



A NEW ELEMENT OF TOURISM IN NORTH-EASTERN PART OF HUNGARY – STEPS TO ATTRACT JEWISH PILGRIMS TO TOKAJ-HEGYALJA REGION

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Abstract

Religious tourism can be considered as one of the defining sectors of tourism, which is playing an increasingly important role in today's economic and social life. Memories of the Jewish religion, one of the dominant religions on Earth, can be found on several continents and have attracted an increasing number of tourists as tourist attractions in recent decades. In the spirit of the above, the aim of our study is to present the situation of Jewish tourism in one of the specific regions of Hungary, in the Tokaj-Hegyalja region, which is still known today mainly through other tourist attractions (e.g. wine tourism). To summarize the results, it can be said that there are very significant architectural features of Jewish tourism in the region (e.g. synagogues, tombs), and these have recently attracted an increasing number of visitors to the region. At the same time, local actors (municipalities, economic enterprises) have only a limited recognition of the opportunities offered by tourism (for example, the majority of investments financed by the European Union, state and foreign sources), the exploitation of which requires further steps and much more conscious intervention.


Key words

Jewish tourism, heritage products, wonder rabbi, Tokaj-Hegyalja region.


INTRODUCTION

Religion has played an important role in people's lives for a long time, and as a result, it is not surprising that travels related to religion, as a form of tourism (e.g. visiting oracles and shrines) has existed since the Antiquity, and in fact, they were among the first forms of tourism ever. From a geographical point of view, Judaism occupies a very special position among the major religions of the world: during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, its believers were forced to flee from their core area in Palestine, and after a long migration, religious communities were established and important religious structures were built in the countries of Europe, Africa and North

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America. World War II triggered a new migration, and as a result, Israel can now be considered as the most important centre of the religion. At the same time, the traditions and buildings of the past centuries can be found in many countries of the world and especially in Europe, and they are important destination for tourists following Judaism. In the spirit of the above, the aim of this paper is to present the connection of the Tokaj-Hegyalja region (Fig. 1), located in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, in the north-eastern part of Hungary, and answer the following questions:

- what is the relationship between Jewish tourism and local actors (e.g. municipalities): how well was the importance of Jewish tourism recognized and from what source were the most important investments financed?
- what are the most important characteristics of Jewish tourists visiting the region
- what are the most important effects of Jewish tourism in the region

The importance of the topic is indicated by the fact that while the region is primarily known for its wines (Bujdosó et al., 2019), it is also one of the main centres of Hasidic pilgrimages not only in Hungary but also around the world.

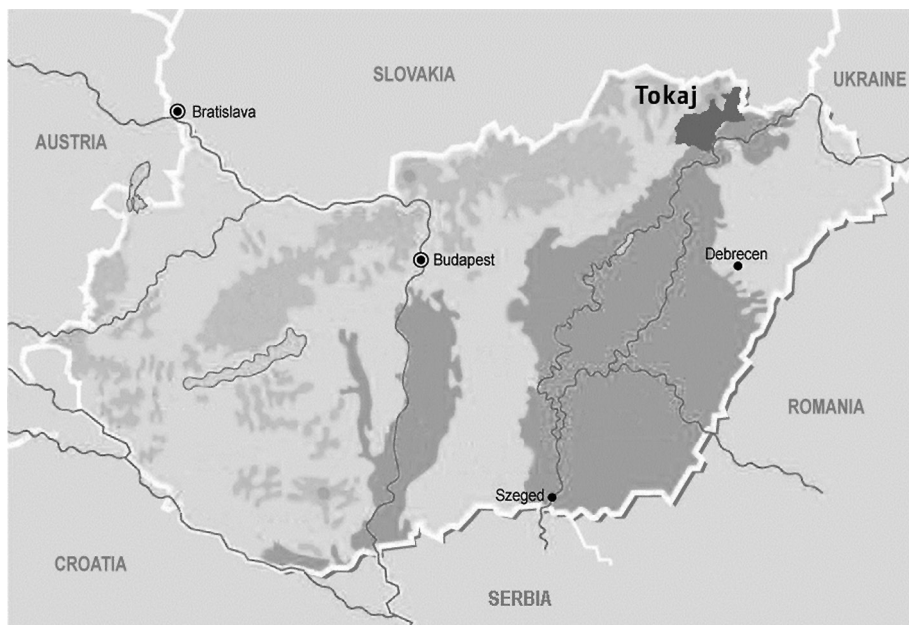


Fig. 1

Location of Tokaj-Hegyalja region in Hungary

Source: own work



The paper fundamentally consists of three larger units. After a review of the literature of religious tourism, it will outline the history of Judaism in the region and the special position of Tokaj-Hegyalja. The third major unit deals with the steps taken to welcome Jewish tourism in the region, and it also analyses its socio-economic impacts.

