

# Acceptance Wild Roots (2021)

Translated by Kornelia Kincses

The purpose of this material is to support the professional preparation for helping conversations in the frame of “Filmteràpiàs Filmklub” (Film-therapy - Filmclub). Its main goal is to help professionals start sensitisation, psycho-educational and self-reflective conversations with adolescents and young adults alongside the topics occurring in this film. The centre of these interactive sessions is the 2021 film Wild Roots that creates an opportunity for young people to think about the importance of connections and the sense of belonging in relation to their own experiences. During the discussion young people can express how they experience their presence in their communities; how does it feel when they are accepted, what effect does loneliness and exclusion have and how does this all influence their self-acceptance. Processing the film creates an opportunity for young people to think about the specific issues of social existence occurring in adolescence and young adulthood, and the balance between social integration and personal identity through their own experiences. The reflections may highlight the challenges of the digital age, which has a huge impact on young people’s social experiences nowadays. The aim is to help students express their own feelings and thoughts, develop greater awareness of the resources and challenges inherent in human relationships, and improve self-reflection and social competences. The processing dialogue creates an opportunity not only for improving self-awareness and social skills, but also for fostering sensitisation within peers.

This material offers thematic aspects and questions for conversations. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the boundaries between these topics might be blurred, therefore it is not necessary to stick to the given structure, but to adapt it to the needs and dynamics of the group. Processing the topics is scaffolded by a wide range of materials and activities that help participants’ active involvement and collective thinking. During the discussion, it is useful to prevent the shared experiences from becoming too intimate, since in a group setting it may cause anxiety. The role of the facilitator is to support participants in verbalising their experiences, but prevent the dialogue from becoming too personal. It might be useful, for instance, to help self-reflection with general examples, and questions that create a safe environment for expressing emotions, but at the same time avoid the risk of excessive self-disclosure. However, it is important to provide the possibility for sharing personal thoughts and experiences if needed. It is useful to emphasise empathy, acceptance of different perspectives, and the fact that there are more than one answer to a question.

## 1. Tuning-in - First Impressions and Emotional Resonance

Sharing the first impressions and emotional experiences in connection with the film can help participants initiate self-reflection and begin thinking about their own inner processes within a safe framework. This phase of the discussion promotes the development of emotional awareness in adolescence and young adulthood, which is one of the key elements of self-awareness at this stage of life. When young people reflect on how the film affected them, they also practice identifying and verbalising their own emotional responses, which helps them to handle and communicate their

feelings with greater awareness. The questions supporting tuning-in do not require deep or personal self-disclosure, but they create an opportunity for young people to express their experiences and impressions. In order to minimise potential anxiety, it is beneficial to emphasise at the beginning that each and every personal experience is valid and valued. Sharing feelings and associations create a shared experience, since the members of the group recognise that others have similar emotions and thoughts, which strengthens the connection and the feeling of security. All of these ensure that the processing discussion begins in an open, honest and safe atmosphere, laying the foundation for further collaborative work on heavier topics.

### Conversation Starter Questions

- What feelings did the film leave you with?
- Which scenes had the greatest impact on you?
- If you had to describe the atmosphere or message of the film with one word, what would it be?

## 2. Processing the Film Experience and Seeking Points of Identification

This phase of the discussion creates an opportunity for participants to engage with topics indirectly through the characters, enabling reflection on matters that may concern their own lives. This phase of the discussion offers an indirect approach, where participants can explore the dilemmas of loneliness, sense of belonging, acceptance and self-acceptance through the perspectives of the characters while avoiding excessive self-disclosure. This indirect approach is essential at this age since young people's, especially adolescents' emotional world is intense, and it is often difficult for them to express and verbalise their emotions, problems and anxieties. It is much easier to reflect on a fictional character's decisions, dilemmas and life situations because that way they do not have to talk openly about their own vulnerabilities. The film thus provides a projective space through which participants can explore their own experiences, insecurities and inner conflicts, which helps with self-reflection and processing experiences. Analysing the characters and the supporting, plot-related questions help young people to identify the dilemmas of exclusion, loneliness, sense of belonging, desire for connection and self-acceptance without having to express their own emotions directly. This creates an opportunity for self-reflection while keeping distance from self-disclosure. Personal associations linked to the film provide an opportunity for participants to explore their own life situations and experiences, and they gently cross over from the storyline of the film to the bridge leading into their own reality. The discussion in the group works as a model: it helps participants practice forming opinions, listening to others' perspectives and expressing thoughts in a safe way.

