

FOLKLORE ART AS CULTURAL ATTRACTION IN HUNGARIAN TOURISM

Tamara Rátz - László Puczkó

Paper presented at the
"Innovatory Approaches to Culture and Tourism"
ATLAS International Conference
22-24 October 1998
Rethymno, Crete, Greece



Introduction

Tourism is one of the leading sectors of the world economy and its role is invaluable in Hungary as well: it makes a major contribution to the GDP, plays a significant role in improving the balance of payment, and, besides all its economic benefits, is an important factor in forming the country's image and in contributing to the protection of our natural and cultural values.

Though Hungary cannot compete with most countries in the field of natural resources, the richness of cultural attractions is one of the country's strengths in the international tourism competition. The two main components of Hungarian culture as a tourist attraction are the classical "high" culture and the traditional folk culture. In this paper, the role and significance of folk culture and especially folklore art are discussed. This study is the first, introductory step of a larger research project studying folklore as an element of Hungarian tourism.



Culture and tourism

Culture is "the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behaviour" (Spradley 1979, in Littrell 1996:107). Culture in general consists of behaviours and artefacts, beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions, i.e. ways of perceiving, thinking and evaluating the world, self and others. Through the development of tourism in a destination, culture is usually being transformed to a product as an element of the overall tourist supply. Culture can be marketed to tourists through tangible and/or intangible elements, e.g. buildings, crafts, art objects, and/or behaviours and values.

Culture is part of the tourism system, both as an attraction and as an element in the system's environment. In a country like Hungary, with a limited supply of particularly attractive or internationally unique natural attractions, culture can be one of the most significant tourist attractions. Cultural tourism is a fast growing tourism form internationally (Richards 1996, WTO 1997) and this trend has been reflected in the development of Hungarian tourism as well: more and more tourists are attracted to the country by cultural events (HNTTO 1998b).



The country's attractions

In 1997, the Tourism Division of the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism (now Ministry of Economy) carried out a research project to draw up an inventory, evaluate and define priorities and the development opportunities of Hungary's natural and man-made attractions (HNTTO, 1998a). Data collection included the analysis of secondary information and personal interviews with the representatives of local governments using unified structured questionnaire, attraction evaluation form and settlement evaluation matrix. The research provides a most complex (though partly subjective) picture on the country's tourist attractions, presenting also information on their main characteristics, rate of attractiveness, seasonality, accessibility, distribution of demand or further development planned.

Attractions are classified to the following major categories: natural attractions as climate, water and landscape resources, cultural/heritage attractions as architecture, traditions, culture, religious events and minority culture and traditions, and so-called special attractions as gastronomy, wine, sports services and facilities, conferences, entertainment and leisure activities. In more details, the category of cultural and heritage attractions include – among others - folklore art, folk customs, traditional dance and music, and handicrafts (HNTTO, 1998c).

The research results show that in the majority of settlements, tourism does not currently play a major role compared to other economic activities. Cases where the significance of tourism is judged to be of primary importance are in the most popular holiday destinations of the country (around Lake Balaton and Lake Velence).

One of the main purpose of the inventory is to help to define which tourism forms are to be supported and developed in Hungary. Based on the attraction list compiled, cultural tourism may become a major growth area, since more than 50% of all the identified attractions are related to culture (Nemes & Kozma 1998).



Folklore art as a tourist attraction in Hungary

Tourists are attracted by three major forms of culture: those which are inanimate and do not involve human activity, those which are reflected in the daily life of host communities, and those which are animated (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). Based on this categorization, inanimate forms of Hungarian folk culture as tourist attraction include primarily folk architecture and folk art objects.



Busó mask

Photo by T. Rátz

Living traditions - connected often with special times of the year like the Easter holidays, harvest or Christmas - are basically rather similar in the whole country, but regional differences add to the overall attractiveness: the mixture of various national minorities living in a relatively small geographical area provides tourists with a complex supply of traditional experiences. Folk art objects have traditionally also been used in everyday life, but their role is changing, due to changing lifestyle: nowadays their main function is decoration, even though most folk art objects can be used for their original purpose (e.g. as tools, for food making, as clothes for everyday wear or for special occasions, etc.) as well. Animated forms of folk culture are festivals, folklore programmes (e.g. dance or music shows, staged weddings) or special festivities like the masked parade of Mohács ("busójárás") celebrating the end of the winter every year.