Even though, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, just like all other branches of tourism, religious tourism in the region also declined significantly in 2020, from the point of view of the future, it is still important to draw some conclusions based on the experience gained so far.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Travelling for religious reasons, or religious tourism, has a very notable history (Chakrabarty and Sadhukhan, 2020). Places and objects endowed with various supernatural powers attracted significant masses already in the prehistoric era (e.g. Stonehedge), but the first boom of religious tourism occurred in the Antiquity (Rinschede, 1992; Olsen and Timothy, 2006). In the Middle Ages, the holy places of Christianity, Judaism and the Islam attracted a large number of pilgrims (initially to the Holy Land and Rome, later also to Santiago de Compostela and after the appearance of the cult of relics to places like Aachen, Assisi, Cologne, etc.). During the Baroque period, in the era of the Counter-Reformation, there was a revival of pilgrimages and more frequent visits to religious sites, which was followed by a significant decline during the Enlightenment period. At the same time, the 19th and 20th centuries brought a new boom, which also continued over the last decade: the UNWTO estimates that nearly one-third of the 1.4 billion people involved in international tourism in 2018 travelled for religious purposes.

In terms of the definition of religious tourism, there are basically two approaches (e.g. Griffin and Raj, 2017; Hvizdová, 2018; Sulyok and Mártonné-Máthé, 2014; Varga, 2011). According to the narrower interpretation, religious tourism involves trips linked to practicing a religion, and those participating in it wish to exercise, live, or strengthen their faith. By contrast, more recently, increasing attention has been given to a broader approach to religious tourism, according to which religious tourism also includes the cases where the intention of travellers is to visit religious buildings or events as cultural attractions.

We can distinguish between various types of religious tourism. Some of the researchers (e.g. Rinschede, 1992) have focused on the duration of the trip, distinguishing between short-term and long-term religious tourism. The former aims to visit a local or regional religious centre, attend a religious festival or conference, or visit a church. In the latter case, the visit to religious centres may take several days or weeks, and the journey is not limited to religious sites of national or international importance, but also includes other national or international religious centres.



The other approach (e.g. McGettigan, 2003; McKelvie, 2005) focuses on the force of attraction serving as the basis of religious tourism, and distinguishes between three types, which are also interconnected to a certain level. The best-known among these, also having the longest history, are pilgrimages undertaken for the most part by believers (pl. Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Čábyová, 2016; Kim et al., 2020; Krogmann et al., 2017; Nompumelelo, 2020; Pasternák and Tomas, 2018; Tőzsér, 2020), during which the visit to the holy place may be based on the intention of finding spiritual peace or replenishment, fulfilling a requirement of a given religion (e.g. islam) (Arjana, 2017; Luz, 2020), or the belief in healing as a result of the pilgrimage (Goldingay et al., 2014; Talbot, 2002). The second type consists of attending various religious events (e.g. a service by a prominent ecclesiastical personality, International Eucharistic Congress of Catholic Church), in which it is also mainly followers of a faith that are mostly involved (e.g. Cerutti and Piva, 2015; Sánchez et al., 2017). Finally, visiting major sites of worship (e.g. churches, cathedrals, shrines) not primarily for religious purposes, but rather for their architectural and cultural historical values is related to the broader definition of religious tourism, the which the proportion of visitors not motivated by religious reasons is also significant (Buchrieser, 2019; Irimiás and Michalkó, 2013; Kozma, 2014; Navajas-Romero et al., 2020).

For various reasons, tourism related to the Judaism occupies a special place within religious tourism. Firstly, we should consider the history of Jews: after their migration/exodus from their ancient land in Palestine in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, they settled in various countries in Europe and Africa (their presence was particularly strong in the Eastern part of Europe from the 17th century), and created a variety of religious buildings (synagogues, cemeteries, bath houses). However, as a result of the events of the 20th century (the Holocaust and the subsequent large-scale immigration to Israel), these buildings have often lost their function and deteriorated. Secondly, in some Jewish communities, there is a very strong attachment to the past, as a result of which, from the 1960s and 70s, the intention of rediscovering former places of habitation and preserving the memories there has been on the increase. Thirdly, Jewish communities have a larger proportion of higher income layers, and therefore the financial conditions for travelling as well as for repairing for these deteriorating buildings also in place.

As a result of the above, three destination areas of tourism related to Judaism can be fundamentally separated (Collins-Kreiner and Luz, 2017). Firstly, religious monuments in Israel represent very significant attraction (e.g. Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Ioannides and Ioannides, 2006; Luz and Collins-Kreiner, 2015), which, for a long time, had only served as motivation for people of the Jewish faith to travel, for whom it provides an opportunity to discover their past and traditions. However, in recent decades, there has been a tendency that the architectural works concerned



have also motivated a large number of travellers to Israel who are not believers of Jewish faith. The second main target area consists of the former concentration camps (e.g. Auschwitz) that were the main scenes of the extermination of Jews during World War II, and today function as memorial sites and museums, calling attention to this shameful historical act (Griffiths, 2019; Thurnell-Read, 2009).

