

Pécs World Heritage Management and Tourism

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Abstract

The authors, classical archaeologist and director Boldizsár Csornay of the Janus Pannonius Museum (JPM) and former heritage manager and tourism expert Bernadett Mészáros first met during the preparation process of the Pecs World Heritage Site Management Plan (WHSMP). In the below article, we would like to focus the reader's attention on the present of the World Heritage Site; on the problems and needs for change which are related to the local questions of urban development but are also suitable for drawing general conclusions. The main points are: how legal issues affect operation; what makes a tourist attraction authentic and at the same time grabbing the visitor's attention; how can a 21st Century, cultural plaza like display be reconciled with the immanent values of the monuments. We believe that we can no longer postpone the answers given in concrete plans. The most important economic sector of the City of Pécs is currently tourism which directly requires the strengthening of the destination attraction. The prospective developments can be financed by the Horizon 2020 Programme.

Keywords: *tourism, heritage, management, Pécs, early-christian cemetery, world heritage*

1 The Early Christian Cemetery of Pécs/Sopianae

The area of the 1900-year-old Pécs has been inhabited since the Roman Era. Peoples having lived here left a legacy of outstanding importance. The Early Christian Cemetery of Pécs/Sopianae has a special rank among these. On St Stephen Square and its vicinity, can be found the 16 burial structures of the Early Christian Cemetery from the 4th Century A. D. which were listed as a World Heritage Site due to their historic, architectural and artistic

values in 2000. The buildings known so far may have been two-storey mausolea. On the underground floor, the burial chamber (hypogeum) was used for the burials while on the ground floor, the memorial chapel (cella memoriae) was the place for the services commemorating the deceased. There are the buildings of the bishopric see, museums, and other historic buildings, catering units, sometimes private houses upon further graves and buildings of the cemetery. Even this way the size and richness of the Early Christian monuments is the greatest among those outside Italy. We can organize its attributes in three, main groups: first the great number of graves in the historic centre, second the surviving cemetery buildings (mostly two-storey with the burial chambers and the memorial chapels) and third the frescoes employing both Early Christian and pagan motifs decorating the burial chambers. Our starting point is the value that can be seen today as the result of the excavations of Zsolt Visy, Gábor Kárpáti, Zsuzsa Katona-Győr, Olivér Gábor and Zsolt Tóth and architectural plans by Zoltán Bachman and which is to be preserved and perpetuated. Finally, we have to mention the continuity and environment-shaping power of Christianity due to which the Pécs Episcopate founded a thousand years ago and the cathedral that gained its current, Neo-Romanesque style during the 19th Century renovation are still in the area of the Early Christian Cemetery. This idea is also represented by the logo chosen for the Early Christian monuments: a Christ Monogram (or Christogram)¹.



Fig. 1 The logo of the World Heritage Site, the Christogram

The use of the symbol (Christogram) related to the integrated identity has been trademarked by the excavating institution and its owner (the Museum and the Municipality). The decision in choosing this symbol was based on the multitude of relics and the claim to connect them ideologically, too.²

¹ In the northern cemetery of Sopianae, from the layer above the Burial Chamber 4, this Christogram, a part of the suspension of an oil lamp came to light. The Greek X and P characters as well as the Alpha and Omega symbolise Jesus Christ. The legend of Emperor Constantine and the battle of the Milvian Bridge are also related to the letters X and P.

² The image of the World Heritage Site has changed during the years and its logo is only partly used as the present operator (ZSHM LLC) has other tasks as well. Unfortunately today the Christogram as a brand for the World Heritage does not have a distinctive impression.