Folklore art and traditions play an important role in Hungarian tourism. Being part of our cultural heritage, objects of folklore art and handicrafts are among the main tangible attractions of the country. Costumes and other tangible forms of art have been best preserved in small rural settlements, where the inhabitants' everyday life has been tightly interwoven with traditions. Thus rural tourism development in most regions attempts to emphasize the importance of these attractions, in order to attract the type of visitors who are highly motivated to learn more about arts and crafts.

Folk arts and crafts, traditions and customs can be classified as local, regional, national or international attractions. The best known example of international attractiveness is the village of Hollókő, one of the four World Heritage Sites in Hungary. Hollókő was declared to be a World Heritage Site in 1987 for its traditional "Palóc" architecture and folklore heritage. The old part of the village – including more than 50 buildings - has become a living museum in the last decade. Visitors can watch various craftsmen in work, buy handmade souvenirs in their workshops and become familiar with local customs on the village's holidays and special events.

The main types of folklore art in Hungary are wood-carving, weaving, embroidery, pottery, peasant architecture and other craft forms as e.g. blue-dyeing, candle-making, furniture painting or honey cake making.

Wood-carving in Hungary is mainly related to pastoral life: herdsmen carved objects that were closely linked to animal husbandry and outdoor life. Nowadays carved objects (from small items to whole sets of furniture) are mainly used in traditional style hospitality, but are also popular souvenirs.



The church of Hollókő

Photo by T. Rátz

Weaving is one of the most ancient branches of textile art. Various products have been produced by weaving, one of the most special ones is the "szur", the old-type long woollen frieze coat of Hungarian shepherds. Due to the changes pastoral life has undergone in this century, the "szur" is only worn nowadays in folklore events

(e.g. in horse-shows which are very popular among foreign tourists in Hungary).

Embroidery is a relatively young type of folklore art in Hungary: the currently well-known patterns and colourings of the different regions are not older than 100-150 years. Despite the relatively small size of the country, different regional styles and patterns have developed, the most famous being the multi-coloured, shiny Matyó needlework, the flourishing embroidery of Kalocsa and the red and blue Palóc style.

Pottery is a very widespread folk craft. Pottery dishes were made for everyday usage (like plates, jars, bowls, cooking forms, flowerpots) or for decoration (e.g. floral plates for walls of rooms and kitchens, vases, candle-holders). The function and the popularity of the different items have been changed during the last decades, but pottery goods have kept their place among the most appreciated folk art products, both by international tourists and local residents.

Peasant architecture as a form of folklore art includes both churches and residential houses, the former often constructed with peasant house building techniques, furnished with the help of peasant carpenters. Due to the modernization process of the last decades, in most villages the old-style buildings were destroyed or reconstructed (which now seems to be an obstacle in the development of rural tourism, since tourists are looking for the "good old" village atmosphere). However, traditional architecture has been preserved in the most remote areas of the country (like in the above mentioned village of Hollókő or in the "Őrség" region) and some of the finest (original) buildings have been collected in the open-air ethnographic museums all around the country. (The best known of these museums is in Szentendre, near to Budapest, where visitors can get acquainted with the traditional architecture of several regions in a day: a "condensed" tourist experience).

Among other craft forms, blue-dying, candle-making, furniture painting and honey cake making are the most important for tourism. The traditional honey cake heart - a once popular gift for lovers - even used to be the logo of Hungary in national marketing, as the symbol of hospitality and friendliness.

As the attraction map completed by the Tourism Division of the Ministry of Industry shows, precious folk traditions are scattered all over the country. Almost every region has been famous for certain forms of folk art, which have been best preserved in small, more isolated settlements, but nowadays are also well presented in larger towns' museums, so tourists have various opportunities to get acquainted with regional folklore. The regions best known for distinctive folk culture are the Sárköz, the Galgamente, the Őrség, the Rábaköz, the Kiskunság and the Hortobágy National Parks, and the "Palóc" and the "Matyó" areas. Among the most important settlements are Kalocsa (famous for embroidery and unique wall-painting), Hollókő (the World Heritage listed Palóc village), Mezökövesd (the centre of the "Matyó" area), Karcag (home of pottery art and a traditional village museum), Kiskunhalas (famous for lacework) and Tihany (folk art centre in an old peasant village at Lake Balaton).

