

REGION, TOURISM DEVELOPMENT, AND CULTURAL HERITAGE¹

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ABSTRACT

The paper shows how the newly restored palace representing part of the Hungarian cultural heritage changes the tourism economy of a micro-region. The research was based on sociological interviews conducted in 2016 with the mayor and representatives of municipalities, leaders of touristic NGO's, touristic and other service managers in the region. According to the stakeholders' opinion, the tourism industry must change in many ways in the region. The Esterházy Palace could be the 'flagship' of the micro-region's tourism. The tourism entrepreneurs, the representatives of local governments and NGOs, played a significant role in the tourism of the micro-region, and they tackled the new challenges posed by the new initiatives in different ways according to their interests and position. On the whole, we can conclude that in the touristic activity of the region the most significant problem for some stakeholders is the lack of cooperation.

Keywords: Regional and tourism development, micro-region, cultural heritage, entrepreneurship

THE REGION AND THE ESTERHAZY PALACE

The microregion is situated on the southern bank of Lake Fertő on the Hungarian side (*Figure 1*). Previously it used to be a traditional agricultural area famous for its olericulture and processing of reeds. Before 1945 and especially before the First World War the Hungarian and Austrian villages next to the lake had normal and lively cultural and economic relations. The area was isolated between 1945 and 1990 due to the Austrian border and the Iron Curtain built on the border. This isolation also led to the fact that the region was not particularly attractive for industrial investments (the political situation would not have allowed it anyway). The lasting advantage of this isolation is that the natural resources have remained relatively intact (*Brown-Kulcsár 2000; Kulcsár 2012*).

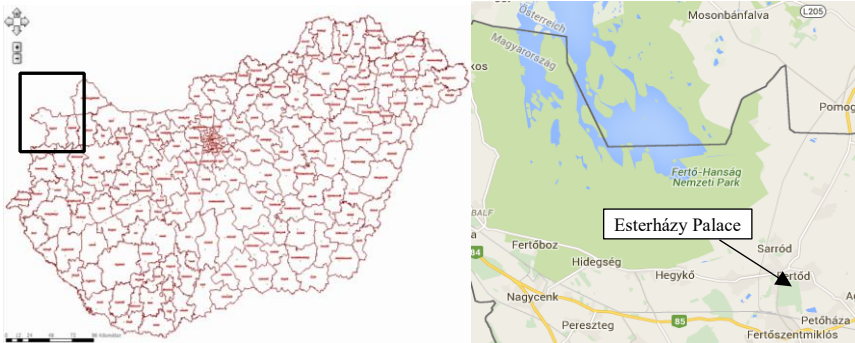
The development of tourism started and succeeded at different rates in different villages in the second half of the 1990s. In most cases, there is a lack of

¹ Part of the article was presented at the Conference of “Smart Ideas and a New Concept of Economic Regeneration in Europe” – SINCERE. Dubrovnik 28 September - 1 October 2016. (László Kulcsár, László Anzelm Bodrogai, István György Vizi: Tourism Development and Cultural Heritage: The Stakeholders' Opinion on the Role of Restored Esterházy Palace in Western Hungary).

coordination and integration between the various developments or the individual municipalities.

Figure 1

The area of research



The Esterházy Palace (*Figure 2*) had its heyday in the second half of the 18th century. Its intellectual aura went beyond the small village, and it became the political and cultural center of the Hungarian and Austrian elite. Furthermore, it became one of the most famous places in Europe thanks to Joseph Haydn's 30-year long stay at the palace and his compositions.

Figure 2

The restored Esterházy Palace in Fertőd, Hungary



Its significance dropped in the 1800s, and it also suffered from considerable damage, primarily due to the neglect of the previously highly indebted estate. During the first half of the 20th century the owner, Duke Miklós Esterházy largely renovated the site, but it could not redeem its cultural, political and intellectual life it had previously played, which was also due to the peace treaty signed in Paris, resulting in changed state borders. During World War II it sometimes functioned as a Russian military hospital, barracks, warehouse, etc., which resulted in a significant deterioration of its environment and its furnishing.

The third golden era of the Esterházy heritage is connected to the Eszterháza Cultural Research and Festival Centre created in the year 2014. Renovations began in the second half of the 1990s, and they accelerated during the first decade of the 21st century, and even today major projects are underway.

