

4. CULTURAL TOURISM IN A PANDEMIC – USEFUL LESSONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Edit Ilona Pallás, Dániel Molnár

INTRODUCTION

This case study is based on research conducted during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic, however cruel and fatal it was, brought a wide range of technical advancements and ICT (information and communication technologies) usage and implementation. In the first two years of the Covid-19 epidemic, live participation in cultural events was not possible or only under very specific conditions, which radically changed people's leisure habits and their lifestyles had to be redefined in this respect. This might be an opportunity for cultural tourism sites and UNESCO heritage sites to re-think and re-consider their strategy, products and development.

This also put cultural 'service providers' and the whole cultural and creative industries in a new situation. Although it was not necessarily in this area that the Corona virus epidemic caused the greatest damage, it must be noted that culture played a major role in the isolation of the quarantine, reinforcing its resilience. Cultural institutions have had to find new solutions to survive, in the form of innovative online and digital platforms. Looking back to 2022, a digital revolution has taken place in the world of culture, where a quality online and digital presence in terms of content and technology has become inevitable. Individual initiatives have also emerged, which have taken creative, often voluntary, cultural initiatives.

Covid-19 in 2020 has also had a very strong impact on European tourism and culture. The cultural sector has seen an even greater drop in profits (-31%) than tourism. Performers and theatre artists were hit hardest by the pandemic, with their revenues falling by around 90%.

The primary research was based on an in-depth interview with professionals and a questionnaire shared on social media. It brought the information, among others, about how satisfied they were with digital and online solutions and if there is a need to continue using cultural digital and online platforms in the future.

First, we will present some initiatives, both organised and spontaneous, taken by individuals, which, without claiming to be exhaustive, clearly show that the demand for cultural events increased even more during the pandemic, despite the fact that it was not possible to attend them live. In this situation, cultural operators sought platforms where they could continue their activities, at least in part, out of necessity and their own motivation, and also to meet the needs of the general public. The isolation and quarantine caused by the pandemic, and the reduction of personal contacts, have led to a high level of creativity among artists and cultural institutions, which has led to unusual but interesting solutions.

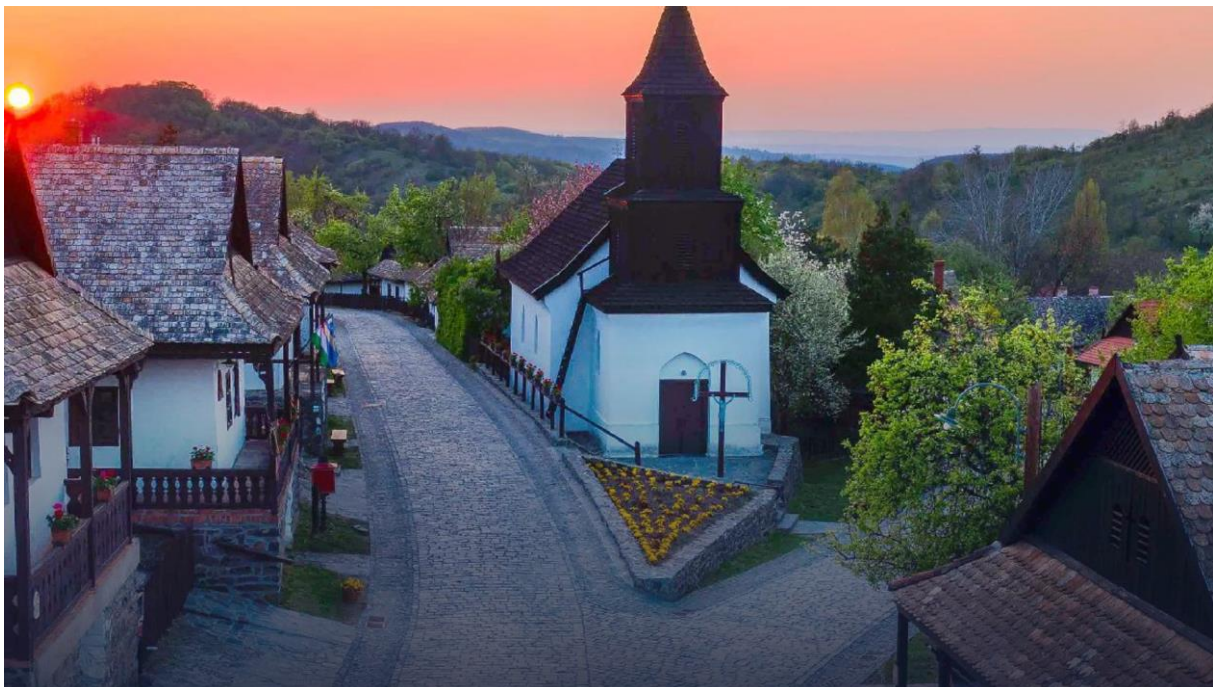
Digitisation, which had already started earlier, has not left the cultural sector untouched. There was a wide choice of Internet-based broadcasters. During the pandemic, most ISPs

