

Laki Ildikó

## CULTURE WITHOUT BORDERS

## Introduction

In the past twenty years meaningful changes have occurred in the utilization of cultural institutions. Some have gained more prominence (theaters, museums, novel multifunctional cultural establishments), while others, despite the efforts to reinvent themselves, have lost some of their appeal (movie theaters, local houses of culture). There are however certain cultural institutions which became known and accepted by the Hungarian public only following the 1990s. The festival, as an institution, belongs to this category; one explanation to this development may be the convergence between local and international trends, the true permeability of borders is not limited only to the former eastern Socialist countries, and the general openness of society. The emergence of festivals gave a further impetus for maintaining and furthering a meaningful cultural exchange among diverse geographical regions and areas.

One of the possible forms of inter-regional co-operation is the creation and then the „operating” of festivals. What makes it such an appealing form of co-operation? European examples e.g. the Oktoberfest in Munich show that with a single festival a region’s creative energies may be actuated and harnessed to its utmost. By doing so, that particular region may develop in certain fields a unique, unparalleled sophistication, which combined with the right cultural activities and tourism could prove economically feasible and even lucrative enterprise in the long term. Festivals in macro-economic terms can be viewed as social and economic institutions, whereas micro-economically they function as cultural spheres for gaining and sharing ideas and information. Concerning the significance of festivals my intention was to evaluate their merits relying on the findings of a cultural survey conducted by the Hungarian Institute for Culture and Art in 2003.<sup>1</sup>

*„1. Festivals despite their diversity have a common denominator. It may very well be that they owe their*

*increasing popularity to this shared characteristic. It can be stated that each festival captures more than just the collective sum of its programs. Beyond the programs themselves festivals also project a communal experience, a sense of belonging, which can not be attained within the privacy of one’s own residence irrespective of the cultural impetus.*

*2. A festival unifies the participants. The sheer experience of being physically present at such an event will break the social barriers persisting outside its premises.*

*Festivals serve as a venue to acquaint the individual with people of diverse backgrounds and cultures, which in turn may mitigate distrust and prejudices thus strengthening tolerance.*

*3. Local or regional festivals may have beneficial effects on local communities in multiple ways. In addition to energizing the cultural life they can bolster regional identities especially if locals are not simple visitors at such an event but are actively involved in its organization.*

*4. Local and regional festivals can battle against the unifying and homogenizing effects of globalization by emphasizing and featuring local values and peculiarities.*

*5. Festivals make possible the development of their environs and potentially can give a boost to the wider economy. The surrounding areas are cleaned up, old deserted buildings can get a new lease of life, and entire streets or even neighborhoods can be revitalized. The local population may gain new employment possibilities, ridding themselves of the quagmire of joblessness. Successful festivals by creating a good image of the locality may have further attendant perks e.g. attracting new investors and actors in the field of education and culture, contributing to the emergence of new jobs in the services sectors, and infrastructure development”.*

This festivals can function both as the progenitors of a shared, unique communal experience; and as useful tools in contributing to the balanced development of global and local characteristics. By having positive impacts in the economy, the local area and even the environment they can have a meaningful role within our cultural institutions.

The Summerfest Festival of Százhalombatta is a fine example for such an established cultural event

<sup>1</sup> *Encounters with culture. The place, role, and the audience of festivals in cultural consumption.* (2003). HAS Institute of Sociology, Budapest. On-line <http://www.mmi.hu/frames.htm>

since it has been held annually in the past seventeen years. The prime significance of the Festival lies in that it is a truly international event without sacrificing its local roots (there are several venues with multiple performers), and that it popularizes a segment in high culture, which has been unjustly relegated to a secondary role in the last two decades or so. This festival is able to transcend cities and counties to bridge the distances between countries and continents wide apart, continuously staying true to its original mission and professional creed.

The brief history of the creation of the *Forrás Néptáncgyűttes* (Spring Folkdance Ensemble) and its role in the life of the Summerfest Festival.