Research shows that folklore art is mainly local, secondary attraction in Hungarian tourism (HNTTO 1998c). Of course, those regions that have been able to preserve their unique folk culture have a good basis for tourism development, but their infrastructural and touristic underdevelopment often prevents them from exploiting this opportunity (usually the same remoteness and isolation that made the survival of traditions possible are the reasons behind the general underdevelopment). The attractiveness of folklore resources is decreasing as distances increase, so tourism development related to folk culture should be based on the domestic market. Unfortunately, the development of domestic tourism is rather slow in Hungary. In 1997, only app. 50% of the families took at least one trip in the country for expressly holiday purposes (HNTTO 1998a). However, on one hand, forecasts show a positive change in the development of domestic tourism in the next few years. On the other hand, one of the main objectives of Hungarian tourism development is to decrease the spatial

concentration of international tourism in the country. If national marketing proves to be successful in this field, tourists with more specialized interests might discover those remote areas where folk traditions have been saved or revived and tourism might contribute to the further preservation of folk culture.



Demand and supply of folk art objects

Handicraft folklore products are often sold on the spot where they are manufactured (in the workshop, in the settlement), but the geographically concentrated nature of tourist demand in Hungary would make this kind of distribution unviable. Open-air markets organized on holidays or together with special events in the main tourist centres (like dance house meetings - e.g. the National Dance House Meetings and Folk Crafts Fair organized every year - or other folk dance or folklore festivals) also provide an opportunity to make the products available to the widest possible range of customers. For international tourism, probably the most significant of these events is the "Mesterségek Ünnepe" (Feast of Crafts), a five-day meeting of the representatives of Hungarian folk art in the Castle District around August 20th, Hungary's national holiday. During this traditional festival, various craftsmen present their art in workshops, including wood-carvers, felt-makers, wheelwrights, rope-makers, smiths, potters, musical instrument makers, weavers, lace makers, egg painters and honey-cake makers. Beside the workshop presentations, the craft exhibitors also sell their goods at the traditional fair.

Souvenir shops in major tourist destinations (especially in Budapest and around Lake Balaton) sell almost only folklore products: embroidered clothes, handmade pottery dishes, painted Easter eggs (sold now throughout the year), woodcarvings, honey cakes or jewellery made of horse hair.

There is no reliable statistical data on how much tourists spend on souvenirs or handicrafts. Surveys show that app.6% of tourists' overall expenditure is spent on gifts (Lengyel, 1995). The income of Hungary from international tourism was 484 billion HUF (app. 2.3 billion USD) in 1997 (HNTÖ, 1998), so it can be estimated that foreign tourists spent at least app. 1.4 million USD on gifts which mainly include handicrafts. In domestic tourism folk art does not play an equally important role. In souvenir purchase decisions, one of many tourists' common goals is to create linkage with a culture, to sample a different way of life (Littrell 1996). For foreign tourists, folk art objects as souvenirs often symbolize a part of Hungary, a part of the Hungarian culture and they are motivated to buy these products by a desire to preserve the memory of their trip. This motivation is far less important for domestic tourists who share the culture of the visited destination than for international tourists coming from different cultures.



Authenticity and commercialisation of folk art

When travelling, tourists are motivated to experience local cultural, and this motivation includes a search for authenticity in craft souvenirs as well. Authenticity of a handicraft product generally means that the object is produced by the traditional methods using the traditional material and is used for the traditional purposes. In the case of handicrafts produced as tourist souvenirs, often only the first two criteria can be fulfilled, since souvenir goods are not necessarily used for the original purpose, their primary role being to serve their owners as a reminders of travel experiences.

The Association of Folk Artists founded in 1982 in Budapest has set as its objective to preserve and support the values of traditional Hungarian folklore and craftsmanship. Every year, during the "Mesterségek Ünnepe", they award the prize "Master of the Year" to the most outstanding craftsman. The retention of the ancient shapes and forms and the survival of the original style is evaluated by a strict panel of judges. This evaluation process

aims to guarantee the authenticity and the quality of those folk art goods that are available in the specialized folk art shops.

