

POSSIBILITIES FOR BRINGING LOCAL PRODUCTS TO THE MARKETPLACE IN THE CITY OF KECSKEMÉT

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Abstract: *This paper examines the framework of local communities' various self-organizing concepts. It explores the work of an organization that focuses on bringing Hungarian products through the shortest possible path from the Hungarian producers to the consumers. In the city of Kecskemét, beside the local farmer's products, cultural and artisan traditions also appear at the regularly organized fairs. In addition to the shopping experience, the complex programs also function as a community forming force.*

Key words: *local products, local market, short supply chain, community organization*

INTRODUCTION

The European Union, as an organization above nation states, is the best example of creating a balance between global and local thinking. The Union with the enforcement of the principles of the four freedoms is the "main scene" of the European Globalization, while with the use of its regional and rural development policy and subsidiary principle the local level is also important. In the EU aid policy support for local initiatives and community programs is especially highlighted. The demand for local uniqueness occurs at the level of individual people and it is growing. People are becoming more critical of goods produced in mass production and are looking for quality and reliable products that are produced in their locality and require local communities that support them.

The activity of local communities is manifested in different types of grass-root organizations. In this work an initiative in Kecskemét is presented, a non-profit organization designed to bring Hungarian products from producers to consumer in the shortest possible way. As a result of their work fairs have become regular with local products in the main square of Kecskemet, where in addition to the goods produced by local farmers, crafts and cultural traditions are also present. It is a complex scheme in which participants, beyond the purchase experience, can partake in other events and both customers and vendors at the fair have a sense of community organizing force. In addition to organizing fairs the organization also strives to provide a forum all actors who are interested in the development of local agriculture - local representatives of the research, production, processing and marketing sectors – and to encourage them to join forces.

Historic background. We would be looking in vain for the origins of fairs in the increasingly proliferating small local markets of IX.th. century Europe. While fairs were formed later, they are not related in any respect to markets, just the opposite. Markets were in fact destined to satisfy the daily food needs of people's who settled in the area. That is why markets are held each week. The pull of local markets is very limited and their activities are confined to the sale and purchase of small quantities [4].

Markets and fairs were of great importance up to the 20th century, as they functioned as the only site of trade. Across Europe in the Middle Ages greater or lesser fairs were developed which attracted hundreds and thousands of sellers and buyers. Henri Pirenne [3] in his work "The history of medieval economy and society" explained that in the Middle Ages, their location was determined by the direction of trade routes and where these fairs routes have meet played a significant role in their development.

In medieval Hungary, a significant number of fairs were held as attested in many place names referring to where the fairs were kept (Hódmezővásárhely, Marosvásárhely). In the beginning, the fair day was held on Sunday (in Hungarian Sunday is Vasárnap =

Vásár nap = Day of the market), the venue was a space in front of the church. This was also favorable for the church, because the people who came to the fair for the most part also entered the church. A few decades later, the aim was that the fairs should not be held on the day of the Lord, as it distracted attention and diverted the faithful from visiting the church. As records show, as early as the reign of Stephen I., the new day for the fair became Saturday. Chronicles also show that even before the Hungarian conquest, during the wandering years fairs were also held [1].

In connection with Kecskemét, the earliest data on markets comes from 1393, while about fairs we can first hear in 1463. From the Middle Ages daily or weekly fairs become commonplace partly due to the fact that a multitude of orchards and vineyards emerged in the sandy areas. At these fairs turnover was so significant that occasionally they went on for several weeks, and half of Europe was bringing their wares to them [2].

