

The History of the Development of Keszthely as a Holiday Resort

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Abstract

The aim of our essay is to follow up the structural changes of the town of Keszthely from the 1800s to our time. The development of the town was first determined by craftsmen, merchants and the patronizing activities of the Festetics family. During the development of the town it had become a holiday resort by the 20th century as a result of the boom of tourism, and most of the residents lived on activities connected to tourism. In our time an industrial park in the outskirts of a town belongs to its structure, but in Keszthely it has not been established so far. As a result of the declining tendencies of tourism a solution must be found to compensate the loss of income of the residents from tourism so that we can make the town more attractive for industrial businesses.

1. Introduction

The aim of our essay is to keep a track on the structural changes of Keszthely from the 1800s to our time. As only few written memories exist

of the time before 1800, we do not deal with that time in details, however we refer to that period. In the 1800s the patronizing activities of the Festetics family, while in the 19th century the boom of tourism, due to the construction of the railway, played an important role in the development of Keszthely. In the 19th century the town was divided into two parts, one of them was the area around the Franciscan church and the other one was the so-called Kiskeszthely, a burgher town.

In the 20th century the boom of tourism changed the citizens' orientation of livelihood and the emphasis from crafts shifted to tourism. The first hotels, the shore of Lake Balaton, and the rows of villas by the shore were built at that time. The significance of agricultural production, which had been very important because of the Festetics family, decreased. By the second half of the 20th century the main profile of the town was the reception of Hungarian and foreign guests. Nowadays the characteristic holiday resort feature has lost its significance, tourism has decreased, there are not industries in the town, therefore the leaders of the town must seek new perspectives for the residents.

2. The History of Keszthely until the 1800s

Earlier Keszthely was a much more famous settlement than it is today. In the Celtic times it was a prosperous town, during the Roman occupation it was the advanced post (castellum) of the Mogentia, the Roman fortress (castrum) of Fenék, in the period of the great migration it was a populous place, which is proved by the findings uncovered in the cemeteries of Keszthely, Páhok, Dobogó, Diás and Fenék.

Before the Hungarian conquest the Slavonian prince Privina had his residence in Mogentia near Keszthely, next to the lake of Zalavár, which

has been dried out by now. During the time of the Árpáds and their ancestors, Keszthely was a privileged settlement a kind of junction as the famous Roman road to Aquincum, called the road of war because of the Hungarians, crossed the town, which owed its development to it. Keszthely was situated in the middle of this main road of world trade leading from the Adriatic Sea to Buda and the whole traffic to and from the sea went across Keszthely. During the Turkish occupation and mainly after the fall of Kanizsa, Keszthely became an important border fortress, during the Kuruc-Labanc times (Hungary's war of independence from Austria in the 18th century), it was still one of the biggest settlements of Transdanubia (*Table 1*) (*Oppel* 1923).



Table 1 Keszthely in 1770

In Keszthely urbanization started at the end of the 14th century and from that time Keszthely was the economic centre of the large estate at the north-west corner of Lake Balaton, which comprised several fortresses, towns and churches (Koppány-Péczei-Sági 1962). In the

Middle Ages the church was the centre of the town and the settlement surrounded it. The settlement was a market town from the 13th century, the centre of which was the parish church functioning as a fortress at the same time. Its memory is kept in the Fortress garden next to the church in the Main square.

In Keszthely there were about 200-300 houses at that time. The town started to decline after the construction of the Southern Railway because at the beginning Keszthely was completely out of the way of railway transportation (*Oppel* 1923).

3. The development of Keszthely in the 19th century

Due to the school founding activities of the Festetics family, the intellectual development of the town was booming from the beginning of the 19th century. The secondary grammar school and Georgikon, the first agricultural high school of Europe, were founded.

