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## Every Day's a Festival!



### Diversity on Show

**Edited by Susanne Küchler, László Kürti and Hisham Elkadi**



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# The politics of festivals

## *Fantasies and feasts in Hungary*



LÁSZLÓ KÜRTI

### Introduction

*festival ... noun. 1. An occasion for feasting or celebration; especially, a day or time of religious significance that recurs at regular intervals; the festival of Chanukah. 2. A series of related performances, exhibitions, competitions, or the like; festival. 3. Conviviality; revelry. adj. festive.*  
(The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 1969)

There is today an inundation of festivals, public celebrations and national holidays all over Europe, and beyond. Whether this is the natural outcome of the increasing number of European rituals, observed by Jeremy Boissevain almost two decades ago (1992:1), remains a tantalizing question. In 1989, Hungary and the Hungarians were placed on a pedestal by the European powers as having a democratic, multi-party and constitutional republic as they celebrated newly acquired independence and nationhood. As a result, old festivals and communist holidays rapidly gave way to new national holidays, public celebrations and religious festivities. It is therefore high time the question was asked: why the general lack of interests in festivals since 1990 in east Central Europe? Interestingly, the year 2008, designated by the European Commission the 'Year of Intercultural Dialogue', was not considered by Brussels apt for festivals, and the concept is nowhere to be found in the decision to name the year.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this is one reason why the European Festival Association published a declaration showing the many contributions



festivals make: they reach broad audiences; offer artists opportunities and visibility; enhance participation and belonging; boost cultural tourism; are unique expressions of local community; play a unique role in educating the public, especially youth; and also enhance the process of social inclusion for disadvantaged people and ethnic or cultural minorities.<sup>2</sup>

To redress this imbalance, the town of Kecskemét, the regional seat of Bács-Kiskun county, was selected for anthropological fieldwork to study festivals.<sup>3</sup> Curiously, most studies do not see public celebrations and festivals as a problematical complex requiring detailed explanation. Others explain festivals as recreations and celebrations of local community spirit, and as symbols in a coherent and unified framework. Many, moreover, explain festivals as elements of unique community and urban renewal projects in sync with general developments across the European continent. In this chapter, however, I view the Kecskemét festival scene as a complex whole requiring detailed analysis as to its purpose, content and form. Study of festivals between 2007 and 2008 reveals that many are not timeless traditions invariably repeated at certain key occasions. On the contrary, they are contested by various groups who assign different, often divergent, meanings to them, and they serve different purposes for different consumers and participants. Unique to the Kecskemét's annual festival scene is the fact that while communities elsewhere in Europe, the Americas and Asia celebrate their multicultural, interethnic and ecumenical milieu, Kecskemét festivals attempt to create a multifunctional transnational atmosphere by bringing in participants who offer variety as well as colour, constituents that are missing from the community's local culture and traditions. Situated throughout the annual spring and summer festival cycles, new festive events are created every year to cater to large groups of visitors, both national and foreign. Most popular are the children's festival, the International Air and Military Show, and the local festival known as the 'Famous Week'. Aside from the last, all are newly invented.

## Background

For the ancient Greeks, even though there were variations from city-state to city-state, the names of months were related to festivals held in them.<sup>4</sup> In the Christian calendar, the festive year is clear, with the distribution of major festivals according to the life of Jesus, and the recurrence of holy days marking the agricultural cycle. Words connected to festival and feast can be located in ancient Latin and Greek vocabulary. The English words 'feast' and 'festival' come from the Latin *fešta* and *festivus*, meaning a festive occasion and holiday, with a joyous, humorous or cheerful connotation. Whether religious or civic, festivals in general have also been characterized by pomp and parade. 'Pomp' also has its origins in ancient Greek festivals, *pompe* meaning a special procession with offerings to a deity. 'Parade' comes from Latin (the verb *paro*) and refers to preparation, providing, to make ready, or to furnish.

In general parlance today, feast or holy days refer to ecclesiastical celebrations of a religious nature often associated with saints. All over Europe and in countries with strong Catholic traditions, for example, the Marian feasts refer to those holy days that commemorate the Virgin Mary. Other meanings attached to the word 'feast' have to do with medieval or renaissance family celebrations with meals of abundance. Gluttony (another word of Latin origin) has a special, negative connotation with feasting. This negative ring is easily observable in many festivals with excess eating and drinking. In popular culture overeating in the form of cannibalistic feast is a standard fare: horror films *Feast*, *Feast 1* and *Feast 2* are good examples in which huge monsters devour humans, but one can even think of a hit movie like *Silence of the Lambs*. To give another unappetizing example, the 1997 book *Deadly Feast* by Richard Rhodes describes the prion controversy or the 'mad cow' disease, hinting at the original Australian aborigine data of purported cannibalistic mortuary feasts. Yet even Christian feasts are mortgaged to a rich historical and cultural tapestry, allowing for a fair amount of variation, colour and controversy. In medieval times the number of feast days ranged between 45 and 85, not counting celebrations of local saints. In the Byzantine Empire, there were 66 feasts and 27 so-called half-holy days, and 85 days free of labour. Since the seventeenth century we have witnessed a considerable reduction of feast days. This shift was facilitated by Pope Urban VIII, who reduced the number of feasts to 36. Actual practices however, reveal a different picture. In Spain, there have been about 17 feast days; in Sicily, Austria and Bavaria the number has been steady at about 15. Following the French revolution, only four feasts were retained in France, a number similar to that for Germany and Belgium. Scotland, England and Ireland have four feasts, identical save for those days reserved for the celebration of national saints (St Patrick, St Andrew, St George). The number of official feasts is much higher in Greece, but somewhat less in Russia, and even fewer in Catholic Italy. It must also be mentioned that in certain countries civil law acknowledges a much smaller number of feasts than those celebrated in the ecclesiastical calendar. This fluctuation of number of feast days throughout the centuries continues today, with the rise and demise of festivals and feasts even since the new millennium.

It is perhaps astonishing to realize that though the growing number of festivals today represent a myriad of interests and contents, the majority make use of the word 'festival'. Despite the ubiquity of a common vocabulary, classifying festivals is a task fraught with difficulties. For comparative purposes, however, they have been glossed according to their nature and structure (arts, film, music, exhibits, etc.), settings (parks, boroughs, villages, nature, street, work-places etc.), selected categories of people participating (ethnic, religious, age-groups, gender-based, political parties, companies), or according to desired goals of the organizers (fundraising, celebrating holidays, national days etc.). One kind of festival, the arts festival, is defined as: 'events of



national and international relevance aiming at the promotion and renovation of the respective artistic discipline(s), organised in the same area and over a limited time span' (Ilczuk and Kolikowska, 2007:6). What is clear, however, is that many of today's festivals cut across these categories, as they combine many different purposes and locations, and employ a moveable timetable according to the nature of their specific agendas. In addition, some festivals are one-time events while others recur at various intervals.

Attendance and participation – whether they are open to the public or restricted to those invited – is another way to look at festivals. This perspective allows similarities as well as differences among them to be easily recognized. What separate festivals from holidays are the particular and frequent processions and speeches by leading organizers, privileged guests and/or political leaders. Ironically, large festivals held in the former Soviet-bloc countries had special street parades in which the masses would march in front of tribunes of the country's political leaders. These highly ritualized marches were conducted along traditional or politically acceptable procession routes. A notable and innovative feature was the so-called 'marching-dance', in which dance troupes would perform while progressing along the road in front of dignitaries: a form of dance that did not exist traditionally.<sup>5</sup> In post-1990 Hungary, festivals may be identified as political rituals, civic rituals or civic religion, as Bocock calls them (1985:220), since most are organized and funded by local councils, mayoral offices and major political parties. Such a confluence of interests is a recent development, though it is also a remnant of earlier state-controlled festivities inimical to upholding the idea of socialist patriotism.<sup>6</sup>

Festivals, both contemporary and historic, are also notable for their pompous speeches – often ritualized by formulas, greetings and religious overtones – given by hosts, political leaders and specially invited guests. These latter often come from a selected pool of celebrities, high politics, prominent civic or religious associations and media stars. Expensive props, and elaborate equipment, clothing, specific music and food are also frequently utilized, as befitting the occasion. In current festivals in Hungary we can detect some of the earlier socialist patterns, even though their structure and content are far removed from any Marxist-Leninist propaganda known from the previous era.