However, only in the case of classified products may tourists trust that the goods they buy are authentic and of high quality. The supply of souvenir shops and street vendors includes also mass-produced items that bear a resemblance to several Hungarian folk art styles, but are not identical with any of them. Tourists' tastes and expectations may also result in changes: for example, the original, multi-coloured embroidery of Kalocsa has been too colourful for many customers, so shops have included new, pale or uni-coloured patterns in their supply.



The image of Hungary in national marketing

The 1999 national marketing plan gives priority for the development of following types of tourism: gastronomy and wine tourism, cultural tourism, congress and incentive tourism, health tourism/wellness, rural tourism, horse-riding tourism, bicycle tourism and waterside tourism.

Handicrafts serve as attractions in several types of tourism: cultural tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism - as defined by the Ecotourism Society (Epler Wood 1991), i.e. in a wider sense than as used in Hungary -, "Hungarian mosaic" (based on the diversity of cultures in a given region, including distinctive folk customs, traditions, folklore art, handicrafts, architecture, gastronomy), wine tourism (glass making, pottery, embroidery providing some the tangible elements of the product). Incoming tourist trips are rarely motivated by a wish to learn traditional handicraft-making in Hungary, but the opportunity of participating in workshops or simply watching craftsmen work serves as supplementary attraction and contributes to the development of complex tourist products.

The most frequently used visual elements of Hungary's image in the promotional materials are the following: pictures of the "puszta" (the Hungarian Great Plain, a distant relative of the prairies and steppes), Budapest, folk art and heritage, and gastronomy. One brochure published by the Hungarian Tourist Board concentrates solely on the presentation of folk culture (entitled "Folk Art in Hungary: Land of Style and Traditions"), but all but one national promotional materials contain photos and information on folk art (the only exception is the brochure presenting Hungary's natural resources). The promotion of Hungary abroad usually incorporates traditional textiles and people wearing folk costumes (most printed and audio-visual materials present these elements). It is part of the country's image, though not to that extent as, for example, the tartan is part of Scotland's image. One reason for this might be that during the last fifty years traditions weakened in Hungary, due to industrialization. But nowadays the revival of these traditions is underway in most rural areas and this process also influences their role in the self-image of Hungarians.



A distinctive region: the Matyó area

The Matyó area is located in the Northern part of Hungary. The region consists of three settlements, Mezőkövesd (the centre) and two villages, Szentistván and Tard. The word "Matyó" comes from the name "Mátyás" (legend says that King Mátyás gave Mezőkövesd the title of "free royal town" in 1464) and was originally used by the population of the surrounding protestant villages to distinguish the catholic Matyó people from themselves.

The Matyó area is united and distinguished from the other settlements of the region by the colourful costumes, famous folklore art and lives tightly interwoven with traditions of the inhabitants. Mezőkövesd earned its nationwide reputation based on its unique costumes and free-hand embroidery style. The rich and colourful motives were designed and sketched by so-called "writing" (i.e. drawing) women, who wove the various flowers of their gardens into their clothing.

Matyó embroidery began to hit its prime in the 1860s and 1870s. This era brought the "festive room" to life, as houses were decorated with painted furniture, enamel plates, jars, bowls and high, richly decorated beds. The economic political and cultural background of that time all aided the development of an independent and forceful Matyó folklore art. After 1948 however, due to the dissolvment of independent farms and the aggressive industrialization of rural areas, the practice of folklore traditions almost died out. Nowadays, a revival process is currently underway, but, as in most parts of Hungary, the result is more of a staged performance of the traditions than a real revival in everyday life. Local museums give a detailed picture on Matyó life and customs, presenting the furnishing and the objects of a traditional Matyó home, the history of the famous embroidery and costumes displaying characteristic motifs. The historic old centre of Mezőkövesd has preserved the architecture and the atmosphere of the traditional Matyó village.