Currently, the Kecskemét fairs provide an immediate meeting opportunity, a "marketplace", for domestic and cross-border craftsmen, farmers and consumers. The present structure of the main square of Kecskemet has emerged at the beginning of the XX.th. century thanks to the city's major Millennium Development activities. The enlargement and ease of approach has made the square especially suited to meet the requirements placed by the growing economy that required more space for markets, and fairs. The area is bordered by the main church, the church of Friends, the town hall and by the Protestant church provides ample space for the vendors to present their merchandise. This area is now the Kossuth Square, where there is a statue of Lajos Kossuth since 1906. During the reconstruction of the main square in 2000, the flower beds and walkways have been eliminated thus opening up space, and the park's function was replaced with a public square function. This created the opportunity for the area to serve as an event venue [5].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Venue and timing of the fairs. The fair starts at the Zero kilometer stone, and the vendors and programs take up the promenade in front of the town hall and the area around the statue of Kossuth. The natural "scenery" provides an imposing picture surrounded by the town hall, the Friends church, the Protestant church and the Kossuth statue. The artisans, farmers mostly use tents and stands provided by the organizers, thus providing a uniform, aesthetically pleasing picture of the fair. The location's main advantage is that the main square is a popular meeting and walking place in Kecskemét and so even those might become fair visitors who otherwise would not have attended.

The fair organizers decided to chose a day during the Spring and Autumn "high" days rooted in folk traditions, and tied the fair to that day, even if originally - because of the weather and other festivals in the spring – they were not exactly held on the exact same day. The reference to the traditions is very important, it's part of their educational activities aimed at teaching historic and cultural values since they see that fewer and fewer people are now familiar with these traditions or celebrate these previously very important holidays. Tying the event to the "high" days provides an excellent image to the event and also helps in the marketing activities. Such dates are St. George's Day on April 24th for the Spring-welcoming Fair, or St. Michael's Day, on September 29th. [6].

Research methods. The most important tool of the study was a survey questionnaire. This research method allows for the collection of well-comparable data. At the compilation of the questionnaire the logical and psychological sequence should be kept in mind. When drafting the questions we should aim for understandability, neutrality and conciseness. With regards to the trade fair two target groups were possible: craftsmen, farmers and visitors to the fair. As a first step, it had to be determined what exactly we

would like examine, what questions we want answers to. For the craftsmen and farmers I was curious how satisfied are they with quality filtering of the products displayed at the fair, the role of trade fairs in their sales operations, what they think about customer attitudes towards quality, craftsmanship, and Hungarian products and the age distribution of their customers.

Thus for the artisans/merchants three groups of questions were formed: 1) an assessment of the fair organizing activities; 2) the rating of the fair as a sales channel; 3) the evaluation of customer attitudes. In the questionnaire compiled for the customers, we wanted to know in what way they were notified of the Fair, where and with whom they have arrived, how many times were they already at the fair, what products they were looking for, how satisfied are they with product quality, affordability, does the fair encourage them to look for these products elsewhere, how interested are they in the accompanying programs. The group of four questions for the customers are thus: 1) information acquisition about the Fair; 2) delimitation of territorial location of visitors; 3) fair visiting habits; 4) attitudes towards quality and pricing.

The questionnaires were close-ended, multiple-choice questions, formulated in a nuanced way so that the response options would provide the best possible coverage of the most probable answers. We aimed for simple, clear and understandable wording, since the interviewed target groups were of a mixed composition both in age and educational attainment, thus the style of questions had to be adapted to articulate this.

Since both target groups could be found at a specific time on a well-defined place, we chose the method of personal inquiry. The survey was carried out on two occasions, in May and September of 2015. Among the artisans and farmers 41 people were interviewed, for the customers a sample of 100 people were chosen. The ad hoc sampling, of course, is not representative, but since the method of survey was personal inquiry, we tried to include in the sample younger and older people and people arriving alone or with families. Of course, the level of education could not be filtered in this way. In addressing the artisans, farmers the trade fair organizers provided assistance.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Products offered at the fair

Locally consumed food and beverages. These are Hungarian dishes made the traditional way (oven, kettle, charcoal, etc.) which are suitable for eating on the street. The dishes are mostly made on the spot in "show kitchens". Most of them are edible by hand and can be enjoyed even while walking and looking around. The trade fair organizers, however, also provide tables and benches for more civilized eating and drinking, which makes conversation also possible.

