

## THE ROLE OF FESTIVALS IN THE TOURISM OF HUNGARIAN COUNTRY TOWNS

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### **Abstract**

The achievements of cities successful in tourism are not only measured in the volume of tourists and revenues but also in recognitions differentiating them from their competitors, providing market advantages and prestige, leading to a favourable image of the city. This is especially true for those cities that plan their future development on the basis of culture, by cultural urban development, a possible tool for which is the European Capital of Culture programme launched in 1985. The objective of our research is to look at what themes and scope festivals closely related to cultural tourism have, who their target groups are and what seasonality features they show in a former European Capital of Culture, and the other candidate cities in Hungary. We also want to compare and evaluate the individual features in order to draft an ECOC profile. Methods applied include the examination of the relevant academic literature as well as the analysis and assessment of statistical data relevant for the topic. The festivals and events of the selected cities were collected from several sources in order to get information on the full range of their supply. The supply of the cities examined is really colorful and the most POPULAR dates were May and June. The scope of events with real impacts on tourism is at least regional. The research shed a light on the fact that festival tourism in the cities examined showed many similarities in several cases, but the differences explored should also be highlighted.

**Keywords** Hungary, country towns, European Capital of Culture, event tourism

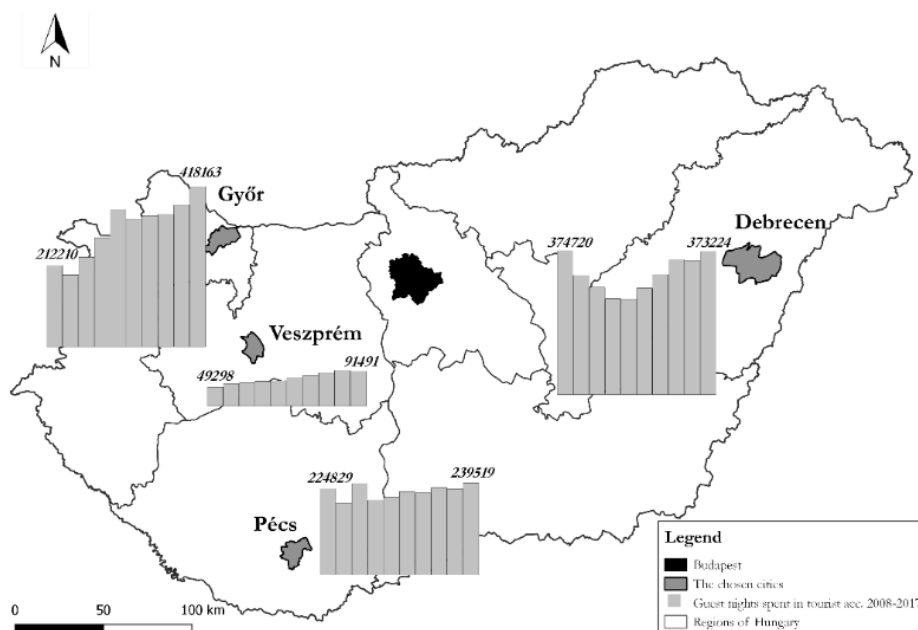
### **INTRODUCTION**

The competitiveness of cities is measurable in several fields, from economy through culture to tourism. The achievements of cities successful in tourism are not only measured in the volume of tourists and revenues but also in recognitions differentiating them from their competitors, providing market advantages and prestige, leading to a favourable image of the city. This is especially true for those cities that plan their future development on the basis of culture, by cultural urban development, a possible tool for which is the European Capital of Culture programme launched in 1985. The first city in Hungary to be given the chance of being the European Capital of Culture in 2010 – besides Essen and Istanbul – was Pécs. The European Capital of Culture title resulted in the growth of the volume of tourism, but only in the short run, for the year of the ECOC. According to Aubert et al. (2015) the investments and programmes implemented within the framework of the ECOC programme had an impact in the year of 2010, only. Growth was limited to the ECOC year, i.e. the touristic position of Pécs could not be changed either on the international or the domestic market. The mixed results of Pécs did not discourage other Hungarian cities to compete again for the possibilities offered by the ECOC programme, as in 2023 it will be Hungary again that is given the chance to feature a European Capital of Culture. The selection process is underway, of the seven cities applying in the first round (Debrecen, Eger, Gödöllő, Győr, Székesfehérvár,