In the realization of the festival a major role can be attributed to the Spring (Forrás) Folkdance Ensemble, created in 1984. Initially, the members of the ensemble came from among the students of the Vörösmarty Mihály High School in the town of Érd. Their main aim was to strive for creating something valuable rooted in a shared cultural background. The Forrás since 1985 has been an essential part of the Municipal Cultural Center of the town of Százhalombatta, which also propelled it to an invaluable role of being the flag-bearer of a part of the local cultural heritage of the region. Operating in a so-called Socialist industrial hub meant that it instigated a renaissance in old and, on the surface, invisible traditions and folk customs. The appearance and taking firm root of folk culture in and around the ensemble became highly visible. The dedication of these young people and the support of local political actors and businesses and the wider community made possible the launching of the Summerfest Festival in 1994, which by now attracts visitors to Százhalombatta from Hungary and from all over the world.

### **The SUMMERFEST International Folklore Festival and Folk Art Fair at Százhalombatta**

The Summerfest International Folkdance Festival therefore was initiated by the Forrás ensemble in 1994. Due to the persistence and motivation of the ensemble the local population also started to show a marked interest in this cultural realm. As a result of this evolutionary process the political decision-makers and key economic actors in the

town came to view the Festival as an „asset”. The municipal government, besides the financial support, also provides counseling in many areas to the ensemble. It should not be forgotten that this high profile event owes its current standing, in addition to the Hungarian participants, also to its numerous foreign contributors and visitors. This strong international presence can not be underestimated as a tool in deepening inter-regional ties, thereby popularizing the Festival itself.

As a result of the continued dedication towards the Festival and folk dancing in 1996 a second ensemble was established called the Forrás-Más or the Other Spring, which welcomes to its ranks dancers from older age groups. Such an arrangement made possible the uninterrupted work of dance groups making possible for the older generations to actively participate and bridging the gaps between generations.

Since 1994 the Summerfest Festival continually strives to professionalize its management and organization. In this endeavor from 1997 on, it can rely on the help and support of the Magyarok Öröksége Alapítvány (Hungarian Heritage Foundation) based in Százhalombatta.

*The Hungarian Heritage Foundation was established in 1991 with the avid goal of safeguarding and promoting local traditions and cultural patterns within the setting of an industrial town. Initially, the Foundation was in the care of the Spring Folkdance Ensemble. The organization and management of events and performances became the primary task of the Foundation; at first, this mainly encompassed the Ensemble itself and later the smaller local and regional festivals, international conferences and exhibitions were added to the repertoire. Having this professional experience enabled the Foundation to organize for the first time in 1994 the Summerfest International Folklore Festival and Folk Art Fair, which has become an annual event ever since. The Foundation by now has branched out into the organization of various other art related activities and events e.g. Hungarian Cultural Week, Ball of the Muse on Leave, Százhalombatta Summer Theater, Civil Festival and Forum. In 2003 a new independent art school was created the Pesovár Ferenc Elementary Art School with branches in the towns of Százhalombatta, Érd, Ercsi, and Diósd.<sup>2</sup>*

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2 <http://www.magyarokoroksege.hu/>

### Pesovár Ferenc Elementary Art School

„The Pesovár Ferenc Elementary Art School commenced its work in September 2003 maintained by the Hungarian Heritage Foundation, which also manages and supervises the Spring Folkdance Ensemble and the Summerfest International Folklore Festival”.<sup>3</sup> Beyond the strict professional work done it is notable that how much initiative is taken by this institution to elevate its work to a higher level. Such activities



Picture 1.: Students of the Pesovár Ferenc Elementary Art School

Source: [http://www.pesovarferencami.hu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=92%3Agyermekszolo&catid=47%3A2009&Itemid=25&lang=hu](http://www.pesovarferencami.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=92%3Agyermekszolo&catid=47%3A2009&Itemid=25&lang=hu)

include the forging of close ties with other institutions with similar missions for the promotion of folk dancing in the region; the widening of the scope of programs with the aim of reaching an ever broader spectrum of society.

