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**THE CHANGING REPRESENTATION OF GEOGRAPHIC SPACE IN THE
CONTEXT OF URBAN BRANDING**

Dissertation (Ph.D.) theses

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I. Justification of the topic selection and literature review

The analysis of destination image in tourism has gained increasing importance in recent decades, particularly in the context of globalization, the growing significance of tourism, and the intensifying competition among destinations. Tourism has evolved not only as an economic driver but also as a platform for socio-cultural processes, reshaping perceptions of places and spatial constructs while influencing local communities and economic activities (MICHALKÓ G. 2014). The image of a municipality plays a crucial role in tourism, as destination images increasingly influence travel decisions and shape the perceived attractiveness of a municipality. This, in turn, has a direct impact on the local economy, society, and culture (KRAFTNÉ SOMOGYI G. - FOJTIK J. 1998; ANHOLT, S. 2010). To gain a deeper understanding of the development of place images and their impact on tourism, it is essential to examine the scientific foundations of place image research, which are rooted in behavioral and cognitive geography.

Within the framework of behaviorist geography, people's spatial behavior is shaped not by the objective structure of space, but by their subjective perception of it, which is influenced by individual experiences and mental images. This perspective has opened new avenues for the study of space and image (LYNCH, K. 1979; CSÉFALYAY Z. 1994; BIERBAUM, E. 2006). These studies provide insights into tourists' perceptions of a destination and how these perceptions shape the destination's image, as well as its economic and social impacts (GREGORY, D. 1978; NAGY E. – IZSÁK É. 2017). Beyond the role of individual perceptions, globalization and postmodern perspectives offer additional frameworks for studying space and urban image, contributing to a deeper understanding of socio-cultural processes.

In the context of globalization and postmodern intellectual currents, space is no longer regarded as a mere physical entity but as a socially mediated construct (LEFEBVRE, H. 1991). Lefebvre and Soja's triadic conceptualization of spatiality—comprising perceived space, conceived space, and lived space—offers valuable insights into urban spaces, as these three dimensions interact to shape the image of cities and influence how they are perceived by both residents and visitors (LEFEBVRE, H. 1991; SOJA, E. W. 1999). A place can also be viewed as a product marketed to tourists. This interpretation of places as products has generated extensive discourse in the fields of social and tourism geography. Within the framework of place marketing, a destination functions as a dynamic and evolving product shaped by the interplay of social, political, and economic relations (GETZ, D. 1999). The marketisation of places is driven not only by economic factors but also

by cultural aspects that help preserve the unique character of settlements and strengthen community identity, thereby enhancing competitiveness.

This is closely related to the cultural turn, which highlights the significance of individual experiences and introduces new approaches to the analysis and development of urban spaces, particularly in the context of tourism (NAGY E. – IZSÁK É. 2017). Cultural values and images play a crucial role in tourism, as emphasizing the symbolic significance of places in destination marketing enhances their attractiveness (PIKE, S. 2004). Presenting the cultural values of destinations not only enhances their appeal to tourists but also contributes to the economic development of local communities, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the strengthening of community identity.

The concept of place as a product in urban marketing becomes even more complex, as physical space must be marketed to consumers with diverse needs (RECHNITZER J. 1995; ASHWORTH, G. J. – VOOGD, H. 1990). Urban marketing functions as an integrated tool within the life of the city, contributing to economic, social, and political processes. Its goal is to create an attractive environment not only for tourists but also for residents and potential investors, thereby fostering economic and social development (HEGYI F. 2007). In tourism-oriented place marketing, the analysis of settlement images aids in the development of place marketing strategies (ASHWORTH, G. J. – VOOGD, H. 1997; JANKÓ F. 2002), the primary objective of which is the deliberate creation of a settlement's image. This process involves highlighting and communicating the unique characteristics of the settlement to target groups (KOZMA G. 2002; ASHWORTH, G. J. – VOOGD, H. 1997), as competition between destinations increasingly influences how settlements shape and present their image, as well as the extent to which they can affect tourists' perceptions (ANHOLT, S. 2010).

