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RESURGENT CULTURAL HERITAGES – A CASE STUDY OF THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE IN BUDAPEST

The Great Synagogue in Budapest plays a very important role in the cultural tourism market of the capital city because it is able to attract thousands of tourists every year. This building is not just the most impressive synagogue in Hungary, but it is the largest in Europe and the second largest in the world. In addition to this, its characteristics are excellent for different kind of musical performances or exhibitions as it gives place to numerous cultural events each year. However, besides its historical and touristic value, it also serves the needs of the locals with its numerous religious buildings and catering facilities. Budapest is the home of the largest Jewish community of Central-Europe and the majority of the Hungarian Jewish people also live in the neighbourhood of this area. So, this part of the city offers an outstanding possibility to get acquainted with the Jewish traditions and heritages. This historical part of the city was quite neglected until 2002 when it became a part of the youth tourism strategy of Budapest. At that time the formerly ruined buildings were renovated and popular summer clubs, like the Szimpla-Garden, and the Gozsdu Courtyard were moved into them. Thanks to these developments, this area offers a wide range of services for both locals and tourists. (greatsynagogue.hu)

It is apparent that sustainability has a major significance in the case of the Great Synagogue and its surroundings. This research explores the whole touristic value of this area, particularly focussing on the latest development efforts that supported sustainability in the last few years. Alongside the supply side, the paper also analyzes the available comments on TripAdvisor in order to get a better overview of the consumers' opinions and experiences. Finally, the conclusion will highlight the possible future development directions which make this area more viable and sustainable.

http://www.greatsynagogue.hu/gallery_syn.html#1

Introduction

The Great or Dohány Street Synagogue has an outstanding role in the cultural tourism market of Hungary and in Europe, too. On one hand, this building is not just the most impressive, but the largest synagogue of the continent. On the other hand, it offers a perfect possibility for tourists to get to know more about Jewish culture as the area of the Great Synagogue is the home of the biggest Jewish community of Central Europe. In the last few years, there were several development plans of the

Seventh District of Budapest to make the whole area better for both locals and visitors, but some problems of the past still exist. Beside the renovation processes and the creation of popular summer clubs or ruin pubs, like the Szimpla-Garden, and the Gozsdu Courtyard the general quality of tourism has increased a lot. However, some infrastructural issues should also be fixed as fast as possible. Fortunately, based on the available development strategy of the district, the local government aimed to develop both the physical characteristics and the tourism of the Jewish district in the future.

This study is the continuation of a research from 2015 which focused on the visitors' experience of Dohány Street Synagogue. That study mainly deals with the specialties of the Synagogue, its tourism facilities and gave some recommendations for its management for the future operation based on the opinion of tourism professionals and visitors. However, this paper concentrates on not just the Dohány Street Synagogue but the potentials of the whole area, as well. It also analyses the opinion of the visitors and the tourism professionals of the sight in order to give a very good overview of the actual situation of the Jewish District of Budapest.

Literature review

Cultural and heritage tourism

During the last few decades significance of city-based cultural tourism has increased a lot for tourism organisations and cultural institutions all over Europe and due to the 'cultural capitals' program it will become more important in the future (UNWTO-ETC, 2005). However, it is still difficult to define cultural tourism because several forms of it exist in the literature. According to ICOMOS (International Scientific Committee on Cultural Tourism, a global non-government organization that works for protecting and conserving cultural heritage places.) cultural tourism is a special activity that enables tourists to experience the life of other people. The most important elements of it are customs, traditions, buildings or different kinds of heritages that determine a given region's essence (ICOMOS Charter for Cultural Tourism, Draft April 1997). Cultural tourism always plays a central role in the tourism of the European cities because in spite of the fact that discovering the culture is not the most important motivation for tourists, almost every visitor is interested in the culture of the destinations (Sulyok, 2005). According to Hegyi (2007) in the case of cultural tourism, towns and cities are special commodities that can only be sold in the market of settlements. In addition to this, they should have a complex package of services that consists of all the facilities, services, programs and touristic values of the given region that are able to satisfy visitors.