2 About Ownership

The development investment of the World Heritage Site (2004-2006) changed ownership as well as operations. When the site was listed as a World Heritage Site (in 2000), the owners and the operational systems of the monuments varied. Some monuments were in private (ecclesiastical) while others in state (municipal) property. Operations were even more hectic. At this time, the locations were not unitary in opening hours, exhibition nor even in communication. The tender, the investment then the installation forced the owners to arrange and clarify the proprietary and operational statuses of the owners. The Cella Septichora and all the other monuments inside its protection building became the properties of the City of Pécs. The former heritage methodology centre, the Pécs/Sopianae Heritage Trust (Heritage House) became the operator of the World Heritage Site. According to its founding document as well as operational duties, the Heritage House worked in a complete symbiosis with the County Museums, the predecessor of the present Janus Pannonius Museum, which operated the Early Christian Mausoleum and the Early Christian Cemetery Structures in two distinct places. The Heritage House did the archaeological excavations, architectural and scientific processing and maintenance of the monuments in cooperation with the museum. Thank to all this, the uniform image of the monuments strengthened and the Cella Septichora Visitor Centre was introduced. The monuments also appeared uniformly (opening hours, tour guiding, image, publications, communication) to the visitors. This status quo was changed with the reorganization of the municipal institutions after the year of the European Capital of Culture (2010). In 2012, the Heritage House lost its independence and under the name of “World Heritage Care”, became part of the Zsolnay Heritage Nonprofit LLC whose operations were, of course, divided among other areas with different interests, too. Due to this, the cooperations with the museum - as a county institution at that time - weakened as well.

Legally, the lesson to learn is that a historic monument can be operated by the owner itself, a trustee of it or even an organization formed for this particular purpose, too.

In any case, it is important that:

- The ownership is legally clear.
- The management of the monuments comprises conservation / preservation, scientific utilization, operation and popularization.
- The owner has to demand special competencies from the operator, and in case it does not have them, the owner needs to “gain” them from third parties. These are as follow:
 - The ability to maintain an appropriate practice in the physical preservation of the monuments according to international monument protection standards (possibility

to control temperature and humidity separately in each burial chamber, avoiding algae and fungi, prevention of the constructional decay of the Antique buildings and the decomposition of the pigments of the paintings etc.). This must be based on profound condition survey and continuous monitoring which the owner is obliged to do by law anyway.

- The special knowledge to create and maintain the documentational information database of the monuments.
- The special archaeological, restorational, heritage protection and museological knowledge to ensure further scientific research and utilization.
- The operator of the monuments therefore needs to closely cooperate with the museum and the heritage protection office of the region.
- Managing the monuments also means social responsibility, i. e. involving the local population, getting the monuments known, understood and liked has to be emphasised as much as profitable activities.
- The visitor, the user is not interested in what ownership and institutional structures there are in the background. He/she purchases a product and will evaluate its quality and service circumstances altogether.

3 The Investment

Between 2004 and 2006, the Cella Septichora Visitor Centre was created from a 1.5 billion forint fund; the protection buildings and the exhibition of the monuments and their surroundings were completely renewed.

Some specialities that had to be taken in account during the planning and that still influence exhibition and touristic utilization:

- The buildings and burial memorials of the Early Christian Cemetery are scattered in space.
- There have been changes in ownership and operation several times.
- The monuments are in different conditions (the goal of the investment was not only to display newly found monuments but also to overhaul the already known ones and to make the overall exhibition more up to date).
- Most of the monuments can be visited underground
- The painted burial chambers need to exclude the visitors.
- The capacity of the monuments is limited: they cannot sustain mass tourism.

Archaeological works were often carried out during the planning process of the protection building and the construction works during the planning of the exhibition. As a result, the

interests of architecture, archaeology, museology and tourism often conflicted, although with compromises, the building and the archaeological exhibition could open in 2007.

The project management summarised the experiences this way: heritage protection, archaeology and tourism, in order to use EU funds, need to get prepared to adopt project methodology (so as to achieve the planned goals, the time and funds must be used along the predefined milestones and within strict administrative frameworks). Archaeology did not receive funds per se but it is a core activity to achieve further goals, i. e. to create a tourist attraction, to strengthen economic sustainability. During heritage related investments, the question always arises: where is the border between the predefined touristic goals or eventually meeting the expectations of the funding and the interests of archaeology or heritage protection.