Thirdly, a significant number of tourists are also attracted to areas that have been important places of habitation for Jews in the past. In the 20th century, as a result of the events previously outlined, the number of Jews living there has significantly decreased, but various mementoes of their lives – albeit often in a deteriorated state – have remained. Of course, buildings (e.g. synagogues) in larger cities have the biggest force of attraction (Corsale and Vuytsyk, 2018; Fenyvesi et al., 2020; Gaižutytė-Filipavičienė, 2020; Ioannides and Ioannides, 2002; Krakover, 2013; Krakover, 2017; Zammit, 2020), in the case of which we can distinguish between two main target groups with respect to tourism. One of these groups are people of Jewish religion who visit the given settlement partly because it played a role in the lives of their families (e.g. their parents or grandparents lived there) and partly for religious reasons (the intention to find spiritual peace or strength there). In recent decades, however, due to the growing importance of heritage tourism, the use of the buildings concerned as monuments and attractions has received more emphasis, and in this sense, the aim is to also attract tourists less interested in religion *per se*, which is often achieved by way of various cultural events organized there.

In addition to the larger towns, the increasing popularity of Jewish monuments in smaller settlements has also been observed in recent times (Marchenko, 2018; Makowiecka et al., 2015; Švedova, 2018). At the same time, in such cases, the renovations were primarily financed by various Jewish organisations, and the majority of the visitors are also people of the Jewish faith.

DATA AND METHODS

In the course of the research project, a variety of methods have been used. The secondary research consisted of studying the relevant international and Hungarian literature (in the framework of which, the most important features of Jewish tourism, as well as the historical role of Jews in the region were explored), and we also analysed the various documents related to the development of the region from the point of view of Jewish tourism. One of the foundations of the primary research was a questionnaire-based survey among Jewish tourists in 2018 and 2019 (the survey took place in three settlements of outstanding importance for Jewish tourism, Mád, Sátoraljaújhely and Bodrogkeresztúr, and covered a total of 345 Jewish tourists, who visited the religious monuments), in the course which we examined the general characteristics of the travels, as well as the tourism services used dur-



ing those travels. In addition, a prominence investigation was conducted with the participation of Slomó Köves, the executive rabbi of EMIH Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH), Mariann Frank, the organizer of “Footsteps of the Wonder Rabbis”, the mayors of Bodrogkeresztúr, Olaszliszka, és Sátoraljaújhely, as well as Kálmánovits Miklós the president of Tokaj Orthodox Community. Besides, we relied on the data provided by the Central Statistical Office of Hungary and the website „palyazat.gov.hu”, which publishes the results of the European Union tenders.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The History of the Jewry of Tokaj-Hegyalja

From the 18th century onward, Jews arrived in several waves in Tokaj-Hegyalja from Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Galicia. Some of the Jews arriving in the area were poor, impecunious people, peddlers who travelled to the settlements and sold various goods. The wealthier merchants commissioned peddlers to sell their goods. In the 18th century, in terms of business activities, distilling pálinka (Hungarian fruit spirit) and brewing beer, as well as activities related to viniculture and viticulture also played an important role among Jewish enterprises (Csorba, 2017).

The increase in the Jewish population (by the middle of the 19th century, the number of Jews had reached 15,000 people) was accompanied by the appearance of buildings related to Judaism. Cemeteries were established first, and later, when there were at least 3 or 4 families on a settlement, a ritual bathhouse (mikveh) was also built. In places with ten or more families, they typically built houses of worship (súl), and later also synagogues. By the second half of the 1800s, in the case settlements with a large proportion of Jews, it was also a natural next step that they also built, in addition to the synagogues and houses of prayer, primary schools and yeshivas (educational institutions after primary schools), which played not only educational but also cultural roles.

The roots of the Hasidic movement, which is of outstanding importance from the point of view of today's Jewish tourism in the region also emerged in 18th century. Hasidism originated in Eastern Europe, and the term Hasid comes from the Hebrew word *chesed* meaning “practising love”. The leaders of the new Jewish movement were called tzadiks or rebbes. The meaning of the word tzadik is “*righteous one*”, and it was used for men that the Jewish communities considered their spiritual and moral leaders. According to historical records, there were four rabbis in Tokaj-Hegyalja, who faithfully proclaimed and followed the teachings, and they were also buried on the settlements of the region after their death (Bodrogkeresztúr - Reb Sájele, Olaszliszka - Friedmann Cvi Hersele, Sátoraljaújhely - Teitelbaum Mózes, Mád - Winkler Mordháj). Their activities were very highly valued by the public, and they became religious leaders referred to as “wonder rabbis”. Thanks to their teachings and assistance, they gained great respect, and not only Jews



but also the Christian residents asked for their help. According to Hasidic teaching, a wonder rabbi has a direct connection with the Eternal One, as a result of which Hasidic Jews believe that wonder rabbis can help – even long after their death, in response to a prayer or a request left there on a piece of paper – so that they can make the right decisions.

