IMPACTS OF THE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE  
TITLE OF PÉCS ON THE CITY'S TOURISM

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Abstract Pécs was the first city in Hungary to be European Capital of Culture. Before the title year, 2010, Pécs was relatively popular with domestic tourists but less known on the international tourism market. Due to the large investments and the variety of programmes, the cultural city character of Pécs strengthened, to the extent that now the name of the city is almost exclusively associated with cultural tourism, and other forms of tourism – MICE tourism, enological tourism etc. – are overshadowed. The success or unsuccessfulness of the programme is still debated; it takes years until all impacts can be fully evaluated.

Keywords Cultural tourism, tourism development, leisure tourism, MICE tourism, Hungarian tourism industry, cultural city
1. INTRODUCTION

Pécs is the first and so far the last Hungarian city that has been awarded the prestigious “European Capital of Culture” title. The city was chosen from a total of eleven applicants, in an intensive competition. There was much expectancy before the event, as Pécs is a city that has lost some of its position, a lot of economic activities and much of its positions in the Hungarian urban network since the systemic change, the early 1990s. The title was (could have been?) a great chance to break out of the “industrial city” image and to place Pécs on the map of international tourism.

The event called Pécs European Capital of Culture 2010 followed a special path, from planning right to implementation, as the city kept in touch from the launch of the project until its closing with the other Hungarian cities that had been applicants for the title. As for the implementation, it mean that theoretically Pécs possessed the ECoC title, but, in addition to the centre of the South Transdanubian region, Pécs, the former competitors too organised events, as did other settlements from the level of big cities down to villages. On the ground of this idea the city of Pécs had a sort of central function to which the respective partner settlements were connected closely or more loosely (www.pecs2010.hu).

The foundation of the tourism in Pécs is cultural and city tourism, the attractions of which are the values of the historical city, the monuments and the programmes. In the case of Pécs this primarily concerns the downtown and the area around the edge of the inner city, which are the architectural values attracting visitors, on the one hand, and give the location of the programmes of the city, on the other hand (Berki et al., 2006, Lőrinc K. – Michalkó G. 2011, Rátz T. 2011).

The ECoC developments were built on the products described above, with the aim of the creation of a supply as diverse as possible for the broadest possible range of tourists and excursionists arriving at Pécs. It is remarkable that the touristic position of the city of Pécs and the touristic supply of the city were stabilised – maybe for good – by the developments: for many, Pécs is a city whose tourism is built basically on the historical values, to which all other elements are connected as auxiliary, supplementary attractions, only (Aubert A. et al., 2010).

To summarise the ECoC developments: they were concentrated mainly on the renewal of the cityscape, the improvement of the cultural values and events, their elevation of these values and events to a higher level, and also on capacity development and quality improvement of accommodations. It remains a question, though, whether the city would have, could have reached much better positions within the tourism sector of Hungary by the creation, development and appropriate positioning of the other touristic products (like enological tourism, health tourism etc.) that Pécs offered to guests by its external cooperation partners.

2. METHODOLOGY

We applied two basic methods, supplemented by several others. As regards desk research, the use of secondary information, we relied – in addition to the literature cited in the references, of course – upon the data of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) and the tourism destination management organisation of Pécs, IrányPécs Ltd. All three
authors of the paper were involved in two extended questionnaire surveys done in 2011 and 2013, shortly after the Pécs European Capital of Culture 2010 year, and a total of 2,500 thousand visitors, domestic and foreign ones alike, were asked about details of their travel to Pécs and the level of satisfaction with the attractions of the city, as well as the types of services they used or intended to use, main motivation(s) of travel, and what they thought could be done to improve the tourism industry or Pécs and make Pécs more attractive to visitors. The findings of these two questionnaire surveys are fresh and useful pieces of information, relevant for both the supply and the demand side of the tourism of Pécs.