Shaping these perceptions and influencing the opinions of potential visitors, alongside the rise of online marketing and social media, creates new opportunities for localities (URRY, J. 2012). Individuals' spatial planning and tourism decision-making increasingly occur in the online realm, where tourists base their decisions on the experiences and opinions of other travelers (FOJTIK, J. 1999). Post-modern tourist's experiential consumption habits and the subjective factors influencing destination choice are continually evolving. Tourists are increasingly seeking authentic experiences that establish a personal connection with the destination. In a competitive environment, the success of a destination in terms of tourism largely depends on the extent to which visitors' actual experiences align with their preconceived image, as the image formed after their visit significantly affects their satisfaction and their willingness to return, provided the destination has met their expectations (BEERLI, A. – MARTIN, J. 2004; HEGYI F. 2007).

Therefore, in branding tourist destinations, it is important for local authorities and tourism professionals to develop an image that aligns with both tourists' expectations and the unique characteristics of the locality (PISKÓTI I. et al. 2002). The deliberate development of a local image has become pivotal for ensuring the economic and social success of settlements (MICHALKÓ G. 2014; HERENDY CS. – MURÁNYI P. 2008). The ultimate goal in shaping the image of a territory is to develop the branding of tourism products for municipalities and to imbue them with meaning (JÓVÉR, V. – BAGDI, R. – KÓRÓDI, M. 2020).

Through branding strategies, municipalities can become distinct and recognizable from their competitors, which can be accomplished through the effective use of appropriate marketing tools (KAVARATZIS, M. 2004). The city branding strategy encompasses a range of approaches, including a focus on the natural and built environment, as well as the city's educational and healthcare infrastructure (e.g., education – Cambridge, healthcare – Sopron). Additionally, the city's economic performance (e.g., Ingolstadt) and its cultural programs, such as festivals and major international events (e.g., the Olympics – Sochi), play a key role in the branding process (JAKAB P. 2016).

Festivals not only highlight local culture but also play a significant role in shaping the town's image and attracting tourists. These events contribute to strengthening community identity and the local economy, while drawing new groups of visitors (KAZÁR K. 2014). Festivals are therefore not only tourist attractions, but also an integral component of the municipality's brand. The marketing value of festivals lies in their ability to reinforce the destination's image, which is crucial for enhancing competitiveness. Integrating these events into branding strategies enables a coherent presentation of the municipality's identity and attractiveness to potential visitors. Festivals are not only tourist attractions but can also play a key role in the long-term development of a municipality. By fostering community engagement, reinforcing local identity, and attracting tourists, festivals can become an essential component of local marketing and sustainable tourism development.

Music festivals have the potential to attract a diverse audience through extensive media coverage, thereby serving as a pivotal tool in enhancing the appeal of destinations, including smaller towns and cities. Nevertheless, quantifying the increase in visibility and the impact on destination image facilitated by such events remains a challenging task. A critical question arises as to whether the co-branding of destinations and festivals—leveraging the image components formed in tourists' perceptions—can effectively heighten awareness and stimulate repeat visitation.

The complexity of the topic and its evolving context reflect the intricate relationships between tourism image, local identity, economic competitiveness, and social dynamism, all of which influence how localities shape and communicate their image within the global tourism market

II. Objectives and questions

The aim of this doctoral thesis is twofold. First, it investigates the impact of popular music festivals on the image of a municipality and their integration into branding processes. Second, it examines how a destination is positioned by a music festival and whether the image conveyed by local actors aligns with the perceptions of festival tourists.

Based on this, the thesis aims to address three main questions, which can be further subdivided into sub-questions.

1. What role does a popular music festival play in the tourism processes and image of a municipality?
 - a. How does the municipality hosting the festival leverage the event to shape its image in terms of tourism, awareness, and branding?
 - b. What role do representations of the municipality hosting a music festival play in shaping its image within the tourism sector?
 - c. How is the destination perceived, experienced, and spatially used by visitors?
2. What impact does the use of a geographical name have on the branding of a tourism product, such as a music festival, for the municipality? Is there a significant difference between the presence and absence of a geographical name?
3. How do the internet and social media influence the image of the municipality?
 - a. How do visitors to a popular music festival assess the impact of social media content about the event on shaping the image of the destination?
 - b. How do the internet and social media influence tourists' perceptions of the event?