The horrors of World War II, however, also affected the Jews of Tokaj-Hegyalja, and the Jewish population inhabitants either fled or were taken away. The majority of the Jews in the area immigrated to Canada, the United States or Israel (Zelenák, 1990). The return of Jews who formerly lived on the settlements started in the 1970s. They came to Tokaj-Hegyalja with the aim of visiting their old contacts and former homes, and before 1989, an average of 4,000 Jewish religious tourists arrived in the area (Gleszer, 2006).

Role of the Jewish tourism in regional and local policy

In recent decades, several strategies and programmes have been developed that strive to outline the possibilities of development of Tokaj-Hegyalja and its wider region, as well as the possible breakout points. Looking at the relevant documents from the point of view of Jewish tourism, it can be concluded that for a long time “higher-level” materials did not address this issue at all: the documents titled “Northern Hungary Region Tourism Development Strategy 2007-2013” (accepted in 2006), “Northern Hungary Operational Programme 2007-2013” (accepted in 2007), “Regional Development Concept of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County” (accepted in 1999), “Situation Assessment and Development Concept for the period 2011-2013” (accepted in 2011), or “Regional Development Concept of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county 2014-2020” (accepted in 2014) did not mention Jewish tourism either in the parts assessing the existing situation or in the chapters on development strategy. In all likelihood, what is in the background of the above situation is that the writers of these documents considered wine tourism, active tourism and other branches of cultural tourism (e.g. visit of fortresses and castles) as having such forces of attraction that could significantly contribute to bringing tourists to the region.

In the case of small regions situated between county and settlement levels, a slightly more favourable situation can be observed: two of the development concepts of the four regions comprising Tokaj-Hegyalja in the 2000s include attractions related to the Jewish heritage (Tokaj small region: Tarcál és Tokaj – synagogue and Jewish cemetery, Szerencs small region: Mád: synagogue); however, tourism related to Jewish values is not mentioned among the development priorities related to tourism at all. (The renovation of the synagogue in Tokaj is the sole exception, but even here it is only referred to as a cultural venue.) The situation is also similar in the application of the Tokaj wine region for the title of UNESCO World



Heritage Site, in which the synagogues and other religious buildings in Tarcal and Mád are listed among the assets of the region.

An important element from the point of view of settlements is that in recent times only the towns had to develop an independent development concept (2007-2013: Integrated Urban Development Concept, 2014-2020: Integrated Settlement Development Concept). An analysis of the documents of the three towns of the region (Sátoraljaújhely, Tokaj, Sárospatak) reveals that a minimal role of Jewish tourism appears in case of Tokaj and Sárospatak: even though these documents mention the Jewish cemetery and synagogue in Tokaj and the ritual bathhouse in Sárospatak, the strategy parts of these documents do not address this topic any further. This is probably due to the fact that the two settlements concerned fundamentally focused on other areas related to tourism development. The only exception is Sátoraljaújhely, where the possibility of exploiting tourism linked to the tomb of the wonder rabbi already appears in the strategy prepared in 2015.

In the spirit of the above, it is hardly surprising that for a long time the local governments of the region devoted very little attention and financial resources to the renovation of the architectural monuments related to the Jews (their modest financial opportunities of the settlements also played a role in this), which means a greater reliance on the donations of the descendants and other grants from outside. The first major investment was the renovation of the synagogue in Mád (which took place between 2000 and 2004, resulting in this facility functioning as a cultural centre), the costs of which were mainly provided by the Hungarian state and the Jewish Heritage programme of the World Monuments Fund (the restoration received a Europa Nostra award). The municipality also took part in the renovation of the synagogue in Tokaj (the project was completed in 2006, with 90% of the cost of about HUF 400 million provided by the European Union and the rest of the funding by the local government); at the same time, the resulting facility is not linked to the Jewish religion, but operates as a cultural and conference centre. In Bodrogkeresztúr, the descendants of the wonder rabbi bought and renovated the birthplace of their ancestor, which became one of the centres of Jewish tourism.

In addition to further developments, the project titled "Journey to the Jewish heritage of Northern Hungary" (ÉMOP-2.1.1/B-12-2012-0031), realized between 2014 and 2016 under the leadership of EMIH, aimed at placing the elements of the Jewish heritage into a system, which received a grant of HUF 460 million from the European Union. As part of this project, the building of the former rabbi's house and yeshiva in Mád was transformed into a museum and a pilgrims' accommodation (due to the growing demands, the latter is expected to be enlarged in the coming years), and a memorial was also created in Olaszliszka by rebuilding one of the walls of the demolished synagogue after excavations of the ruins of the building there (Fig. 2).



On the other hand, a thematic route called “Footsteps of the Wonder Rabbis”, including 10 settlements (Mád – Tarcál – Tokaj – Bodrogkeresztúr – Olaszliszka – Sárospatak – Sátoraljaújhely – Erdőbénye – Abaújszántó – Tállya), was also created, and access to the Jewish heritage on these settlements is provided in various ways (websites, guided tours). With the aim of addressing the accommodation problem described later, a project was completed in 2020 in Sátoraljaújhely, as part of the project titled “The Path of Jewish Heritage in Easter Hungary – A Presentation of Orthodox Jewish Monuments in Sátoraljaújhely” (GINOP-7.1.4-16-2016-00002), in the framework of which the building of a former educational institution was transformed into pilgrims’ accommodation and a museum.