In the years before the ECoC title of Pécs, during the respective year and partly also in the years afterwards local press devoted many articles to the issue of the European Capital of Culture title: the preparation for the programme, the problems that emerged, and the assessment of the respective problems and the event on the whole. Although these pieces of information are not cited exactly in the paper, the authors of the paper, all three of them still being active participants in the tourism sector of the city and the region, remember the essence of the information; also, being Pécs citizens they meet the achievements and the problems analysed in the paper practically every day.

3. PÉCS AND THE ECOC 2010

The application to the first round of tender announced by the government of Hungary was made in very short time, only two months, November and December 2004. The application was written by external experts and the staff of the city hall, especially from the department of education and culture. No less than eleven cities of Hungary submitted their applications in the first round: Budapest, Debrecen, Eger, Győr, Kapovsár, Kecskemét, Miskolc, Pécs, Sopron, Székesfehérvár and Veszprém. Pécs was one of the first cities to make its way to the second round, with a univocal decision.

The victory gained in the second round and officially announced on 19 October 2005 was evidently the merit of the good tender material of Pécs, called “The borderless city”. The concept of the application of Pécs was a high-quality scenario of the future image of the city as a regional sub-centre mediating to Southeast Europe.

The phenomenon of the ECoC is a complex urban planning and development project that allows a new development path to be drawn for the city of Pécs, struggling with an economic, social and identity crisis. This was the main ambition of the application of Pécs: the city did not only want to make up a colourful potpourri of cultural programmes and did not only aim at the implementation of long-awaited large-scale cultural investments, either: Pécs wanted to create the chance for a complex modernisation of the city.

One of the most positive and most striking features of the programme is the full synchronicity of the outlined model of urban development with current trends of European urban development: things to be done were defined and chances identified along the concept of “cultural city development”; also, the concepts used by the tender of Pécs were the concepts popular in Europe: “creative city”, cultural industry”, “urban tourism. This kind of attitude basically transformed the relationship system of the city: “culture” and “creativity” became points of reference that could no longer be avoided, and they appeared in the practice of social activities, too (project in this field were defined, organisations doing such activities created etc.). Also, this new attitude had an impact on the economy and the identity of the city as well as the material environment like urban architecture.
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The tender, on the other hand, paid much less attention to the actual state of the economy in Pécs, the reasons for the seemingly unstoppable loss of population and the increasing social and spatial segregation. Parallel to the successful description of what Pécs should be like and the successful mobilisation of a significant part of the elite of Pécs, the tender almost completely neglected ideas about what competent actors and with the inclusion of what institutions would actually turn the concepts into practice in a way that the deep structure of the city should be improved and transformed.

It was basically not the existing city development concept – approved by the local government in 2003 – that had an impact on the ECoC programme but vice versa: the urban development concept gradually absorbed the programme. (It is true though that not only Pécs but the majority of other big Hungarian cities too lack comprehensive and self-initiated planning documents that could serve as the basis of the operation and development of the respective settlements. Cities in Hungary are characterised by an ad-hoc decision-making system instead of a strategic one.) Accordingly, the city of Pécs and its self-government was (and still is) drifting with the events. Although there are planning documents that are legitimate plans approved by the local government, they do not make a complex urban development system, do not serve as a direct basis of urban development in Pécs. In the absence of own development resources, improvements are determined by the availability of external resources and the intentions of private investors, plans are adapted to the external conditions and not the initiatives and projects are integrated into a strategy.

It takes time until the new institutional system created (or still under creation) will fully operate and become professional. It takes patience of all stakeholders for these institutions, created in Pécs in connection with the ECoC programme, to create their own image, operate appropriately and contribute to the process of culture creation and consumption. The results of the ECoC year can be assessed from two basic aspects:

- the new opportunities that Pécs was given, the new achievements through culture, i.e. how much culture fills up the city with life and energy;
- changes taking place in the lives of the city inhabitants: whether there are new relations now between city dwellers and their place of residence, induced by the ECoC programme. People should realise: Pécs is their city, their habitat and they also have responsibility in the success of the city. The objective is to transform the local population from the consumers of the city into creators of the city. The birth of a new city mentality is what matters the most – for which the best example may be that of Glasgow, the European Capital of Culture in 1990.