Tourists' motivations for visiting cultural attractions are quite different, but the opinions have tended to be relatively stable in the last few years. The majority of visitors would like to learn about history, culture and enjoy the special atmosphere of the visited destination. However, in the case of city visitors the situation differs as they do not identify themselves as cultural tourists. In addition to this, culture plays a different role in their travel decisions. (UNWTO-ETC, 2005).

The huge increment in the number of visits related to culture, heritage and history encouraged researchers in this field to identify different types of cultural tourism. Heritage tourism is understood as one of the several forms of this kind of tourism (Ramires et al., 2017). In the last few years it became an important part of cultural tourism as it is mainly about both material and immaterial remains of the past. However, heritage is not a fixed outcome when it is represented in tourism because it is constantly reinterpreted in order to satisfy the specific needs of tourists and to reflect the socio-cultural changes of the world (Hyung, 2013).

According to Porio et al. (2004) there are three main reasons for visiting heritage sites: to be 'emotionally involved', to feel a 'sense of belonging to the site' and 'because it is a part of their heritage'. In addition to this heritage tourism can be seen as a personal encounter with traditions, culture and history. So, it is mainly based on special concepts that each and every community has a story to tell and the majority of the heritage tourists would like to see culture as unique or authentic as possible. Due to this, it has a very important educational role for both visitors and locals and it also can involve participants in protection and promotion of local cultural heritage (Heritage Tourism Handbook, 2010).

Past and present of the Jewish Quarter and the Great Synagogue

Jewish people first appeared in Budapest in the 13th century when they settled down near Szent György square in Buda. When they were warned off that area in the 17th century they moved to Óbuda as it was very close to the fairs of Pest. Within some years new accommodation facilities were opened in the neighbourhood of these markets for Jews and when they received the right of establishment more and more people stayed in this area. Due this process, Király Street slowly became the first Jewish quarter of Pest. At that time, headquarter of the community was the so called Orczy House that were located next to the Jewish market. The building functions as a "metropolitan shtetl" because it serves as synagogue, study houses, apartments, restaurants, cafes, shops and warehouses. It was an ideal place where Jews from all around the country found a home when they moved to the capital city. At that time the 70–80% of the inhabitants of the Király Street was Jewish and the majority of the markets, shops, bakeries and other facilities served their needs. However, due to the fast increment of the Jewish community the Orczy House lost

its significance and the so called “Jewish Triangle” in the inner part of the Seventh District became the centre as it is anchored by three large synagogues: Dohány Street Synagogue, Kazinczy Street Synagogue and Rumbach Street Synagogue. During the two world wars, around 1930 there were several urban renewal project plans in Budapest and as a part of it Orczy House was demolished so it was completely lost its former role in the life of the Jewish community of Budapest (centropa.org; hg.hu).

The Great Synagogue of Budapest was built in 1859 and it is not just one of the most impressive religious buildings in Hungary, but it is the largest in Europe and the second largest in the world. It had several functions in the last few decades but its grand reopen was in 2000 and about fifteen thousand people visited it in the first year. It offers a wide range of facilities for tourists as numerous attractions can be visited there like the building of the Great Synagogue, Jewish Museum, Holocaust Cemetery, ‘Heroes’ Temple, Raoul Wallenberg Memorial Park or Tress of Life (jewishtourhungary.com; zsidu.hu) Nowadays, it is among the ten most visited attractions in Budapest according to budapestinfo.hu and 32nd of all sights of Budapest by TripAdvisor. The area is one of the most visited destinations in the international tourism based on its historical and architectural heritages and the increasingly popular ruin pubs like the Szimpla Garden, Kőleves Restaurant and the Gozdsu Courtyard. Thanks to these general development efforts, this area offers a wide range of services for both locals and tourists (jewishtourhungary.com).

However, besides its touristic value this district (Elizabethtown) of the capital city also serves the needs of locals and the biggest Jewish community of Central Europe lives in Budapest (greatsynagogue.hu). According to the Integrated Settlement Development Strategy of VII District of Budapest, Jewish Quarter has a significant role in Elizabethtown as it gives the district’s economic pulling power. However, there is a very strong competition between this area and the other parts of the Seventh District regarding creative industry companies, hotels and catering facilities. Therefore, the local government aimed to develop the Jewish district in the future (Budapest Főváros VII. Kerület Erzsébetváros Önkormányzata Integrált Településfejlesztési Stratégia 2014–2020; 2015).