### **Festivals in Hungary: a brief comparison**

In one way or another, festivals and public celebrations have long been part of the human condition, as they mirror communities, looking both inwards and outwards (Handelman 1990; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Perhaps this is one reason why the number of festivals is so astonishing. In 2005, the 'horror figure of 3,000 was cited again and again in the media' for the number of organized festivals throughout the country (Inkei 2007:161). Most of these are funded directly or indirectly by the state, either through central distribution, or through various local governmental support schemes. Major festivals in

Hungary that have received international fame include the Budapest Spring Festival (March), the Sziget rock music festival (August), The Valley of the Arts (August) and the Jewish Summer Festival (late August/early September).<sup>7</sup> One sporting event that cannot be considered a festival, though frequently it is listed among Hungary's main festival attractions because of its huge financial success,<sup>8</sup> is the Hungarian Formula 1 Grand Prix every August. This is clearly the festivalization of a sporting event, a rather recent development in the case of Hungary. Adding to the confusion of festival categorization are those listed in Wikipedia:<sup>9</sup> the Busójárás, International Culture Week in Pécs, the Dutch Festival in Budapest, the Island (Sziget) rock music festival, and name days. This last category nobody would classify into festivals proper, although there is no doubt that celebrating name days offer plenty of time for feasting, revelry and eating.

Obviously, there are plenty of major national and religious holidays that are also festivalized, a new development characteristic of Europe as a whole. Urban or city festivals are a recent feature in Hungary, as communities have begun to celebrate the day they were awarded the title of a 'town'.<sup>10</sup> There are plenty of festivals occurring every year in which the sole justification for feasting has to do with the commemoration of the town's birthday. The title European Capital of Culture also mobilize interests and sponsorship, giving towns a new *raison d'être* for putting on weeks and weeks of festival events. The Romanian city of Sibiu was awarded the European Capital of Culture title in 2007 (see Stroe in this volume) and the Hungarian city of Pécs will follow in 2010. In the case of the latter, there are already series of organized events to create the feeling of a festival town with a European dimension. Following this initiative, the Hungarian state has invented the 'City of Hungarian Culture', a prestigious title awarded through a competition by the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Foreign Affairs every year. Recognizing the town's cultural achievements, special funds are allocated to the winning municipality to organize even more special events. Having 'sister cities' is yet another new inspiration for festival organization.<sup>11</sup> For instance, while the city Kecskemét possesses several 'sister cities' all over and outside Europe (Japan, Turkey, Israel and the UK, for example), other smaller towns have one or two sister cities. These sister cities join in various cultural programmes, exchanges and celebrations, offering some obvious colour and internationalism. This idea, interestingly, was already a stated ideal of the socialist government of Hungary, in line with the socialist brotherhood of socialist nations. Settlements in Hungary have competed in gaining sister cities since the 1960s, but there is one notable difference today: these sister cities now come from all over the world; before 1990 the preferred exchanges were among socialist states of Eastern Europe. There are, in addition, several international sports events that have a more-or-less festival milieu. For smaller local communities, however, one of the most important things on their yearly calendar is celebrating local saints or local heritage days.



According to Péter Inkei, the following major types of festival can be observed in Hungary: general arts festivals, classical music, popular music and jazz, theatre and dance, film, literature and other art forms, folk art, amateur art, gastronomy and entertainment, and various others (Inkei 2007:161). This classification is rather arbitrary and serves only as information. By looking at specific urban milieu there is the possibility of observing these, but not only these. When comparing several locations and festival circuits we may see similar patterns as well as major departures from this typology.

The way festivals are generated, and run, is one area that must be examined. New festivals, when compared to older or more traditional feasts, also offer evidence as to how they maintain success, or in contrast what causes their demise. In Hungary the indicator of the emergence of the new festival spirit is the number of new festivals. As researchers have shown, one third of the current festivals have been created since 2000, about another third are more than ten years' old, and only a very small percentage date to before the 1980s. A few festivals, such as the Open-air Theatre Festival at Szeged, and the Spring Festival of Budapest, do belong to the latter category. In fact, the Szeged festival has a more prestigious history than the one in the nation's capital. It started in 1930, when the first open-air stage was erected in front of the recently completed Roman Catholic church (the Dóm). The summer theatre events continued every year until 1939, a date that marked Hungary's eventual alliance with Nazi Germany during the Second World War. The festival – which started as a strictly drama and music event, but later included other artistic forms such as ballet, musicals and rock music as well – was revived in 1959 and has been in existence ever since. The Szeged festival raises an immediate problem of diversity. To quote an analysis:

In fact, in spite of the venerable past, the festival is almost exclusively national. The very detailed analysis of the audience shows that 2,7 percent of visitors came from abroad. The majority of them came from among the other side of the Serbian border, at a few minutes drive south of Szeged: almost certainly ethnic Hungarians, who constitute majority of the nearby area... The average visitor is a 40 years old woman living in Szeged, having secondary school education.

(Inkei, 2007:173)

The Budapest Spring Festival has a more modest past. It started in 1981, when the new hotels were erected along the Danube River in downtown Budapest. Interestingly, this event, planned for ten days, had a rather sinister underlying agenda: to invite Hungarian artists and performers who were working abroad back to Hungary (legitimizing the communist state). At the same time, the organizers were clearly looking for opportunities to offer a more positive image of Hungary, a country still under the control of the communists (the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) and led by the ageing János Kádár. Attendance during

the first years showed that Hungarians living outside of Hungary, mostly in Western countries, were targeted by the cultural programmes of classical music, opera and classical ballet performances. Between 1981 and 1990 the organizing agency was the National Tourist Office (Országos Idegenforgalmi Hivatal), and the programme was entirely managed by the Tourist Propaganda and Publishing Company (Idegenforgalmi Propaganda – és Kiadóvállalat). After 1991, the Budapest Spring Festival was reorganized: a new company, Interart, took over its management, the two-and-a-half weeks were extended to a full month, and artists and performers were now mostly selected from within Hungary. The changes 'proved' disastrous: the pool of artists was limited, attendance fell, and foreign visitors did not bring in the much needed revenues. Since the early 1990s the festival's organization has been in the hands of the Budapest Festival Centre (BFC), which is also responsible for extending the festival idea by creating the Budapest Farewell Festival (Búcsú), an open-air festival, and the Autumn Festival.

In 1996, the Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Tourism and the Budapest City Council signed an agreement to sponsor the festival. This meant that the festival organization was now in the hands of a joint management team composed of appointed representatives of the three partners. According to festival organizers, the festival aims to be the most prestigious and important in Hungary, with the single function of promoting the development of national and international tourism. 'Window to the West, a possibility to the East' was the slogan of the organizers, indicating their intention to combine what Hungarians and non-Hungarians had to offer to audiences. In order to provide added uniqueness, the organizers aimed high: it was declared that artists and performers should only perform 'premiers', with the added emphasis that foreign performers should be invited only once. The latter principle having been maintained with only a few exceptions. Every year is organized under a special slogan: for instance, 'Farewell to the 20th Century' (1999), 'European handshakes' (2002), 'Greetings Europe, Welcome Hungary' (2004), 'East and West in Budapest' (2008) and 'Five Years in the European Union' (2009). The growth of the festival is best summarized by a few numbers: in 1997 there were 53 event locations with 173 performances; in 2005 these had increased to 82 and 253, respectively. The various events are grouped together under classical, jazz and folk music, theatre productions, dance, theatre and opera.<sup>12</sup>

That this is a rather large festival is also easily demonstrated by its finances. The festival budget has grown from a one million Euros in 1997, to an impressive five million Euros in 2006. While sponsorship is still a relatively new concept in Hungary, some companies do offer large amounts for such events. Among the main corporate donors are Siemens, Deutsche Telekom, ÁB Aegon and Sofitel Atrium Budapest. Some festival events have also been produced with financial assistance by the European Community, the PHARE Program of the EU, the Italian Institute of Culture, the French Cultural Institute and various



embassies in Hungary. But at the same time, the average ticket sales are only about one million Euros. In 2005, 67,258 tickets were purchased, 32 per cent by foreigners (German, Austrian, British). It is also interesting to note that about 60 per cent of the Hungarians attending come from Budapest itself, with the remainder from outside the capital. There is no doubt, with so much state and corporate sponsorship, the festival is a major cultural event in Hungary. This achievement was recognized by both the German KulturForum and by the Dutch 'Lokale Festiviteiten' web-based festival forum in 2005, which also recognized the Budapest Spring Festival in the same year, ranking it 25th out of the 50 European festivals analyzed.