### Conversation Starter Questions

- How would you describe the two main characters? What are their strengths and weaknesses? How do they relate to their environment?

- What might have motivated Niki to seek a connection with her father despite all the obstacles? What does this show about her inner needs and desires?
- What could explain Tibor and Niki's attachment, even though they barely know each other?
- Have you noticed that both main characters are searching for their place in the world? What signs suggested this in the film?
- How did the film portray Tibor and Niki's isolation? Which scenes expressed their loneliness the most?
- Why do you think Niki felt that she had to show a different self for her peers? How is this in connection with the desire for acceptance?
- What do you think Niki's shoes symbolised? How did they contribute to the story and the character's inner struggles?
- What could have Tibor done differently so that his environment accepted him more easily? What external and internal factors stood in his way and how can we interpret his decisions?
- How did you perceive Tibor's relationship to himself and his past? How did this affect his behaviour towards his daughter?
- How would you interpret the title of the film (Wild Roots)? What message could the title send about relationships, community and being an outsider?
- Why do you think Tibor turned back at the end of the film? What does it mean in relation to the father-daughter relationship?
- If you could give advice to either Niki or Tibor at the end of the film what would it be? How could it help them with self-acceptance or forming relationships?

### 3. Loneliness and Solitude

Adolescence and young adulthood is all about identity exploration and transformation of relationships (Ruiz, & Yabut, 2024). The absence of a supportive, holding environment and meaningful, fulfilling connections can be especially impactful for this age group. Chronic loneliness is strongly connected to the occurrence of mental health issues (Matthews, et al., 2023). Having a discussion about loneliness can help the participants recognise that these feelings are universal, presented in everybody's life, yet can be experienced in completely different forms. Anxiety and tension can already be relieved by facing the fact that they are not alone with their feelings, their peers fight the same battles as they do. This alone reduces the feeling of isolation, strengthens the sense of belonging to a community and supports empathy towards others.

During the discussion it is helpful to emphasise the difference between loneliness and solitude. Loneliness is usually experienced as a painful and isolating sense of deprivation in which the quality or quantity of our relationships does not meet our needs (Supke, Hahlweg, Job & Schulz, 2025). People often do not feel genuinely connected even when physically surrounded by others. It is important to emphasise that the fear of being alone is quite common among young people (Corsano, Grazia & Molinari, 2019). As a result of this, they force themselves to create social situations around them, however, these connections are often superficial and they lack emotional stability. This mechanism can maintain or intensify the experience of loneliness in the long run. During the discussion, it is made aware that solitude is not necessarily a negative state, but it creates an opportunity for identifying personal needs and

improving self-awareness. Solitude can be a relaxing and self-reflective experience that can serve as an inner resource (McVarnock, Cheng, Polakova & Coplan, 2023). Making this distinction can assist young people in approaching their experiences more consciously, recognising when they genuinely need social interaction and when spending time alone may be more restorative.

It might be an important experience to recognise that the modern forms of interaction, such as social media, offer a possibility for connection, but at the same time they involve the risk of loneliness (Pum, Salama, Lin, Kirschmann, Johnstonn & Hendel, 2025). When examining the experience of loneliness, special attention should be paid to the impact of the digital world, since that is the primary setting for interactions among young people. Although social media and constant connectivity appear to offer a continuous opportunity for interaction, they often reinforce the feeling of isolation. Interactions experienced on social media platforms are often superficial, transient and do not necessarily offer real emotional security. Moreover, young people are exposed to constant comparisons. The idealised and carefully curated self-presentations of others may contribute to self-esteem issues and intensify the feeling of loneliness. Thinking about this phenomena during the group discussion may help young people to see online interaction more realistic and critical. In addition to this, the discussion draws attention to those forms of connection that provide genuine support and resources for us, such as friendships, family bonds or community experiences. It is also emphasised that everyone has such resources (people, places, activities) that provide support when the feeling of loneliness intensifies.

