

THE COORDINATION OF THE TOURISM MARKET THROUGH PATRON-CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT During the course of research in the Hungarian region of Szatmár I investigated patterns of cooperation between actors in the field of tourism and looked into whether collaboration comes into being spontaneously, or if it is enforced. My findings suggest that wide cooperation with market actors does not arise spontaneously: good organizers who have authority and who are willing to enforce cooperation are needed. In this paper I illustrate a special example of enforced cooperation: in the village of Szatmárcseke, collaboration between actors is systematically organized by the mayor of the settlement. The leader of the village, having social authority, provides advice, convinces or even puts pressure on ‘potential entrepreneurs’ to enter the market. While this research site is exceptional, taking into consideration the depth and extent of the influence of central direction-giving it exemplifies well how market mechanisms can be completed through patron-client relationships.

KEYWORDS tourism market, patron-client relation, authority, local products, regional brand

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1. INTRODUCTION

During the course of a 10-year-long research effort² I investigated the formation of the tourism market in the Hungarian Szatmár region and analyzed it using economic sociological methods.³ I investigated patterns of cooperation between actors of tourism and sought to identify whether collaboration comes into being spontaneously, or if it is enforced. My results suggest that the wide cooperation of market actors does not arise spontaneously: good organizers who have authority and who are willing to enforce cooperation are needed.

In this study I illustrate a special example of enforced cooperation which I observed during my fieldwork. In Szatmárcseke⁴ it is characteristically not independent market actors who cooperate with each other; collaboration between actors is systematically organized by the mayor of the settlement. The leader of the village, having social authority, provides advice, convinces or even puts pressure on ‘potential entrepreneurs’ to enter the market. The opportunity to get people to enter the market is created by a special social relationship: the patron-client relationship.

The tourism market organized along patron-client relationships can be characterized – in my opinion – using the term ‘authority’ (close to hierarchy) in the sense that Ménard (2008) employs it.⁵ In this system, the characteristics of leaders are very important and informant relationships create an explicit and private order among the actors. Aside from the historical reasons for the formation and survival of paternalist management, the uncertainty of the market also predestines it to be more centralized (Ménard 2008). Therefore it is not by chance that, in the market for local products in Szatmár, where quality assurance of common brands is still a problem, and opportunism is a

² I was in Szatmárcseke for the first time in 2005 as a participant in a research project entitled “Adaptation strategies in rural economy” funded by the National Research Fund and later, between 2006 and 2008, in the framework of National Research and Development Program (“For the equal opportunities of small settlements and their residents”) on behalf of the Centre for Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. I carried out research with two fellow researchers at two selected field sites. Later, I continued the research with the help of the Sasakawa fellowship in 2009-2010, and a grant from the Corvinus University of Budapest designed to promote the research projects of Ph.D. candidates.

³ During the ten years I visited the Szatmár area ten times for 4-6 day periods. 145 interviews were undertaken at which I was present on 76 occasions (in Szatmárcseke, 20 interviews were undertaken).

⁴ The actors are referred to using pseudonyms in the article.

⁵ Authority is a special enforcement mechanism which coordinates different autonomous partners and decision processes towards cooperating. (Ménard 2008: 295-302)

threat, one of the ways of enforcing cooperation among actors is the use of authority.

In the following I introduce the general features of Szatmárcseke's market for tourism and patron-client relations; subsequently, I discuss the market-organizing force of this relationship. The analysis of this coordination mechanism extends from the supporting and sorting of actors to the purchasing of products, controlling and sanctioning.

2. REGIONAL PARAMETERS

In this chapter I briefly present those background data that are necessary for understanding the tourism market. Szatmárcseke has 1525 residents⁶ and is one of the largest settlements in the area, consisting of 49 (usually tiny) settlements along the Ukrainian-Romanian-Hungarian border. The rate of unemployment locally is very high, even compared to the micro-regional and county average: only 26.4 percent of residents are employed. After the Second World War this border zone lost its traditional commercial-economic centers and routes. It became a peripheral area that is difficult to approach. In Szatmár, traditional agricultural production is predominant (especially pasture-based livestock husbandry) and the area lacks industrial sites. In the Socialist era a considerable number of villagers were employed by local state farms and cooperatives, besides which commuting to cities for work was also important.

After the change of regime in 1990 state farms and agricultural cooperatives either collapsed or were liquidated, and no successor enterprises came into being to provide mass employment. It is no wonder that, owing to the high unemployment rate and low level of qualifications of inhabitants, their major source of income comes from various forms of social aid, smuggling, and crime. Successful families usually need to have numerous jobs and sources of income in order to be able to make a livelihood.

Out of the restricted set of opportunities, tourism seems to be a promising source of income for those local residents who are in a better financial position and have entrepreneurial skills. The environment is attractive to tourists since the landscape is almost untouched, as is typical of areas with tiny settlements and hardly any industrial sites: it is full of bogs, marshlands, forests, and slow, meandering rivers and brooks. Besides rural tourism, numerous recreational opportunities are available to fans of sports and adventure tourism: many

⁶ Data from TSTAR, 2011.

rivers are suitable for boating, forests for hiking and the roads that were reconstructed after the recent great floods are ideal for cycling. In Szatmár, festival-oriented and culinary tourism has been present for about two decades and the number of lodging establishments and related enterprises increases year by year. Most people are familiar with the area because of the popularity of rowing and canoeing on the Tisza River, but related service capacity could be extended.