Nationally, participation in Hungarian festivals is problematic. Roughly half the country's population, about five million people, participate each year in some sort of festival or arts fair. This is much less than in Germany, where every person visits at least two festivals per year (Hunyady *et al.* 2006). The Spring Festival gave Hungarians the rare opportunity to see visiting foreign orchestras and performing artists and, arguably more importantly, brings back long absent Hungarian émigré artists.<sup>13</sup>

The rest of the audience comes from regions other than Europe, most notably North America and Japan. Recently, festival visitors have generated considerable tourism income, not only for the Municipality of Budapest but for other Hungarian cities and towns that have joined the Spring Festival with their own programmes. Ticket prices for various events range from 4–5 Euros to 20–30 Euros. In an attempt to make the festival as widely accessible as possible, organizers include free events as well as ticket give-aways for some events. Given the fact that the average monthly income in Hungary is around 700–800 Euros, the Spring Festival is a luxury many Hungarians cannot afford. With ticket revenue comprising approximately twenty per cent of the festival's total income, organizers walk a tightrope in trying to adjust costs to the local market while breaking even. Despite the high ticket prices, festival attendance has been steadily growing, as more and more tourist agencies organize special fares for people living in neighbouring countries. At any rate, ensuring increased public attendance and bringing in new audiences and artists is not easy. Although one of the main goals of the Spring Festival has been to promote tourism during a slow season, its timing has also had some unfavourable effects. Being a major classical music festival, one of its main problems has been a difficulty in establishing contracts with internationally well-known artists. An exception was 2009, when the Spring Festival organizers selected the Czech Republic to be the honoured guest-country and Zdenek Miler, the famous Czech children's book cartoonist was brought into the limelight for the occasion.<sup>14</sup>

### Festivals of lesser fame: the case of Kapolcs and Kecskemét

In 1988 the small village of Kapolcs, next to the resort of Lake Balaton, received national recognition when István Mártha, a composer and theatre director in Budapest, decided to organize a small summer theatre show in the village. Every year another small neighbouring village became associated with the show circuit. Today seven settlements participate in the week-long summer festival that has become known as the Festival of the Valley of Arts.<sup>15</sup> Programmes vary from stage plays to concerts (classical, jazz and folk), poetry reading, arts and crafts exhibits. Some settlements have become so closely associated with the festival atmosphere, that their official web pages contain only information strictly relating to the festival.

Beyond Budapest and Szeged, whose claims to be festival cities are well known, many other cities in Hungary are also caught up in the festival spirit. Less promoted, yet still international, are the festivals hosted by the city of Kecskemét. The city, population of 100,000, is located 75 kilometres south of Budapest, actually halfway between Budapest and Szeged. The town has a considerable history as one of the major agricultural settlements in central Hungary (together with Cegléd and Nagykőrös) and has a record of festivalization over recent years. Unique, even in the new climate of the festivalization industry, is the magnitude and the grandiosity with which organizers attempt to cater to visitors and sell their festival. For example, the Kecskemét Festival is advertised as a fantastic opportunity of '100 events held in 36 locations and lasting 20 days'.

Another characteristic feature of the new festivalization is the combination of religious and civil – for Durkheim the sacred and the profane – aspects of the events. Before 1990, the religious and the civil spheres were clearly demarcated: the former relegated to matters of church affairs; the latter, supported by the state, demanded of all local councils and state institutions that they commemorate state holidays with their own version of celebrations and festivals. By contrast, today the Kecskemét Spring Festival – in harmony with the Budapest Spring Festival – is organized the week before Easter and the first days are allocated for the pious: Catholic, Protestant, Reformed, Evangelical and Jewish churches and associations take centre stage as they offer concerts, modern passion plays and oratories. Another standard element is exhibitions by artists who belong to the local fine arts association. Painters, sculptors, designers and photographers exhibit their works produced in the last year. Theatre performances and classic music concerts are also very common. The Kodály Institute – named after Hungary's renowned composer and music educator Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) – produces a special series of concert performances by student and teachers. Since Kecskemét has one major theatre and one small company, it always includes several plays in the spring and summer festival programmes. Kecskemét has Hungary's only Popular Fine Arts Museum, a place that is always included in the festival programmes with



special workshops (rug and felt carpet making, pottery, basket weaving etc.). The closing evenings of the Spring Festival are always for jazz, ragtime and Dixieland lovers.

The Kecskemét Summer Festival is even more ostentatious, and has programmes jammed with events ranging from classical music to theatre, jazz, and sports events. As claimed by the organizers: 'altogether there are 70 days of summer, but 30 of it are festival days'. From the end of June until the end of August various cultural programmes are scattered throughout the city, sometimes with week-long breaks between them. Sponsored by the city council and the city's major bank, Raiffeisen Bank, the Summer Festival has a budget of around 50,000 Euros, a sum that is rather low considering the magnitude and range of activities. In contrast to the Spring Festival, it always kicks off with a big staged production: in 2006 it was the Seoul Ballet Company's performance, which was followed by an open-air wine festival. An added special feature of this Summer Festival was the FISEC games, an annual Olympics for the International Sports Federation for Catholic Schools. Held between June and September, the 2007 programme was equally colourful: it included the Kodály Classical Musical Festival, the International Animation Film Festival, the Famous Week Festival, the Folk Music Festival, and the Harvest Festival in September.

Unique among festivals, the Kecskemét 'Famous Week' (Hirös Hét) deserves special mention.<sup>16</sup> It was in 1934 that Hungary's well-known populist writer László Németh (1901–75) uttered the historic words that have since become a slogan for the city: 'When I first mentioned the notion of Hungary as a country of home-gardens, I really meant that the entire country should be like Kecskemét. In fact, the whole country should be Kecskemétized.' Many of his fellow intellectuals wholeheartedly agreed, including populists such as Ferenc Erdei, the 'scholar of the Great Plain' as he has been called, whose name was given to the city's major arts and cultural centre.

Ferenc Erdei Arts Centre serves as the engine of festival organization in Kecskemét. It is a state institute, fully funded and supervised by the city council of Kecskemét. Full-time workers at the centre are all public servants paid by the city. In addition to hosting many programmes and providing space for clubs and civic associations, it is also a institute of propaganda for the town. They do not hide the fact that they are behind most of the cultural programmes connected to the city's name. They organize four major festivals every year: the international Kodály Music Festival, the Spring Festival, the Summer Festival and the Folk Music Festival. Moreover, they are also responsible for overseeing and managing the 'Famous Week Festival' (Hirös Hét), another major event that has a considerable tradition in Hungary, and various folk-dance festivals during the spring or fall. These are extremely demanding programmes for the staff and hired assistants, who work round the clock to ensure the smooth working of the festival programmes. Once every three years the centre also

hosts the International Animation Festival. The centre is equipped with a 600-seat theatre that allows for major productions such as plays, musicals, ballet, conventions and opera to be held. No wonder that the centre's name was changed to Ferenc Erdei Cultural and Congress Centre in the 1990s.<sup>17</sup>

### **Festivalization: the Kecskemét Air Show and Festival**

After the military reorganization of the 1990s, Kecskemét remained the fourth largest air-force base in Hungary (the others are in Pápa, Szolnok, and Taszár). This base is important, it is responsible for air defence and the general security of the Hungarian air space. Its general is István Pető, a skilled officer who was appointed to that post in 2004.

Kecskemét has a long history of air shows. The initial idea was voiced by György Rákossy of the Office of Air Transport, in 1932, who argued that Kecskemét was an ideal location for an air-force base. In three years, the base was already realized, and by 1940 it had several new hangars. During 1944 the airport was mainly used by or for the German army. It was badly damaged in the fights of 1945, and it took almost three years reconstruct. In 1950 a new runway replaced the one built by the German army. By 1951, the new Hungarian air force was taking shape: pilots were trained in the Soviet Union and MiG-15 fighter planes were added to the already existing JAK planes. In 1952, two divisions (the 62nd and 67th fighters) were resettled from Kunmadaras to Kecskemét, a move that could be counted as the real foundation of the present airbase. This was also the year when the first major air-force exercises were held: pilots were required to fly at night and in cloudy conditions. By this time the new MiG-17 fighter planes had arrived from the Soviet Union, planes that were in use until 1974. In a few years, Kecskemét became the air-force training base.

The year 1962 brought fundamental changes: 28 new MiG-21 planes arrived, all supersonic fighters. The number of pilots who were able to take the required exams for these planes was 24. An interesting moment occurred in 1968: the Kecskemét airbase was involved with the occupation of Czechoslovakia, flying 33 sorties over that country. By that time planes were equipped with both air-to-air and air-to-ground missiles. The Soviet military build-up was also recognizable: fighter planes were constantly in demand in friendly military exercises in neighbouring Warsaw Pact countries.

In 1990, planes were decommissioned, and one mechanical and one pilot division were disbanded. Signs of the changes were visible elsewhere as well. The airbase changed its name, selecting Dezső Szentgyörgyi as its official new designation. Szentgyörgyi was an exceptional pilot: during the Second World War, he was victorious in 33 air battles. From that point the Kecskemét air force became known as the 56. Dezső Szentgyörgyi Fighter Air Force of the Hungarian Military (Magyar Honvédség 59. Szentgyörgyi Dezső Harcászati Repülőezred).