4. CHANGE OF THE SUPPLY AS AN EFFECT OF THE ECOC

The number of tourists in the city was constantly high in the socialist decades, exceeding in some years 200,000. Then, after the systemic change (1989-1990) tourism working on market grounds appeared in Pécs too, resulting in a significant loss of positions for the city (Aubert A. et al., 2010). After the systemic change the change in the number of guests showed considerable ups and downs (Figure 1).
Following the decline in the transitory period there was a decade of growth peaking in 2002, with approximately 170,000 tourists in Pécs. This was followed by a serious decline, the nadir of which was 2011 when the number of guests just exceeded 100,000. The trend was broken by the title European Capital of Culture in 2010, when the number of guests naturally increased, but this increase was not more than 20 thousand guests. The reasons why this index showed such unbalanced figures are manifold: frequent changes of profile in tourism marketing (Mediterranean city, city of culture etc.), lack of an adequate tourism management, lack of significant investments in the tourism sector, and the strengthening of the competitors. The year 2010, however, with its developments of the touristic supply started a tendency of growth in the number of guests which may have a long term effect on the tourism industry of the city of Pécs.

If we look at the origin of the tourists, we can see a considerable overweight of domestic tourists, according to the statistics of the last decade not more than 20-25% of all guests are from abroad on the average, and their share did not exceeded 30% even in 2001, the year of the European Capital of Culture. Surveys show that the largest number of foreign guests come from the German speaking countries (50-60% of guests from abroad are from Germany, Austria, Switzerland and from the Benelux States), and from the Anglo-Saxon countries (20-25%: Great Britain, USA, Australia, New Zealand), while the remaining approximately 25% are typically from European countries but Pécs receives a small number of guests from the Far East, Africa and South America as well.

As regards the preference of accommodations by tourists, it is clearly hotels that have become the most popular by now: approximately three-quarters of all guests prefer this type of accommodation.

Looking at the breakdown of tourists by age we can see the dominance of the generations between 20 and 50 years of age. In all age groups most of the travels are organised individually, groups of a few people or families typically travel to Pécs on their own, without the help of a tour organiser. The core of the demand is tourists with higher education diplomas, together with those who have grammar school certificate they make three-quarters of all tourists travelling to Pécs. This of course has impact on the sector of the
city, because the “city of culture” slogan and the direction of the tourism product developments are trying to address just the same segments of the demand.

A natural consequence of these is that the majority of the guests only use in significant numbers the accommodation services and catering from all the services offered by the city (Figure 2).

![Fig. 2: Services used by the tourists in Pécs (in per cent)](source: By the authors, using the findings of questionnaire surveys in Pécs)

This does not seem to be evident at first glance; however, surveys reveal that tourists with higher education qualification, arriving at Pécs with conscious city sightseeing intentions, do not require either the services of local guides or the small sightseeing train, or any other general sources of information, because they collect and possess most of the information before they start their journey, already. They require special skills that they are able to acquire during their stay in Pécs, from the staff of the respective attractions, and these pieces of information are far beyond the information provided by general travel guide books. This fact is also justified by the statements of local tourism experts who meet tourists and their exact demands daily.

The analysis of the popularity of the respective attractions and the changes of this demonstrate that there was a growing demand for cultural attractions, induced by the ECoC title. We have to emphasise, on the other hand, that tourists keep on visiting the classic values of Pécs well-known before the European Capital of Culture year, already (like the TV Tower and religious memories), as well as the ones created in and for the year 2010 – in fact, the Basilica or the Turkish remains enjoy priority over newly established attractions related to the ECoC project. It is a major problem that some of the new attractions have a limited appeal to guests (see for example the Kodály Centre); also, the number of visitors to open-air programmes lags far behind the expectations, while one cornerstone of all developments should be high culture. Also, the values on the Mecsek Mountain attract much less visitors than they are expected to, the evident reason for which is the lack or belatedness of developments.
Pécs has a significant number of one-day visitors, excursionists, but the exact assessment of their number is just as problematic as in any destination of the world. Experts estimate that this number is approximately 400-500 thousand people per year; the basis of this estimation is the daily activity and experiences of the experts, and the volume of traffic at the respective attractions (Figure 3).