Methodology

The analysis based on different kind of researches in order to give a better overview of the actual situation of the Great Synagogue and the Jewish Quarter in Budapest.

As for the quantitative part, within the confines of a field research the whole building with its attractions were visited and a Hungarian guidance in Jewish

Heritage tours was taken. Due to these personal investigation sit became easier to analyse the actual tourism situation and opportunities of the whole area.

As for the quantitative side, an online questionnaire was filled out by official tour guides in Jewish Heritage Tour and other employees of Great Synagogue, so the sample is able to represent the opinion of the workers of the Synagogue. Altogether, ten people answered to the questions in connection with attractions, the characteristics of the visitors and the possible development facilities. According to Babbie (2000) questionnaires are suitable to collect self-memories from the past or the future so the result of it is appropriate to give a very good overview of different situations.

Finally, a content analysis was carried out in which opinions of hundreds of visitors were analysed in connection with the Great Synagogue and some popular places like ruin pubs and restaurants. The analysed comments were available on TripAdvisor and the chosen sights were: Jewish District, Gozsdu Courtyard, Szimpla Garden, Kőleves Restaurant and Lokál Pub. Altogether 198 comments were analysed. According to Lehota (2001), the content analysis is an ideal tool to draw inferences in different contexts where the facts are not directly spoken, but conclusions can be made from the characteristics of the elements.

Results

The results of the online questionnaire and the content analysis showed a perfect picture about the visitors' profile in the case of the Great Synagogue and the whole Jewish Quarter. Based on the answers, it revealed that about half of the visitors is female and other half is male, so both gender represents themselves equally. However, the majority of them are middle-aged or older than 65 years. As for the travel patterns, 65% of the tourists travel alone, in pairs, or in smaller groups, and only the 35% of them arrive in groups that consists of more than 10 people. However, the opinion of the tour guides and the results of the content analysis differed related to the nationality of the visitors. In spite of the fact, that the majority of the tourists (about 95%) are not Hungarian, their nationality cannot be identified easily.

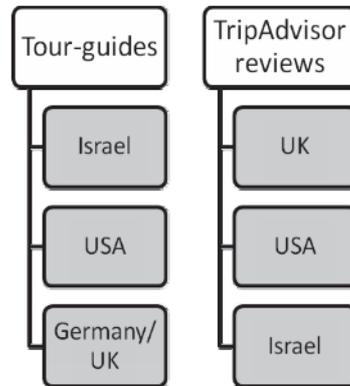


Figure 1: Nationality of the visitors
(Source: online questionnaire, content analysis)

Figure 1 shows that according to the tour guides and the other employees of the Synagogue the majority of the guests are coming from Israel, the USA, Germany and the United Kingdom while based on the available comments on TripAdvisor more tourists arrive from the UK than from Israel.

As tour guides are in a strong connection with the guest, they have a huge amount of information in connection with those characteristics that should be developed according to the guests.

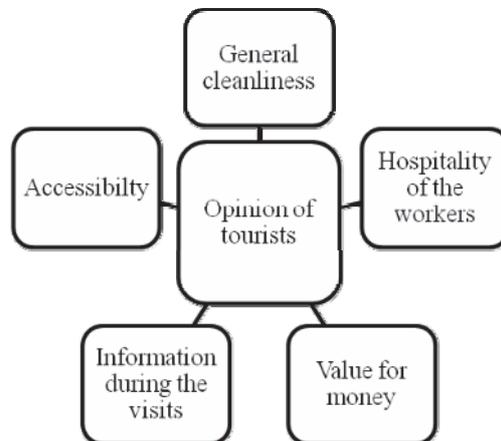


Figure 2: Development facilities according to tourists
(Source: online questionnaire)

Figure 2 shows that problems are in connection with both physical and non-characteristics of the building, like cleanliness, hospitality or accessibility. Based on the opinion of the guests, respondents also mentioned that visitors often complaint about the content of the tours as they would like to get to know more about the Jewish culture. In these cases they always offer them to try the Jewish restaurants of the Quarter and to ask locals about special questions.

