehmann, Rolf. 1979. *Circus: Magie der Manege*. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe.)

*„Az idei ECA-konferencia minden eddiginél sokszí-
nűbb és összetettebb. Egy élénk, nemzetközi ku-
tatói és szakmai közösséget hoz össze, és világosan
jelzi, hogy az itt tárgyalt kérdések messze túlmu-
tatnak egy szűk szakmai kör érdeklődésén: közös
kultúránk jövőjének alapvető kérdéseiről van szó.”*

Fekete Péter

*“This year’s ECA conference is perhaps more di-
verse and complex than ever before. It brings
together a vibrant international community of re-
searchers and practitioners, demonstrating that
the questions we address here are not the con-
cern of a narrow professional circle alone. They
reach far beyond that sphere and are fundamen-
tal to the future of our shared culture.”*

Péter Fekete



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