Foodstuff. Food offered at the fair is produced by vendors themselves using individual or small-scale methods. In this way, they can only be available to customers in limited quantity. During preparation they try to use green technologies and avoid applying preservatives and additives. Customers can purchase directly from the manufacturer of the products, thus they are personally, with "their face" guarantee product quality. This is very important at the so called "trust products". According to our observations, the traders are very willing to talk about their activities and about the product's characteristics, advantages to customers.

Everyday products. Several of the craftsmen are wearing authentic folk art. They often are recipients of appreciative titles such as Master of Folk Art, Young Folk Art Master or Folk Artist. Artists are aspiring to faithfully represent the original folklore. In addition, the use of folk sources and the creative use of folk motifs can also be observed. The use of natural materials is typical of this group of products: wood, wicker, leather, clay, glass, wool, linen, cotton, paper.

Medicinal Products. Each formula contains 100% natural ingredients, without preservatives and additives. Their medicinal effects have been described based on folk observations.

Beauty care, cosmetics, cleaning products. In this product group there are relatively fewer products to offer because it is more difficult to meet the technological requirements of production on craft level. For each product is true that not only their production, but also the application is environmentally-friendly. They do not contain preservatives and additives.

Plants. Plants are present in small numbers, as horticultural producers have a number of other opportunities to market them, especially in their horticultural stores. The main square is a regular place for flower markets and also in the market hall of Kecskemét, and at other outdoor vending locations large place is dedicated to the vendors of seedlings, plants and cut flowers.

Fresh fruits and vegetables come mostly from organic farming from local and area producers.

The results of the survey. Most of the artisans and traditionalists are satisfied with the organization of the fairs and there is no one who is unsatisfied, as shown in figure 1.

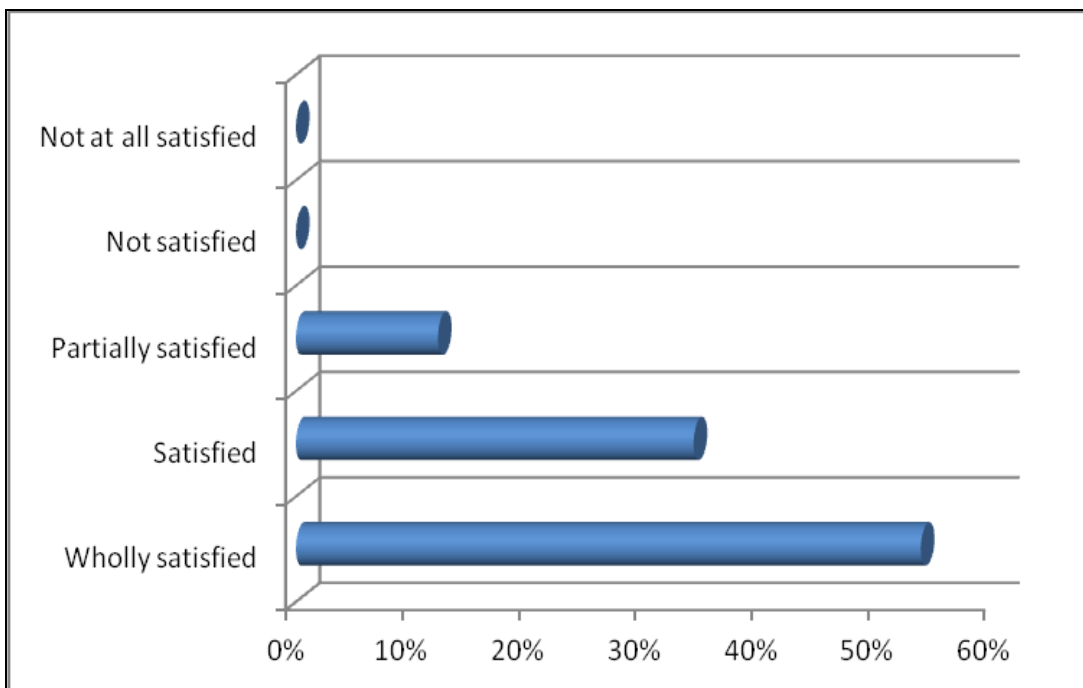


Figure 1 How satisfied are you with the organization?