helped the population with low-cost tariff plans and free-of-charge service promotions, which further boosted the streaming of programmes, events, and programmes. As the primary research later showed, the majority of the population took advantage of these opportunities.

Theatres, cinemas, and cultural institutions have attracted attention with their archival footage, offering theatrical and film delights that were previously rarely available to the public. The museums, exhibition halls and galleries invited visitors to take a virtual walk guided by experts, who also presented and analysed the details of a particular work of art. Several major events were cancelled, others were held in the online space. Initiatives and projects were created that survived after the restrictions were lifted.

Artists' creativity was further enhanced during the pandemic. In Turin, singer-songwriter and guitarist Federico Sirianni and harpist Federica Magliano, who lives one floor below, were the first to give a live concert on their balcony. Balcony performances, where residents sing together, have since become a regular feature in cities around the world. Hungarian performers have followed suit. In addition to balcony concerts, there was a series of concerts in residential areas and public squares. On social media, there was a succession of artistic productions set up in the Home Office, where almost every genre was represented, from opera to rock concerts, from ballet to country dance classes. In Hungary, free "Warehouse Concerts" were held with government support. The 45-minute shows by 200 artists from the world of popular music were recorded without an audience, and the concerts were made available to everyone on TV and social networking sites.

Picture 8: Holloko village



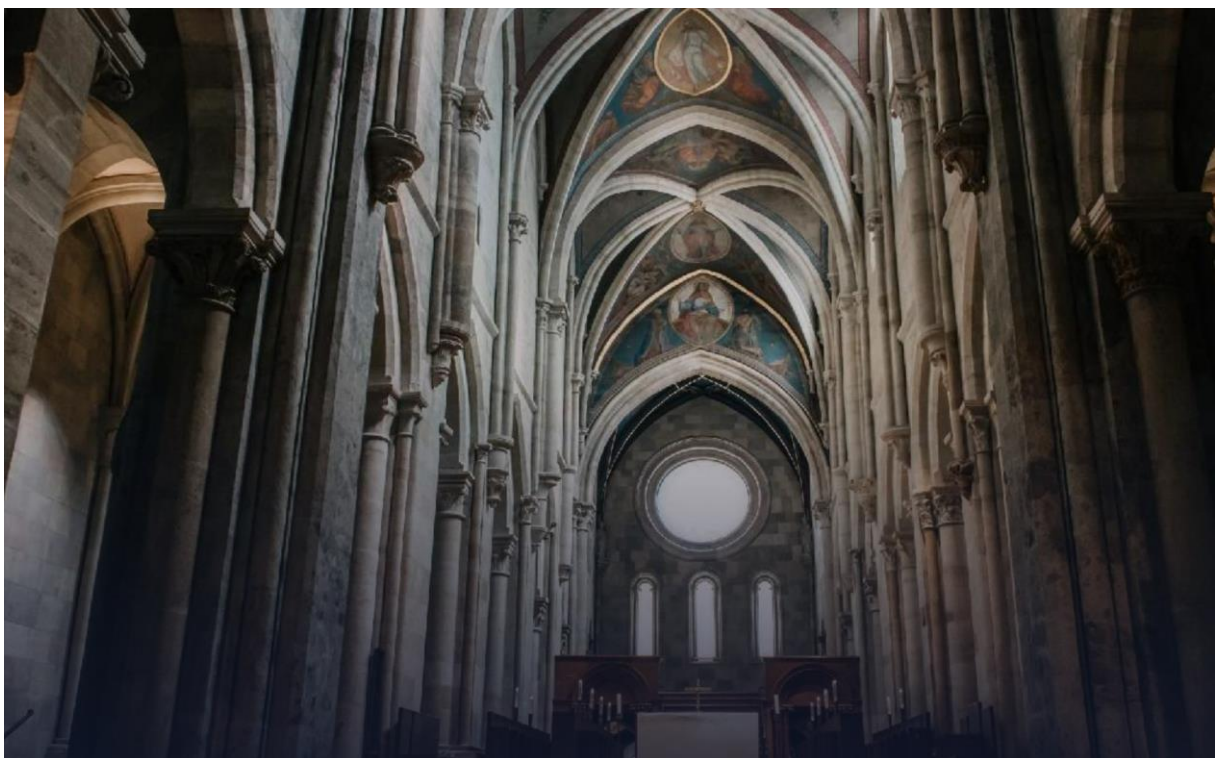
Source: <https://visithungary.com/articles/old-village-of-holloko-and-its-surroundings>

