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Interpersonal Relations and Group Formation in the Market

As a participant at the 3rd International Summer Seminar in Szeged I had the possibility to take part in the feast devoted to Our Lady of the Snow in the church of Szeged-Alsóváros. First I noticed the date of the celebration - 2-3 August, while the calendar feast day itself of Our Lady of the Snow was August 5th. Later I was told that during socialism people could not get a day off for this religious feast, so they celebrated it at the weekend nearest to the calendar day.

The structure of the feast is rather peculiar, as it consists of two basic components: a sacral and a profane. I was impressed by the fact, that although both parts are related to the feast itself and the profane side depends on the sacral to a certain extent (the religious events provide the sellers with a lot of customers, thus higher income), even so, in the mind of those visiting Mátyás square the two sides are clearly separated.

In Croatia at events like this the sacral is usually highlighted: the stalls are erected in such a place as to be of service to the believers. Whereas in this case a large part of those coming to the market and the fair did not even step into the church, instead their motives were merely profane. These were mainly young parents who brought sweets and toys for their children, or paid for a pony-ride and other attractions. Also the price of certain goods such as technical equipment and cassettes was much cheaper than in the department-stores, which also served as a reason for many to come only to the market.

Most of the people though came with the intention of taking part in the sacral events, so they did not stop at the market, only walked through it. The relation between the two poles became clear already during the interview made with the organiser of the fair. He told us that the fair had always been held in front of the main entrance of the church until 1993. Later the local government changed the scene for the market in order to protect one of the oldest squares of Szeged. Today the fair is held to the north of the cloister where there is no exit from the church. Along the way leading to the church entrance only stalls selling sacral objects such as rosaries, crucifixes, candles, prayerbooks, pictures and statues of saints or holy-water stoops, are allowed to be placed. Thus the market is situated further from the church and is not connected to.

In fact the sacral seems to alienate itself from the profane, thus protecting the religious content of the feast. One of the Franciscan friars told us overtly that he was displeased with the fair being too close to the church. He would like to have the market placed to another square much further in order not to destroy the solemnity of the place.

Our group did research on the secular side of the feast (i.e. fair), while I myself concentrated on exploring interpersonal relations and the market scene.

Already at the beginning of our research we noticed a basic difference between those selling secular and religious objects.

The sellers of religious objects behaved in a more serious way, they did not joke among each other so much, they talked to the customers with respect, while at the stalls selling secular objects the atmosphere was more relaxed and joyful.

Their relation to the goods they are selling is noticeable, as the motivation is the same: mostly these sellers have their own workshop or they work in one of those producing these kind of objects. Religious feast bring in occasional income for them. Thus the motives of the sellers are very similar with their relation to the supply of goods. It seems that the reason could be the different nature of the goods offered, some of them being religious, others secular.

Although in the secular part of the market the prices were fixed towards the end of the fair or in case of buying in bulk the sellers reduced the price. On the other hand at the church entrance sellers did not enter into a bargain.

This proves that the relation to secular and religious objects is different.

The goods offered in front of the church are respected more both by the sellers and buyers, as these are related to the faith of the people. Thus the feelings connected to the church are at the same time projected to the goods offered in front of the church.

Also the customers visiting the two parts of the market were different. At the stalls next to the church mainly elderly women appeared, who also often visited the church. They bought candles, which were lit inside the church.

They bought small devotional pictures and statues as a present for those, who could not come to the feast. Besides they buy objects for themselves, which they take home and place on a small table in a so called sacred corner. On the other hand at the stands to the north of the friary young people, mainly children with their parents were present.

The market of secular objects was not influenced by the events of the church feast, but rather by the weather or part of the day. On the first morning of the fair due to the rainy weather the number of visitors was minimal. However, around noon the fair became lively and more and more people appeared until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. After that the number decreased, though some stands were open until midnight. The following day was busy until 6 o'clock, when the commotion of the fair started to calm down. The changes in the number of visitors was not influenced by the time of the masses, as most of them came only because of the fair. The secular part did not attract those living further, as opposed to the religious part.

The only event that caused the slackening of interest at the fair was the procession, when the sacral part came out to the street drawing the attention of all those present.

We observed the religious stalls on Sunday morning before, during and after the main mass.

While before the procession there were few buyers (- the service was conducted this time -), during the procession even less (- all the people paid attention to the procession -), after the procession more and more visitors came to the stands and it even increased after the mass. Thus it was obvious that the popularity of the stands selling religious objects has a direct connection with the church events.

About operating and organising the market we talked to the head organiser, Mr László Kálmán. His task was to mark out the places for the stalls. He said that year after year the same stallkeepers come back to Szeged. Some of them have even a permanent place, so the organisers do not have much work to do in the allotment of the stall space. Those who came to the fair for the first time either book the place beforehand or take their place on the territory set apart for those without a reservation on the right side of the market square.

The stalls are not grouped according to the goods they offer, which also makes the fair more colourful and livelier. The sellers not living in Szeged stay in their cars for the night, keeping an eye on their goods at the same time.

There is a wide range of goods offered at the market: toys, sweets, honey-cakes, clothes, ceramics, books, technical equipment, jewellery and small trinkets.

Though the variety of goods was entirely dissimilar to what we can see now: there were fewer industrial products and more home-made sweets, toys and pottery. This has undergone great changes since World War 2.

There are also a lot of snack-bars at the fair selling drinks, sandwiches, hamburgers, etc. In the past meat stewed with paprika or goulash soup was cooked in bigger cauldrons around the market, which is nowadays for health reasons prohibited.

Most of the stalls at the fair sell sweets and toys which are mainly manufactured products. They have the greatest number of customers, with parents mainly buying souvenirs for their children. Thus our research work also concentrated on this kind of business.