Building on previous research and drawing from the open questions formulated within it, this paper seeks to explore the role of popular music festivals in shaping and branding the tourism image of localities. In contrast

to prior studies, this research not only examines the direct effects of festivals but also analyzes the influence of geographical names, visitor perceptions, and social media. Unlike earlier works, I integrate these factors and assess their combined impact, offering practical insights into the potential for tourism development in localities.

III. Research methodology

To address the research questions, the case study method was employed, focusing on different types of destinations: cities with high tourist appeal, resorts, and smaller, lesser-known settlements. These destinations, each with distinct tourist attractions, exemplify the varied relationship between festivals and locations. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques were applied within the case studies (Figure 1). The comprehensive research methodology developed for this study included semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire survey. In response to some of the findings, further exploration was undertaken through content analysis, specifically involving media and social media analysis.

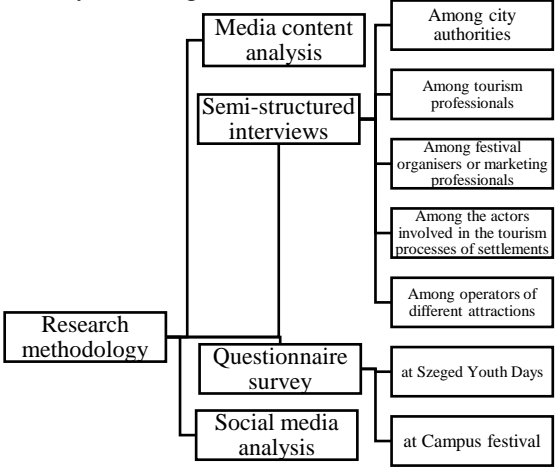


Figure 1. Research methodology
Source: own editing, 2024

To explore the supply side, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders involved in the tourism process. These interviews included representatives from city administration, tourism professionals, festival organizers, accommodation, and catering establishments, as well as operators of various attractions. A snowball sampling method was employed to

select interviewees, enabling a broader range of participants to be included. The interviews were conducted between September 2020 and June 2021, with a total of 41 interviews recorded. During the analysis, particular attention was given to the synergies and conflicts between festivals and municipalities, the impact of tourism generated by festivals, and the role of festivals in shaping the municipality's image.

In addition, to investigate the demand side, a questionnaire survey was conducted among visitors of two festivals (SZIN and Campus) to explore their perceptions of the towns' images and the relationship between the festivals and the destinations. A total of 618 evaluable questionnaires were collected at SZIN in Szeged and 300 at the Campus Festival in Debrecen. The data were analyzed using statistical methods, with particular emphasis on visitors' festival attendance habits and their perceptions of the cities' images. The questionnaires were processed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS. In SPSS, cross-tabulation was applied to analyze the relationships between nominal data.

To complement the interview and questionnaire data, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on media articles concerning the relationship between festivals and their host municipalities. By searching online news sources for the festivals' names, I examined approximately 3,000 pieces of online media content, of which 152 articles related to the topic were selected for analysis. Additionally, a content analysis of social media posts on Instagram was performed. This helped to understand the travel habits of younger generations, for whom the internet and social media have become primary sources of information. In total, 5,552 public posts were analyzed, focusing on whether the municipality or any tourist attractions within it appeared in the hashtags.

IV. Summary of research findings

Based on the responses to the research questions, the following key findings and theses have been formulated:

- 1. Popular music festivals significantly influence the tourism image of destinations, regardless of whether they are regional cities, resorts, or smaller localities with limited tourist activity.**

Music festivals are not merely entertainment events but can evolve into significant tourist attractions that enhance the image and visibility of municipalities, particularly among younger generations. The image projected by these festivals - be it cultural, historical, or natural assets of the town - is

intrinsically tied to the destination's overall image, potentially shaping a lasting impression for visitors. For each type of destination, these events can serve as strategic tools for shaping the tourism image. Long-term success in attracting tourists, both during and beyond the event, can be achieved through collaboration between municipalities, the integration of festivals into the broader regional tourism offerings, and coordinated promotional efforts.