New planes were also given to Hungary by the Russian Federation in 1993, a move that also involved the decommissioning of the older MiG-21s. The infrastructure was also changing, with a new hangar built in 1996. In 1998, Gyula Vári was invited to Fairford in England to participate in the Royal International Air Tattoo. Among 46 countries and 170 pilots, Vári received a gold medal for his flying act. Taking the gloss from his achievement was a sad accident: on 24 July 1998, the pilot Zsolt Rácz lost his life during the preliminary programme of the air show. This did not stop the airbase organizing its Pilot Day, an open air show and festival to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Hungarian military and the 60th anniversary of the Hungarian air force. Recognition of these achievements went hand in hand with the reorganization of the air force and the airbase, which in 2000 became a fully autonomous airbase for the Hungarian military.

Several pilots received training on the new MiG-29s in Russia. There is a moment here that needs to be highlighted. With the escalation of the Balkan wars, a number of politicians voiced their concern that the Hungarian air force needed restructuring, as well as new, up-to-date planes. However, the US declined their request for F-16 fighters. Therefore the only option for rejuvenating the ailing technology was to rely on what the Russians had to offer. During the socialist government's 1994–8 reign in office a tender was offered for new, Western fighters. Finally, in 2000, the Swedish Gripen, the French Mirage and the American F-16 planes were taken into consideration. A decision was taken, and the Gripen planes (JAS 39) were leased. In 2006, the first six Gripen planes arrived in Kecskemét; a year later a further eight planes arrived.

The Kecskemét International Air and Military Show began during the momentous months of 1990, when the country was still in thrall to celebrations of its newly discovered independence. This programme, timed to coincide with the most important national holiday (20 August), had as its highlight the landing of the new MiG-29s and F-16 fighter planes on the same air strip together, to the jubilation of the crowd. The next development was another air show, organized not in Kecskemét but in Taszár, another airbase in the western part of Hungary. Several years of hiatus followed, basically because of economic and military reorganizations. In 1997, Kecskemét reinstated the air festivals, now scheduled every two years. The 22–3 August 1998 was a double anniversary: the Hungarian military celebrated its 150th year, and the air force its 60th birthday. A two-day air show was staged, with many international teams attending. This did, though, also have its unfortunate side, with the accident that cost Zsolt Rácz his life as his Mig-29 crashed during a routine manoeuvre. This was the first (and last) MiG among the 28 bought by Hungary in 1993 to crash.<sup>18</sup> In general, twenty odd countries participate, with over 200,000 visitors during the two days of the show. Every year new teams

are invited: in 2000 the Slovak air force and the Italian Frecce Tricolori were the stars.

The Kecskemét International Air Show and Military Display – which really has only one major competitor, the Brno Czech International Air Fest – has given rise to similar events across the country. This festivalization has led to the creation of Kalocsa airport, a former Soviet air force base that was converted into a Hungarian one, where an annual international air show, the EuropAirVenture, is held. Although this festival is modest compared to Kecskemét, it is well attended by air-show enthusiasts. Similarly, in Pécs, another former air-force base, an air-show day is a major local event. None, however, compete with the magnitude and attendance of the Kecskemét air show.

What is obviously behind this unmatched success is the huge governmental and corporate sponsorship that provides financial backing. Major sponsors include MOL (Hungarian Oil Company), the Hungarian Lottery (Szerencsejáték), T-Mobil, several major banks, Red Bull, Volkswagen and others. The festival has different parts that contribute to the programme. The actual air show has various attractions grouped together according to specific types of planes and the manoeuvres they make. The fighter jets or the transport planes have very different skills they show to the audience. Helicopters are a speciality entirely on their own.

Adding to the international venue, the air show boasts of being a truly international air festival. Aside from being able to see various vintage and recent aeroplanes up close, the show's real attraction is the performances of the various international teams in the air. Among the major attendees are the British Royal Air Force aerobatic team, known as the Red Arrows, the Spanish Air Force's aerobatic demonstration team known as the 'Eagle Patrols' (Patrulla Aguila), and the similar Swiss, French and Portuguese teams. The USA has a special place in the air show; every year audiences rave over the various American military 'marvels', as one participant put it. Certainly, the Chinook, the Apache and the F-series fighters add considerable and novel excitement to the Kecskemét show. Similarly, the US Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, better known as the Blue Angels, achieves popular acclaim for their unique show routine. Undoubtedly, the Blue Angels are always remembered for their exceptionally daring manoeuvres.

A regular attendee at the Kecskemét festival, a man in his fifties, explains:

There is no question in my mind that the Americans are the real heroes of the sky. They have the best and the most perfect routines among all the international teams. This is why I come every year and bring my entire family. They invented what everybody makes these days the Delta formation. But they also make the High Alpha when two planes slow down put up their nose high and you get the sense that they are slowly falling down to earth. But no, this is just a trick. There is also the 'knife-edge pass', when two planes look like they



are going to collide head on, from the ground that is, but they pass over and under each other. It's a real adrenalin boost.<sup>19</sup>

Among the invited foreign guests is the Italian air force's 'Frecce Tricolori' (Three Coloured Arrows). This special team first participated in the Hungarian air show in 2000. The group, composed of ten planes, was formed in 1960, then using F-89 Sabre planes. In 1964 the planes were changed to Fiat G.91 models, and in 1982 the Italian-made Aermacchi MB.339 training planes were commissioned. The unit, officially known as the 313 sport-training unit of the air force, has been introduced as a real fighting unit, whose skill can be called upon by the air force when needed. The pilots are certainly well trained – as a group they must fly 2,500 hours every year. By comparison, pilots in Hungary fly only about 200 hours per year. The unit has 17 planes all painted different colours, and ready also to be commissioned when needed. All the international air teams are competition with each other.

As one Italian pilot expressed it:

Every year we try to practice new manoeuvres and new forms. Since we are invited to many national as well as international festivals, national holidays and army shows we cannot afford to be the same always. People expect us to show something new even if it is only a new colour, a different formation or something like that. But we know that our French or American buddies also watch us therefore we are also very keen to show them something new every time we meet.

The parachuting exercises are also special. In fact, one can see the parachute show as stand-alone, demonstrating skills that are exhibited on other national holidays also. For instance, on 20 August (Constitution Day) different parachuting units jump over Budapest, some of whom land not on the land but on the river Danube. Parachutists at the Kecskemét show are led by major Sándor Méhész, an able jumper himself, who is responsible for the training of the team for special jumps executed in figures. One such jump is executed from a transport Mi-8 helicopter, from which parachutists jump out in formations of four or five men from 2,000 meters. To add to the excitement, men – for most of the parachutists are male – fasten different colour smoke signals to their ankles. 'It makes the men more visible during the jump,' argued one participant 'and it also allows the audience to recognize the different jumpers in the formation better.' During the last few years, more acts were added. Between the four- and five-men formations are three more parachutists carrying a large Hungarian tricolour, and the NATO and Hungarian Air Force flags. In 2008, a further feature was added: this time the team included a loudhailer and an air-photographer parachutist!

In 2007, more than 70,000 visitors bought tickets for the three-day event that Kecskemét had become, and the income generated is not 'chicken feed,' to use the expression of one of the organizers.

He had this to say:

While we receive most of the funding for the air show from the government and from corporate sponsors, we can show that we can also generate a considerable income which is about almost one third of our expenses. And if you think that most festivals generate an income which is about one tenth of their total expenses, you can see that the tens of thousands of people who come to Kecskemét really help us out. There is another source of income as well: all the kiosks pay daily rental fee and we also know that they, too, make a good income during these two days.

A funny impression of how one ordinary citizen saw the organization is as follows:

It was a positive disappointment for me. We went to the air show on Sunday by car already shitting in our pants, prepared for the enormous traffic jam fortold on national television. But then came the surprise: to Kecskemét there was no traffic at all. But after the major intersection, a 4 kilometres long line followed, but it was moving so we reached the airport in about 30 minutes. At the airport we found at least four policemen on every corner giving directions. Strangely, they only told us to proceed to the parking lot. We did not have a pass for the day, so we were kind of nervous about it, but there was somebody selling passes there together with some refreshments. From there we were taken by a bus to the actual site of the show. In about 15 minutes we were inside and I was ready to take some pictures. Small things, but there was no dirt or garbage anywhere, the entire site was really clean. Plenty of ambulances were waiting by, fire-engines, toi-tois [portable toilets], water and many food stands. The programme was absolutely fantastic, only if you saw it once, you can know what I mean by that. It was really professionally done and the pilots did everything to make this a remarkable and memorable experience. So our Sunday was really 'kingly' [*király* in Hungarian] but the Saturday was awful. We came by car and found things in disarray. Traffic was terrible. We took road number 50, but as we were approaching Kecskemét things started to be real slow. All traffic lights were red and there were no traffic police anywhere in sight. When we reached the M5 highway the four lanes were completely bumper to bumper. It took us about 50 minutes to reach the parking lot at the airport. Then we went to the ticket booths and we found a ghastly scene: thousands of people were jammed into lines to buy the daily pass. We waiting for exactly one hour and finally made it, but the programme was already under way. There was no water fountain and visitors had to stand in long lines at the kiosks to buy refreshments, if there was any. We bought some awful warm 'piss-water', extremely highly priced. So what is my advice for the future visitor: leave at dawn in the morning, fill up your lunch bucket with plenty of



food [*kaja* in Hungarian], also have enormous quantities of water and soda in your cooler, take with you blankets and umbrellas, folding chairs, and be prepared to carry all this on your shoulders for about half an hour from the parking lot to the airport.