Szombathely and Veszprém) three cities are recommended by the experts of the European Commission (EC) to run for the title after the more detailed elaboration of their applications. The three cities still in competition are Debrecen, Veszprém and Győr.

The volume of tourism in the cities selected for the research varies; nevertheless, they serve as a good basis for comparison, each of them being the cultural centre of their regions. Figure 1 demonstrates the development of guest nights spent at the commercial accommodations of the respective cities in the least ten years.

Figure 1: **The amount of guest nights spent in tourist accommodation establishments (2008-2017)**



Source: Based on HCSO edited by Závodi, B. 2018.

Of the cities selected for the research, it was Győr that showed the most dynamic development in tourism from 2008 to 2017. During these nine years tourists visiting this city spent 97% more guest nights at commercial accommodations: this figure was 212 thousand in 2008, and exceeded 418 thousand by 2017. In Debrecen we cannot see much change when comparing the data of 2008 and 2017, but the figure demonstrates that the tourism sector of the city has been dynamically developing since the nadir in 2012 (with 248 thousand guest nights), the number of guest nights registered in 2017 was 373 thousand. In Pécs a total of 224 thousand guest nights were spent in 2008 by tourists arriving here. In 2010 there was a leap compared to the previous year, but it was only enough for the city to stabilise for the year of the ECOC title the losses caused by the world economic crisis. The year following the ECOC year was characterised by a drastic decrease, in the years since then a moderate growth can be seen in the tourism industry of the city, with no less than 239 thousand guest nights realised in Pécs in 2017. Despite

the fact that the number of guest nights spent in Veszprém lags far behind the other three cities, this city has an important role in the tourism of its region. It is characterised by a tourism sector closely linked to Lake Balaton. In the summer peak season, a considerable proportion of the guests arrive as excursionists from Lake Balaton settlements where their accommodations are. Taking also this into consideration we can say that the tourism industry of Veszprém is a success story, just like that of Győr, as the number of guest nights spent in Veszprém increased by 85% from 2008 to 2017, as a result of which 91 thousand guest nights were spent by tourists visiting Veszprém in 2017. From all cities examined in our study it is only Győr that was in the top 10 settlements by the number of visitors in 2017. Getting this favourable position was significantly promoted by the European Youth Olympic Festival, which proved that one international festival can give a significant momentum to the tourism of a city.

Interest in festivals has increased in recent years both in Hungary and internationally. Consequently, festival tourism of cities is also expanding and diversifying, in order to fully meet the demand of the consumers. During last decades the field of event tourism research became really wide and it affected numerous topics. The events are connected to destinations in many points therefore there are many researches about this connection and about the effects of the events on the life of destinations (Getz and Page 2016). The selected programmes with large number of visitors not only increase the external image of the respective city but also strengthen the internal cohesion of the settlement (Rátz 2012). Our experiences suggest that besides the improvement of the image achievable at the external target groups of the city, festivals also strengthen the destination identity of the internal target groups, the local inhabitants (Rück 2013). According Getz et al. (2012) the effects of festivals on destinations do not depend only on the size of the events. Certain event are not mega-events but they are hallmark-events because they play a significant role in the life of the destination. They can strengthen the positive reputation and the external image of the destination. A successful event is suitable for the inclusion of settlements into the mainstream of tourism, as a result of which the settlement may develop by the multiplier effects of tourism. It increases not only the number of tourist but also their expenditure. It has positive effects on the infrastructure and on the public administration too. As result the destination can be more attractive to the tourists (Getz 2013). We should not underestimate the impacts of the events on local communities, the internal cohesion of the city, either. Jaeger and Mykletun (2013) argued that events with smaller size have a greater acceptance among local citizens. Consequently, local citizens attend in a greater amount to these type of events as a result the bond between them deepen and the preservation of local traditions is more likely. An event built on local traditions and targeting certain local motivational groups can result in the retention and strengthening of the community made by the respective target group, and so can play important role in city marketing. According Quinn (2013) the cultural festivals (e.g. artistic) have further advantages, besides tourists they can draw cultural investors and creative workers to the city as well. Events organized around specific themes or places can invigorate the life of forgotten parts of the city.