2. In large regional cities, popular music festivals significantly contribute to promoting a youthful, modern, and diverse tourism offering and image.

Music festivals can significantly enhance the diverse tourism offerings of regional cities, with the image conveyed by these events increasing the attractiveness of the destinations. In the cases of Szeged and Debrecen, these festivals position the cities on the tourist map as destinations that not only highlight historical and cultural heritage but also host modern, youthful, and vibrant events. Such festivals serve as strategic tools for branding the cities, ensuring that the image projected aligns with their overall tourism strategies. Beyond their cultural significance for the local community, these events contribute to elevating the profile of Szeged and Debrecen, even on an international scale, as integral components of the cities' tourism development initiatives.

3. In holiday resorts, music festivals can serve as pivotal tourist attractions and integral components of the destination's tourism dynamics and image.

In the case of Orfű and Velence, the festivals are integrated into the natural environment, creating a unique atmosphere, and offering visitors an exceptional experience. Beyond the image-enhancing effects, it is important to highlight the economic impacts, which are more pronounced in these types of settlements compared to regional cities. During events such as Fishing on Orfű and EFOTT, local accommodations, catering services, and other businesses see a significant increase in demand, resulting in long-term economic benefits for these areas. The findings suggest that music festivals can play a crucial role in shaping a positive new image for these holiday resorts. Both events contribute to fostering a modern, youthful image, which appeals to young tourists, potentially leading to repeat visits and further strengthening the destination's tourism appeal.

4. For destinations with lower tourist volumes, music festivals can serve as a key driver in shaping the image of the locality and stimulating tourism development.

Settlements such as Mezőtúr may not possess individual attractions that can independently draw large numbers of tourists. However, the festival provides an opportunity to enhance the municipality's profile and establish it as a long-term tourist destination. The tens of thousands of visitors attracted by the festival can also explore other tourist attractions within the municipality and its surroundings, potentially returning after the event. The likelihood of return visits can be increased if tourism professionals, in collaboration with festival organizers, integrate additional cultural and tourism activities around the festival. A popular music festival can, therefore, successfully position a locality on the tourist map and serve as a point of identification, particularly for younger visitors.

5. A destination-oriented approach is essential for ensuring the sustainable development of tourism in holiday resorts and smaller tourist destinations.

In the context of destination thinking, the music festival and its host municipality should be integrated into the broader tourism offerings of surrounding settlements and the region. Municipalities like Mezőtúr and Sukoró, studied in this research, face challenges in attracting tourists on their own. Therefore, they need to be developed within a comprehensive regional framework, which will also contribute to a more effective tourism image. This approach offers several advantages for the region, as when a festival and local management provide visitors with a complex tourism package - spanning multiple settlements and diverse experiences - visitors may be encouraged to extend their stay.

6. The use of a geographical name in branding a music festival has a varied impact on the image and tourism of regional cities versus resort towns. In the case of holiday resorts, incorporating a geographical name creates a more complex and powerful effect on the destination's appeal.

The research shows that in the case of Szeged and Debrecen, the connection between the geographical name and the festival can be directly beneficial for strengthening the cities' image, as the message and experience conveyed by the festival are directly associated with the location. However,

in Szeged, according to interviewees, SZIN alone does not necessarily become a strong identity factor for the city, as many other tourist attractions and products also influence the municipality's image. In the case of a large regional city, the use of the municipality's name in festival branding does not contribute to the city's overall tourism image to the same extent as, for example, collaborations. The case study from Debrecen demonstrates that collaboration between local governments, tourism offices, and other local stakeholders is essential for the success of a music festival and its integration into the municipality's tourism strategy. Such partnerships enable the festival to generate a positive long-term impact on the city's economy and community, even if the festival's name does not explicitly reference the city. In contrast, Szeged illustrates how the absence of cooperation can hinder the achievement of the city's tourism objectives. In resort towns, the festival may become nearly synonymous with the name of the town— as exemplified by Orfű—thereby strengthening local identity and distinguishing the town within the tourism market. The research indicates that the association of a festival's name with a resort settlement plays a significant role in enhancing the long-term reputation and tourist appeal of the locality, while also promoting the destination and fostering visitor loyalty.