![Graph showing visitor numbers at attractions in Pécs](image)

**Fig. 3: Volume of visitors at the attractions of Pécs**
(Source: By the authors, using the data collected by Irány Pécs Ltd.)

We have to add as further information concerning the numbers in Figure 3 that in many cases the turnover in a given year is not for the whole year; in the case of the Zsolnay Cultural Quarter eg. such “short” years are 2010 and 2011, as the Quarter is only operating in its present form since 2012. Also, in many cases data are absent from certain years. Despite the deficiencies of the data the indices featured in the figure are exact, as they are based on the number of entrance tickets sold at the attractions in the given years.

It is striking that visitors prefer in large numbers those ECoC-related attractions – Zsolnay Cultural Quarter, Kodály Centre – the creation of which was definitely to promote the volume of tourism. The turnover of constantly operating museums is also significant, but the number of their visitors also includes schools groups arriving from the whole territory of Baranya county who make a considerable share of their overall visitor numbers.

5. CHANGE OF THE DEMAND AS AN EFFECT OF THE ECOC

The product range of Pécs is basically built on few elements, centred on city and cultural tourism and supplemented by a few auxiliary products. However, these together only cover a small part of the potential touristic supply.

Cultural tourism is the “flagship” product of Pécs, and since the European Capital of Culture 2010 event tourism investments have been implemented almost exclusively in this field. If we look at the city itself as a touristic product we can say that the supply of
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attractions is very diverse, so tourists arriving with cultural motivations – as we have seen, they are the majority of demand – can meet their expectations. Within this touristic product, all three sub-groups – non-living culture, culture manifested in everyday life and animated culture – appear and have extremely diverse supplies.

A significant part of non-living culture is sacral monuments and values, due to the clerical functions in different historical times. The most significant of these values are

- Cella Septichora: Early Christian burial place from late Roman times, part of the UNESCO World Heritage since 2000. The modern visitor centre in its present form, on the other hand, has only been operating since 2007;
- Cathedral and Dome Museum: symbols of the clerical centre, and the cathedral itself is one of the symbols of Pécs. It is under enlargement, in the framework of which the Episcopal Cellars will be renewed and a conference room and lookout point will be established;
- Complex of the Episcopal Palace: though it is not open to visitors itself, the connected Barbican Garden and Barbican Bastion are very popular with tourists;
- Djami of Gazi Kasim Pasha /Church of Our Lady: it can be found in the main square of the city and is evidently the best known building of Pécs, a symbol of the city that now functions as a Catholic church;
- Djami of Yakovali Hassan Pasha: the Djami and minaret, preserved in the best condition of all such buildings in Hungary, is now primarily a museum but also serves as an important place of prayers for the followers of Islam religion;
- Synagogue: it can be found in the inner city. It was built in the 19th century; an important fact about the building is that it is home to the first organ built by the famous organ manufacturing workshop of József Angster.

The second part of this category is made by profane memories, among which the following are the most important for tourism:

- Zsolnay Cultural Quarter: it was established as a flagship project of the ECoC Pécs 2010 in 2010-2011, with its inner units (Zsolnay Mausoleum, Pink Exhibition, Gyugyi Collection, Bóbita Puppet Theatre, History of the Zsolnay Family and Factory, Show Manufacture, Planetarium). Now it is a significant element of the supply;
- Kodály Centre: another investment built in the framework of the ECoC Pécs 2010, providing a state-of-the-art venue for arts, cultural and scientific programmes;
- TV tower: an attraction of Pécs that has become classic by now. Although it has hardly been modernised since it was opened, with its lookout tower it is still one of the symbols of Pécs, attracting large numbers of visitors;
- Zoo and terrarium: coming from its character it is a major attraction, despite its deteriorating quality. The zoo is closed for the time being, so that it should be completely renewed in the coming years;
- National theatre: beyond its theatre function and architectural value, the building renewed in 2011 is the location of events like the annually organised prestigious National Theatre Festival of Pécs or major award ceremonies in Pécs;
- Constant museums: they are concentrated in the inner city of Pécs, open to visitors with an extremely wide range of supply (Zsolnay Porcelain Museum, Csontváry Museum, Vasarely Museum, Martyn Museum, Museum of City History, Museum of Natural Sciences,
Ethnographic Museum, Dorottya Kanizsai Museum), but their technological modernisation is yet to be done.