Within the framework of the European Capital of Culture project, cities, during their years, demonstrate their cultural values through a series of events. In addition to this they are also given a possibility for the development of their cultural infrastructure. In Pécs, besides programmes a great emphasis was laid on the development of infrastructure,

which did not only concern buildings but also the main public squares of the city. Especially these squares and locations were used as the venues of different festivals and events, and so their success and rate of utilisation is closely correlated to the ECOC programme. For the long-term sustainability and success, it is indispensable that people should use these facilities. An important role in this was played by the ECOC, serving as a sort of educational agent. It educated people to use the old and the newly established cultural spaces and locations of the city. It evoked the demand of the local inhabitants for such events (implemented within the framework of the ECOC).

The basic aim of our ECOC research is to look at what themes and scope festivals closely related to cultural tourism have, who their target groups are and what seasonality features they show in a former European Capital of Culture, and the other candidate cities in Hungary. We also want to compare and evaluate the individual features in order to draft an ECOC profile.

## **METHODS**

During the research we applied several methods, in order to base the findings of our research on information from as broad a circle as possible. Methods applied include the examination of the relevant academic literature as well as the analysis and assessment of statistical data relevant for the topic. The festivals and events of the selected cities were collected from several sources in order to get information on the full range of their supply. In the first round we collected and systematised data from information on festivals available on the Internet, on the basis of national and local programme recommendations. The database gained this way was supplemented by the data received directly from the tourism management organisations of the cities analysed: the TourInform offices. The tourism management organisations of the cities were helpful to give us the lists of the events that play a dominant role in the lives of the respective cities. Another method applied was the analysis of the thematic programme recommendation leaflets published by the cities. Our existing contacts to the tourism management organisations allowed us to control the judgement of the scope and composition of guests of the respective festivals.

We have to raise attention on the difficulties of the methodology regarding this topic. In Hungary there is not any connected or unified system which deal with the organization, promotion and effects of the festivals despite the fact that these events are varied and they are strongly connected to the culture. Any community, non-governmental organization, economical organization or institution can organize festivals after some formal registration. Usually they do not make qualitative data collection about the turnover of the festivals therefore it is not possible to analyse festivals from the point of qualitative view. In the absence of these databases the research relies on a narrow circle of information. We tried to make a festival analyzation concerning the evaluation system of attractions based on value scoring.

## DEFINITION AND CATEGORISATION OF FESTIVALS

Festivals have no universally accepted definition; different sources of the literature define this kind of events on different grounds. The Hungarian Festival Association (Márta 2008) says that “...festivals are series of cultural, arts, gastronomy, sport or other events – organised around one topic or more, regularly held in one location or more, with a preliminary announced programme – whose objectives are to give the audience high quality, value mediating quality knowledge and at the same time to offer entertaining leisure time experience to the community”.

On the basis of this “definition” we categorised several events into the festival offer of the selected cities that are not open-air festivals in the classical sense, motivating masses of people, but have a smaller magnitude, still they are important in the life of the respective city. In our approach the festival offers of the cities do not include sport events that are organised regularly as parts of sport championships (national championship of a sport branch). The primary reason for this is that we see guests arriving for such events are visitors whose prime motivation is to watch the game and they typically do not use any other programmes or services. These sport events do not satisfy an important criterion of festivals: cultural relevance. Their role in the tourism sector is also limited by the fact that they do not reinforce other services, e.g. accommodations.