#### Conversation Starter Questions

- If loneliness was a weather condition, what would it be like and why?
- Do you think that loneliness is more like noise or silence?
- Have you ever experienced loneliness while having family and friends around? Why do you think this feeling might arise?
- Have you ever felt like an outsider in a friendship group or community? How did it feel?
- Does it happen that you chose to be alone on purpose? When do you feel that being alone is more calming and recharging rather than making you feel lonely?
- Has it ever happened that someone joined a group simply for not being alone?
- Do you think that social media and online interactions reduce or increase loneliness? What is your personal experience about this matter?
- Why do you think so many young people feel lonely today, even though the internet allows them to stay in touch with almost everyone?
- Was there a time of your life where you felt lonely? What helped you feel better?
- Name three of your resources (person, place, activity) that would make you feel better when you experienced loneliness?

#### 4. The Significance of Social Groups and the Human Need for Belonging

Belonging to a community and the need to feel connected are fundamental human needs, which become particularly important in adolescence and emerging adulthood as the experience of acceptance contributes to the development of healthy self-

esteem and identity formation (Allen, et al., 2024). Belonging means healthy, stable and positive relationships, and it involves interactions based on mutual care (Howard, Dadirai, Gwenzi, Newsome, Gebru & Gilberston Wilke, 2023). One of the most important psychosocial characteristics of adolescence is the strong orientations towards peers and the increased need for belonging to a community (Cole&Cole 2006). Young people partly define themselves through the groups they belong to. Belonging to a group gives them the feeling of security, emotional support and identity, and it helps consolidate their personal and social identity (Ragelienè, 2016). The group norms and expectations strongly influence young people's thinking, decisions and values. Stable attachments and social support continue to serve as crucial protective factors during emerging adulthood (Lane, 2015). This phase of life is a critical stage for strengthening of identity, where young people face several new challenges. Such challenges are the studies, fitting in the world of work, independence, separation from family, long-term relationships and building friendship networks. Secure attachments and supporting social connections work as psychological resources in these transitions. However, the influence of the community can also have negative effects so it may be beneficial to draw attention to its dual nature.

Belonging to a group is versatile: family, school/university communities, friendship circles, sports, hobbies and online groups all serve different purposes in young people's lives. The diversity of social belonging points out that the identity is not static but is continuously shaped through connections with different groups (Erikson, 1968). Young people often take different roles in different social settings, they behave differently with family, at school or in an online community. Changing roles serves the development of social competencies, but at the same time it can create dilemmas about the question of identity (Meeus, 2011). The processing discussion creates an opportunity for participants to recognise that it is fine to show different sides of themselves in different social groups, since this is a natural part of social development. It is beneficial to talk about the times they feel this change authentic and the times it feels like the result of external expectations. This type of self-reflection helps them to recognise the situations, where they feel authentic and the communities that support their development and the ones that can exert a constraining influence. This awareness can help young people to develop a more nuanced understanding of their social roles, to identify constructive and harmful group dynamics, and to make more conscious decisions regarding the communities they choose to engage with.

The reflection about communities can help young people differentiate between supportive, constructive group influence and harmful, destructive dynamics. Supportive communities offer a secure frame, strengthen the sense of competence, develop a healthy self-expression and contribute to the positive reinforcement of identity (Masten, Burt, Roisman, Obradović, Long & Tellegen, 2004). However, communities with negative effects often present conformity, exclusion, too much emphasis on hierarchy or destructive behaviour (such as aggression, deviance) (Regeliene, 2016). These kinds of experiences may lead to self-esteem issues, insecurity or maladaptive behaviour strategies. That is why it might be crucial to think together about what makes a good community. This kind of mindset helps them to recognise that the quality of social belonging is at least as important as the mere fact of belonging. It is a useful experience for young people to verbalise the values, aims, habits and behavioural patterns they attribute to a secure and supportive community. This helps not only with the interpretation of the group experiences, but also projects

the skill of choosing communities more wisely in the future, and it actively contributes to the formation of community norms.

