

## Continuity and Change in the Fair

In our paper we intend to analyse the fair and the showmen present at the pilgrimage feast of Szeged-Alsóváros.

During our work on the one hand we made observations (e.g. how a seller offers their goods, whether there is any opportunity for bargaining, what kind of goods are marketable, etc.) on the other hand we made interviews using our questionnaire which concerned retailers and customers.

The crowd at a pilgrimage feast provides a good occasion for trading. Thus there has always been a close connection between the market itself and the pilgrimage feast. As almost everywhere, also in Szeged-Alsóváros the market and the group of showmen is a part of the pilgrimage feast. The assembled crowd offers a good opportunity for showmen to make profit. Until 1993 retailers and showmen could set up their stalls right in front of the church. Nowadays it is allowed only for the sellers of sacral objects. Thus the profane is banished behind the friary so that loud music should not disturb the liturgical events happening in the church.

In our research work we concentrated on the activity of the showmen so first we give an account on them.

The first day of the pilgrimage feast was Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1997. It was a rainy day so not many retailers unloaded their goods. However, since there were not any visitors at the fair, the showmen had time to talk with us. They were ready to help and pleased because of our interest in their job.

Roundabouts and shooting galleries were situated to the left of the friary. As it is shown in the map there were 28 amusements at the fair.\* Shooting galleries and stalls were placed on the edges, and in the middle of the area there were different kinds of roundabouts. All these belonged to seven families.

- Four families came from Baja. All of them are relatives., They live together like a big family. More than half of the roundabouts, shooting galleries and other gambling stalls (altogether 17) were in their procession.

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\* Maps and figures can be found in the Appendix.

- The Czékus family was from Szeged. The most popular roundabout, called 'polip' (octopus) belonged to them. Their amusements are on the most frequented places on the ground. They employed eight people.
- One family came from Kecskemét, and another from Bátaszék.

The above mentioned showmen has been coming to Szeged for many years. Each member of the family has their own duty. They are born into this job and often could not even tell how many years their ancestors started the business.

Usually the season starts on the 1<sup>st</sup> May and the showmen move from fair to fair until October-November. During this time they live in caravans. Mostly people with gypsy origin take on this way of living. They arrived in Szeged already on Monday before the pilgrimage feast, and they set the roundabouts and shooting galleries. However, most of the visitors came to the fair only on Saturday afternoon. The showmen stayed until Monday morning, then all of them left to the village of Ruzsa, where a dedication feast was held the following weekend.

As it is shown in the map roundabouts and shooting galleries belonging to different families were placed sparsely. In spite of the families being of kinship with each other they often debate about better places. However, the problems are always solved 'and in the evening everything is all right in the pub'. Gaining profitable places is crucial because of the higher income. All the showmen stressed the importance of the place as nowadays people have less money for entertainment. The objects that can be won at shooting gallery and gambling stalls are purchased from a special store in Budapest. Nowadays straw hats and toy animals are the most popular.

During the pilgrimage feast we could continuously hear loud music. Yet there was no oral advertising of the articles, nobody tried to call our attention.

At the opposite end of the market another group of showmen appeared clearly separated from the roundabouts requiring greater financial investment. Here the fortune teller gypsy woman was sitting. Having no permission to trade, she appeared on different places.

Copied notes were placed in a box which had its opening at the top. Two colourful parrots picked out the notes. They were both called 'Gyuri'. At one end of the box the notes were addressed to young lady and at the other end to gentlemen. The texts of the notes emphasized and praised positive characteristic features. After outlining the temporary difficulties in life they predicted a happy future with love and great fortune.

*'Prophecy for a young lady. Love for you is a heavenly present, you will have a rich husband. Your best friends will envy your happiness, but they can not do you any harm. You will be lucky, you will live in happiness and harmony. You will inherit a great fortune from an uncle. The name of your husband will be János. You will live to be seventy. You will have children. Your lottery numbers are 12, 26, 45.'*

Riding on ponies was a new kind of amusement at the fair. Mini-motorbikes for children represented modern technology in entertainment.

Mostly the young and families with children came to the fair for amusement. The number of visitors depended mainly on the part of the day and on the weather, not so much on the liturgical program of the feast. The only exception was Sunday morning when all the visitors at the fair watched the procession after the high mass.

The showmen did not have much to do with the sacral part of the pilgrimage feast, they did not even enter the church. The pilgrimage feast was not a holiday for them, it meant only a way of earning money. They often did not have any information about the pilgrimage feast at all. This fact is supported by the opinion of a showman.