Festivals can be put into groups on the basis of their different characteristic features, e.g. the scope of their attraction and the frequency of their occurrence (Getz 1991; Getz 2008), the topic of the event (Hunyadi et al. 2006), and also by genres (Márta 2008; Sulyok and Sziva 2009). The special significance of the festivals lies in their favourable impact on the local economy by the extra demand appearing in shopping facilities and commercial accommodations (Frey 1994). They intensify the cultural life of the settlement serving as location, they strengthen the image of the respective settlement as seen by the guests, and they also reinforce the ties of the local inhabitant to their settlements (Leenders 2010). Another positive return of festivals is the improvement of the satisfaction of visitors by the increase of the touristic attraction, and this satisfaction as a positive feedback will further reinforce touristic attraction (Grappi and Montanari 2011). The visitors of the cities explore the cultural life intensively so they use services and they attend on cultural events while these events are made not primarily for tourists (Ashworth and Page 2011).

In 2008 the Hungarian Festival Association classified festivals into four categories (Márta 2008):

- Art festivals,
- Purely amateur arts competitions,
- Gastronomy festivals
- Other, non-art festivals.

In 2014 the Registration Programme was changed, as a result of which festivals are now classified not into 4 but 12 categories. As a result of this change, categories created on the basis of different genres give much more precise information on the respective event. The 12 categories are as follows (Ásványi and Márta 2016):

- |                   |                           |   |
|-------------------|---------------------------|---|
| - Arts            | - Community               | - Technique/achievements/<br>inventions |
| - Folklore        | - History/traditions      |   |
| - Gastro          | - Amateur arts            | - Hungaricum                            |
| - Children/family | - Sports/lifestyle/health | - Other                                 |
| - Youth           |                           |   |

In our opinion one problem with this categorisation is that sometimes genre categories are too broad (e.g. arts). Also, the basis of this categorisation is not only genres: it contains types of festivals defined on the basis of their target groups, which makes it difficult to identify festivals and events and to classify them into groups. For an optimum grouping it is necessary to have categories created on the basis of one single approach. Taking this into consideration, the attraction, i.e. the core of the supply of the event was examined and the new categorisation is built on a thematic breakdown. Categories were defined in a way that the total supply of festivals can be categorised and we also get further information on the focal points of the festival and event supply offer of the respective cities.