### Conversation Starter Questions

- Why do you think it is important for people to belong to a community?
- What feelings come to your mind when you think of the sense of belonging? Why those feelings? if you had to describe the sense of belonging with one movement, metaphor or image what would it be and why? Think of an object, natural phenomenon or colour that symbolises this feeling for you?
- What communities do you belong to? Which ones are the most important for you? How did priorities change in the last few years?
- In what ways do you think your group memberships define your identity? How did a community you are a member of affect who you are?
- Can you say an example of a community forming your opinion, decisions or values?
- Imagine that one of your communities stops existing from tomorrow? What changes would you feel in yourself or in your life?
- Have you ever noticed that you behave differently and take different roles in different groups? For instance, do you behave differently with your family, in school or on an online platform? Why is that and what does it say about you?
- Have you ever experienced a situation where the community had a negative impact on you or someone else? If yes, what happened and what did you learn from it?
- What do you think makes a community 'good' or 'bad'? If you had the possibility, what kind of community would you create? What would it be like, who would you like to see in it and what kind of habits, experiences and values would you like to have?

### 5. Acceptance and Fitting In

Acceptance and fitting in is a crucial question in adolescence and emerging adulthood as the quality of peer relationships and the sense of belonging to a community affect young people's self-esteem, identity and mental wellbeing directly (Ragekienè, 2016; Rejaän et al., 2022). The supportive community environment serves as a protective factor: it provides security, emotional support and stability (Butler et al., 2022) while exclusion, abuse and bullying can cause serious psychological damage (Han, Ye & Zhong, 2025). Discussing the topic collectively can help young people become aware that through their own behaviour they also contribute to shaping the atmosphere of the community, and that they share responsibility for ensuring that everyone feels safe. An important aspect is that young people recognise that the destructive effects of the lack of acceptance influence not only the victim, but also the atmosphere of the group, while an inclusive attitude creates a more secure and open environment for everybody. Such awareness can support participants in recognising their own role in maintaining and shaping community norms. The discussion also gives an opportunity for participants to reflect on what makes a community truly inclusive, what small gestures or actions can support the integration of new members, and how they can prevent anyone from feeling excluded. Collective reflection not only develops empathy but also

offers practical ideas for how to consciously and actively contribute to maintaining and creating a supportive community environment. The digital world deserves special attention since bullying and exclusion occurring online have different dynamics compared to face-to-face interactions. Anonymity or physical distance often reduce empathy and intensity aggression. It is also important for adolescents to recognise that bystanders have responsibilities in an online context as well; they can stand up for victims, report inappropriate behaviour, or promote positive community norms.

### Conversation Starter Questions

- When do you feel safe in a community? What things and circumstances give you trust and protection in a group? How do others show you that you matter to them?
- What do you think makes a community truly inclusive and safe for its members? What can the members do to ensure that nobody feels excluded? What is needed to create a positive atmosphere for everybody?
- What effect do you think it has on a community when the norm is to accept and include everyone? What effect does it have on the mood of the community and the relationships between the group members?
- Have you ever felt like you need to hide something from yourself in order to be accepted by others? Are there any groups where you never had to play a role? What is something you would never give up just to belong somewhere?
- Have you ever experienced or witnessed abuse or exclusion from a community? How did it affect the excluded person? What can help them get over it?
- How do you think it is different when people hurt each other online and offline? Why is people's behaviour different online?
- Have you ever come across a case online, for instance in a group or on social media, where someone was bullied or left out by others. In your opinion, how can a bystander most effectively support a victim in such situations?
- What would you do to help a newcomer feel included if you saw that the group wasn't involving them? How would you make them feel welcomed and show them that they are part of the group?
- How can you contribute to making your environment more accepting and inclusive? Can you name one small step or example that you could do even tomorrow to make this happen?

### 6. Being Accepted and Accepting Myself

Understanding the relationship between self- acceptance and social acceptance is crucial in adolescence and emerging adulthood, as young people's identity, self-esteem, and relational patterns are still in the process of developing. The way communities provide feedback about them significantly influences how they view themselves and how acceptable they feel. Positive feedback improves young people's self-confidence and contributes to the development of a more stable self-esteem, while judgment, exclusion or conditional acceptance can easily lead to insecurity, self-esteem problems or anxiety ( Arian, Shen, Wu, Xu &Yan, 2025). Understanding the relationship between self-acceptance and social acceptance can help young people