Lead architect Zoltán Bachman of the Cella Septichora Visitor Centre told about the planning of the protection building (summarized freely by the writer of this article): The locations of the buildings and graves of the former, Early Christian Cemetery were determined by the geological and hydrological circumstances south of the current cathedral. Terraces and slopes then again terraces and slopes were alternating. The burial chapels stood on the terraces and the burial chambers underneath may have been accessed from the slopes beneath. It was the easiest for us with the Early Christian Mausoleum since the chapel is on the surface. In case of the Wine Pitcher Burial Chamber it was harder as we had to display the former Roman ground level underground. We solved this with a gallery. In case of the Peter and Paul Burial Chamber, the ground level of the Roman cemetery is symbolised by a steel structure.

The investment funded by the EU between 2004 and 2006 made it possible to excavate the formerly known but reburied, most significant cemetery building, the Cella Septichora (the chapel with seven apses), and to form a protection building that connected the formerly known and separately accessible Burial Chambers with the Wine Pitcher, with Peter and Paul, the Octagonal Burial Chamber, the Burial Chamber Number 3 and also the newly found Burial Chambers Number 19 and 20.

With the glass roof of the protection building, the plaza-impression museum open around the clock was created. Such a large, walkable glass surface had not yet existed in the country before. The success was marked by visitor reactions as well as high state awards.

THE PAST IS NOT A PILE OF RUINS...

The architectural goal was to create a high quality stone and glass labyrinth applying 21st Century technology which can attract masses and where the visitor may directly contact with the past and gains the experience of a time travel underground.



Fig. 4 The Cella Septichora during its excavation in 2005 and the interior of the Visitor Centre at the beginning of 2007.

Photo by Károly Kismányoki - in the Archives of the Pécs/Sopianae Heritage Trust

4 But Has it Become a Success, Has the Dream of the Planners Come True?

The Management Plan (WHSMP) being worked on as well as the already accepted Substantiating Documentation (SD) provide a fresh, authentic evaluation of the monuments of the World Heritage Site in Pécs. They explored the state of the monuments from architectural, heritage protection and touristic points of views, drew attention to the necessary actions but they leave the concrete methods to the owner and the parties involved. The diagnosis says that the Zsolnay World Heritage Care is merely an operator, the heritage methodology function which looked at the historic city as a whole is unfortunately took a back seat. They also draw the attention to the *lack of a monitoring system*.

The Tourism Chapter of the WHSMP made it obvious that the tourism of the city has significantly decreased in the past 8 years. The visits of the World Heritage Site, though high, compared to other local museums, are lower than before the investment. The city itself has fallen out of the top 10 country destinations. The evaluation makes it clear how the tourist destination and its attractions influence; support or obstruct each other. The study identifies targeted tourism marketing between the city and its surrounding area based on professional footing as a priority, for which mere operational view and competence is not enough. The WHSMP calls for the *close cooperation of all organizations involved in heritage protection. Among the professional organizations, the Janus Pannonius Museum* is the most competent as it can help in the fields of researching and documenting the monuments on one hand and helping with the physical preservation, especially restoration, monitoring and technical operation on the other. The SD suggests recovering the pedagogical program originally prepared for the whole city, the significance of the live relationship with the inhabitants and especially with the students of the city and the importance of *operating as a methodological centre*.

The Performance in the Light of Touristic Data

The City of Pécs provides one-two percents of the national tourist performance. In 2010, it was still among the top 10 country destinations but in 2015, it was only number 15 already. The nights spent in hotels are between 200 and 215 thousand yearly, which is only about one fifth of the nights spent even in its own region. 80% of the visitors and the nights spent here are domestic. The traffic of the individual attractions is naturally determined by the conditions of their own destination. In Pécs, the Hotel Nádor, which could be a tourist attraction itself, has been out of operation for decades and the Hotel Palatinus could also be spent on. The performance of local economy is further worsened by the weakness of tourism and the dominance of the local demand in a region deteriorating economically as well as socially. Although the number of foreign visitors to the World Heritage Site is relatively low, it is spectacular that from Australia to Norway and from China to the United States, the monuments can attract visitors from forty countries.