7. Social media plays a significant role in shaping the tourism image of destinations hosting music festivals.

For all types of destinations, social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have a direct impact on visitors' initial impressions of the destination. Potential tourists often rely on these online sources for primary information, which is fundamental to shaping the destination's image. The experiences shared by festival participants significantly enhance the municipality's online visibility. Participants frequently tag the festival's location, thereby increasing the municipality's presence in the digital space. This is evidenced by the fact that 63.8% of the hashtags related to SZIN in the analyzed Instagram content included references to Szeged, while 71.3% of the hashtags for Campus referenced Debrecen. This form of 'voluntary influencer marketing' can play a pivotal role in promoting the municipality.

8. Social media content not only attracts tourists but also fosters long-term engagement.

Visitor-generated content can foster an emotional bond between tourists and the locality, particularly when it is authentic and rooted in real experiences. Posts shared on social media platforms can significantly

influence tourists' decisions, especially when influencers play a role in content dissemination. Younger generations are particularly receptive to the impact of social media content in shaping the image of tourist destinations and making travel decisions. They frequently share their experiences on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok (Figure 2).

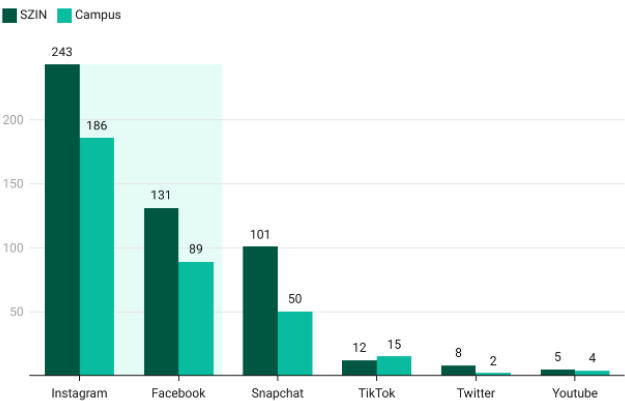


Figure 2. Distribution of experience sharing across online social networking platforms: SZIN and Campus festivals (source: questionnaire survey, 2021–2022; own editing)

9. Social media serves as a particularly significant marketing tool for holiday resorts and smaller tourist destinations.

Destinations like Orfű, Sukoró, and Mezőtúr often lack the large budgets required for traditional advertising campaigns. An active online presence and user-generated content can significantly boost tourism by promoting these locations at no cost, enhancing their appeal and long-term attractiveness to visitors.

V. Applicability of the results

- The research reveals that effectively implementing image transfer requires the development of a broad network of tourism stakeholders and strengthened collaboration in marketing activities. Such efforts contribute to creating a positive image of both the municipality and the festival among tourists.

- Integrating festivals into the tourism flows of a municipality requires offering visitors opportunities beyond the festival itself, such as the introduction of a city card or discount schemes.
- Local authorities should foster cooperation among various stakeholders in cultural tourism, particularly within the broader domain of festival tourism.
- A well-defined image should be developed and consistently maintained under the coordination of the city authorities.
- One of the key findings of the research highlights the importance of the location of festival sites within the city. Therefore, it is essential to preserve these sites, emphasize them in marketing communications, and effectively manage potential conflicts with local residents, such as noise or increased traffic
- In municipalities with lower levels of tourism activity, coordinating tourism development with festival management is particularly important. Festivals provide an opportunity for tens of thousands of tourists to become familiar with the destination, which can encourage them to return during non-festival periods.
- For holiday resorts and localities with lower levels of tourism activity, adopting a destination-level approach is recommended. The joint presentation and integration of multiple municipalities within the festival framework can more effectively enhance the profile and image of the area.
- In general, these events cater to specific target groups, making the selection of appropriate marketing methods—particularly on social media—critical. Young festivalgoers are likely to discover the city's attractions and tourist appeal, thereby increasing the probability of their return to the destination in the future.