To the question “What should be improved in the organization” even those who were otherwise satisfied with the organization of the fair responded. There's no contradiction, as some of the respondents would like if the fair was organized on other high days several times a year. Those who are not completely satisfied with the organization were focusing on improving the marketing activities through more ads (figure 2). The artisans would prefer that more varied programs and traditional demonstrations would accompany the event. Many would also like to strengthen the family program lines. The artisans were of the opinion that the more colorful of the event, the more attractive it will become.

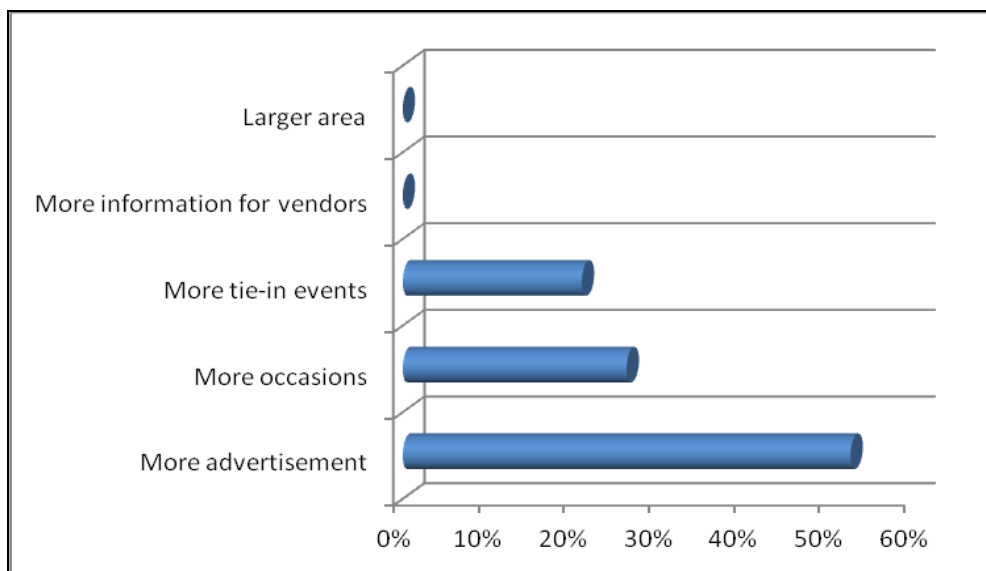


Figure 2 What improvements would you recommend?

For the majority of interviewed craftsmen the traditional fair is an excellent sales opportunity, as there are many new customers who get to know their products and who will look for their products in subsequent fairs or even outside of the fairs (figure 3). The majority of the artisans the fair is a major sales opportunity, since it addresses those people who are looking for their type of products. However, the artisans also perceive that, despite the demand for these products for many they are not affordable.