The above-mentioned research came to following conclusions. The majority of the interviewees mainly missed events where they could have had fun in a larger group (concerts,

festivals, or other events with travel). They would have been able to visit towns and places of interest. The lack of sporting and religious events did not play a role. Mostly, they attended classical and popular music concerts, theatre and other performances, and dance performances in the virtual space. Since it was not possible to attend in person, their needs were met by programmes broadcast by the media. Most respondents (72%) primarily used media services where different types of films could be streamed with the minimisation of personal contact, so there was an increased demand for experiences that could alleviate this constraint to some extent. I believe that the visual experiences provided by films, even if only for a short time, lifted people out of their everyday reality, offering them relaxation and entertainment. The responses also show that nearly 8% of people also liked to read. The majority of respondents do not believe that live cultural events can be replaced by online events, but they do see opportunities in exceptional cases. Around 9% say that at least half of events could be replaced by online events, while around 5% say that events could be mostly online. These responses suggest that the pandemic's forced use of online platforms to deliver programmes has become partly accepted by the public, perhaps because the digital space has become part of everyday life for younger people, and cultural activity is no exception.

When asked if there were any online events that they liked very much, respondents primarily mentioned art and theatre performances.

Picture 9: Millenary Benedictine Abbey of Pannonhalma



Source: <https://visithungary.com/articles/millenary-benedictine-abbey-of-pannonhalma>

The pandemic has posed serious challenges for cultural service providers. Recent experience clearly points to the need for the everyday use of digital platforms alongside live events and

face-to-face programmes. They offer excellent opportunities, not as a substitute, but as a complement and as an extension of choice. It should also be recognised that the current generation of children (Generation Alpha), and to some extent Generation Z, take the use of electronic devices for granted, using them not only for information and communication, but also for entertainment and experience. They are also particularly open to online cultural programmes, as well as preferring to participate in live programmes, where they can experience a greater sense of companionship, a sense of belonging to someone or something, and more intense experiences.

It is worthwhile for cultural institutions to maintain tried and tested practices that meet audience needs online programmes and information channels. Maintaining electronic access to archived events (e.g. theatre, opera, concerts) is also important to ensure that this content is accessible to those who would otherwise not be able to attend in person. In this way, more people could be attracted to become regular consumers of culture.

Picture 10: Pécs



Source: <https://visithungary.com/articles/something-old-something-new:-a-walk-in-downtown-pecs>

It cannot be expected that well-trained IT specialists will be employed in culture, so it would be worth considering other forms of employee training, including intensive courses. It would be worthwhile to involve virtual game developers in the training, who could be of great help in developing creative ways of presenting cultural content on digital platforms. Digital literacy programmes for the general public are already in place and should be maintained and

promoted through a stronger campaign. Tenders should be launched to upgrade and replace electronic devices for the population.

OBJECTIVE OF THE CASE STUDY

The aim is to learn to identify important data and information from research, and to think about implementing the results into decision-making process and planning.

GUIDANCE QUESTIONS, TASKS

1. First, recapitulate and add, what types of digital experience are available to tourists.
2. Which types of digital experiences were most appreciated?
3. Discuss the ways of using the digital experience to foster sustainability.
4. Discuss the new ways of presenting culture with regard to spatial dispersal in the destination.
5. Choose a particular UNESCO site you know and suggest new activities and potential products that might help with preservation of UNESCO cultural heritage and foster sustainable development.
6. Suggest and discuss the possibilities of monetizing these activities and products.

TEACHERS' NOTES

It is important to logically work with offered information – to identify the importance of particular types events that are preferred in person and why, to find the acceptable forms of digital experience etc.

The principle of the suggested activities and digital products is to help reduce the overtourism (in space and time), to support preservation in a default setup and/or to help the tourists understand the importance of sustainable development.

The users expect that the digital content is very often for free. However, some content is very valuable even in a digital form. To monetize the activities can help the tourists understand the value.

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