Tourism in Szatmárcseke

Szatmárcseke is favored by its natural and cultural environment. Below I summarize briefly the tourist sights and characteristics of the settlement.

The settlement, situated as it is on the bank of the river Tisza, has been an important destination of *water tourism* for decades. Despite the decline in water tourism in the past few years, which has guaranteed a nationwide reputation for this area, water-related tourism is still an important source of income, having generated several related services: beaches, snack bars, camp-sites, boat hire venues, etc.

Besides the natural sights, the village is known for its *cultural attractions*. Szatmárcseke is known principally as the place where the text of the Hungarian national anthem was written. Secondly, the village is famous for its boat-shaped wooden headboards that can be found by graves, which have been declared Calvinist monuments. In terms of *tourist services* a radical development has been observed in the past ten years in Szatmárcseke. At present there are two camp sites, two large (accommodating 24 and 31 guests) pensions and six smaller (accommodating 7-15 guests) bed and breakfasts, hostels and guesthouses; thus, there are 10 lodging establishments in total. With only one exception, all the accommodation, as well as the only local restaurant, are only open seasonally, from May to September.

In the past ten years various *culinary festivals* have rapidly become popular, organized within the framework of the Szatmár Festival. In Szatmárcseke the so-called *cinkefőző* festival⁷ is held each spring when folk dishes are cooked and served to visitors. But as far as gastronomy is concerned, the settlement has gained a reputation because of its plum jam competition, at which thick, sugar-free jam is simmered in cauldrons using traditional methods over two days. At the festival site visitors may stir, taste and purchase plum jam.

⁷ In the regional dialect it refers to a traditional dish similar to polenta made from potato and flour.

For local residents this festival is the most important occasion and site for the sale of local products. These services (the preparation and manufacture of jam, dried fruit, and souvenirs) supplement local tourism and provide a living for six families, and comprise a very important (although not exclusive) source of income for them. Besides the families who make a living out of tourism, there are other villagers also potentially involved in it. According to the mayor, there are people who typically live alone in spacious houses and desire to make use of their unused rooms. Formerly, they regularly accommodated tourists, but later, as they did not develop facilities (e.g. separate guest bathrooms), these guest houses failed to meet the requirements of contemporary tourists. Therefore they can enter the tourism market again only if the mayor recommends them and directs tourists to them.

3. HIERARCHICAL FEATURES OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE MARKET

3.1. About patron-client relationships in general

“The patron, who is in a better social position, provides a job for, protects and aids the client who is in a worse position and who politically supports his/her patron among the people who live under the same circumstances as the client does, and occasionally works for free for the patron”. The asymmetrical patron-client relationship that connects persons in different social positions with mutual interests is summarized this way in an entry in *Magyar Néprajzi Lexikon* (Sárkány 1987:221). Eisenstadt and Roniger have collected and described the general features of patron-client relations, out of which I highlight below only those features that are relevant to the case under survey.

Patron-client relationships rely on interactions that can be described as exchanges of various types of resources (typically economic or political: e.g. support, loyalty, votes or protection). This relationship is usually unconditional and is based on long-term credit and obligations. As a consequence, solidarity is an important element of the relationship (usually described as ‘loyalty’) between two (or more) partners. Solidarity is built into personal identity in the form of respect and obligations; moreover, after some time a personal bond may be formed between patron and client. At the same time, it is important to note that these relations are informal and never organized; moreover, they often contradict official rules and regulations. In theory, one may quit the patron-client relationship without any consequence, but typically the

relationship infers a long-term commitment of a compulsory nature, and in an ideal case, lasts a lifetime. These relations are vertically-structured; moreover, it seems that they undermine horizontal group organizations (especially among clients). The patron-client relationship is based on inequality and unequal power relations, where patrons monopolize certain positions that are important for their clients (Eisenstadt–Roniger 1980: 49-51).⁸

Edit Fél and Tamás Hofer recognized the complex system of patron-client relations in the 1950s-1960s during fieldwork carried out in Átány⁹. The authors described the advantages that mutual dependence can provide for both patrons and clients. For the patron, the most important advantage is that a cheap labor force is at their disposal which does not need paying in cash, and which can be mobilized in an informal way if necessary. The poor, meanwhile, get help from their patron: a means of transportation, draught animals, food, clothes or interest-free loans. The authors note that it is very important for the poor families that the patron provides information about various innovations, credit, machinery, procurement opportunities, etc. to which they do not have access due to their lack of connections and know-how. The patrons have important political roles as well: laborers in certain farmyards organized around a patron's property may openly declare their political commitment to supporting certain organizations, parties or persons. At elections the patrons' task may be to collect votes: In Hofer's research it was the clients' duty to vote in compliance with their patron's wishes (1973 in: Hofer 2001:199-237).