Beside the opinion of the visitors, tourism professionals were also interviewed in this topic and they mentioned other problems in connection with sustainability.

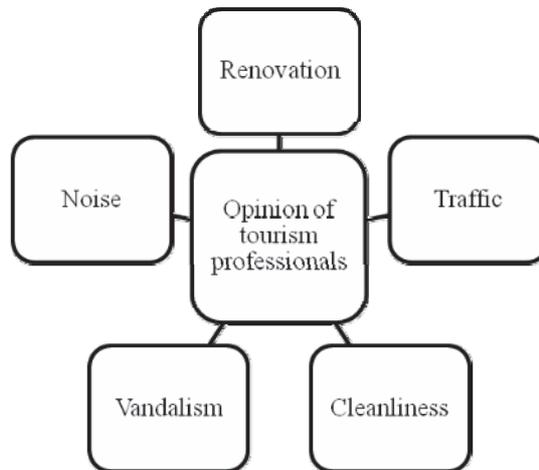


Figure 3: Development facilities according to tourism professionals
(Source: online questionnaire)

According to them there is a strong need to act against loud night noises, vandalism and waste because it disturbs local people and endangers tourism, too. In addition, they also mentioned that the renovation and maintenance of some determinant buildings are also crucial as the development processes of the last few years could not solve every problem. They also noticed that the reduction of the traffic of the area or turning the Dohány Street into a pedestrian street could make the whole area better for both tourists and locals. Finally, they said that more musical events, a creation of an interactive museum or stronger marketing activity can make the whole Quarter more popular.

As for the content analysis bigger areas and single catering facilities were also examined. In the case of the first group, the comments of Jewish Quarter and Gozsdu courtyard were read in order to get a better overview on the general experiences concerning the whole district. As for the second group Szimpla Garden, Kőleves Resturant and Lokál Pub were analysed.

Forty-five comments were available on TripAdvisor related to the Jewish Quarter and most of them were positive, only smaller problems were mentioned by the reviewers like the prices or duration of the walking tours. Almost every people highlighted the role of history, the special atmosphere, the amazing architectural solutions and impressive buildings of the area. Beside the physical attractions, the majority of them realised the excellent opportunity to discover the specialties of the Jewish culture with the help of the locals. They also highlighted that very good local shops, cafés, pubs, bars and restaurants are located there (*Fig. 4*).

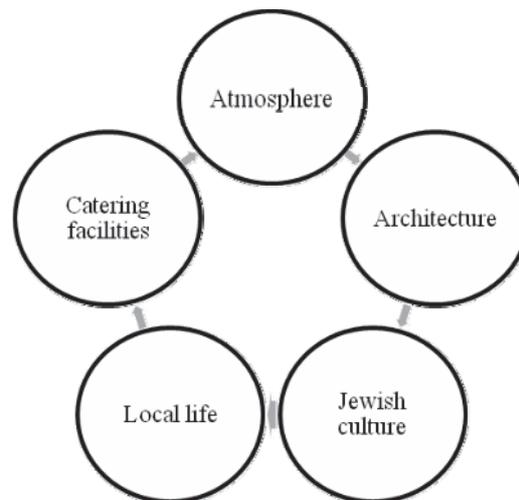


Figure 4: Strengths of the Jewish Quarter
(Source: content analysis) (N = 45)

In the case of the Gozsdu Courtyard, the majority of the comments were also positive. Altogether 45 comments were analysed from the last two months. The biggest part of the reviewers highlighted that it is an excellent meeting point for the different cultures as many international tourists visit the Courtyard each day. Besides, the majority of the comments mentioned that there are numerous excellent cafés, shops, bars and pubs can be found in that area. The negative opinions were mainly in connections with low quality food, safety and security issues like overcrowd places, pickpockets or noise (*Fig. 5*).