recognise that, although external feedback significantly shapes their self-image, in the long term, the stability of their relationship with themselves provides genuine security (Branje, 2021). During the group discussion it is useful to emphasise that self-acceptance does not mean that one sees themselves perfect, but that they are able to see their strengths and weaknesses realistically and with empathy. This internal sense of security gives a greater resilience against external criticism, social pressure or exclusion (Ruan, Shen, Wu, Xu & Yan, 2025). During the processing conversation it could also be useful to talk about identity and authenticity. It is common for young people to feel accepted in certain communities only if they give up aspects of themselves or conform to group norms even if they are not aligned with their own values. Drawing attention to these situations may help participants recognise that the communities that provide lasting security are those in which individuals can participate authentically. This recognition supports creating healthier relational patterns and a more stable identity.

### Conversation Starter Questions

- How important is it to you what others think of you? How does this change depending on who the people are?
- Do you think there is a difference between being loved and being accepted? What is the difference?
- How does the feedback from important communities influence our self-image? Is there a connection between how we see ourselves and how we perceive our communities?
- How does your self-esteem change depending on whether you feel accepted or excluded in your friend group?
- How does the opinion of your environment influence you? How does it form your self-image? Have you ever had an experience where the positive feedback from a community helped you accept yourself more?
- Imagine a situation where you want to fit in a group but you feel that you could only be accepted if you gave up certain parts of yourself. To what extent would you be willing to change yourself for acceptance and how would that make you feel?
- What does truly accepting yourself mean to you? Can you think of a moment when you really felt it or when you found it difficult?
- Do you think that self-acceptance can be learned? How can it be developed?

### 7. Closing Round

This round helps with integration and closes the emotionally demanding process. It plays a key role in both the safety of the students and the follow-up. The discussed themes can be emotionally moving for the participants, especially if they are personally affected. That is why it is crucial to take enough time for reflection and create an opportunity for them to share their thoughts and experience about the session. They should be given time to articulate the lessons they learned, to connect to their feelings in order to close the session successfully. This closure supports psychological integration and emotional security. The moderator must inform the participants about further possibilities to get help if it is needed (school psychologist, trusted adult, etc).

Conversation Starter Questions:

- What was the most memorable thing you heard today?
- What feelings arose during the day?
- What is it that you take with you from today's session?

## Acceptance ( 2021)

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### I. *Wild Roots* as an Auteur Film with Documentary Realism

Kis Hajni's 2021 debut feature film, *Wild Roots*, quickly won over both critics and audiences. This comes as no surprise, as in her earlier short films she had already demonstrated a deep understanding of the traditions of Hungarian cinema and, more importantly, a strong awareness of the social milieu around her. Social sensitivity is a crucial characteristic of a self-conscious auteur filmmaker, and Kis Hajni has already embarked on a difficult yet intriguing path with her first feature film. The whirl of contemporary life was portrayed through a lens of documentary realism.

Hungarian cinematic tradition has a designated space for this genre structure. It was primarily employed in the 1970s - 1980s wave known as *New Sensibility*. The artists of this era - such as Béla Tarr, Péter Gothár, János Xantus, Gábor Bódy and András Jeles - sought to detach themselves both from the politically infused feature films of the time and from postmodern experiments with temporality in cinema, shifting the focus from the collective to the individual. They were heavily influenced by the British New Wave known as *Free Cinema*, and by the new wave followed in its footsteps. These filmmakers portrayed the mundanity of daily life and the microdramas of the community, always from the perspective of ordinary people, dreamy youth and individuals jaded by the routine of everyday life. The two central concepts - documentary and realism - formed significant parts of their toolkit, alongside original venues, natural lighting and camera movements, and often the use of amateur actors. Many of the films produced during this era remain relevant today as a model for the debut of contemporary auteur filmmakers.

*Wild Roots* fits perfectly into this tradition, both in theme and execution. The camera follows venues that might be familiar to anyone living in Central and Eastern Europe: forests of panel flats, everyday stairwells, dimly lit corridors, rusty railings, old trees in the parks, playgrounds among the flats, suburban clubs, late-night diners, and loop routes. The documentarist, almost sociographic elements blend seamlessly into the fiction. The narrative unfolds along two separate storylines: on one hand, the story of Tibor, the bouncer, and on the other, the story of Niki, a teenager living with her grandparents. They belong to each other but drifted apart long ago. Tibor, an ex-con, can only work as a bouncer. He is trying to pull himself together and save enough money to move out of his brother's house. Niki has a complicated family background: she hasn't seen her father for a long time and her mother died in an accident caused by his father. When Tibor appears looking for an old passbook, sets off an avalanche, and the former family units seem to fall apart.