Fig. 2

The Holocaust memorial wall on the site of the former synagogue in the village of Olaszliszka

Source: own photo

Tourism related to Jewish heritage in Tokaj-Hegyalja

As a result of the developments in Tokaj-Hegyalja presented above, a Jewish tourism offering consisting of several elements has been created recently (Fig. 3). Among the most widely available elements of the Jewish heritage are the cemeteries, which can be found in nearly two-thirds of the 27 settlements in the region. Thanks to the hard work done in the recent period, often by volunteers, the cemeteries of 11 settlements (Abaújszántó, Szerencs, Mád, Tállya, Tarcál, Tokaj, Bodrogkeresztúr, Olaszliszka, Sárospatak, Sátoraljaújhely, Erdőbénye) have already been partially mapped (a cadastral database of the graves, complete with GPS data, has been created and made also available online, thereby helping Jewish tourists arriving in search of the graves of their ancestors), and continuous efforts are also made to maintain the condition of these cemeteries; however, in the absence of custodial works, the condition of cemeteries on six settlements (Bekecs, Legyesbénye, Bodrogkisfalud, Rudabányaácska, Szegi, Vámosújfalud, Tolcsva) is deteriorated, they are hard to access and walk around in.

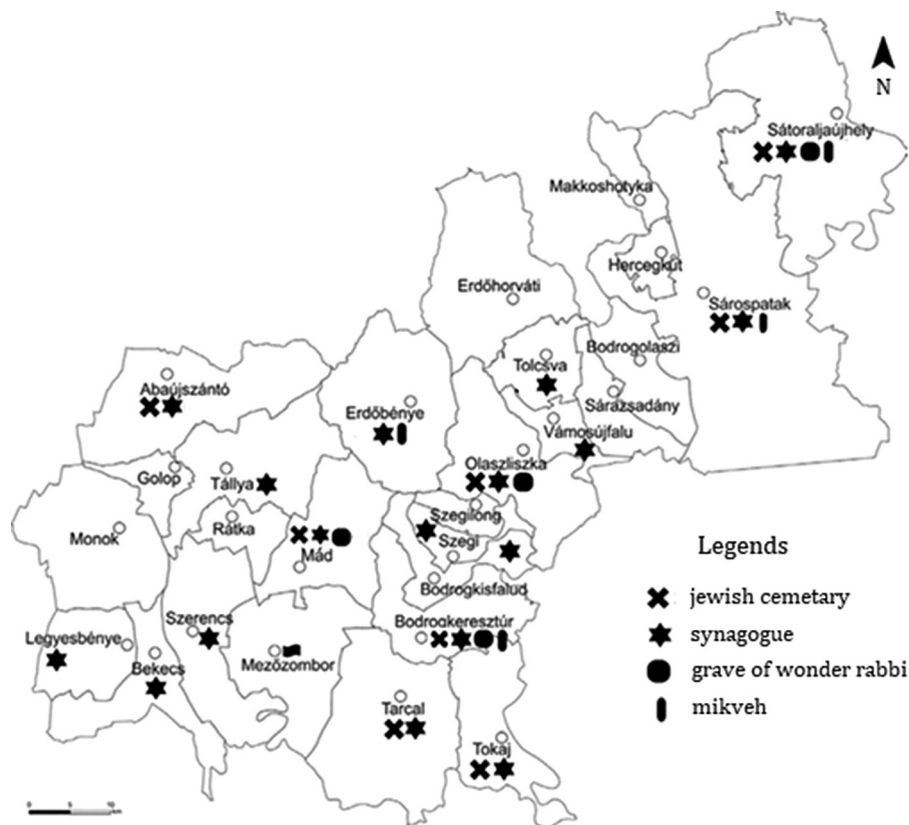


Fig. 3

Existing Jewish architectural monuments in Tokaj-Hegyalja

Source: own work

Among the cemeteries, as destinations of Jewish tourism, an outstanding role is played by those that also contain the tombs of some of the wonder rabbis (Bodrogkeresztúr – Reb Sájale, Olaszliszka – Friedmann Cvi Hersele, Sátoraljaújhely – Teitelbaum Mózes, Mád – Winkler Mordháj). The renovation of these were started in 2007, largely with the financial support of the descendants, in the framework of which modern electronic security systems were installed, and air-conditioned *ohelim* were built over the tombs.