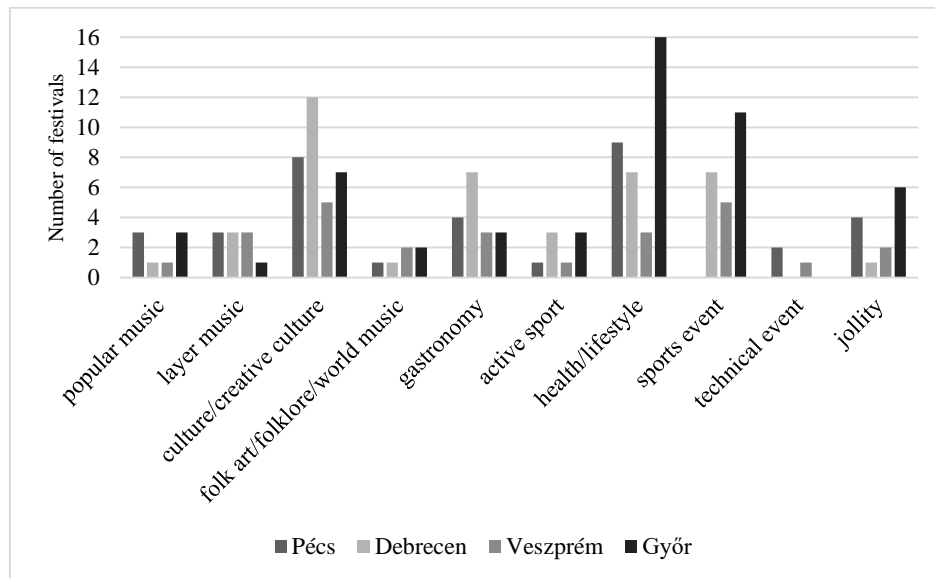
- Popular music: events that are related to popular music, to all its diverse genres and have a mass demand.
- Layer music: events that evoke the interest of a narrower layer and are held in the genre of classical music (e.g. jazz, operetta, opera, church music, symphonic music etc.).
- Culture/creative culture: introduction of pieces of art related to contemporary artists, fine art that creates objects. This is the most diverse category that includes events related to theatre and dance, films, video and photo art, books and literature, fine and applied arts, and also amateur arts.
- Folk art/folklore/world music: events primarily related to folk traditions and handicrafts, and also world music in close correlation with folk music.
- Gastronomy: events in whose themes cooking meals, and the demonstration and tasting of foods are of central importance. They can be organised not only about foods but also beverages (wine, beer, pálinka).
- Active sport: people visiting this kind of events are active participants in the programmes. Such programmes include amateur sport competitions and mass sport events.
- Health/lifestyle: events with programmes organised in the first place around the health and way of life of participants. This category includes different knowledge dissemination and popularisation (e.g. local products) events, as their educational character is a great contribution to the shaping of the lifestyle of participants.
- Sports event: classical examples of passive sport tourism, participants are typically spectators of non-regular combats by professional sportsmen.
- Technical event: focus is on different technical devices and their demonstration, letting the audience get to know them: day of airplanes, car show, and car and motorbike race.
- Jollity: they are diverse open-air cultural programmes related to special days (e.g. New Year's Eve, 1 May), with catering and community participation. They target mixed audiences and are suitable for the motivation of masses.

## RESULTS

### Festival offer of Pécs, Debrecen, Veszprém and Győr

Events with different themes and scope play an important role in the tourism supply of the cities selected for our paper. Figure 2 demonstrates that in 2017 Pécs had 35, Debrecen 42, Veszprém 26 and Győr 52 festivals. The divergent numbers of events may not only be related to the number of population in the respective settlements but also to their economic positions and the activity of local cultural life. On the whole we can say that eight out of the ten categories can be found in each city. The primary reason for this is that each city functions as regional centres in the culture, consequently the number of entertainment facilities in them is higher than in other, minor towns. In Pécs it is sport events, in Debrecen and Győr technical events on which no festivals were organised.

Figure 2: Number of the festivals by categories



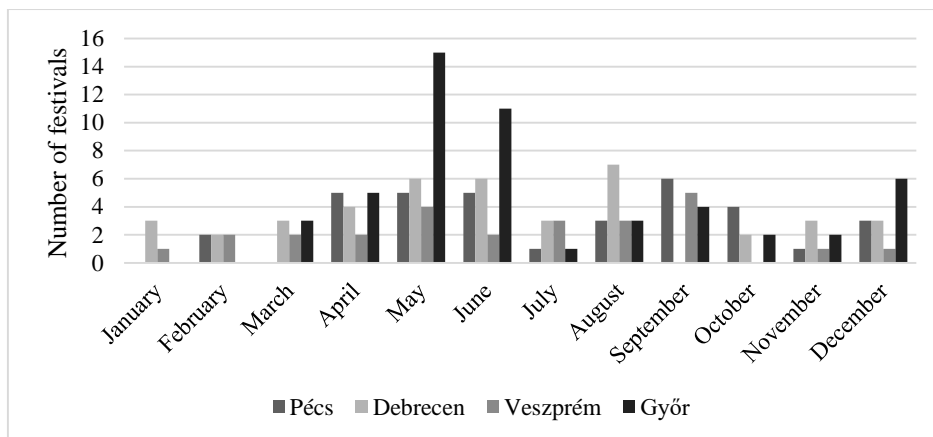
Source: Based on our sources own editing