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

The 21st century is the century of marketing, according to marketing specialists (Kourdi, 2011), but it was culture that played a truly important role in this century's marketing trend. In this case, culture incorporates a tool coordinating the way of life and common values in a certain area, the push factors for cultural attitudes, as well as the cultural pull factors of a certain institution. The social-cultural composition of a region's population determines the relationship to the tourist institutions in the region, including the effectiveness of marketing activities performed by these institutions. Based on the assets of the area, cultural tourism marketing focuses on heritage tourism and its institutions as well. As to the economic importance of cultural heritage building complexes, such as a palace complex or a Belvedere of a historical and cultural value, these are indisputably part of the local assets. Their situation and their developments are the competitiveness and status indicator of the area. The knowledge related to this is an important part of the knowledge capital, which is closely related to the social capital present in the region. Oppio *et al.* (2015) adds that the relationship between cultural capital, economic growth and the well-being of the people living in the area is also clearly positive.

The fundamental principle of our research is close to the ecomuseum concept which was born in the early years of 1970s in France (Varine, 1996; Davis, 2011). The ecomuseum concept concentrates on the cultural heritage of the region: natural, economic, and social amenities. The ecomuseum is an open concept, which counts on the participation of the local community, for the protection of the cultural heritage values, education, research, and presentation of them.

Caserta and Rasso (2002) make the difference between the “primary tourist product” which is the cultural heritage institution itself (Esterházy Palace) and the “secondary tourist product” which are the attractions that can be found in that area. The palace can be a primary or secondary tourist product, depending on the palace as a starting point or the other tourist products in the region.

Therefore, the reconstruction of a historical monument is not only a question of restoration and architecture. The reconstruction process must not be interpreted as the restoration of the concerned buildings and their local area. The objects of an

architectural heritage - as *Winkler* (2002) notes -, cannot be separated from its historical, regional role. Therefore, the reconstruction process also includes the creation of renewed features, as well as their role in history and reinforcing identity. Cultural heritage tourism is increasingly important in Hungary, and in the same way as in Europe, increasingly contributes to the growing GDP. The European Union's official report (*European Commission*, 2015) stresses that cultural heritage institutions do not simply represent the cost of that country, but also a major source of revenue. So, you must evaluate the cultural heritage tourism in Neusiedler See region and the role of the Esterházy Castle in it in this way.

This multi-directional relationship shows that the tourism activities of the palace complex cannot be separated from those of the region. In practice, however, the situation is not that simple. The tourism players of the region should realize that cooperation is in their interest. Co-operation among the tourist attractions in the region can result in significant synergies, which favorably affects the positions of those involved.

The region's situation shows serious inequalities in this respect, and also, the attractiveness of some events in the palace are reduced by infrastructural deficiencies in the region. It has been said several times that because of poor access to quality and sufficient accommodation in the area, the attendance of cultural programs of the palace is impeded (e.g., the music of Haydn).

THE METHOD

Our basic approach was to measure to what extent important touristic stakeholders view the palace and its surrounding area. This approach is very important because the mostly small, regional tourist attractions having a loose relationship with each other cannot exploit the region's full potential. On the other hand, the touristic development of the palace - which is more than a simple restoration - cannot happen independently and isolated from the local area.

The survey was conducted in the region, interviewing entrepreneurs, mayors, municipal representatives and tourism professionals. The chosen method was the in-depth sociological interview. Among the interviewees, we find the head of the Esterházy family, Prince Antal Esterházy, and his wife². The interview focused on two main topics: (1) the resources of the micro-region and its position from a touristic point of view, and (2) the features, the programs and visitor attendance of the renovated Esterházy Palace. During the qualitative interviews, the most important and influential people of the region answered our questions. The answers did not always cover each of the examined topics, so the analysis focused only on the most important issues raised. Thanks to their work and status, the interviewed stakeholders have (and had in the last decades) a strong influence on the region's tourism. They do this on one hand through their businesses; on the other hand,

² The interviews were made by the following persons: five mayors and municipal representatives; Three tourism entrepreneurs; 6 tourist NGO leaders; Duke Antal Esterhazy and his wife.

they are influential people in the development of the region's settlements, and thirdly, they are conservation experts as well. The activity and the opinion of the decision-making tourism experts in the area can significantly facilitate or hinder the Palace's efforts and its connection to the region, and most importantly, effective cooperation.

The interviews focused on the questions in *Table 1*.