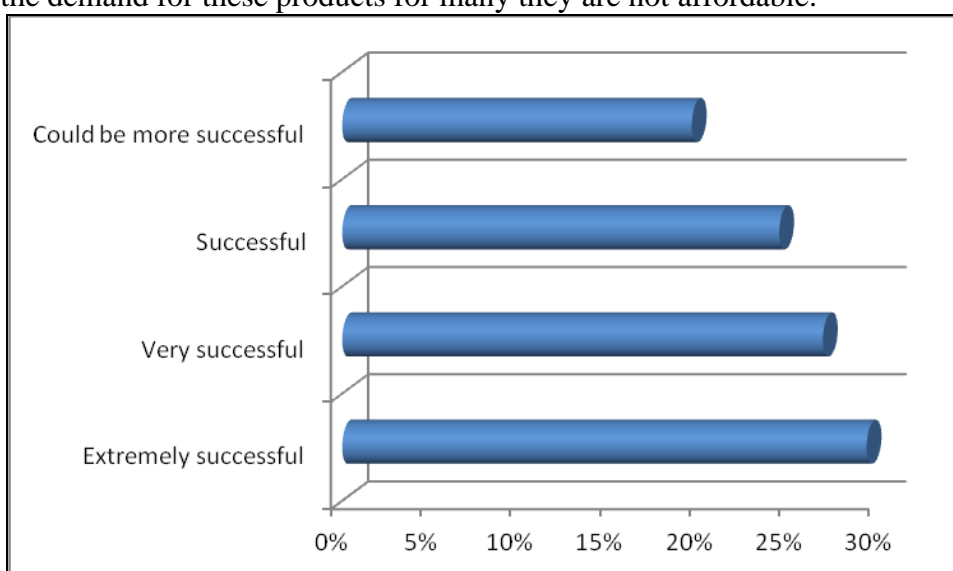


Figure 3 How successful of a sales channel traditional markets are for you?

The vast majority of the interviewed craftsmen and producers sell their products at other traditional fairs. Even those who partner with retailers and wholesalers and also those who have their own companies were primarily farmers who were participating in fairs. If we include those who also run their own business, it is generally true that the artisans perform the sales themselves personally (figure 4). In selling self-made, unique products personal contact between artisans and buyers is very important. The direct encounter with the product's manufacturer increases confidence in consumers. If the fair becomes more regular, a more personal, long term relationship can develop between the artisans, farmers and their customers.

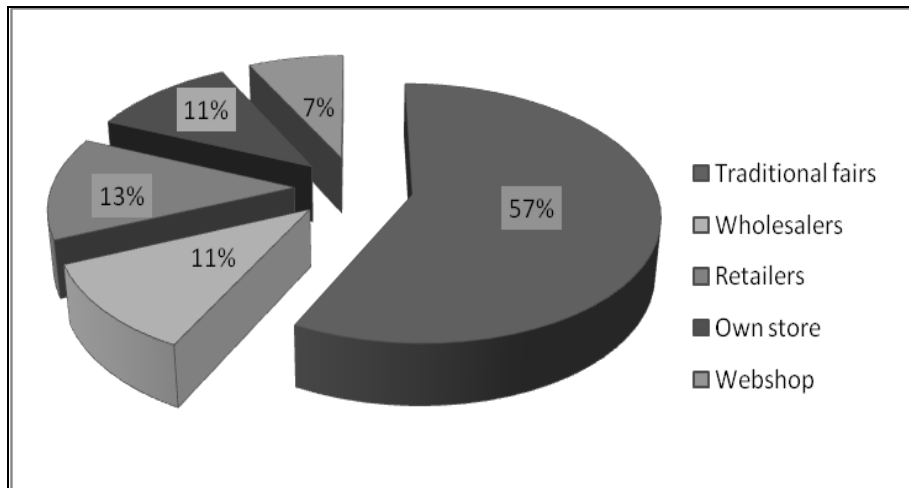


Figure 4 What type of distribution channels do you usually use to deliver your products to customers?

As to the age of buyers, the responses stated that the demand for unique, high-quality, handmade products cannot be segmented by age (figure 5). The vast majority of respondents perceive that people of all kinds of ages are looking for their products. The other two possible answers, the under 40, and over 40 was identified by only a few respondents.