The four cities organised the same number of festivals on popular and layer music. If we look at their proportions from the total of festivals, the share of music-related festivals was 18% of all festivals in Pécs, 9% in Debrecen, 16% in Veszprém and 8% in Győr. Culture and creative culture is a very complex group, which makes it one of the largest groups in each of the four cities. In Pécs and Debrecen more than one-fifth of all events are in this category (23% and 29%, respectively), their proportion is 19% in Veszprém and only 13% in Győr. Habits and events organised around the topic of gastronomy have long traditions in Hungary. Gastronomy related festivals were held in the largest number in Debrecen, seven of them, which was 17% of the total supply of festivals in the city. Debrecen has several traditions related to foods and beverages, for the cherishing of which traditions these events are excellent opportunities. The gastronomy festivals of

Pécs, Veszprém and Győr do not have central positions in the supply of these cities. As regards the proportion of events organised in the health/lifestyle category, it is striking that in Pécs (26%) and Győr (31%) they have central roles. The other two cities have fewer events in this category. Sport events were organised in all cities except Pécs, although their numbers are quite different, their proportions are similar: Debrecen 17% (7 festivals), Veszprém 19% (5 festivals) and Győr 21% (11 festivals). Jollities are usually held in order to satisfy the needs of the local inhabitants. These events make organic parts of the supply of each of the four cities, but their number and proportion is much higher in Pécs and Győr (11% and 12%, respectively) than in the other two cities.

Figure 3 demonstrates that the most popular time for organising such events is May and June. Of all festivals organised in these two months, almost half of them was held in Győr, the main reason for which being the large number of events organised around Children's Day and also the fact that a summering event was also organised, in the category of jollities. The second time of the year most abundant in festivals is August and September. If we look at this issue by cities, in Pécs it is September, in Debrecen August, in Veszprém also September and in Győr it is May when the largest number of festivals were held.

Figure 3: **The distribution of festivals during the year**

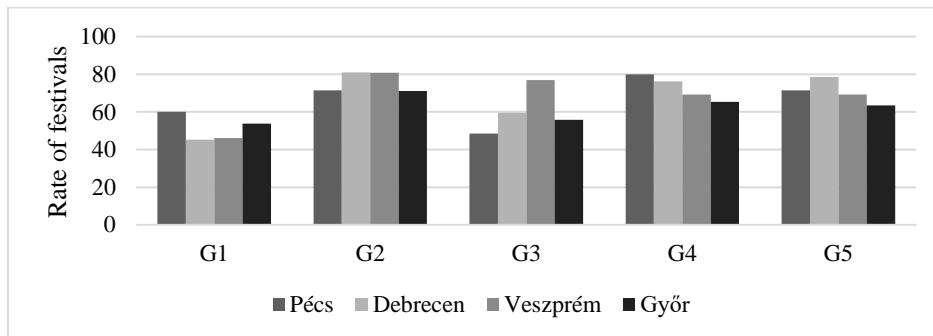


Source: Based on our sources own editing

In Swarbrooke's opinion (1995) one of the methods for the segmentation of tourism demand on the basis of demography is the application of the family life cycle model. The model also takes into consideration age, in addition to family status. Different groups, coming from their different needs and preferences, show different interests in attractions as well. Taking these factors and the contents of festivals into consideration we can define which target groups will be primarily motivated by the attractions (festivals and events). On the basis of the family life cycle model we distinguished five target groups: families with small children (G1), companies of friends (G2), hobby/professional groups (G3), youth (G4) and couples (G5). Figure 4 shows how many per cent of the festival target the respective target groups, i.e. what are the target groups the satisfaction of whose demand has a priority in the festival tourism of the respective cities.