For the wider public, the most spectacular Jewish architectural monuments are synagogues. Several synagogues were built in settlements with larger Jewish populations during the 18th and 19th centuries (Tab. 1), but during the post-World War II period a large number of them became deteriorated, and some were also demolished. By examining the current situation, we can conclude that the smaller part of the remaining synagogues fulfil cultural functions after their renovations,

**Tab. 1** Jewish architectural monuments located in Tokaj-Hegyalja and their current use

Jewish architectural monuments	settlement	current use
synagogue	Tokaj	renovated, cultural and congress centre
synagogue	Tarcal	renovated, cultural function (exhibition centre)
synagogue	Mád	renovated, cultural function (cultural centre)
synagogue	Abaújszántó	economic function (storage)
synagogue	Sárospatak	economic function (shop)
synagogue	Tállya	demolished
synagogue	Tolcsva	demolished
synagogue	Sátoraljaújhely	demolished economic function (shop)
synagogue	Olaszliszka	demolished (memorial wall)
synagogue	Bodrogkeresztúr	administrative function (office of Aggteleki National Park)
primary school	Tolcsva	educational function (primary school)
primary school	Sátoraljaújhely	economic function (economic development foundation office)
yeshiva	Mád	accommodation
rabbi house	Mád	accommodation
mikveh	Bodrogkeresztúr	renovated, tourist attraction
mikveh	Erdőbénye	renovated, tourist attraction
mikveh	Sátoraljaújhely	renovated, tourist attraction
mikveh	Sárospatak	economic function (shop)

Source: *own collection*

while the majority of them are used for other purposes, with the original religious function not observable in any of these cases. Due to the lack of children who would attend them, the former Jewish primary schools are used for completely different purposes these days, while the majority of *mikvehs* (bath houses) function as tourist attractions. In terms of architectural monuments, the village of Mád plays the most important role among the settlements of the region: the block consisting of the former synagogue, the Rabbi's House and the yeshiva (school providing higher education) have been completely renovated thanks to a European Union grant, and it also serves as the starting and the end point of the thematic tour titled "Footsteps of the Wonder Rabbis".

The attractions associated with the Jewish religion also include programmes that are targeted at non-Jewish people as well. The event called *The Jewish Days of Mád* is a three-day series of events with popular music concerts and religious



ceremonies, where participants also have an opportunity to visit the built and renovated Jewish sites. During the *Kosher Experience Tour*, in addition to seeing the Jewish heritage, it is also possible to sample some kosher food. In the framework of the event titled *Good night, Mád*, held in the Rabbi's House in Mád, visitors can hear presentations on the history of Jews in Tokaj-Hegyalja and are also invited to sample some kosher products (pálinka, wine).

The number of Jewish tourists arriving in the area is difficult to estimate for two reasons. On the one hand, a significant part of the attractions are outdoors, and there are hardly any institutions (e.g. museums) where such data collection could take place. In the course of interviews with the leaders of national Jewish organisations as well as mayors of the settlements in the area (and my personal experience also confirms this), it was mentioned that on some of the holidays (e.g. Shabbat, Yom Kippur, Passover) and on *Jahrzeit* dates (the death anniversaries of wonder rabbis), 5,000 to 7,000, while on other days 50 to 100 Jewish pilgrims arrive in the region, where the main number of Jewish pilgrims from the United States can reach the country, whose total combined number per year may be up to 40-50,000 (the two countries most of them come from are Israel and the United States of America, where there is an increasing tradition of researching family trees and finding one's roots, and there is also an increasing level of consciousness about their heritage).

On the other hand, for the reason to be discussed below, information on accommodation services does not provide adequate data either. Data including sending countries relate only to commercial places of accommodation and do not include other types of accommodation (e.g. pilgrims' accommodations). In addition, the data are only available at district level, and since the Tokaj-Hegyalja region belongs to four administrative districts (Sárospatak, Sátoraljaújhely, Szerencs and Tokaj), with some settlements in these districts being outside the Tokaj-Hegyalja region, certain distortions of the data is due to occur. There is also a problem with the fact that tourists of Jewish religion arrive not only from Israel, but also from other countries, so including them in the survey may also raise problems (in the course of the research, apart from Israel, I examined the data of the United States of America, which both the experts' opinion and my own experience confirms is the most important source country of Jewish tourism). However, the analyses shed light on a number of important facts/processes (Tab 2).

In terms of the number of the guests arriving from the two countries and the number of nights they spent, after the fluctuation in the first half of the 2010s, a very significant increase occurred in the second half of the decade (in all likelihood, the developments presented earlier were in the background of this increase), which greatly exceeded the earlier figures for all foreign guests. Comparing the data of the four administrative districts, the outstanding role of the Tokaj district can be observed (75-80% of the guest nights spent by Israeli and American tourists



in the four districts belong here, while in case of all foreign tourists combined, this proportion is only 25-30%), which is due to the fact that Bodrogkeresztúr, a settlement connected to the wonder rabbi Reb Shayele, can be considered as one of the principal destinations of Jewish tourism to the region).