A male participant in his early thirties had more specifics about the actual performance of the pilots:

Wow, those MiG-29s! They go like hell, the French and the Italians were really crazy. The F15-C was also a scene: 22.5 tons of power and the din made your brain jump out through your ears. You felt like there was thunder. Last year, we saw the pilot Gyula Vári doing some stunts, so we waited for him this year. And, boy, he came: he pulled over our heads about 200 metres high with his MiG-29. I really like these powerful beasts flying over my head. This is a jolt you cannot get anywhere else.

A mother who visited the show with her two sons and husband had this to say:

This is really a one-time experience. It is one thing to watch these planes and helicopters on TV, and my boys watch them a lot and even play with their toys at it, but bringing them here is nothing like it. The whole week they were already psyched up and just could not wait for the day to come. We packed up everything and made the day into a family affair. Of course it cost a lot, the ticket, the food and the beverages. But, hey, you only do this once a year. Next year? Well, maybe we will come again. For me this whole show is a bit too much. I do not like the exhaust fumes, the tens of thousands of people also are a bit much, and the prices are not really for a family of three or four. The boys really like it and so does my husband, he even took pictures of all the planes.

With so much festivalization, Kecskemét can now boast of being a real festival town. Building on the already well-established folk music festival reputation, the Kecskemét festival organizers decided to hold the first world festival of jew's-harp players in 2005. What was initially a modest affair, little known beyond the confines of the city, saw an enormous rise in popularity as well as attendance the following year. Jew's-harp players from all over the world flocked to Kecskemét in August to participate in this rather eccentric festival. The fact that Kecskemét, through its Kodály Music Institute, has good connections with Japan enabled organizers to invite prestigious international artists such as the president of the Japanese Jew's-harp Association. Other attendees came from as far as Switzerland, Germany, Russia, Mongolia, USA and Israel.

The Kodály Arts Festival is another colourful programme providing a wide array of entertainment. This event has a surprising vitality as well as longevity: its foundation goes back to 1970, when the first musical pedagogy conference

was organized in Kecskemét. Three years later the Kodály Musical Institute was established, a school that became the focus of pedagogical seminars and musical performances every year. Since 1979 the Kodály Festival has become a benchmark event, not only in Hungary but Europe and around the world, for classical-music teachers and performers.

In 2006, the programme received the full backing of the mayor's office, and assistance of a considerable sum (roughly 50,000 Euros). Obviously, the city feels a responsibility to offer such help, as the name of Kecskemét is synonymous with that of Zoltán Kodály, Hungary's number one composer and music educator in the twentieth century, whose name the music conservatory carries. There is obviously some tension between Kecskemét and Budapest in this regard, because Budapest claims Béla Bartók and Kecskemét, Zoltán Kodály. Receiving state funding for festivals with such names is an obvious sign of governmental sponsorship. However, Kecskemét always holds its Kodály Festival during July to August, with or without governmental backing. While the emphasis is always on classical music, alternative or folk music and dance programmes representing various regions of Hungary are also featured in the festival, adding to the well-known festival ideology of domestic exotics.

One of the oldest festivals, not only in Kecskemét but also in Hungary, is the 'Famous Week' (*Hirös Hét*), a week-long celebration of the town's artistic and cultural achievements. It was first organized in 1934 and has been in existence ever since. Unlike other regional festivals, it started out as a show of skill and pride for local farmers and animal keepers in and around the city. The idea was not novel in Europe, but was certainly unique in Hungary. In those early years about 60,000 visitors travelled to Kecskemét, out of whom about 20,000 came from abroad, to witness what farmers had to show to them. This was no small feat for a town that then had a population of 80,000. Slowly, however, it became obvious to the organizers that showing first-class vegetables and fruit produce, as well as prized cattle, sheep or horses, to visitors can only last for a day or two, and that there must be additional events and programmes to hold the attention of visitors and tourists. Cultural programmes were added that provided the badly needed extra excitement. For instance, in 2005 Japan was the festival's guest country, and Japanese cultural programmes were abundant. Within the same festival, a Legal Summer Academy was also held, an intense summer course for international students. Another interesting feature from 2000 onwards has been the wine show, an event catering to wine-lovers who are introduced to the local wines of the region.<sup>20</sup> In 2008, the name of Famous Week was adjusted to Famous Week and Wine Festival, to signal the changing demands. The Wine Festival of Kecskemét, now a regular and well-attended part of the summer festival, is organized by a company aptly titled 'Full Party'.

In September 1990, the Future of Europe Association was established with the aim of helping the children of Kecskemét become acquainted with children from Europe through Children's Meetings. The theme was simple: inviting



children from different countries of the continent to be hosted by Kecskemét schools and to stay with local families. In the following year the foreign groups would invite their hosts for an exchange visit. The only thing the Association asks for from foreign groups is that they bring along presents: music, dances and programmes that can be demonstrated without any linguistic difficulties. Csiperó, the birdy mascot of the meetings, has grown up before the citizens' eyes, and is now well known among children who have participated in the festivals. During the past two decades, the festival has hosted 8,000 children from 80 settlements in 27 countries. The task of the Association is still the same as it was at its beginning: to help the children of today become a tolerant generation, free from all prejudices and accepting of people and their differences.

Csiperó soon became a favourite at the first Children's Meeting in 1991. The winner of the Association's design competition, Ms Csilla Szabó, created the kind, round-bellied puppet figure of a birdie. Today a manager of the Alternative English School, she is still firmly committed to the Association and the meetings, and contributes to the activities by overseeing the translations of the Association's applications. As for the name, it comes from an elementary school student, Dávid Kis. The popular character and the ear-catching name were perfectly fleshed out by a song composed by Mr Pál Bertalan Szénási.

Csiperó, Csiperó, heartiness and merriness,  
Time of joy and happiness!  
Csiperó's our friend, this summer will never end,  
We are all here for rejoicement!  
Csiperó, Csiperó, a sweet little bird of joy,  
This fine feeling none can destroy.  
Csiperó's our friend, this summer will never end,  
We are all here for rejoicement!

(The Csiperó music is copyright of the Future of Europe Association.)

Usually, the Children's Festival officially starts on a Sunday in the impressive main square of the city. Several groups go on stage to present a brief selection of their performances. The Mayor of Kecskemét hands the town keys to the two youngest children at that year's meeting, a boy and a girl, then dozens of balloons are released with a fanfare that indicates the beginning of a week's wonders. The importance of the Children's Meeting is reflected by the fact that each year the President of the Republic takes part in the inauguration ceremony as the main patron of the festival. Oddly, the 2004 festival was officially opened by a five-year-old from an Italian aristocratic family, Zakarias Rodrigo Massagrande, a name that may seem out of place to those who associate the Massagrande family with Italian fascism.

Throughout the period of the Csiperó festival, the main square of the city is filled with vendors, food booths, and street artists. The opening ceremony

is always followed by other events such as a concert by the popular hometown band, the Csík band, named after its leader János Csík. Sporting events are always broadcast in the main square of the city, with large screens for audiences strolling by. This is the way 'Children magic' normally starts on the opening day: in the mornings and in the afternoons, from Monday to Friday, visiting ensembles perform their programmes on the main-square stage. The groups themselves, as well as the inhabitants and the tourists, often spend hours watching these shows. During the week each group comes on stage several times. This can be quite demanding on the children, who sometimes complain about the scorching sun. The shows performed by the children's groups give insights into the traditions of their country or region by demonstrating their folk music and dances. All the colourful traditional costumes worn by the Polish, Portuguese, Turkish or Koreans, or by the Hungarian children from neighbouring Romania, are special sights on their own. This latter feature is always highlighted by various speeches extolling the virtues of Transylvanian Hungarian groups as the real treasures of Hungarian culture on display.<sup>21</sup> This is in fact one of the most important underlying ideologies of the festival: to showcase Hungarian performers and artists from neighbouring countries. They are the true exotic domestic others. Other foreign groups perform modern dances or even acrobatic performances. Such groups are the Primavera from Bucharest, the Taxmen group from the Czech Republic and the groups from the Carpathian region of the Ukraine and the Hungarian settlements from Transylvania, Romania.