Table 1

The questions were divided into the following categories

| The situation of the region and its tourism | Programs and visitors' attendance of the Esterházy Palace |
|--|--|
| 1. Touristic competitiveness of the region | 1. Evaluation of touristic services and their price |
| 2. Tourist attractiveness of the region | 2. Main target groups, groups of visitors |
| 3. Tourism offers and services in the region | 3. Assessment of the palace's marketing communication |
| 4. Necessary improvements, vision for the future | 4. The palace and the region |

LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS, THE REGION, AND THE PALACE

Microregional competitiveness

The crucial element of the opinions about the region's touristic competitiveness is how coordinated the tourism programs and their infrastructure are, and how fragmented is the marketing activity related to tourism in the area. If every attraction focuses solely on their activities coordination between tourism programs is small, and it results in an inadequate competitiveness. It is especially true to a region where a prominent tourist attraction dominates the region, moreover, it has recently entered the market. In other words, it entered a market that was unchanged for a long time, and now the region's tourism needs to be reconsidered under the usual conditions.

The interviews show that the local tourism operators see the region's competitiveness in different ways. Austria's proximity is considered rather as a disadvantage than an advantage. But they do not recognize that this disadvantaged situation requires an even greater cooperation. They acknowledge the leading role of the palace and they have their expectations accordingly. It is feared that with this in view they feel exempted to take the necessary steps.

„We have everything here: ecotourism, recreational tourism, wine tourism, spa tourism. And we haven't yet mentioned the cultural values or the historical monuments. I think that viewed from the supplier's side; competitiveness is unequivocal. But the service providers have a lot of work to do.”

„The danger lies in that people cannot think regionally. The problem is that as soon as a business starts to become profitable, everyone just wants to use it for

their interests. That is what happened in the past few years. And they cannot think regionally.”

„It would be crucial for the municipalities to have efficient cooperation related to tourism. There is no real cooperation between the municipalities in the areas of tourism.”

„Clearly, on a national level, we are on the top. But we shouldn't forget about Austria either since we are in a cross-border region. Again, my opinion is that we lack the necessary infrastructure.”

„When the Fertő-Hanság National Park was created, the Austrians were already there, and Hungarians only joined by the time of the change of regime, and Austrians had already built the lakeside resort facilities, and Hungarians now cannot build any because the National Park does not allow a marina or a beach to be built. On the Hungarian side, because there was nothing before, and now it is not allowed anymore.”

„We lack one leading attraction that would attract visitors, and this would link to other attractions. We cannot say that people come here for the spa because it is not that big. In this regard, I feel this is somewhat of a disadvantage in competitiveness. Obviously, based on recent developments, the Palace can become the most important attraction in time.”

“The National Park was created, but its limitations also caused traumas, and people are still stunned because of them. Lands cannot be used; villages cannot develop - basically many things that are possible in other villages, are not done here because of the protection imposed by the National Park.”

„The most important tourist attraction in the region is the Esterházy Palace. Of course, the Fertő-Hanság National Park as a World Heritage is also a very good buzzword.”

„I think that for domestic tourists, this region also has the promise of Austria. What we do not realize is that the guests arriving from Eastern Hungary see the promise of Austria, of Burgenland in us and the western standard of living and values. Regarding values, I think it is very important that we preserved a large amount in architecture, culture and natural heritage. To be able to have a National Park, a World Heritage site here, it was necessary that for forty years this region could be entered only by border guards, hunters, and fishermen.”

„For further development, everyone needs to realize that in a common European market it makes no sense to talk about the Hungarian and the Austrian Lake Neusiedl and its environment separately, but we need to treat this region as one. Lake Constance is a good example, where three countries treat it as a common good and they came to an agreement regarding common products and communication, and everyone tries to comply. In this regard, we are highly underdeveloped, and I don't see any encouraging signs.”

„So even though we promote ourselves as an integrated region, I believe that Austrian patriotism and nationalism is still stronger in which that they are reluctant to let guests into Hungary. It's like a hotel which doesn't let the guests leave to visit the area to achieve full spending on the premises when at the same time we market ourselves as part of a region.”