The World Heritage Site had 50,000 visitors in the opening year of 2007. Later, apart from the outstanding numbers (58,000) of 2010, the year of the European Capital of Culture, there were about 40,000 visitors a year. One fourth of the visitors come in groups and one fifth of them are foreigners. According to the operator, the numbers are growing; in 2015 they reached 55,000. Merging with the Zsolnay Heritage Management Nonprofit LLC also resulted in a joint ticket with the Zsolnay Cultural Quarter. It is notable however that less than one percent of the visitors purchased this combined ticket. This also indicates that the interests of the visitors of the World Heritage Site and the other heritage related attractions in the Zsolnay Cultural Quarter are not shared while due to the proximity, the combined tickets with the attractions in the Bishopric See and other museums in the historic centre are popular.

Compared to domestic and foreign tourist attractions of similar facilities we may suspect that there are still untapped tourism potentials in Pécs. For example, in the also poor, Northern Hungarian region, near a wine producing area, in the medium sized City of Eger, the hotel nights spent are twice and the visitor count of its main tourist attraction is eight times bigger than those of Pécs. In Austria, in one of its economically weak regions, the visitor count of a Roman tourist attraction, Carnuntum, is fifteen times higher than that of Pécs and approaches 600,000 visitors a year.

5 The Attraction as an Exhibition. Facilitating the Visitor Experience.

The World Heritage attraction consists of the Cella Septichora Visitor Centre (Fig. 6), the Early Christian Mausoleum and the Early Christian graves in Apáca Street. The exhibition

of the Early Christian monuments can only fulfill its role and be meaningful if it is authentic, informative and interesting to the visitors.

The builders strived to achieve this during the creation of the central building of the attraction, the Cella Septichora Visitor Centre, which, with its 1000m² protection building, huge glass roof, comprises several burial structures and graves like the Cella Septichora itself (N^o 11), the Burial Chambers with Peter and Paul (N^o 1), with the Wine Pitcher (N^o2), the Octagonal Burial Chamber (N^o 5) and the Burial Chambers N^o 3, 19 and 20. In the Visitor Centre, a sarcophagus found near the western wall of the building during the excavations in 2005 is also exhibited, but there are several brick graves as well as some Medieval walls witnessing the layers of constructions throughout centuries.



Fig. 6 Pécs, Cella Septichora – plan

Source: Cella Septichora Exhibition. Graphic design by Barna Benedek, 2006.

The monuments of the Cella Septichora Visitor Centre (CSVC) can be visited individually and also with tour guides. The minimal duration of the tour is half an hour, the ideal is 1.5 hours. The building is accessible for the disabled and except for the Burial Chamber with the Wine Pitcher, each monument can be visited in a wheelchair. The exhibition is supported by publications and tourist guides. At the ticket office, quality gifts, some of which created by local artists, can be purchased.

In the CSVC, tickets to the Early Christian Mausoleum and to the monuments in Apáca Street can also be bought. Visiting the latter is only possible with accompanying personnel. In the Apáca Street, there are unfortunately no information tables or text for the pedestrians. The Early Christian Mausoleum however, is staffed and tickets are also sold. The CSVC at the same time is able to host events, too, and the operators also organise different exhibitions from time to time. Knowing that these are also able to sustain interest and revisits, it would be extremely important to inform the visitors that these exhibitions are temporary and they are not related to Early Christianity and the historic site.

According to touristic data analysis as well as architects and heritage protection professionals, the monuments can fulfill their role as an authentic tourist attraction worthy of international interest if its exhibition is based on its own values and it does not only serve as a background scenery or cultural coulisse. This is fortunately emphasised by the large scale glass roof, which lends a pleasant, plaza like impression, attracting and at the same time keeping the visitors inside.