Supply elements related to culture manifested in everyday life include events that are the images of the topical social processes of the city and of the needs of the demand:

- Pécs Champagne and Wine Festival: a festival lasting for several days, organised on the main square of the city, in the framework of which wine makers and cellars from Pécs and all over Hungary offer their products;
- Pécs Spring Wine Festival/Toast of the Regions: a spring festival in Pécs, organised on gastronomy, primarily wine producing, on the main square of Pécs;
- Pécs Feast and Pálinka Festival: a gastronomy festival where not only catering services but also guests can make their meals in different cooking contests. The other main element of the programme is beverages, featuring the pálinka-s of all major pálinka producers in Hungary;
- Pécs University Days: a several-day popular music event organised by the University of Pécs – or its assignee –, the main programme of which is compiled on the basis of the current music trends popular with the young generations;
- Rock Marathon: a rock music festival of the city that has become traditional by now, and the biggest such event in the whole of Hungary, held at the Malomvölgy (“Mill Valley”) Lake city park each year.

Animated culture is a category in which the city of Pécs offers several programmes for locals and guests alike. The most significant of these programmes are as follows:

- National Theatre Festival of Pécs: maybe the most renowned event of theatre programmes in Hungary, when the cream of the theatre industry comes to Pécs for performances in contests and out of contest.
- Heritage Festival: the oldest all-art festival of the region, demonstrating in extraordinary ways the museums and the sacral places of the city, in addition to offering a very diverse range of cultural programmes.
- Southern Gateway International Folklore Festival: an event built on folk traditions and folk arts, with a supply relevant for the whole of Europe.
- Sétatér Festival: the festival organised in the centre, Séta Tér (“Pedestrian Square”) is basically a popular music and gastronomy event, supplemented in recent years by Hungarian and international cultural elements including folk dance, folk arts fair and the demonstration and sales of handicrafts products.
- Pécs Vintage Festival: it is a programme basically for the local inhabitants, but guests are also coming in increasing numbers to see the spectacular procession and the handicrafts market.

The cultural supply of course involves many other less significant elements, in addition to the ones described above (less known monuments, smaller-scale programmes, temporary exhibitions etc.), but these are not the topic of the paper, as they do not mean a considerable attraction on the demand side. Of course this does not mean that tourists arriving at Pécs neglect these programmes and services.

Enological tourism in Pécs is a supplementary product, closely related to programmes. Pécs is part of the Pécs Wine Region and the Pécs-Mecsek Wine Route, which, although being far less popular and important than their Villány and Szekszárd counterparts, have an increasing role in tourism. The volume of wines produced by the cellars of Pécs is not very large, but the wines made are of high quality, popular especially
on the domestic market. A sort typical of the area and only produced here in Hungary is Cirfandli; both the dry and the sweet version of this are real curiosities. Another interest is the sort called Pécs Csomorika, traditionally giving the raw material of champagne manufacturing in Pécs, but better known by the public as Juhfark (e.g. Sheep’s tail).

The city has two theme parks, the Mecsextrém Park and the Pécs Zoo. Mecsextrém Park is an adventure park in a forest environment, open since 2006. In its supply it tries to address all segments of demand, so toys and activities for the whole family can be found here as well as activities that are real physical challenges. The other theme park is the Zoo, built in the 1960s by voluntary work. The supply of the zoo is undergoing a major transition. After the systemic change there was a decline in the demand, followed by some smaller-scale improvements of the zoo, nevertheless the positions of the park compared to its competitors in Hungary continuously worsened. In the May of 2014 the zoo was closed, to be completely renewed and reconstructed.