Railway has always been outstandingly important in the development of a region. Keszthely was one of the stations of the Buda-Pragerhof railway, which was built in 1861 and went along the southern coast of Lake Balaton. Probably the boom of tourism in Keszthely was due to this fact and it led to the building of new hotels in the 1880s to serve the guests. These hotels, which still exist, were completed in the middle of the following decade.

Although the inauguration of the Keszthely-Balatongyörök branch line in September 1888 had local importance, it gave a lot of advantages for the inhabitants of the area.

Besides the construction of the first railway, 1861 is the starting date of the press. Among others it was the year when the Newspaper of

Horticulture and Industry was edited by the director of the School for Horticulturists and Viticulturists.

According to a guidebook published in 1889 Keszthely was a pretty, vivid town with a population of about 7000, where the inhabitants were mostly tradesmen and craftsmen. At that time it had only two inns but as the result of booming tourism private houses started to let their rooms. They had the opportunity because in 1890 – not including the burgher town - 589 houses existed in Keszthely. There were two four-storey, forty one-storey buildings, the rest of them had only ground floors (*Table 2*).

In the secondary grammar school, which were opened in 1892, Premonstrant friars taught young people. The building of the secondary grammar school was constructed according to the design of János Schandl, the teacher of the institution of economics.



Table 2 Kossuth Lajos street in the 19th century

Despite the fact that in 1900 Keszthely was not a town, but a village de jure, it could be regarded a central settlement, which had the functions of a town. Of the 6796 inhabitants 254 were tradesmen and 181 were civil servants. In 1908 the name of the Burgher town became Kiskeszthely (Littlekeszthely) officially. Between 1881 and 1900 the number of the inhabitants doubled.

7 August 1898 is a significant date in the life of the town: The Balaton Museum – Society directed by Sándor Lovassy was inaugurated then (*Tar* 2000).

4. The first half of the 20th century

“There are hardly any towns in the country, which, besides its poverty, and without the harder taxation of the residents, could make so much progress in material gain, the establishment of cultural and humanitarian institutions, than Keszthely during the administration of Reischl”, *Boncz* (1896) wrote it his monograph about Keszthely.

In 1911 King Francis-Joseph promoted Earl Tasziló Festetics to the rank of a duke. In December the same year Imre Reischl was elected mayor unanimously.

Imre Reischl became the head of Keszthely in a difficult period. After some peaceful years, a period of war came, then the proletarian dictatorship, life returned to normal very slowly.

After some days of the “revolution of asters”, on 2 November 1918 the National Council was established in Keszthely and Mayor Imre Reischl was elected its chairman. In the meeting of the National Council on 3 November Chairman Imre Reischl resigned. He did not take part in the events of the year 1919 but after the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic he returned as the mayor of the town (*Tar* 1992).

World War I took a heavy toll on every family including the family of the duke. Tasziló tried to help the town during the war as well, giving charity to people in need and orphans.

In the summer of 1921 the Helikon festival could be organized again, its main supporter was Tasziló Festetics. Large crowds of people came together including some of the well-known people of the country visited it for example Ferenc Móra, Zsolt Böthy, Ferenc Herczeg, József Vas, János Zichy, Albert Apponyi, and governor Miklós Horthy with his wife.

At the elections of 1930 Imre Reischl received the honourable chair of the mayor as he deserves the credit for laying the foundation stone of the Carmelite church, opening the beach (*Table 3*), and building the Balaton Museum and the Post Palace (*Tar* 1992).

Between the two world wars Keszthely was regarded as the town of pensioners. A lot of famous people were attracted by the town. The main problem was that Keszthely was not supplied with public utilities. The roads, the streets and the pavements were out-of-date together with street lighting.



Table 3 The shore of Lake Balaton in the 19th century

Keszthely was liberated on 30 March 1945. During the fights Keszthely did not suffer big destruction therefore it had the possibility to start a new life. Lake Balaton had a different role as well, as it became the lake of the whole country (*Table 4*).

The role of schools changed fundamentally, education became available for everyone. It is natural that the role of Keszthely as a school town and holiday resort increased in the new era (*Sági 1975*).