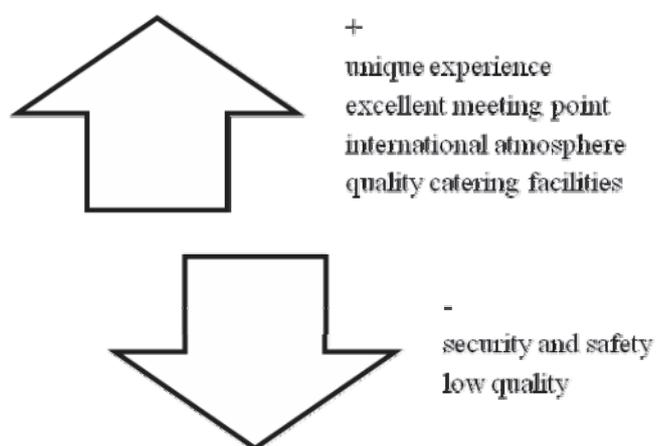


Figure 5: Strengths and weaknesses of the Gozdsu Courtyard
(Source: content analysis) (N = 45)

The analysed catering facilities were evaluated excellent according to the comments available on TripAdvisor. The biggest strengths of them were the excellent tastes, the unique atmosphere, the special equipment and furniture and the international experience as they are a kind of a ‘melting point’ for the representatives of different nations (*Fig. 6*). The question of prices were divisive as the Hungarian and Eastern European people found the place quite expensive while western Europeans liked the low prices. In addition, Hungarians often noticed that these facilities are not for locals because of the too international offers.

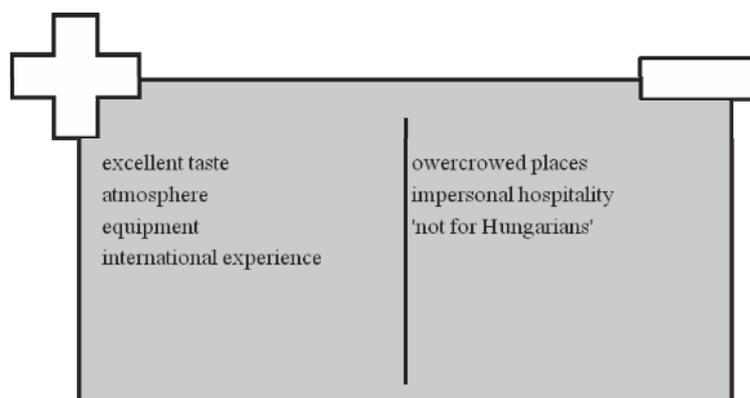


Figure 6: Strengths and weaknesses of some catering facilities
(Source: content analysis) (N = 108)

Discussion and conclusion

Based on the results of the online questionnaire and the content analysis, the Great Synagogue of Budapest and the whole Jewish district play a huge role in the life of the capital city as both locals and tourists take the available services. However, the needs of these two groups are quite different that cause enormous challenges for the management of the area and local government of the Seventh District related to sustainability. From the beginning of 2000 several development actions have taken place as some of the formerly ruined buildings were renovated and popular summer clubs, restaurants and ruin pubs were moved into this area. It definitely changed the attitude of the visitors and the inhabitants toward the Jewish District because due to these processes higher quality services became available.

However, problems still exist in connection with the daily operation of the area. As it revealed from the online questionnaire, tourism professionals often receive complaints from their guests concerning general cleanliness or accessibility. Besides, tour guides also noticed that higher level of safety and security should be ensured in the area in order to avoid vandalism, noise and stealing. In addition, they also highlighted that the reduction of the traffic of the area or turning the Dohány Street into a pedestrian street could make the whole area better for both tourists and locals.

Fortunately, tourists do not discover these serious problems according to the results of the content analysis. Reviewers are mostly satisfied with the Jewish District and its facilities mainly because it can give a very unique experience for them. Beside the impressive buildings and attractions, they have an excellent opportunity to get to know the Jewish culture better as there is a huge amount of Jewish shops, restaurants in the surroundings of the Synagogue. In addition, this area is the home of the largest Jewish community of Central Europe. However, visitors also realized the need for higher level of safety and security because of the crowd and pickpockets.

On the whole, based on the results of the examination the operation of the Great Synagogue and the Jewish District is quite sustainable as locals and tourists can live side by side. Nevertheless, there are several issues and problems that should be solved in the near future in order to ensure this peaceful state for a longer period of time.

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