„Our strengths: geographic location, transportation access, since the Bratislava and Vienna airports are reachable in an hour - so the accessibility is not bad. Highway connection from the western side is almost completely solved the border since the road reaches Csorna - I believe that this is already a huge achievement. Our strength is still the attractive and diverse touristic programs. What makes this place unique: it is a meeting point of the Alps, the plains, and a steppe lake. The weakness is the lack of strategic thinking. A beach on Lake Neusiedl will not be competitive compared to an Austrian one since there were no developments. The lack of a wide range of accommodation - from camping to five-star hotels - is also a weakness. It is also a weakness that there is no dialogue between the stakeholders. It would be important to have discussions about how to act as collaborators in remote markets and not as competitors. This cooperation is still lacking from the region.”

„I believe in the development of cycle tourism, I see that this topic will be in focus on the area, so this area and the Palace could be a staging post during a cycling trip.”

„Our big problem is that a huge number of tourists who are there on the beaches of Lake Neusiedl is only just passing through us. Accommodation is scarce, and the municipality of Fertőszéplak didn't realize the assets they have (e.g., the heritage of Széchenyi), and on the other hand, we have the only one open-air museum presenting the architecture of the region, but sadly, it is not managed by the municipality. I think that this could be a much more important tourist attraction if we could be its managers. „

„The key question in this regard is whether in the future we will be able to develop the palace or other attractions in a way so that private capital would see a better opportunity in investing in accommodation. I have a feeling of absence regarding the region, namely the fact that the developers didn't attract private capital investments.”

Attractiveness of the Esterházy Palace complex of Fertőd

Every participant praised the renewal of the palace, and its European significance and the efforts of the management. They stressed, however, that there is a significant difference between the Palace's and the town's (Fertőd) attractiveness, the level of development and atmosphere to the detriment of Fertőd. The differences in development and the infrastructural problems make it almost impossible keeping the guests to visit the Palace for exclusive programs, to achieve multiplicative effects.

The respondents mentioned minor difficulties from the part of the palace regarding tours and service. Proposals have been made to attract guests, e.g., authentic clothing when welcoming guests or giving tours. Marketing and communication practices were also considered weak.

„I think the cultural programs and concerts are excellent. However, during tours, I'd put more emphasis on the appearance. For instance, guides could wear authentic clothing while giving tours.”

„This is Hungary's largest baroque palace: it has a milieu, an atmosphere. When I go to such a historic place, I feel goose bumps thinking that princes, kings, and queens walked here before me. I love history; I visit lots of castles and battlefields. I am touched by these things, the same way I think of this Palace. „

„There is a huge gap at Eszterháza between the palace and the town. The palace is developing very nicely, but the township is lagging behind. Something needs to be done here. If I were the mayor, I would be working on this day and night. At Hegykő we use lawn mowers for the green areas and not a tractor, especially the areas near the bath and the ones frequented by visitors. The adequate environment is already part of Hegykő's rank, its milieu, and its many guests. I don't see this at Fertőd.”

„I think the site is excellent. I also saw brochures, but these should be placed and disseminated in more frequented areas. And not only brochures: every caterer should be taught to recommend the Palace - this is a problem I often have in Hegykő as well. We should reach the point where they recommend a visit to the palace: an oral recommendation is an excellent advertisement.”

„Our goal should be to sell the region - and its leading attraction is the palace at Fertőd.”

„Its strength lies in its absolute value: it is unique and can be advertised on the European level as well, not forgetting Haydn's³

„It is difficult to deal with the target group of the palace separately because it cannot be very different from the target group of the area - if this should happen, we have a problem. But the region's target groups are not defined clearly, which is also a regional problem.”

„Accommodation possibilities are incredibly bad. There is no accommodation at Eszterháza, Fertőd, Süttör that would be worthy of the palace. This situation has not been developed either from private capital or with funding from tenders. Although there is no fine dining in the area, I think that the catering service is decent. There is a cycling path, but they don't appear next to the palace. We see examples in Western Europe that next to a historical site, you can find completely new things, like an adventure park or a fun park, complementing each other to target different groups or the time spent. A recurring problem in the region is the lack of beaches in the summer. If we narrow our analysis strictly to the palace and Fertőd, we could say that the touristic background is weak, and the Fertőd Cultural Landscape has a common service and touristic background.”