VI. Future research opportunities

- Throughout the dissertation, I explored the relationship between destination image and music festivals through five case studies. However, future research could expand the current analysis to include additional cities and festivals, thereby enhancing the comparative nature of the study. This extension would offer an opportunity to examine the interactions between festivals and municipalities, as well as the role of stakeholders and their responses to changes in various regions. Such an approach would provide a more comprehensive, national perspective on the impact of festivals on destination image and the tourism processes within individual municipalities.

- Future research could also explore longitudinal changes in destination image and visitor attitudes, thereby deepening our understanding of this subject.
- The dissertation primarily examined the impact of music festivals on destination image and tourism processes in municipalities from the supply side. A questionnaire survey was conducted for two festivals; however, future research should focus more on the demand characteristics of festivals to better understand how visitors' expectations and perceptions align with the experiences offered. This would contribute to the sustainable development of festivals and the long-term tourism success of localities.
- The results of the dissertation indicate that social media play an increasingly significant role in shaping the image of festivals and localities. Future research could benefit from analyzing how content shared across various platforms influences visitors' perceptions and decision-making processes.
- In the future, it may be useful to compare domestic festivals with examples from abroad, especially with municipalities that are similar tourist destinations. This comparison could help identify the best practices globally and assess the competitiveness of domestic festivals.

VII. Publications

In the field of the thesis:

SÜLI D. – BOROS, L. – PÁL V. (2024): The role of music festivals in shaping destination branding and image in two hungarian regional centers. – *Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 53, 2, pp. 657–667.

SÜLI D. – PÁL V. (2021a): City-image festivals: the role of cooperation between tourism operators and festivals in image transfer in two hungarian cities (Szeged and Debrecen) – *Review of Historical Geography and Toponomastics*, 16, 30–31, pp. 9–30.

SÜLI D. – PÁL V. (2021b): The role of music festivals in shaping the image of destinations by using geographical names - on the example of the Szeged Youth Days. – In *Tourism and the global crises: proceedings of the international scientific conference organized by tourism department at Faculty of Economics of the “St. Cyril and St. Methodius” University of Veliko Turnovo*. pp. 423–433.

SÜLI D. – MARTYIN-CSAMANGÓ Z. (2020): The impact of social media in travel decision-making process among the Y and Z generations of music festivals in Serbia and Hungary. – *Turizam: International Scientific Journal*, 24, 2, pp. 79–90.

SÜLI D. – TÓTH B. – NAGY GY. – MARTYIN Z. (2019): Az utazással kapcsolatos attitűdök és vélemények Magyarországról mint turisztikai desztinációról az Y és Z generáció körében. – In. CSAPÓ J. – GONDA T. – RAFFAY Z. (szerk.): *Turizmus*,

fogyasztás, generációk: II. Nemzetközi Turizmus Konferencia: Tanulmánykötet. Pécsi Tudományegyetem Közgazdaságtudományi Kar, Pécs. pp. 20-344.

SÜLI D. – MARTYIN Z. (2018): A fesztiválok szerepe a település imázsának alakításában. –In Generációk a turizmusban. I. Nemzetközi Turizmusmarketing Konferencia: Tanulmánykötet. pp. 97–108.

SÜLI D. – MARTYIN Z. (2017): A közösségi média szerepe a fesztiválturizmusban – a Szegedi Ifjúsági Napok és a Green Future példáján. – Turizmus Bulletin, 17, 3–4, pp. 24–32.

Other publications:

HANGODI K. – MARTYIN-CSAMANGÓ Z. – SÜLI D. (2019): Spa towns in the system of hungarian settlement development and their opportunities for development resource allocation. – Changing Spa Towns, 1, pp. 112–132.

MARTYIN Z. – SÜLI D. (2019): Határmenti térségi kapcsolatok elemzése a délvidéki idegenforgalom jelene és jövőjének tükrében. – Interkulturális ifjúsági együttműködési mozaikok a határokon átnyúló régióban. pp. 25–37