As it can be seen from the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism's survey, only Mezőkövesd, the centre of the Matyó area has the potential to develop to a tourist destination (Table 1). Besides the attractions related to the region's distinctive folklore art (1-6), the town also offers a spa, an old church and events connected with wine-making.

Table 1. Main tourist attractions of the Matyó settlements

Mezőkövesd	Szentistván	Tard
1. Matyó museum	1. Hunting	1. Matyó wedding
2. Old town centre		
3. Bori Kisjankó museum		
4. Matyó wedding		
5. Matyó folk dance		
6. Town gallery		
7. Zsóry spa		
8. Agricultural machine museum		
9. "Day of wine"		
10. Roman catholic church		

Source: HNTO 1998c

Despite the relative richness of attractions, tourism plays a negligible role in the town's economy, for several reasons. As Table 2 presents, the attractions of the area are mainly of local importance, but domestic tourism in Hungary has just started to grow and the most popular destinations are those that are suitable for longer - especially summer - holidays. The Matyó region is more suitable for short trips, weekend breaks or special interest tourism, but the development of these tourist forms is hindered by the relatively low income and low

quality of life of the Hungarian population. For international tourists, these attractions are not known enough to stimulate a travel decision to visit the area, though they might be considered as satisfactory secondary attractions (providing especially additional activities for those who are already in the country or reinforcing travel decisions motivated by other attractions of Hungary). Research data partly confirm these hypotheses: most Matyó attractions are visited mainly by domestic tourists (their share is around 60-70% in the total number of visitors). The only exception is the Matyó wedding (a staged performance of a traditional wedding) which is very popular among foreign tourists (80% of visitors are foreigners). The share of local people in the total number of visitors is very low, the most popular attraction for them is folk dance (40% of all visitors of the folk dance programmes are locals) (HNTO 1998c). At first glance, there is a contradiction between low visitation and high local attractiveness, However, all three populations are relatively small, and the nature of the attractions does not really stimulate repeat visits of locals residents.

Table 2. The importance of the Matyó attractions

Attraction in Mezökövesd	L	R	N	I	P	S	Attraction in Tard	L	R	N	I	P	S
1. Matyó museum	7	6	5	2	0	3	1. Matyó wedding	7	5	3	1	0	4
2. Old town centre	7	5	3	1	0	3							
3. B. Kisjankó M.	7	5	3	1	0	3							
4. Matyó wedding	7	5	3	1	0	4							
5. Folk dance	7	5	3	1	0	4							
6. Town gallery	6	3	2	1	0	3							

Source: HNTO 1998c

Values from 1 (least attractive) to 9 (most attractive)

L - Local attractiveness

R - Regional attractiveness

N - National attractiveness

I - International attractiveness

P - Primary attraction

S - Secondary attraction

The general infrastructure of the area is rather good, though the accessibility of the two smaller villages needs improvement. The tourist infrastructure of all three settlements is underdeveloped, which is an other reason for the insignificant role of tourism in the region. Accommodation services are limited to Mezökövesd and Tard, other tourist services (tourist information, travel agency, currency exchange, etc.) are only available in the town. Matyó folk art is presented in most national promotional materials, but the lack of appropriate services prevents the region from benefiting even of this free promotion and from exploiting the potential of its unique and valuable attractions.



Conclusions

Folklore art is a unique element of the Hungarian tourist product. The originality and the variety of different art forms provides a special experience for the tourists and a powerful promotional tool for national marketing. Since the photos and films presenting folk art objects and scenes of traditional events play an important role in the visual representation of Hungary, tourists develop their expectations accordingly before their trip. So the animated and inanimate forms of folk culture remain significant elements of the tourist supply not only in cultural tourism, but also in rural or even incentive tourism. When tourists attend folklore programmes,

participate in folk traditions or see examples of folk architecture or handicrafts, they see their expectations reinforced. Consequently, folk art objects are among the most popular souvenirs that international tourists buy in Hungary, since these objects can perfectly fulfil the basic requirements concerning souvenirs: they are relatively inexpensive, easy to take home and typical to the visited area, so can act as reminders and proofs of the trip.