The burial structures of the cemetery used to be standalone buildings with no connection to each other at all. Neither underground nor on the surface it was possible to “pass over” them. According to the differences between their levels and orientation, we may even guess that they were not the result of a single, conscious urban planning programme and they were not even built at the same time although all of them are the legacy of the Late Roman population. In the light of the archaeological and art historic results therefore we may suspect that there was a chronological lapse in the use of the buildings. Thus both in the design and construction of the exhibition space and the planning and implementation of the exhibition itself it is necessary to indicate the standalone individuality of the graves and cemetery buildings and to form the exhibition to avoid the misleading catacomb impression. To answer this design challenge, the architect shows the burial monuments sort of placed into museum display cabinets. The task of the present is to maintain the uniqueness of the exhibition, the passageway making us able to “peep in”, walk under or above, to look up or down at the individual burial chambers but beside this, topographical orientations also have to be clear. Roman ground levels need to be marked more characteristically, the two-storey feature of the burial buildings needs to be further emphasised and last but not least, the Roman Age, the people living here need to be brought into the exhibition material, too.

Sometimes certain interventions are only possible by destroying some archaeological finds, fragments. Decisions have to be made whether the fragment of a Medieval wall out of its context should be sacrificed so that we can better demonstrate other archaeological remains from the Roman times. Altogether the clear indication of the relics of different historic eras displayed above or next to each other may help a lot with understanding them. The exhibition has to be understandable per se, without a trained tour guide as well. When the CSVC does not provide a tour guide, it is even more important that the exhibition is interactive and can tell its own story.

6 Baranya and Pécs Are the Tourist Destination and the World Heritage Site Is the International Attraction

“The connection between attractions or the synergy effect influences the common attractiveness of the area.” (Putzkó-Rátz). In case of Pécs, this means that the attraction of

the city is added up by its attractions (such as the Medieval town walls, the streets, squares and restaurants of the historic centre, the conference centre also hosting performance art events in the Zsolnay Quarter or even the Mecsek Mountains). These are all individual brands yet what is common in them is the built heritage and we have to be able to create a tourist product from them. The ecclesiastical and municipal city centres, the World Heritage Site as a museological service can only stand out of the national palette as a uniform, cultural heritage management and the emphasis on the cultures built on each other.

“For a foreigner, the tourist attraction is the historic city centre, its atmosphere and all its environment: the Mecsek Mountains, the wine in Villány, and spa in Harkány. For a foreigner, visiting the Vasarely Museum or the Early Christian burial chambers is not enough attraction itself. The attraction is that beside the above, there is a historic city centre with a unique atmosphere and its buildings, museums, parks, festivals and sunshine. And there is the possibility to hike in the mountains and the wine and the thermal spa”³

In the daily routine of the tourist offices Pécs appears as the tourist destination for domestic visitors while for foreign visitors, Pécs-Villány-Harkány are the suggested destination within Baranya.

For sustainable tourism therefore it is fundamental to have tour packages which can build upon the following:

- the joint presentation of the attractions of Pécs and Baranya;
- joining the cultural and natural attractions and getting them to strengthen each other
- emphasising the atmosphere of the city (including arts, Bohemianism, ethnic minorities, sunshine, wine and gastronomy)

Things to improve in the infrastructure:

- the connection of attractions inside and outside the city, like in the relation of Pécs and Villány, Pécs and Harkány, Pécs and Orfű
- convenient transfer to the destinations both by own or by public transport; employing means of transportation that can be tourist attractions themselves
- parking facilities near the attractions

The Early Christian Cemetery of Pécs/Sopiana can become a primary tourist attraction capable of attracting international tourism only if all the above conditions are met.

³ The tourist positioning and marketing strategy of the City of Pécs - from the interview

Closing Remarks

The recent history of the monuments, the attraction derived from their present state and placing the attractions into the context of tourism draw the attention to the responsibility of the planners, developers and operators, and emphasise the necessity of thinking and cooperating together.

The authors believe that the World Heritage Site is the leading attraction of the region and it can fulfill its role only if its exhibition is based on its immanent values, if the monuments are live and are part of the everyday life of the city. At the same time, without professional, destination level tourism marketing and tourist attraction development, no significant brand can be strengthened even in a World Heritage Site.

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