Tab. 2 Data on commercial accommodation in the four administrative districts comprising Tokaj-Hegyalja in the period 2011 to 2019

	number of guests			number of guests nights		
	A	B	C	A	B	C
2011	205	508	14,192	226	1,544	27,266
2012	42	424	14,557	51	879	31,291
2013	138	281	14,343	215	568	29,889
2014	165	582	19,269	277	961	43,570
2015	77	569	15,384	116	945	30,612
2016	179	750	17,661	293	1,071	39,624
2017	231	1,092	20,184	323	1,751	41,361
2018	527	1,586	22,193	771	2,418	44,508
2019	782	1,862	21,549	953	2,626	40,742

A – guests from Israel, B – guests from United States of America, C – foreign guests

Source: edited by the authors by the data from the Central Statistical Office of Hungary

The third important conclusion can be drawn with respect to the average length of time spent in the region, which is very low (in most years, it is less than 1.5 days for tourists from both Israel and the United States of America), and is also significantly shorter than the average length of time spent by tourists coming to the region from all the other countries (which is around 2 days), and is also shorter than the average length of time tourists from these two countries spend in Hungary (in case of Israel it is usually more than 3, while in case of the USA, it is around 2,5 days). What is behind this phenomenon is related to the characteristic features of the visits of Jewish tourists to the region, which will be discussed in the next unit.

In the course of the questionnaire-based survey, we first examined the general characteristics of the travels of Jewish tourists visiting the region. Most of the respondents have visited Tokaj-Hegyalja several times, and it was their first visit only in case of 14%. In case of the first group, the largest proportion of them spend 2-3 days in the region (50.8%), while in terms of the annual number of visits there was no major difference (51.2% visit once a year, while 48.8% more than once a year). However, with respect to the relationship between the travel characteristics of the two groups, we can draw several important conclusions (Tab. 3). On the one



hand, it can be observed that those visiting for the first time spend more than the average time in the Tokaj-Hegyalja, which is due to the fact that they wish to get to know the region better, as one they are still unfamiliar with.

Tab. 3 Travel characteristics of the tourists surveyed (%)

		first time visitors	returning visitors	total
number of days spent in the region	1 day	14.9	85.1	100.0
	2-3 days	10.7	89.3	100.0
	more days	24.4	75.6	100.0
	total	14.4	86.0	100.0

Source: *own survey*

On the other hand, among those visiting Tokaj-Hegyalja on several occasions (Tab 4), we can identify two larger groups in terms of the characteristics of their visits (as far as differences from the average can be observed). Among those who only spend one day in the region, the proportion of visitors who only come once a year is higher, which means that this probably the group that comes to Tokaj-Hegyalja for the anniversary of one of the wonder rabbis. In the group that also shows significant over-representation compared to the average we can find those who visit more than once a year and spend more than three days: these Jewish tourists are likely to also visit other attractions in the area regularly.

Tab. 4 Travel characteristics of those who are not first-time visitors to Tokaj-Hegyalja (%)

		first time visitors	returning visitors	total
number of days spent in the region	1 day	55.3	44.7	100.0
	2-3 days	50.7	49.3	100.0
	more days	38.7	61.3	100.0
	total	51.2	48.8	100.0

Source: *own survey*

Among the types of accommodation used by the respondents, private accommodations (including pilgrims' accommodations and properties purchased by tour operators) play a prominent role: the proportion of these two is 72.2%, while guesthouses account for 16.7%, and hotels for 11.0% (only the latter two belong to the category of commercial accommodations, which may justify the low figures in Table 2). However, we can observe significant differences between the groups (Tab 5). On the one hand, those arriving for the first time use hotels in a proportion



above the average (this is probably due to the uncertainty caused by the unknown situation), while returning tourists with a certain level of experience have more confidence in private accommodations. On the other hand, tourists who spend more than three days in the region prefer bed and breakfast places and hotels, which are typically higher quality accommodations, as these are more comfortable.

Tab. 5 The characteristics of accommodations used by respondents (%)

		private accommodation	guesthouse	hotel	total
novelty of visit	first-time visitors	60,7	14.3	25.0	100.0
	returning visitors	74.2	17.0	8.8	100.0
number of days	2-3 days	73.8	16.1	10.1	100.0
	more than 3 days	65.9	19.5	14.6	100.0
	total	72.3	16.7	11.0	100.0

Source: own survey

Respondents essentially expressed a positive opinion concerning the quality of the services used: on average, accommodation services received a grade of 4.54 (on a scale of 5), food services a grade of 4.40, traffic and transport a grade of 4.34, and the availability of shops was the only category with a grade below 4. However, substantial differences between groups of respondents could be observed in terms of perception of individual services. In terms of the evaluation of accommodations, the best average grades were given to hotels and guesthouses, while the rating for private accommodations was only 4.46. In terms of the quality of food services and shops, it could be clearly observed that first-time visitors and those spending less time in the region gave higher evaluations (Tab. 6). In our opinion, this is basically

Tab. 6 The perception of food services and shops in different groups of respondents

		quality of food services	quality of shops
novelty of visit	first-time visitors	4.85	4.02
	returning visitors	4.33	3.89
number of days	1 day	4.52	4.07
	2-3 days	4.34	3.86
	more than 3 days	4.27	3.59

Source: own survey



due to two things: on the one hand, those arriving for the first time are still more captivated by the spirit of the place, and are therefore less critical; on the other hand, those who spend longer time (2-3 days or more) can gain more experience and this can lead to a more negative opinion.