Kis Hajni chooses authentic methods to explore this topic. She often uses handheld cameras and never overexposes anything, instead relying on natural lighting and the conditions of the venue. She also adapts to the scenes; for example when Niki is searching for her father, the camera adopts hidden angles, as if taking over the perspective of the hiding girl. The director frequently works with long takes, so the film's visual language follows two paths: it is simultaneously documentarist/realist and lyrical. The former is required by the depiction of the milieu, the portrayal of everyday life, the quiet nature of relationships, and the authenticity. Lyricism emerges in subtle details, as the camera lingers on small elements such as gnarled tree trunks, sunlight filtering through leaves, lights in the disco, faces, veins of a leaf, or a beetle walking on the grass. This creates a poetry-infused realism in the film with the father-daughter relationship as its central axis.

## **II. Father and Daughter: Missing bonds and Unhealed Wounds**

If one of the main virtues of the film is its style and execution, then the other is undoubtedly the nuanced and deeply problematic father-daughter relationship. Tibor has been estranged from his daughter for years, and he would not want to take the role of the father if his daughter did not seek him out. In fact, the film revolves around the rebuilding of their relational dynamics.

The girl, Niki, is in puberty and creates numerous problems around herself - at school, at home and wherever she goes. Her mother is dead, her father is absent, and her grandparents try to raise her. Niki rightly feels that the emerging family roles are on shaky grounds. She struggles to connect with her grandparents due to great distance between them. At the beginning of the story, the family dynamics lack the roles of mother and father which the grandparents are meant to fill. In contrast, an empty space emerges around Niki - if we interpret this through the duality of love and care - where there is no emotional support or connection. Her grandmother is supposed to fill the void left by her mother, just as her grandfather should fill the void left by her father. However, the grandfather is very sick and bedridden, and the grandmother must care for him constantly. As a result, the family dynamics that were meant to fill the void shift in a completely different direction: the act of care moves from Niki to her grandfather leaving her increasingly alone. Consequently, she loses her childhood and must navigate in an adult world for which she lacks the emotional maturity to understand its system of rules. She develops a defense mechanism to avoid facing these harsh facts: she lies, wanders around and builds a separate world with her best friend - a distinct clique based on complicity. Niki constantly rewrites the narrative of her harsh reality with these lies: in her imagined world, her mother is the singer of a popular northern synth-pop band on a world tour, and her father is a white-collar criminal laundering money through offshore companies currently on the run from the authorities on the Cayman Islands. Her behaviour represents the internal turmoil of absence, stemming from a lost childhood and the intangible nature of the care and parental love she craves. This core trauma may be the trigger that drives her to seek out her father in the Budapest night.

After many years, father and daughter meet again following a fight at the disco where Tibor works. The first thing Niki sees is her father brutally abusing a guest who had attacked him. From the very first encounter, this sparks ambivalent feelings in Niki. As

she sees her father, her feelings oscillate between curiosity and fear, mistrust and the desire for love. While she hopes for some kind of openness - a "tabula rasa" moment - Tibor is uncertain how to react. He has never experienced what it means to be a father, so at their first meeting, he flees wherever he can. In the end, however, he returns. This decision signals that he will, in some way, become a part of his daughter's world.

From a cinematic perspective, it is highly compelling how Niki and Tibor begin to rebuild their relationship. This father-daughter universe is ruled by minimalist dialogues, long, profound silences, penetrating stares and intuitive gestures. They do not attempt to describe; instead, they reveal themselves through small details that carry multiple meanings - first through northern synth-pop music and Scooter, then through tiny secrets and gestures - while their repeated encounters gradually open the possibility of emotional connection. Each scene they share is striking: the empty disco where they try to outbid each other with their favourite songs; the fancy party where Tibor works as a doorman; the scene they sit on opposite sides of a tree while he tells her about the accident; Tibor's plan to escape from the authorities which quickly transforms into something else; and finally, the closing scene, which is both cathartic and deeply painful. This is where the emotional impact of the ending lies, it is neither judgemental nor didactic. Instead, it traces a path at the end of which each character must accept the other without expectations.