We talked to a middle-aged couple from the surroundings of Szeged. They were selling different manufactured toys and ceramics purchased from special wholesalers. Some products such as ceramics with the inscription Medjugorje have different origins. These souvenirs were brought from the shrine in South Bosnia by acquaintances. Our interviewees were professional traders running their own shop in their local town. This kind of activity was not a family tradition, but they started the business themselves. As the income of the trading activity is not satisfactory, their children probably will not continue it in the future. They claim that even traditional trader families stop their business due to small income. Similarly to other

stallkeepers at the market they also go from fair to fair in this area of Hungary, either to a church feast or cattle-market. If they spend several days at the same market, they have to stay in their car for the night as it would be difficult to take the stock home day after day. As they came to Szeged for the first time, they got a place on the right side of the square.

In trading, the role of the husband is more important. He offers the goods and he takes the money. He often goes to the market alone, his wife is his assistant. She usually stays at home and prepares the articles. We noticed that men have a leading role in trading.

Like the other sellers, the investigated couple did not advertise their goods in a special way. They consider this characteristic of the market. They marked the prices on the articles, as it is the general habit. It was not possible to bargain, though towards the end of the fair they gave reductions to sell the objects more successfully.

The second most frequently sold articles are the sweets and honey-cakes. There have been changes in the way they are offered. Those stallsellers dealing with sweets and honey-cakes used to be called honey-cake makers, nowadays they are called confectionery makers. They used to sell more traditional home-made sweets, such as gingerbread and home-made candies. The variety of goods are more or less the same on the stalls. The sellers claim that the success of industrially made sweets is due to the change in the taste of customers and they try to adjust their offer to the demand of customers. However, it is said to be a tradition to take home some home-made candies as a souvenir from the church feast. As opposed to this, children nowadays like more industrially produced sweets, so both type of articles are sold well at the market.

The stalls can be divided into three groups on the basis of their offer:

- 1, honey-cakes,
- 2, home-made candies (rolls, Turkish delight, etc.),
- 3, industrially produced sweets.

The family tradition is noticeable more frequently among the stallsellers dealing with sweets. In the case of one seller this profession has been in the family already for centuries passing the heritage from generation to generation. Women decorate and prepare the products at home in the workshop. They usually do not take part in the market, as there is a lot to do at home around the house. Mainly men sell at the markets. They visit the most important markets in the surroundings. Each member of the family gets involved in the trading activity. All the families selling sweets in markets or to retailers only have their own recipes which are usually secret and inherited from generation to generation. Each workshop has its own range of products different from others. For instance, there are two groups of honey-cake makers. One makes a traditional kind of cake of one colour decorated with white and brown, while the other produces a new type with fiery red basis decorated richly and colourfully. Sometimes they change products with other workshops to enrich their range.

These kind of family enterprises are disappearing. Nowadays they purchase the sweets from producers who do not deal with selling and can meet the demand of more retailers.

The tradition of this kind of profession is also disappearing. The son of a retailer said that he might not continue this job as it is not profitable.

We talked to another couple who do not sell sweets and honey-cakes as a family tradition. After they had become unemployed, they started their own business to get some income.

It is interesting to note, that they work together, both in purchasing and selling. They do not make products but buy them from wholesalers.

We also asked other stallsellers dealing with carpets and hand-woven handicrafts, ornaments from plaster, pastry horn. We talked to a retailer who sold pictures. (The painter is the customer themselves: a few drops of paint is put on a piece of paper with the help of a apparatus which sprays the colourful paint in different directions, causing interesting patterns to appear on the paper.) The two most characteristic products at the fair are in fact toys and sweets. All the stallkeepers attend other markets as well beside the church feasts. They follow the events with the help of a special calendar. Most of the retailers are men from other towns or villages who stay in their cars for the night. The prices of their goods depends on the current prices of that particular commodity, which can be reduced towards the end of the fair. Another common feature is that none of them advertises their articles.

Several stallkeepers stressed that often they make very good friends at the markets. Some even claimed that they feel the whole market to be one big family without quarrelling or jealousy. As opposed to this the relationship between legal sellers and black-marketeers are entirely different.

Several of the latter arranges a temporary stall from paperboxes, for instance a fortune-teller. Others put out their articles on plastic covers, for example two gypsy families.

Others offered their goods by walking around the market, like two women from Székelyföld (Harghita and Covasna counties in Romania). They were dressed in the once traditional costume of their village in this way advertising their articles. They offered handwovens and embroideries made by themselves. In their neighbourhood traditional handicraft is still alive and all the girls have to learn weaving and spinning. These women try to sell their goods all around Hungary going from one market to another. They offered their articles walking up and down at the fair as they could not get a fixed place. Finally they were allowed to sell their goods at one side of the church.

It is also worth mentioning that black-marketeers did not fix their prices, but bargaining was allowed. Legal stallkeepers had a different relation to blackmarketeers, than to each other. While they felt amiable amongst each other, they turned towards illegal sellers with anger and hatred considering them swindlers.

One of the professional sellers mistaking me for an organiser came up to me and complained that those who had not paid for an allotted place, drove away customers and entered into unfair competition.

The black-marketeers are aware of the stallkeepers' opinion, but are not disturbed by it as they also have to do something for a living.

Doing research during the two-day market was obviously not enough to explore all the characteristic features and contacts present. A deeper and more complete investigation of the data needs a second phase in the research. However, as a conclusion we can see that the market, but mostly the church feast itself composes a layered and dynamic unity where certain rules and rather significant relations are dominant, which is in any case worth investigating in the future.