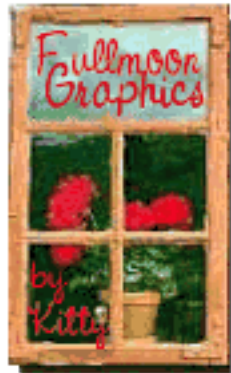
In order to fully utilize the potential of folklore resources in tourism, further improvements are necessary, both in the general infrastructure and in the tourism sector. It must be understood that though the attractiveness of each individual folklore attraction is limited, the power of appropriate attraction sets is multiplied. One possible way of developing new types of tourist packages would be to design thematic routes for various market segments (cultural trails based on folklore events, exhibitions, workshops, textile or pottery routes, etc.). An other idea could be a stronger co-operation between tourist businesses and folklore organisations or folk artists, which would provide additional sponsorship for the artists, contribute to the improvement of service quality and to product development, and could even widen the country's existing image.



References

- Epler Wood, M. (1991): Global Solutions: An Ecotourism Society; In: T. Whelan ed.: Nature Tourism. Managing for the Environment; Island Press, Washington, D.C. USA, pp. 200-206
- Evans, G. (1994): Fair Trade: Cultural Tourism and Craft Production in the Third World; In: A.V. Seaton ed.: Tourism. The State of the Art; John Wiley & Sons Ltd, Chichester, UK, pp.783-791
- Healy, R.G. (1994): 'Tourist Merchandise' as a Means of Generating Local Benefits from Ecotourism; Journal of Sustainable Tourism 2(3):137-151
- HNTO (1998a): Tourism in Hungary 1997; Turizmus Ltd on behalf of the Hungarian National Tourist Office, Budapest
- HNTO (1998b): Marketingterv 1999; Hungarian National Tourist Office, Budapest
- HNTO (1998c): Tourist attractions of Hungary; <http://www.miwo.hu/vonzlelt.html>
- HTB (N/A): Folk Art in Hungary: Land of Style and Traditions, Hungarian Tourist Board, Budapest
- Lengyel, M. (1995): A balatoni turizmus fejlesztési koncepciója; KIT Képzőművészeti Kiadó, Budapest
- Littrell, M.A. (1996): Shopping Experiences and Marketing of Culture to Tourists; In: M. Robinson – N. Evans - P. Callaghan eds.: Tourism and Culture: Image, Identity and Marketing; University of Northumberland, Newcastle, UK, pp.107-120
- Littrell, M.A. (1990): Symbolic Significance of Textile Crafts for Tourists; Annals of Tourism Research 17(2):228-245
- Littrell, M.A. - L.F. Anderson - P.J. Brown (1993): What Makes a Craft Souvenir Authentic?; Annals of Tourism Research 20(2):197-215
- Mathieson, A - G. Wall (1982): Tourism: Economic, Physical and Social Impacts; John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, USA
- Molnár, L – Prisztács B. (1998): Dél-Dunántúl, az ezerszínu találkozások régiója; Turizmus Bulletin 2(1):13-18
- Nemes, A - B. Kozma (1998): Magyarország turisztikai vonzerőinek számbavétele; Turizmus Bulletin 2(1):8-12
- Onderwater, L - G. Richards - S. Stam (1998): Why Tourists Buy Souvenirs: European Evidence; Paper presented at the ATLAS-EUROTEx International Conference "Innovatory Approaches to Culture and Tourism", Rethymno, Crete, 22-24 October
- Richards, G. (1996): Production and Consumption of European Cultural Tourism; Annals of Tourism Research 23(2):261-283

- The Wonderful World of Matyó; Budapest Airport Magazine 1998(1-2):23
- Vidas, A.A. de (1995): Textiles, Memory and the Souvenir Industry in the Andes; In: M-F- Lanfant – J.B. Allcock – E.M. Bruner eds.: International Tourism. Identity and Change; SAGE Studies in International Sociology 47, International Sociological Association, London, pp.67-83
- Vukonic, B. (1996): Marketing Culture as a Tourist Commodity; In: M. Robinson – N. Evans - P. Callaghan eds.: Tourism and Culture: Image, Identity and Marketing; University of Northumberland, Newcastle, UK, pp.289-296
- WTO (1997): Tourism: 2020 Vision; WTO, Madrid, Spain



<http://www.fullmoongraphics.com/>