But amateur children ensembles alone could not hold the audiences' attention. Over the years many 'professional' groups have taken part in the festival, so that this event is claimed by organizers to be one of the 'best art festivals' in Europe. Many dance groups involve children between the ages of 8 and 16. The evening programmes are named after Europe's music and dances, and each evening a different band performs on stage, often followed by dance lessons for the audience. The Bohém Ragtime Band has been a recurring professional guest. The Csík band's concert and the teaching of Hungarian folk dances always follow the inauguration ceremony. The concert and dances of the Hungarian Greek Syrtos band have also been a real attraction of the Festival from its beginning. Adding to the inter-ethnic nature of the musical show, the Budapest Klezmer Band, which was hardly known a decade ago, when they first came to the Festival, has now become an internationally recognized Jewish orchestra. Now, it is politically correct that the Budapest Klezmer Band is a constant highlight of the musical show. Interestingly, Kecskemét has one of the few remaining synagogues in Hungary, and its Jewish community is lively, though small compared to before the Second World War. Regular performers include the Zurgó Ensemble – a band that play Moldavian folk music – and the Musical Studio of Tapolca. Other well-known bands are Besh O'drom, 'Álmodozók' Student Theatre from Komarno, Vujicsics Orchestra, and a band



playing Irish music, M.É.Z. This congeries of bands and performers is the creation of the 1990s, when world music grabbed the attention of millions all over Europe. Hungary was a fertile ground for the emergence of such musical groups.

In 2002 a new programme was added: following the evening concert of Europe's Music, the series named 'Little Night Music' begins among the ruins of the old cloister next to the Brethrens' Church. It starts at 10 p.m., with choirs singing among the ruins lit only by torches, it creates a special atmosphere among the walls of the old church. Classical-music lovers flock to such events, especially when foreign ensembles are also performing. In the last years there were several unique concerts by artists from Armenia and Serbia and choirs from Belgium and the Netherlands.

One young participant commented:

I have never seen any person from Armenia before. Now I know how they look and not only through the television. I also had some bad stereotypes about Serbians, mainly because of their involvement with the war in Yugoslavia. Now, I am changing my mind...

Children are always provided with extra treats to choose from. For many years the tent of the Alternative English School has been one of the most popular places, and is where the youngsters can test their knowledge through different quizzes and contests. The excitement is maintained as the results are only announced on the last day of the Festival, and only then do winners receive their prizes. Those interested in handicraft workshops may proceed to the Youth Centre in the city, while the more adventurous can try various old-time games (walking on stilts, etc.). A new feature in 2004 was a climbing wall set up for the bravest to test their strength and courage. The Ministry of Information and Technology also set up a special tent with several computers for youngsters who wanted to use the internet or write emails. Such technology can also add to the image of technological mastery.

One instructor of a group from Germany had this to say:

Before I came to Kecskemét I was nervous about how I would keep contact with my folks back home. We all believed that this place Kecskemét is nowhere. But now every day I go into the internet tent and send out a few letters to my friends and family back home. It's a great invention.

The festival never forgets for a moment that Europe, or the European Union, is made up of many members. In 2006, the main square was turned into a European Music Square, with 24 music benches symbolizing the member states. On each bench one could find useful information about the country and could listen to its traditional music for half an hour. These benches are becoming a regular feature of the festival due to their great success. They

help promote tolerance as they also serve as meeting points for children from different countries. In 2006 the velocipede show was organized, with the velocipedes ridden by people in old costumes. A young architect designed a swinging boat which was set up behind the large Catholic Church: fashioned to encourage cooperation, many volunteers have to come forth to make the swing boat move.

Up until the year 2000, the official closing ceremony of the festival was housed by the sports stadium of Kecskemét, where each group performed a short version of their programme. This is also the final possibility for the hundreds of families who are hosting foreign children to come together and watch the entire show. There is a symbolic gesture as well: to officially close the festival, the children return the town keys to the mayor who refers to them as 'honourable young citizens of Kecskemét', giving them certificates to take home. This is followed by the final signal, the Csiperó song, and a majestic firework show closes the evening.

From 2000 on, the guest children say farewell to their Hungarian hosts on the Main Square of the town, but only for a year, until the foreign children host the Hungarians in their home country. At the ceremony the most popular groups give a short performance, and in 2004 some members of each group came together to form a huge choir that sang the official anthem of the European Union, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The spectacular closing event of the ceremony after the children hand back the keys, is the release of dozens of balloons with the colours of the visiting countries. After the farewell concert several thousands of spectators watch the fireworks, the finest part of which was the Greek fire falling down from the balcony of the Great Church.

In 2006 there was another surprise for the audience. A half-hour 'laser show' gave a delightful description of a colourful Europe. It showed the most characteristic buildings such as the Acropolis, Stonehenge and the Eiffel Tower, but we also saw Dutch wooden clogs, gondolas of Venice and German beer. This was the way the Future of Europe Association wished sweet dreams and a safe journey home to all the guests of Csiperó.

The tradition of the children spending a half day at Manor Pongrácz in Kerekegyháza was established in the year of the first Csiperó Meeting. The owner, Mr Imre Vörösmarty, offers this gift every year to the participating children, who can enjoy the real puszta there, nearly 25 km from Kecskemét. The puszta is a special prairie in Hungary, where before the nineteenth century large-scale animal herding was the main economic activity. Now only museums and heritage associations keep this tradition alive. Traditional goodies are baked in an outdoor furnace for the visitors, and the children may watch a horse show, go for a pleasant ride in a carriage, ride a horse, have a look at the stables, draw water from a sweep-pole well, and gain first-hand experience of a lifestyle familiar to the town kids only from stories. This is what Micaela di Leonardo has called the historical contextualization of exhibits and world



fairs (1998:12–14), but it also characterizes the contributions of local elites to making festivals more colourful with local flavours.

Both the children and adults look forward to the picnic day organized on the penultimate day of the festival. Maybe it is too much to say 'organized', as this day provides the possibility of abandoned relaxation without any restrictions. Partner dancing, tug-of-war, walking on stilts and wrestling are all very popular, but the water cannon provided by the local army and firemen is the most well loved of all the activities. Its story is known by even those who have never experienced it. It was such a success that they had to go and refill the tank every half an hour. Young and old alike stood under the jet of water wearing their bathing suits, shorts and T-shirts, and when they became dry again they looked for the return of the engine. The water cannon was met with international success. Soon after the first meeting there was a commentary on both Vienna radio and Novi Sad saying that in Kecskemét the most peaceful water cannon of Europe had been introduced. Two years later the teacher of the Czech group wondered: 'Is it what people were so afraid of in Prague?'

From the beginning, many Hungarian groups living beyond the national borders participated in the Future of Europe International Children and Youths Meeting. Representatives from Sighet (Máramarossziget), Romania, have been coming to every Festival since 1991. Already in 1991 there were five Hungarian groups from beyond the borders, and two years later eight such groups participated from Slovakia alone. In 1995 and 2000, five and seven groups, respectively, came from Transylvania to perform in the Main Square, and Hungarian children also came from the former Yugoslavia. Throughout the years this invitation has been extended to countries such as the Netherlands and the United States. Bringing the nation together is one of the underlying motives of the Csiperó. Thus in the year 2000 the Future of Europe Association created a separate programme and named it 'The Joy of Hungary'. On its foundation the purpose of the programme was to enable youngsters from beyond the borders to get to know each other and the host families in Kecskemét better, and to have them participate in programmes that enhance their awareness of being Hungarian.

As part of this programme in 2000 the replica of the Hungarian Crown was brought to Kecskemét at the VII Future of Europe International Children and Youths Meeting. The replica of the Hungarian Holy Crown and Crown Jewels were displayed in the Catholic Church for a day and many guests and tourists went to see them. In 2000 'The Joy of Hungary' programme had its closing ceremony in the Saint Emerich Catholic School and the participants commemorated the millennium of the foundation of the Hungarian state by lighting fires.

Among the games and special events are those that are obviously copies of computer games. The Treasure Hunting Camp is a program for teenage journalists, which is organized by the Treasure Hunting Association. Along

with the Children's Meetings, the camp has been held each year where young apprentices can learn and apply the basics of journalism. The results are made public at the end of the week in a booklet of the interviews, reports, and pictures entitled CSIPERO.K. An interesting program is 'Lapozgató' (Browser), an exhibition of international children magazines during the camp. From its beginning the organizer and the leader of the camp has been Márta Koleszár.