The effects of Jewish tourism in Tokaj-Hegyalja

The examination of the effects of Jewish tourism in Tokaj-Hegyalja (including, in particular, the arrival of people of the Jewish faith in the region) is not separate from the characteristics of the given branch of tourism. The arrival of pilgrims is organised to a large extent by American and Israeli travel agencies, who often integrate the other centres of pilgrimage (e.g. Poland – Leżajsk, Ukraine – Uman, Romania – Bixad) in the Central European region into a complex “star-pattern” tour with trips from a central location. The pilgrims who typically arrive to Budapest are transported to the region mainly by companies with their headquarters there, but it can be seen as a favourable change that in recent years already entrepreneurs from the Tokaj-Hegyalja region are involved in this activity. In connection with the problem of transport, parking should also be mentioned: in the absence of properly built or temporary parking spaces, the large number of motor vehicles arriving sometimes obstruct traffic on the settlements. Parking spaces for only five cars were built in front of the rabbi’s house in Bodrogkeresztúr, and for fifteen at the Jewish cemetery. In Olaszliszka, a total of fifteen, while in Sátoraljaújhely twenty-five cars can park next to the Jewish cemeteries. On some of the settlements (e.g. Sátoraljaújhely, Bodrogkeresztúr, the parking lots of nearby stores are used as a solution to alleviate the parking difficulties; however, this causes disturbances to the local population.

The biggest potential income for the region could be providing accommodation for arriving tourists; however, the fact that Jewish tourists – as pointed out earlier – arrive on a seasonal basis (related to major holidays or the anniversaries of wonder rabbis), meeting the additional demands during these times presents significant difficulties. Several steps have been taken to address the situation. On the one hand, it is necessary to refer once again to the aforementioned developments of accommodations, behind which there are various Jewish organisations (according to the plans, in addition to the existing ones, places of accommodation will also be created in Olaszliszka by the Foundation for Jewish Heritage in Olaszliszka). On the other hand, in order to remedy the lack of accommodation during the pilgrimages, a real estate acquisition process started in 2015 in Tokaj-Hegyalja. This trend occurred primarily on settlements with the graves of the wonder rabbis, but it can now be observed also in neighbouring settlements. American and Israeli Jewish tour operators organising the visits of religious tourists saw economic potential in buying empty houses in the settlements and operating them as places



of accommodation after some renovations. The most dynamic acquisition can be observed in Bodrogkeresztúr, where thirty properties were purchased according to the data of 2019. The process has both positive and negative consequences for the settlement. On the one hand, the organisers offer job opportunities to the local population, since they provide the cleaning and supervising of the purchased properties. On the other hand, these acquisitions have significantly increased the prices of real estate, and the fact that the new owners do not become permanent residents, combined with the high prices making it almost impossible for people to move here from nearby settlements, the population of Bodrogkeresztúr is steadily decreasing (natural population decrease also plays a role in this).

Food services play an important role in increasing the satisfaction of tourists arriving in the region, as well as generating higher incomes for the locals. It is a fundamentally positive fact that the traditions of Jewish viniculture and viticulture, which had played an important role in the region in the previous centuries, are being revived nowadays, and several wineries are involved in the production of kosher wines (e.g. Mád – Disznókő winery, Abaújszántó – Galambos winery). However, the situation with regard to food is controversial: although it is true that several settlements (e.g. Mád, Bodrogkeresztúr) have kosher kitchens in which they can produce kosher food, they do not produce and prepare suitable raw materials either in Tokaj-Hegyalja or in neighbouring areas, so these must be sourced from Budapest and abroad (which increases food costs by about 20-25% and also means untapped opportunities).

CONCLUSIONS

The most important findings of the present paper could be summarised as follows. Jewish tourism has a very significant potential in Tokaj-Hegyalja, and based on this, it can be an important attraction of the region so far mostly known for wine tourism. For a long time, however, the local authorities did not recognise the inherent potential, which is indicated by the fact that very little attention was devoted to Jewish tourism, and they also did not allocate financial resources to this purpose. As a result, the necessary investments were mainly in response to external stimulus (e.g. from national Jewish organisations) and with the use of external sources (European Union grants, support from foreign Jewish organisations/descendants). In the last decade, in line with international processes, a very significant wave of Jewish tourism has emerged in the region, with several differences that can be observed between groups of participants in terms of the novelty and the frequency of their visits, as well as the types of accommodations used. The Jewish tourists arriving to the region are essentially satisfied with the services provided, with more criticism expressed only in connection with the availability of shops.

In recent years, attempts have been made to make a better use of the attractiveness of the region to Jewish tourism, partly with an aim to also attract non-Jewish



visitors to the region (e.g. Jewish cultural events, museums presenting the history of Jews in the region), but the result of these efforts are barely measurable yet.

In terms of the effects of tourism on the region, we can observe some positive (e.g. additional income for locals) and negative factors (e.g. occasionally overcrowded settlements, an increase in real estate prices), and further developments are needed in order to increase the former.

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