Figure 4: The rate of festivals regarding the target groups



Source: Based on our sources own editing

Most of the festivals examined have a diverse offer, one of the consequences of which is that in several cases all five pre-determined target groups are concerned by these events. The differences that can be seen are mostly due to the festivals designed in order to meet the demand of specific target groups, e.g. the events targeting children of different ages or even more so hobby/professional groups. The largest number of festivals targeting families with small children are organised in Pécs, 60% of the events in this city (21) target this age group. Addressing the youth may be one of the keys to success in the long-term sustainability of the events, because, if they have good experiences at these events, they are more likely to return in the future to the festivals formerly visited. This is proved by the fact that each city places great emphasis on this target group, both their proportion and number are dominant. As regards proportions, it was Pécs to organise most events in this category (80%), as regards numbers, Debrecen and Győr lead, with 33 such programmes each in 2017.

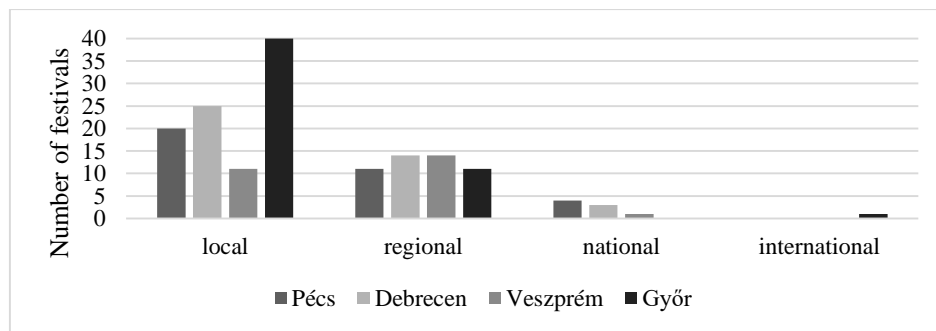
Another way of the categorisation of festivals is grouping by scope. The scope of touristic attractions (festivals on this case) can be defined by different aspects. In this research we defined the scope of the events using the aspects elaborated by Aubert et al. (2007) and Aubert et al. (2010). The categorisation of the attractions was done in accordance with the methodology applied for the first (and until now last) national survey of attractions made in Hungary (Nemes and Kozma 1998). The evaluation system of attractions based on value scoring, supplemented in 2010 (Aubert et al. 2010) ranges from local through regional attraction to national and international attraction. Attractions, in our case festivals, of local relevance and attraction can be given 1 point or 2, regional ones can be given 3 or 4, depending on their scope. National festivals can be given 5 or 6 points, while those with international attraction can have as many as 7 or 8. Global attractions can be given 9 points. This latter category can only include events with outstandingly high attraction, like e.g. Formula One Hungarian Grand Prix.

Festivals held in the four cities examined were classified into the above categories, based on their programmes, clientele and feedbacks on the internet. Festivals in the offer of the analysed cities are usually in the categories of events with local, regional or national scope. There was only one with international attraction, in Győr in 2017. As regards the scoring of the value of the attractions, we used the lower points in each category: festivals

considered as ones with local attraction were given 1 point, regional ones 3 had points, ones with national scope 5 points, and those with international scope 7 points.

In each city, festivals with local scope play an important role. These events are mostly designed to satisfy the demand of the inhabitants of the cities and their agglomerations; their role in tourism is negligible. It is especially those festivals that have a significant impact on tourism which have regional or larger scope. Figure 5 demonstrates that the largest number of festivals (40) with local scope was organised in Győr, they made more than three-quarters of the total festival offer of the city.