It was in 1993 that the first 'Csillagszemű' (Starry Eye) camp was organized, following the idea of a teacher who suggested inviting educators from neighbouring countries for the time of the children's meeting in order to organize a series of professional programmes for them. The first camp proved to be so successful that it has been regularly organized ever since, each year dealing with certain professional questions. The organizers of the 'Csillagszemű' camp are professionals of the Ferenc Erdei Culture Centre, and the attendees are from various kindergartens. In this programme, kindergarten teachers gain practical experience in the kindergarten of the Árpád district, while in the afternoons at the 'Szórákaténusz' Toy Museum at the handicraft workshops they can learn among other things about felting and batik work. The College of Kecskemét provides the professional support for designing the programme of the 'Csillagszemű' camp.

But organizers are very careful not to forget that participants are children. They invented another custom: to celebrate all foreign and Hungarian participants – children and adults – who have birthdays during the festival. Their gift is a short variety show based on original performances. These parties originally took place in the local Ferenc Erdei Cultural Centre, then were moved to József Katona Theatre, and nowadays are hosted by the supermarket Tesco, which provides birthday cakes. In 2004 the Future of Europe Association chose a new way to congratulate these birthday children. The Television of Kecskemét made a live programme greeting for the shy but happy children. The children received presents from Csiperó and a huge birthday cake from the McDonald's Company. Some of these birthday parties are sponsored by regional governments or various ministries.

A year after its establishment, in 1991, the Future of Europe Association decided to set up a 'For the Future of the Children of Europe' award for personalities – Hungarian as well as foreign – who successfully contributed to creating a nicer, happier and more peaceful prospect for children. In the first few years the Association awarded persons appointed by its own members: Hungarians in even, foreigners in odd, years until 1996. Recently the Association has called upon personalities already awarded to appoint their new peers. Since 1998 the awards have been presented during the Future of Europe International Children Meetings, usually in the closing ceremony.

Since the beginning, the Future of Children Association has attached high importance to spreading information about the EU. A series of informative booklets has been issued on this subject, targeted at different generations.



In 2002, one booklet entitled *Peace Message* was dedicated to a thorough treatment of NATO. It provides useful information about the Hungarian Army as well. Thanks to the publications being an unexpected hit, and to financial support from successful applications, the Future of Europe Association has launched a board game in 2000, 'The Young Citizens of Europe'. Players start out in Hungary and arrive in Brussels, the EU headquarters. On the way they are to collect EU member state flags, making up a puzzle in Brussels the shape of the EU flag. The game combines a number of interesting and important questions to be answered, as well as traditional board game elements, e.g. collecting Euros so they can be used in 'tough' situations, playing out jokers, and drawing, so victory is only achieved with competence and good tactics. The booklets and the board game have been published through financial support from organizations such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the EU Delegation to Hungary, and are available in restricted numbers.

Despite some criticism of its superficiality, there can be no question that the children's festival has been a real success. This can be proved by simple statistics: in 1991, the first festival hosted 22 performing groups coming from 16 countries with about 840 participants. By 2006, there were 25 countries and 46 groups with 1,500 participants. As one of the organizers proudly claims, 'Our festival has the capacity to become our city's distinguishing mark. Children coming here from all over Europe, make us a truly European city. The children coming here are the real trump card of our festival.' With all that, however, the political and economic underlying motivations cannot be avoided. With all the hype and new inventions, the festival scene has been somewhat 'Disneyfied'. As both Zukin (1996) and more recently Bryman (2004) have pointed out, consumerism has fundamentally altered the urban planning, timing and the ideological representation of festivals as the quintessential culture of the city.

## Conclusions

There are many who have noted that in the last two decades the cultural-heritage industry and the festivalization of culture and everyday life have been hand in hand. As discussed above, this is certainly the case with regard to the Hungarian festival scene. Independent since 1990 and part of the European Union since 2004, Hungary can now boast excellent national as well as international festivals in various areas. By discussing several festivals, a few conclusions offer themselves as to the nature, goals and structure of current festivals. Clearly, festivals today are movable, unlike many classic or medieval festivals, and neither space nor time seem to be constricting elements. There are also the problems of participation and organization: plenty of festivals are becoming more and more a spectacle to be watched and enjoyed, though some remain more participatory. Obviously, festivals attempt to cater to different kinds of audience by offering alternative venues and excellent opportunities for consumption, in terms of both spending money and filling bellies. High

culture and low culture, popular and eccentric, local and the national are all enmeshed in order to find a balance that caters to a large number of visitors seeking authenticity and historical traditions. This is perhaps one of the first real questions that concern visitors and organizers alike: what is so special about a distant regional city in Hungary where one can find a McDonalds restaurant in the main square, where a Finnish and Italian folk dance groups perform in front of Japanese tourists?

Festivalization is certainly a complex process fraught with several contradictions. On the one hand, the multiplicity of festivals involves a process of modelling, whereby one town simply takes ideas and events from another in order to live up to the current standards. On the other hand, this creates a series of festivals that look more and more similar, despite their peppering of historical and local colour. Certainly the Hungarian festival scene is not without the contradictions embedded in the nature of festivals today. These contradictory impulses are structurally related to festival ideology regardless of the nature of the festival in question. The first and most important, which is also a central issue of this volume, is that diversity and colourfulness in values, aims, nature and participants seems to be an ideal rather than an actuality. The more cultural elements are elevated into various festivals, the more they become a haberdashery of meaningless and superficial events, eventually losing their uniqueness and what makes them special. With so much energy spent on new concepts and themes, festivals tend to lose their categorization. Arts festivals are increasingly unartistic, catering to a larger audience with many food stands, games and gifts shops. Civic festivals include more and more religious flavours. And religious festivities leave the church yard and move into the town hall or the nearby park for wider reception. A mayor, for instance, gives a speech offering a few words of thanks and greetings to a crowd at a religious feast. This civil and parochial mix plays out in reverse when a town's heritage day starts with the blessing of the participants by the local priest. But this is not the only mingling of diverse elements previously kept quite separate from one another.

Local-heritage festivals, another boom since the 1980s, have had their regionally specific nature slowly diluted by elements borrowed from others to make festival programmes more appealing to a wider public. With regard to specific crafts and traditional handiworks, heritage festivals now look more like a display of individual skills and entrepreneurship than community spirit and togetherness. Not that there are no alternatives or exemplary projects to be seen. But what is interesting is that when heritage festivals, or local community days or weekends, are placed side by side, the similarities, rather than specifics and uniqueness may strike visitors. Thus, classification becomes a well-nigh impossible task, as heritage festivals look more like arts fairs, and music festivals now include anything from classical to jazz, ragtime to world music. It is still a music festival, but labels and niches tend to be meaningless as well as politically elusive.



Another notable feature of recent festivals is the increasing internationalizing tendency of performers. This is supported by an increasing awareness of being 'European' and of adhering to some sort of common 'European culture', a move on the part of European Union as well as national governments within the EU. This is what Chris Shore has called the EU's 'cultural turn' (Shore 2006). This political and economic integration, as well as harmonization, has influenced the cultural spheres and policies of the various governments whose national policies have an integrative, top-down and interventionist agenda that eventuates in the overseeing of projects and the monitoring the festivals within the national space.

Another interesting contradiction seems to be about colour and diversity. Even though the stated aim of some festivals is to bring diverse groups of people together, this often remains an unattainable goal. In countries where there is a somewhat more natural and longstanding tradition of a mixture of various ethnic groups and nationalities living side by side – for example in India and in London as Alaknanda Patel and Susanne Kuchler and Rossella Lo Conte point out in their contributions in this collection – festivals may take on a more artificial form of diversity. However, in the case of the Kecskemét children's festival, with its huge variety of children's group performing, audience participation remains passive and rather monochrome. In other words, while many different nations and ethnic groups are present on stage, the audience is still a relatively homogeneous group of Hungarians. This is why festivals with the slogans of 'unity in diversity' often work, in the words of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, with tantalizing 'neutralizing effect' (1998:77).

Despite the original intention of the organizers, festivals may take on a life of their own, with a lifespan beyond any that might have been considered at the beginning of the project. Some tend to grow, accumulate other events, invent new programmes, include extreme ideas or develop into different kinds of milieu by offering more and more to the senses. Not surprisingly, there are many more festivals today than ever before, and this may seem wholly in contradiction with the budgetary constraints of most countries, governments and local organizers, who are in constant search of supplies, funds and ideas. It seems that the number of festivals and the availability of funds work in a strange dialectic: scarce resources and availability of money on the one hand; and the enormous number and popularity of festivals on the other. Obviously, some festivals manage to become regular venues, others only last for one occasion. Probably the numbers of single-shot festivals, those that are born out of immediate needs only to wither away afterwards, are the same, if not more, than those festivals that recur regularly. Strangely, but not unexpectedly in light of what has been said, both the Valley of Arts Festival at Kapolcs and the Kecskemét International Air Show were cancelled in Hungary in 2009 due to financial difficulties. Both have been, it must be emphasized, mainly state sponsored, with half their budget raised by corporate funders.