### **III. Warrior Father - Antisocial Man**

The most interesting and complex character within the model of family dynamics in *Wild Roots* is Tibor, as he can be analysed from both psychological and sociological perspective. From a sociological point of view, he represents the identity of a drifting, marginalised Central-European man in the 21st century. From a psychological perspective, he is equally compelling as it remains unclear whether he should be understood as a pathological case or as a traumatised and anxious individual.

Both analytical perspectives are supported by the film's realist cinematic approach: there is no explanation, no judgement, no explicit moral. It simply presents its subject, shows how it operates and then leaves it open without turning into a parable. In doing so, it creates space for nuanced interpretation and deeper understanding.

From a sociological perspective, Tibor embodies an identity - or rather an identity crisis. By the 2020s, everything is changing. People still live in brutalist panel blocks yet they can no longer identify with the social roles available for them. This is particularly true for men as the traditional role and identity of the socialist, Central European, working-class breadwinner vanishes, leaving nothing to take its place. A void emerges in male identity affecting both those living on the periphery and the middle class. Tibor symbolises an entire segment of society that responds to change and the passage of time with violence and misunderstanding. This dynamic sweeps him further and further away from both society and his daughter. Ideally, a learning process could help him decode the altered parameters of the new world, but his personality prevents him from doing so.

Tibor is hard to categorise, as his personality raises so many questions. He is violent, impulsive, disrespectful of social norms, and does not seem empathetic. However, certain characteristics suggest that he is more anxious or frustrated than pathological. His relationship with his daughter is highly specific, dividing his emotional world into two spheres. On one hand, he exists in the male-dominated world where the only language is power - bouncers, criminals, cruel bosses, pubs, nightlife and homeless shelters. On the other hand, he feels that he should show tenderness towards his daughter who embodies everything he cannot understand: grandmother, school rules, emotions, the absence of Niki's mother. Amid the emotional emptiness he shows to others, the tenderness that awakens towards his daughter is the only thing that penetrates the walls he has built around himself. Tibor's character inevitably moves towards tragedy because he can only engage with the world through the language of male dominance. For him, anger is the core experience, as he was socialised in a world where men are not allowed to feel fear, cry, or experience profound emotions - they must radiate strength and confidence at all times. His stern exterior embodies this masculine ideal: tattoos, weathered face, physical deformities and scars. His body functions almost as Kristeva's abjekt, as well as a male portrait tied to the past whose rule system seems collapsing. The greatest strength of the film is that it introduces his character without any judgement. Tibor is not evil yet he is a violent criminal; his only chance lies in the love for his daughter, but he is unable to fully experience this emotion because he never learnt how. That is the protagonist's crisis, his tragedy - so convincingly real, that he could walk past us in the street at any moment.

#### **IV. Closing**

*Wild Roots* is an exceptionally sensitive and perceptive film. It is precise both formally and psychologically, and it reflects the same duality as its characters. On one hand, it follows the rules - respecting the documentarist/realist traditions, the psychologically grounded characters, and the use of amateur actors; on the other, it breaks them - incorporating the lyricism, avoiding cliches, and remaining completely free of kitsch. This bold balance is where its strength lies, elevating it above the contemporary scene.

#### **V. Questions for Processing**

- How did you feel after watching the film?
- Which part of the film affected you most?
- Was the film realistic? Did you empathise with the characters? Have you ever met people in similar situations?
- What do you think of Tibor? Do you think he is a bad person or does he simply express himself poorly?
- What do you think of Niki? What impact does living with her grandparents have on her life?
- Do you think it is possible to restart a relationship when someone reappears in your life?
- Why is it difficult to show your love?

- Do you think that Tibor will be able to apologise to his daughter and rebuild their relationship?
- What do you think of the relationship between men and emotions? Is it acceptable for a man to show vulnerability?
- What did the film teach about relationships?
- What overall impact did the film have on you? Is there anything you now see differently?