Although to a limited extent, visitors can also use the supply of active tourism and ecotourism. Such attractions are the hiking paths in the Mecsek Mountains in the proximity of Pécs, the only ski slope of the mountains, and a few visitors centres built on natural values (e.g. Pintér Garden, the Tetye Tufa Show Cave). The role of these in the tourism industry of Pécs is negligible, a very small per cent of tourists use these facilities, according to the findings of surveys.

There is no health tourism in Pécs in the classic sense of the word, but we must remark that the public and private clinics in the city – primarily the latter – are getting more and more popular. This is supported by the findings of questionnaire surveys; a few per cents of visitors travel to Pécs in order to use the medical and health services (especially plastic surgery or the treatment of cardiovascular problems). As regards the supply of classic health tourism (wellness units of hotels, spa) the city is in worse position than the other bit cities in Hungary – in fact, than any modern spa now in Hungary.

In addition to the elements of leisure tourism supply listed so far, it is MICE tourism that is a service in the city which has a selected importance, coming form the considerable education/academic and economic centre functions of Pécs, on the one hand, and the already existing infrastructure and suprastructure conditions of this touristic product, on the other hand. There are hundreds of events organised in Pécs annually. Supply has already adapted to this trend, in addition to large conference venues like the Kodály Centre, the University of Pécs etc., many accommodations have also established conference facilities and related services, so organisers of smaller events have now many places to choose from.

To sum up the touristic supply of Pécs we can say that the city positioned its products almost exclusively on cultural tourism and its various elements. However, despite the broad cultural supply it does not have a universal or continental attraction that induces tourism volumes considerable at national level. In addition, the development of all other products lags far behind cultural tourism, so other elements on their own do not motivate many for a travel; they are uses by tourists in Pécs already. On the whole the touristic supply of the city is significant at national level, but on the basis of the demand for Pécs it does not reach specifically the level that should have been induced by the developments.
6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Pécs had a great chance by the European Capital of Culture title to change its image, the – not always positive – concepts of the world outside about the city and to place itself on the touristic map of the world and strengthen its position in Hungary as a tourism destination, a target area of investments and a potential place of residence. The city did not only introduce itself to the world in the ECoC year, did not only host a large number of events but were also given several cultural establishments and institutions that will determine the cultural and economic life of Pécs for a long time. The supply structure of tourism, however, was one-sidedly shifted towards cultural tourism, but the increased interest in Pécs in 2010 has not proved to be sustainable – at least not yet – and the tourism industry of Pécs has not strengthened considerably. Not only the international market but also the domestic does not appreciate Pécs so much as it had been expected prior to the ECoC year. The assessments of different impacts of the ECoC programme (on international relations, urban development, and economic development) are not always positive; at least as many people think that the programme was a failure as many believe it was a success story.

Between 2005 and 2010 two mayors of Pécs died, which of course slowed down planning and organisation works. The frequent changes of the persons responsible for the ECoC programme had a negative impact on the actors as well, making them uncertain about what to do in the implementation of the plans.

The economic crisis that broke out in the autumn of 2008 had a very negative effect on the economy of the city, which proved to be detrimental to the investments just started (or not even started). It is partly the reason why the flagship investments of the ECoC programme were not finished, with the exception of only one, by the year 2010 – renewal of the squares of the city –, all others were finally implemented with significant delays, sometimes in the year after the ECoC title.

We have to admit, however, that a really meaningful and well-founded assessment of the programme may only be possible after some years have passed. In addition to the events realised and the materialised achievements, i.e. the establishments built, what is very important is the system of relationships that positioned Pécs on the international arena and which may be used in the culture and economy of Pécs – and the impacts of which are long-term ones which may not be exactly assessed only four years after Pécs was the European Capital of Culture.
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