Figure 5: **The number of festivals by their scopes**

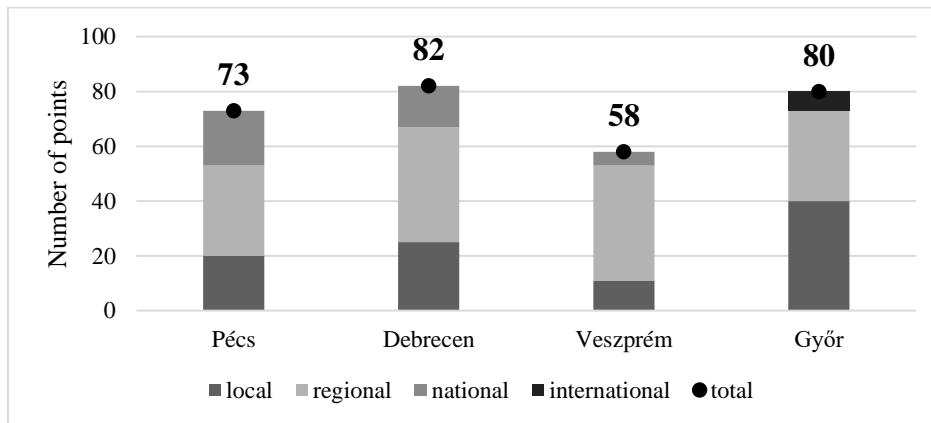


Source: Based on our sources own editing

The number of festivals with real impact on tourism is 15 both in Pécs and Veszprém 15, 17 in Debrecen and only 12 in Győr. Festivals with regional scope make an important part of the tourism of the respective cities, but real significant touristic role is played by festivals with national scope. Events with national scope are the ones that generate in themselves such a volume of tourism that the image of the city can be built on them. Győr has no festival with national scope, but we have to mention the European Youth Olympic Festival with its international scope: Győr was the host city of this event in 2017.

In order to examine the role of festivals in tourism, we scored them using the attraction scoring system described above. The findings of this differentiation are demonstrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Total festival points by the scope of the festivals



Source: Based on our sources own editing

Festivals with local scope, despite their large number, only make a limited contribution to tourism. It is clearly seen that the regional scope events of the cities are the ones that generate the most significant volume of tourism.

## CONCLUSIONS

The most prominent role that festivals play in the supply of the analysed cities is in the health/lifestyle category, the primary reason being the efforts of these regional centres to satisfy the needs of their inhabitants. The second focal point is culture/creative culture, as the existing cultural infrastructure and the cultural consumption habits allow the implementation of such events.

The majority of the festivals and other events examined were implemented in open-air venues, which makes it obvious why organisers preferred early summer and early autumn dates. In the festival supply of the autumn period Pécs shows outstanding performance, organising more festivals than its competitors, due to its location in a wine producing area.

Adapting to the trends of visiting festivals and also taking the habits of consumer society into consideration, most of the festivals were organised for those (companies of friends, youth and couples) whose motivations and discretionary incomes allowed visiting festivals. As regards the target groups of the festivals in the respective cities, no major differences could be seen; organisers planned and implemented events with a broad range of supply and complex programme in each of the cities.

The touristic role of the local scope festivals, organised primarily for the local inhabitants, is low for the time being. It is important to note, however, that the development of the supply and promotion of an event like this bears the possibility of increasing their scope to regional level, which will be an attraction for tourists. From an

another point of view, these festivals develop the environment of cultural life by the mobilization of local people which is necessary to create events with touristic scope and wider attraction. Most of the events already active in festival tourism have a regional scope, whereas the number of festivals with national and international scope lags far behind the other categories – still, these festival register the largest volumes of visitors.

The thematic composition and seasonal breakdown of the festivals of the cities applying for the ECOC title and of Pécs, having already experienced an ECOC programme year, show no major individual characteristics, and the target groups are quite similar as well. It is clear, on the other hand, that a scoring by the aspect of the scope of the festivals reveals significant differences among the four cities. Győr and Debrecen applying for the ECOC title are the leaders with their scores at around 80 points. Pécs has a negligible lag with its 73 points, whereas only 58 points and the low number of events with national scope in Veszprém indicate that this city, as the third applicant for the ECOC title, has still much to develop in this segment of supply.

The experiences of ECOC year of Pécs clearly showed that the motivation of local citizens is crucial for the cultural urban development (Szijártó 2011; Koltai 2015). The festivals which attract local people are one of the good methods to mobilize local target groups. The events of cities which mobilize local people help to strengthen the internal cohesion of the city and thanks to this local people will welcome the year of the ECOC with joy and after the events they are likely to use the cultural infra- and superstructure.

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