„Just a few examples: Joseph Haydn, Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, Maria Theresa - they should be more visible. Or there is that beautiful Esterházy porcelain dinnerware: it should be used. During the tour, a child could be chosen from the group, seated at the table and be told that she is Maria Theresa, her husband, the prince of Lorraine sat here, here sat a Thane, this was the seat of the prince, and this is where Haydn sat. These things should be more dominant because this is crucial. Regarding the palace and of future communication it is crucial, what appears in the social media. If I come here as a father and I am a regular Facebook user, then the best case scenario is that I put a post on Facebook that I was here, and it is visible to all my friends. But if my daughter is playing the role of Maria Theresa, then I take ten photos and show them off for two weeks for everyone to

³ Joseph Haydn was principal conductor and composer at Eszterháza between 1766 and 1790 in Prince Nikolaus Esterházy's service. He composed and premiered his famous farewell symphony in honor of Empress Maria Theresa's visit to Eszterháza.

see that my daughter is Maria Theresa, my son is the prince of Lorraine or that my child sat in Joseph Haydn's chair and touched the reproduction of Haydn's instrument. I digressed a little, but I think that every visitor is also a member of a target group. But they are a channel for communication at the same time. I believe that this can and must be strengthened.”

„In my opinion, it is very important to treat the question of permeability: we need to consider how many visitors we allow and how we handle these groups so that the experience is enjoyable to them. As a marketing specialist, I consider the late communication of the programs as one of the weaknesses.”

„The enormous advantage of the palace is the cultural and historical background and the monument itself, which is a true treasure. But it puts us at a disadvantage if we only consider the region as the place of the Esterházy Palace. Therefore, it is not enough to narrow our thinking to the palace, because there are people who don't like exhibitions or museums: they come in, take the tour and then leave. Naturally, the main attraction of the region should be the Palace, but we need other things to complement it as well. It is dangerous to be conceited and say that we have the Palace, so tourists will just flow in. The attraction of the Palace is not enough alone. It would be nice, but it is not true.”

„The palace is an enclosure in Fertőd and the region as well. For the outsiders, it has always seemed that the relationship between the management of the palace and the municipality of Fertőd is apathetic at the very least. As in other villages, we can safely say that the existence of the palace had no positive or negative effect on us. This changed for the better dramatically in the past couple of years, because of several causes. I could mention four causes for this: for instance, the management of the Esterházy Centre was changed, and the new management was talented enough to be able to promote the cause of the palace. On the other hand, they developed a strategy and a direction of what they would like to achieve, which didn't exist until now, so the Palace has been just there. There were some concerts and the usual exhibition, which I saw when I was a child, and never again, because there was nothing new about it. So now we have an established trend, and there is a political will as well, which is very important for the castle complex to be able to exist and to develop. On the other hand, there is an economic background, because it should be known and it is also obvious that the palace is not one of many. This building is the most beautiful and the largest baroque palace in Central Europe, a building complex, which was built to cater to this beautiful Palace. Their features are not existent anymore, which means that we need to find new features for them. This will never be a profitable investment: it is its intangible value and its uniqueness that ensure its survival. If this works well and it attracts tourists, then we can benefit from it as well, since if there are lots of visitors, then many of them will go and visit the area as well.”

„I think that the external relations of the region and the relationship with local NGOs and municipalities should be strengthened.”

„Here, you cannot just start digging without prior consultation. It is highly improbable that the palace just flies to China from one day to the next, and then we could have a beautiful pond on the top of the hill, so we have to struggle with these things until death.”

CONCLUSIONS

On the whole, we can conclude that in the touristic activity of the region the most important problem for some stakeholders is the lack of cooperation. They admit that the natural values could be conserved due to history, but we should not forget that the more traditional, business-oriented stakeholders treat the National Park as an obstacle, rather than an advantage. Austria's proximity is an advantage and a disadvantage at the same time, and the marketing activities that targeted the Austrian market have not brought any tangible results. It is an advantage regarding the region's attractiveness, especially for visitors from remote areas, but it is a disadvantage regarding competitiveness, where the area is lagging behind compared to Austria. The most outstanding issues are the low-quality tourism infrastructure facilities and inadequate services.

In the case of the palace, the interviewees mentioned that the palace is not an enclosure anymore, and they treat it as a unique cultural, artistic and touristic attraction. The infrastructural deficiencies in the area cause significant problems to the palace as well. The small town surrounding the castle is rather rural, and its level of development is considerably below the desirable level. There is a lack of authentic representations from the period; the tour is not imaginative enough. According to the stakeholders, these issues are detrimental to the consistency of the programs offered. However, the programs recapture the palace's rich, European-class cultural life and atmosphere that existed in the 18th and 19th centuries.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for the valuable comments on an earlier version of this article.

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