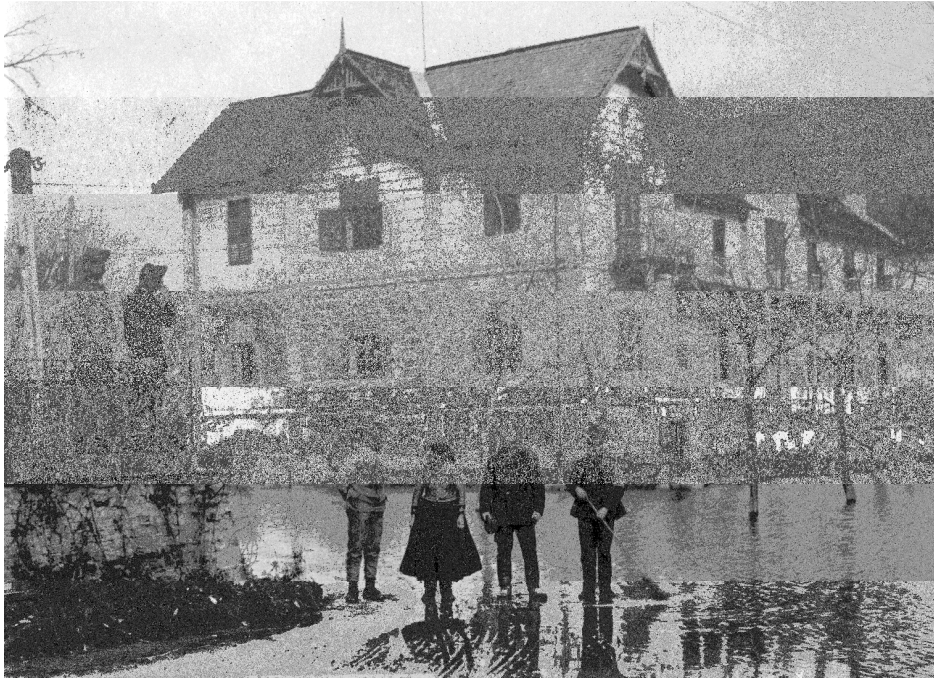


Table 4 The Balaton Hotel I the first part of the 20th century

5. From the 2nd half of the 20th century to our time

The Presidential Council of the People's Republic of Hungary promoted Keszthely to the rank of a town again on 1 February 1954 and in this way Keszthely had the opportunity to develop to the level of a town. In 1958 the work of the shore planning of Lake Balaton was started. In 1960 the modernization of the railway station was started and the work was finished in 1962. The Town Beach was opened in 1963. The new observatory of the Institution of Meteorology was operated from June 1966 to 1999. In 1967 Keszthely was provided with a sewage system and the sewage plant was established. In 1971 the Power Supplier of South Transdanubia established a 120/20 kW plant with modern open air instruments. In 1972 the Fire Station was modernized, Keszthely started a way which was development leading to a modern town.

6. Conclusions

During the development of the town the initial agricultural character fell more and more into the background as an influence of the increasing tourism. In the areas next to Lake Balaton we could see the development of the buildings serving the guests (*Table 5*) while the residential areas with family houses fell into the periphery and the town centre became the centre of the service sector. Nevertheless in the 19th century Keszthely kept the atmosphere of a market town. The character of the town is determined by the Helikon Castle Museum, which is situated in the centre. The main commercial areas have been transferred to the district between Keszthely and Gyenesdiás and to the northern part of the town. Nowadays an industrial park in the outskirts belongs to a characteristic town structure but in Keszthely it has not been established. As a result of the declining tendencies of tourism we should find a solution how to

compensate the income loss of the inhabitants, who lived on it so far, and we should make the town more attractive for industrial businesses.



Table 5 The Island Bath on the Town Beach still keeps the silhouette of the old building

7. Literature

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