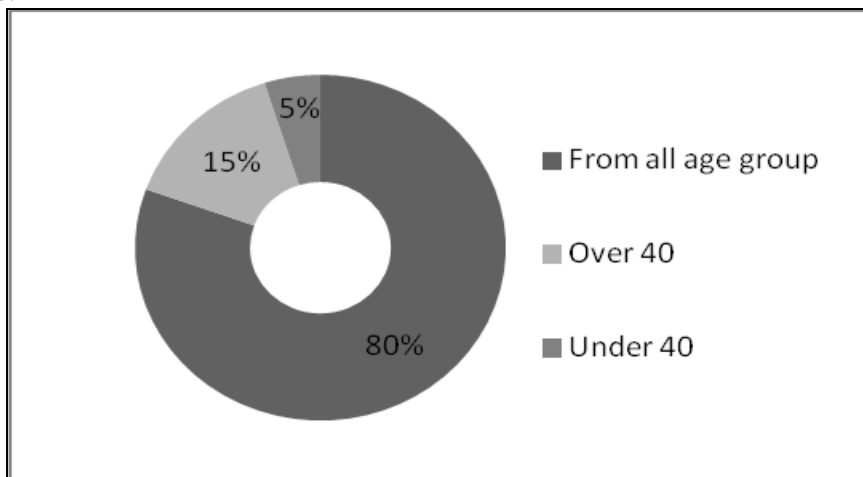


Figure 5 What age group your customers typically come from?

According to the experience of the craftsmen more and more people are looking for quality, handcrafted products, but a certain segment simply cannot afford paying for the higher quality (figure 6). Various surveys show that Hungarians are generally very price sensitive, looking for cheap and discounted products. At the same time in a much smaller tier a new trend is emerging: a demand for the best value for money and high quality products. They do not necessarily look for the cheapest products, but within a certain cost category the best quality and for the higher quality products. Out of the 41 interviewed craftsmen 30 believes there is a segment that is looking for and purchasing unique products, regardless of price, because they appreciate the reliability of the source and the high quality of the products.

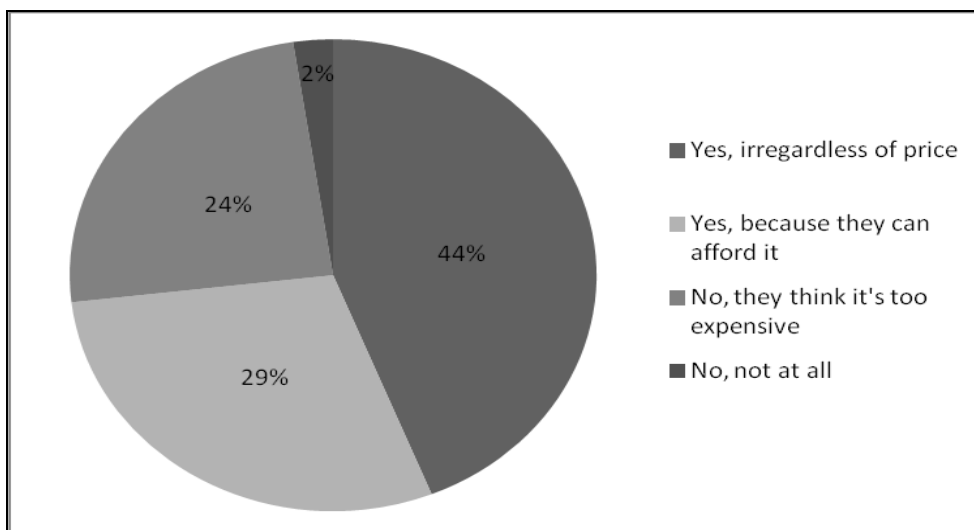


Figure 6 Are customers willing to pay more for quality handicrafts?

Farmers and craftsmen selling at the fairs inherently come across mainly with conscious customers who when choosing a product are taking into account to the place of origin, so this result (figure 7) does not fully reflect the thinking of the Hungarian population at large. Surveys done amongst the general population show that price is still a very important factor. Hungarian revenues are currently in the third place from behind among the European Union countries, so the choice is often a reluctant one. With the price level of the Far Eastern goods dumping the Hungarian craftsmen and farmers cannot and do not want to compete.