In the calendar of Százhalombatta August equates to the month of culture. Initially, for ten and since 2006 for twelve days folk dancers perform from all over the world at Százhalombatta and at two other nearby towns at Ráckeve and Tököl.

In the beginning (1994) personal contacts facilitated the selection of participants, which later

on naturally came to include groups recommended by others and groups volunteering on their own. Nevertheless, for the entire selection process to go smoothly the roles played by the director and choreographer of Forrás were indispensable. Despite the fact that Százhalombatta went through rapid industrialization from the 1950s the genre of folk dancing was never alien to the town. To maintain this tradition and perhaps even instill a sense of nostalgia for the past in its members small groups formed in the town on a purely voluntary basis.

<sup>3</sup> Source: [http://www.pesovarferencami.hu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&id=28&Itemid=3&lang=hu](http://www.pesovarferencami.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=28&Itemid=3&lang=hu)

*Participating countries from the start until the present (between 1994–2009)*

Only a few years have been selected as examples

1994.	1999.	2004.	2009.
Finland	England	Bosnia-Herzegovina	Algeria
Greece	Belgium	China	Belgium
Israel	Egypt	USA	Brazil
Poland	France	Belorussia	Bashkiria
Italy	India	Buryat Republic	Bulgaria
Spain	China	Tatarstan	Cyprus
Turkey	Malaysia	Norway	Georgia
Hungary	Mexico	The Netherlands	Canada
	Nigeria	New-Zeeland	Columbia
	Panama	Haiti	Poland
	Sri-Lanka	England	Mexico
	Sardinia	France	Nigeria
	Romania	South-Africa	Russia
	Taiwan	Egypt	Armenia
	Udmurtia	Portugal	Peru
	Ukraine	Puerto Rico	Portugal
	Hungary	Switzerland	Spain
		Slovenia	Sri Lanka
		Sweden	Slovakia
		Thailand	Thailand
		Italy	Turkey
		Peru	Udmurtia
		Cyprus	
		Hungary (2 localities)	

*The table has been compiled by Laki Ildiko relying on the data provided by the Festival Office (2010)*

From the graph above it can be ascertained that culture indeed can transcend limitations placed by

borders. From the turn of the century the ratio between participating European and non-European groups has been equal. The presence of such a rich diversity of cultures gives the Festival a form of expression that eclipses a mere conventional cultural event. The number of visitors to the Festival is steadily rising; today, thousands of visitors in the Danube bank in this industrial town within the framework of organized events. The town and the surrounding area as result of this cultural cornucopia went through a radical transformation as far its development is concerned in the past ten years. The number of development projects and civic initiatives has skyrocketed at first at Százhalombatta and then at Ráckeve and Tököl. These localities thus now form a cultural hub of the surrounding region further attracting cultural initiatives and co-operative arrangements with other interested parties.

**Conclusion**

In this study it was my intention to give a brief but thorough overview of a local Hungarian initiative, the SUMMERFEST International Folklore Festival and Folk Art Fair. The Summerfest has grown into a major international event and it gives a good opportunity to examine the workings of cultural influences and the limitations posed by cultural barriers. The question of the actual professional significance of this event, locally and internationally, is also enquired into. Further, the paper dealt with the problem whether the Festival could translate into new cooperative arrangements making still existing cultural obstacles obsolete.

After sketching the basic framework in place the event itself has been described in detail, its history and its role in the local and regional cultural life.



*Picture2.: Members of the Forrás Ensemble (2008)  
Source: www.forrasneptancegyuttes.hu*

Certain parallels may exist between the Festival and its host town; just as the cultural event gained international recognition the town itself also benefited tremendously as now firmly being present on the cultural landscape of the country. The programs offered generate a community or social network that far exceeds Százhalombatta itself and which still has potential to grow. Future goals may include the continued promotion of the event through heightened public involvement and the emphasizing of professional ties and connections worldwide.

### Sources

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*Demizson  
Ismeretlen magyar szerző műve Ráckeveéről.*