*'The peculiarity of this feast is the procession which can not be seen at other pilgrimage feasts. The reason for this could be that this is the feast of the church itself. At least, I think so.'*

## THE RETAILERS

The weather influenced not only the activity of the showmen, but also that of the retailers. The stallkeepers usually unload their goods already on Saturday morning, provided the weather was nice. This was not the case in 1997, when due to the rain they could set up their stalls only on Sunday. Those arriving already on Saturday spent the night in their cars or at their acquaintances' in the city.

The allotment of stallplace took place well before the feast days. On Monday all the stallkeepers had to appear at the authorities. The chosen and occupied places were enclosed. The acquaintances often helped each other to gain good places. Some retailers choose the same place for their stall year after year.

László Kálmám, the market supervisor, made a sketch for us about the order of the stalls at the market. The market has been supervised by the authorities since 1993, so it does not fall within the competence of the church any more.

On the square in front of the church entrance only the stalls selling secular objects were allowed to be set up. In 1997 seven retailers of the kind came to the feast. A part of them inherited the enterprise as a family tradition, while others started the business not long before.

They offered mainly plastic holy-water stoops, roseries, calendars, necklaces, images of saints, candles, postcards and books. They purchase their goods from wholesalers and earn a 20-25 % profit on each article. However, one of the retailers was selling candels produced by himself. He noticed that his product was on sale at other stalls, too. These sellers of sacral objects travel in the country between different pilgrimage sites from Mátraverebély to Alsószentiván.

The number of customers at these stalls increased mainly after the masses when the faithful coming out of the church stopped to buy religious articles. Most

popular were the cheap and practical objects (e.g. candles, key-rings, images of saints) which people bought as souvenirs for relatives and friends. On the other hand customers missed the specialities of the pilgrimage site, such as the copy of the miraculous picture of the church at Szeged-Alsóváros. The retailers claimed that producing the copy would have been profitable only in a greater amount, but they could not have been sold at other pilgrimage places in the country.

The larger number of honey-cake sellers was originally connected to the sacral side of the feast. Nowadays they are replaced by the so called candy-sellers. The two groups can be distinguished by the products they offer. Honey-cake retailers produce most of their goods themselves in a special workshop. Making honey-cake is a family tradition in most of the cases and the family members are involved in trading.

Two brothers from Makó has regularly attended the pilgrimage feast of Alsóváros for ten years. Usually they sell their goods at the market in Makó and surroundings. They are personally acquainted with the other retailers and a part of the customers as well. As they remember the atmosphere used to be much livelier at the pilgrimage feast of Szeged, when they were selling at the fair as long as midnight. Nowadays in spite of being on sale also in the shops, wafer biscuits, candies and chocolate are more popular among the customers than honey-cake.

The uncle of the two brothers started the business 18 years ago. Their mother helped in trading. She was said to be very kind to all the customers. The brothers inherited the workshop and the equipment from them. Though they did not study the trade at any special school, they make the honey-cake themselves at home.

As opposed to this candy-sellers do not produce their articles but purchase them from wholesalers and wrap them up afterwards. They usually set up several stalls at the fair and take on employees to help them. We made a longer interview with a candy-seller from Tápé. He had five stalls on different parts of the marketplace selling two kinds of honey-cake. The edible one was made by adding gelatine and corn-starch, while the inedible cake contained boneglue. The candy-sellers and honey-cake makers, together with two sellers of spun sugar possessed 23 stalls at the fair.

The second biggest group of retailers was selling toys. They offered cheap mass products made of plastic which were available in the shops, too.

A couple from Hódmezővásárhely sellig pottery was the only representative of folkart at the fair. They have been trading with their products since 1989. Usually they visit programs where they are invited to. The pilgrimage feast of Szeged-Alsóváros is the only exception.

Besides there were two women from Szék, Transylvania, who were selling embroideries and handwovens made by themselves. They offered their goods by walking around the market, as they did not pay market-dues.

Similarly to the showmen a group of stallkeepers were also acquainted with each other. For most of them trading is only a complementary business. 40-50% of them live in Szeged and about 70% come regularly to the pilgrimage feast at Szeged-Alsóváros in August.

On Sunday evening more and more retailers from the local market came to the fair. At this time most of the visitors were non-faithful, while in the morning mainly religious people came to the fair.

The fair and the group of showmen has for a long time been an organic part of the pilgrimage feast. The sacral side of the feast brings into life the profane providing an opportunity also for entertainment. At Szeged-Alsóváros the two separate sides of the pilgrimage feast are connected by the stalls selling sacral objects and the people walking from the church to the stalls. However, great part of the visitors coming to the fair do not join the liturgical events.