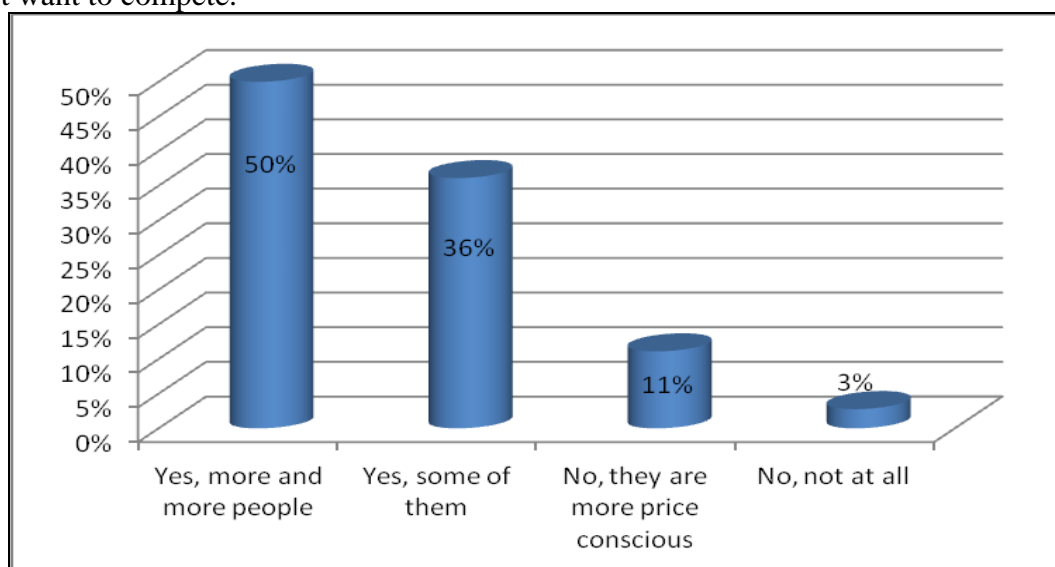


Figure 7 Do Hungarian customers prefer Hungarian products?

CONCLUSIONS

For today's buyers many purchase sites are available from supermarkets, to open-air markets through websites. The Kecskemét traditional fair organizers managed to develop a venue that focuses on quality and uniqueness and have been able to call on the relevant, receptive public, people who are aware that the higher price brings higher quality. The festivals normally associated with the main square do not adhere to the same quality of screening, so supply is very mixed. Along with the truly handmade, quality products a lot of "junk" is displayed. The Kecskemét fair on the other hand guarantees of a quality.

The organizers considered it their mission that in addition to bringing the quality Hungarian products onto the market they should support Hungarian folk traditions and elevate historical consciousness as well. This is not a self-serving pursuit, in a globalized world, clinging to the roots, a sense of belonging to a community's, the exploration of the traditional Hungarian values have their concrete economic benefits as well. It brings self-confidence and confirmation to the entrepreneurs and to the consumer is an incentive to favor Hungarian products, which also develops the local economy of the countryside. The fair, in addition, provides an opportunity for self-organization along the same values for the members of the local community. A network of contacts, on which the organization of the fair is based, provides the basis for a higher level of cooperation with various forms of co-operatives.

These fairs, can also function as festivals as they possess a very characteristic image. Some of the current Kecskemét festivals attract smaller audiences, others are not characteristic enough to attract any interest beyond the borders of Kecskemét. With the strengthening of marketing activities and brand-building this fair could become much more attractive which would bring visitors not only from Kecskemét and the surrounding area, but from a greater distance. Creating a more active Facebook presence, awareness-raising content publishing, building an online community would greatly help with this activity. Outside reaching the families, it would be very worthwhile to find a way to the schools too, as promotion of Hungarian products should begin already at school age.

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