It cannot, however, be questioned that festivals and feasts all over the world are expanding, and that some are more successful than others in gaining international attention and receiving ample funding.

Finally, we must return to our initial question: can we argue that the vast number of festivals observable today the world over is an outgrowth of the increase in public ceremonies and rituals that researchers have observed since the 1970s and 1980s (Boissevain 1992)? The Hungarian data provided here offer answers both in the affirmative and negative. Since 1990, a date signalling Hungary's newly acquired independence and the beginning of its Europeanization process, similar that of its former East-bloc neighbours, we can observe that socialist state festivals rapidly disappeared, or fundamentally changed in outlook and content in tandem with the emergence of new public rituals and festivals. An increasing awareness of religious life, the new spirit of democratic communities, and a reawakening of ethno-national sentiments have produced formidable congeries of festivals. Two additional coeval processes, namely globalization and Americanization, have also fundamentally reshaped political, economic and social relations, in addition to influencing the ways in which public events are organized and equipped with new ideas. One significant aspect of this has been the fairy-world mentality, in fact a European Disneyization, suggested by the historical and cultural themes of the festivals. The other fundamental element has been the overt mediatization of society, a novelty that has added new flavours as well as possibilities of extending local feasts and celebrations into the public realm of the urban landscape. Today civil organizations, ethnic communities and local governments possess their own newspapers, internet sites and cable systems, which both structure and alter what people think and feel about their own festivals and their roles within them. At the same time, festivals do tend to live lives like human beings: they are born out of some local, regional or community needs, nurtured by organizers, vendors and sponsors, and naturally wither away when there is no more interest in them, or when economically they bring tendencies counter to the interests of either the organizers or the communities holding them. Thus festivalization of Hungarian culture – with its obvious Disneyization dimensions, as Bryman (2004:2) argues for the general principles pervading modern life especially the cultural sphere – together with mediatization of festivals are two distinct but fundamentally interconnected processes that characterize the current scene in Hungary. For this very reason, we can be assured – as the Kecskemét organizers so proudly hail – that the slogan 'every day is a festival' may stay with us for some time to come.

## NOTES

- 1 Brussels, 5 October 2005, Sec(2005) 1202, 'Commission staff working document, Annex to the Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008)'.



- 2 See the declaration on the European Festivals Association's home page: [new.efa-aef.eu/FestivalsDeclaration/home.lasso](http://new.efa-aef.eu/FestivalsDeclaration/home.lasso), last accessed 11 July 2009.
- 3 Fieldwork was carried out in Kecskemét and Budapest during 2007 and 2008. I attended festivals, interviewed organizers, cultural workers and participants. In addition, I managed to talk to several local officials who have been key decision-makers in the Kecskemét festival organization.
- 4 In ancient Athens, the days of the festivals were not movable, they were always held on the same date of the same month (Parke 1979:24).
- 5 Such 'marching-dances' would be choreographed specifically for an occasion such as the major socialist holidays like May Day, 20 August, 4 April, and 7 November. As a schoolboy, I was privileged to participate in many of these dances performed in front of the tribune holding all important party leaders, factory executives, school principals, trade union and army and police chiefs. The general setting for the April and May performances were really nice... under scorching sun, dressed in warm folk costumes, singing aloud endlessly, and jumping up and down on the heated pavement while spitting out dust-balls from time to time. What a feast!
- 6 Since its inception during the Stalinist years in Hungary, socialist culture has meant socialist patriotism: hatred of the West, devotion to the Soviet Union, and proletarian internationalism and loyalty to the working-class, peasants and intellectuals who led the communist party (Mevius 2005:252).
- 7 Some of these festivals have received attention especially with regard to tourism (Fejős & Szíjjártó 2000; Pusztai 2003).
- 8 That this is indeed the case see festivals and events listed on: [www.2camels.com/festivals/hungary.php](http://www.2camels.com/festivals/hungary.php) (last accessed 25 March 2009).
- 9 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Festivals\\_in\\_Hungary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Festivals_in_Hungary) (last accessed 25 March 2009).
- 10 In Hungary, there are two major settlement types recognized legally: *község* (township), and *város* (town). In general parlance, the small settlements are called village (*falú*) and only larger ones referred to as a township (*község*). It is the prerogative of the state to offer the status of town to a settlement based on various criteria (size, infrastructure, paved roads, services, sewage system, population statistics, the number of public institutions such as schools, library and nurseries). In general, only settlements with a population over 10,000 may acquire the title town. However, since 1990 there has been a major political push for many settlements to achieve the town designation in order to obtain more governmental funding. This had resulted in the rather awkward situation of many settlements under 10,000 people receiving town status.
- 11 Sister cities, twin cities or friendship towns are not novel ideas. While the first such cultural contacts and exchange programmes go back to the 1920s, the idea really took off after the Second World War. Obviously meant to heal the damage caused by that war, the first such sister-cities programme was that between Bristol and Hannover in 1947. Since 1989, the European Union has got in on the act: every year millions of Euros are spent on such programmes. However, there is a difference between the EU sister cities and the internationally recognized sister cities, the latter monitored by the Sister Cities International.
- 12 Figures are from the pamphlet, History of the Budapest Spring Festival: [www.festivalcity.hu/download/A\\_BTf\\_tortenete.pdf](http://www.festivalcity.hu/download/A_BTf_tortenete.pdf) (last accessed 25 March 2009).
- 13 Over the years the event has played host to such icons as the conductor Antal Doráti, pianists György Cziffra, Péter Frankl, Tamás Vásáry and András Schiff, opera singer Éva Marton, painter Viktor Vasarely and sculptor Amerigo Tot.
- 14 Zdenek Miler is the famous Czech illustrator and animator of the Mole (Krték in Czech) series of children's books and films. The famous small Mole was created in 1956 and appeared on television a year later. Miler received a silver lion for his animation at the Venice Film

- Festival. The character has since been a favoured Czech children's mascot, later making the rounds all over the former socialist-bloc countries. Strongly influenced by the Walt Disney characters, the Mole books and films have been translated into many languages. Hungarian versions appeared in the early 1970s. The Mole character can be seen as a trickster figure of socialism *sui generis*: full of optimism and energy, he does not give up, is successful in getting anything he wants and help people in any way he can.
- 15 The seven neighbouring settlements are: Kapolcs, Vigántpetend, Taliándörögd, Monostorapáti, Öcs, Pula and Nagyvázsony. For an analysis of the valley of arts festival scene see Szíjjártó (2000).
- 16 The 'Famous Week' could also be translated as 'notable', 'renowned', 'famed', or even 'celebrated' week. Thus, it could well be glossed in English as a 'Celebration Week', a phrase that is perhaps more apt to the festival milieu. In English, however, 'famous week' has designated this week-long cultural event for decades. One more notable grammatical feature: in Hungarian it is called 'Hírös Hét' and not 'Híres Hét' an expression that would be more correct today. However, the usage of the 'ö' phoneme instead of the 'e' reflects the popular dialect of the city and its environs. Even today linguists classify the region as belonging to the 'ö-dialect'.
- 17 The centre's home-page is [www.efmk.hu](http://www.efmk.hu) (last accessed 25 March 2009).
- 18 Tragic accidents are not unknown in Kecskemét airport: crashes occurred in 1967, 1968, 1972, 1975, 1983, 1986, 1998 and 2008, all causing the deaths of the pilots. Naturally, there were many more accidental crashes in which pilots fortunately survived.
- 19 Most of these demonstration teams have their own homepage with detailed information as to their staff, pilots, planes and show routines. See, for example: [www.freccetricolori.eu](http://www.freccetricolori.eu) and [www.blueangels.navy.mil](http://www.blueangels.navy.mil) (last accessed 25 March 2009).
- 20 Wine festivals are not unique to Kecskemét; in almost every wine-growing region there are wine-festivals during the summer months. This development is interesting in itself, for traditionally wine makers celebrated the grape harvest in late September. However, the wine festivals are occasions to offer visitors a taste of the wine made from the previous year's harvest. While the harvest festivals used to be low-level local affairs, with dances and plenty of food (not wine and cheese), the wine festivals these days are organized by various knights of wine orders who are prosperous entrepreneurs, with plenty of uniformed processions and elaborate speeches, and very little food and dancing.
- 21 On the importance of Transylvania and the Hungarians there see my book *The Remote Borderland* (2001).

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