3.2. The maintenance of patron-client relations in Szatmárcseke

In Szatmárcseke we found a comprehensive paternalist model of village management when we began our research in 2005. This model is not the same as the traditional patron-client relationship (introduced in the previous chapter), but there are several features common to both, to which I refer in my analyses. The fundamental difference is that patron-client relationships in Szatmárcseke do not involve the strict reciprocity that traditional ones do. Besides the patron-client relations, the role of market exchanges is also significant. This approach is therefore a mixed model, which changes

⁸ The characteristics of patron-client relationships were collected and presented by Gyöngyi Schwarcz as well (2012), who interpreted them in the context of the actors of permanent land lease transactions.

⁹ A village in north-central Hungary.

over time. When in 2005 I started my research I found that many more transactions involved the mayor as a point of courtesy; today, however, market exchanges have gathered ground. However, in 2012 and 2013 when I went on with research in the settlement, I experienced a loosening of this type of paternalism; basically, the essence of this management style has not changed: the mayor declares that he patronizes the residents and in doing so he occasionally performs tasks that go beyond the normal undertakings of a mayor.

The reason for the preservation of a paternalist management style in Szatmárcseke is presumably historical. At the beginning of the 20th century a considerable fraction of the local population were poor peasants or farm servants who did not have lives or business strategies that would enable them to achieve prosperity on their own. Out of the elements of the servant mentality inherited from the past, Katalin Tausz emphasizes an eschewal of risk-taking and the pursuit of security, both of which prove to be later determinants in the worldview of former servants. *“They always worked as subordinates and were regarded as being unable to gain control over their own lives”* (Mátyus–Tausz 1984:129–130). This mentality was reinforced by the common economic experiences of the past five decades when strong local cooperatives were just as patronizing as landlords had formerly been (cf. in detail: Dénes et al. 2008). Therefore, the mayor has to fill the gap that came into being after the collapse of the cooperatives. The mayor of Szatmárcseke seizes all means (even at the expense of transcending his legally-regulated scope of competence) to substitute for lost care: he wants to create conditions that allow the local population to prosper and he also believes it is his task *“to teach local people how to be self-reliant”*. The existence of his positive reputation is supported by the fact that he was elected mayor for the sixth time in 2010. He has now been mayor for 23 years with no break. One may come to the conclusion that the majority of local residents both accept and demand this type of paternalist village management.¹⁰

10 A conclusion of the research supported by National Research Fund (OTKA T-48886) was that community strategies and functions undertaken by local councils become important in those settlements where market mechanisms are not adequate and where opportunities for individual livelihoods are strongly restricted. In other words, in want of individual livelihood strategies (e.g. successful enterprises) individuals merely strive to survive and local councils are forced to find solutions both for individuals and the community (cf. in detail: Dénes et al. 2008).

4. THE MAYOR OF SZATMÁRCSEKE AS PATRON

The quotation below aptly illustrates the comprehensive paternalist management style of the mayor: *“First of all, I like to be a mayor very much. Being a mayor also means that I deal with tourism here. And also that I make people cultivate the lands, and I deal with social issues: we should have a stock-raising program, we have machinery, and a saw mill [...] Because we always get to the point that we simply have to employ people and make them move somehow. If they are unable to organize the sale of their apples, then we organize this for them [...] An urban mayor would not understand what I am speaking about at all. And the case is the same with social aid – I have to go there to check, to tidy up [yards], I have to ensure that they get new windows, I have to do justice when they are quarreling about what side of the fence the tree is on, where the fruit fell and who should be allowed to collect the fruit. So all this is inherent in the system”* (Mayor of Szatmárcseke, 2012).

Alexandra Szőke investigated the social security system in Szatmárcseke. She also draws attention to the paternalist attitude of the mayor, referring to when he said *“we don’t let them sink into irreversible indebtedness and poverty”* (Szőke-Schwarz 2014). The mayor, indeed, does everything he can to improve the social positions of villagers with various forms of aid, public employment and access to other grant sources. Besides all this, he claims that his mission is to teach independence, self-reliance and entrepreneurial skills to local people. This principle was expressed by the mayor with regard to tourism: at first the mayor’s office coordinated all the tourism-related activities, including sale of products, organization of tourists and the distribution of accommodation; moreover, it provided financial support for local producers: for instance it paid for stalls for producers at fairs or exhibitions.

“At the beginning we went to all sorts of events to offer and advertise accommodation, we went everywhere to promote tourism in Szatmárcseke. Now this has changed, basically in the way that we provide an opportunity and give a name and then everybody goes there on his or her own to promote his or her enterprise. Now everybody takes his own product to market and I don’t give them anything. Moreover, at large fairs I ask them to pay the car fare and they take all the risks; they go there to promote what they have, and now it is they who take the products, jams, noodles, walnuts, beans, all sorts of things to sell” (Mayor of Szatmárcseke, 2012).

As the above quotation illustrates, the mayor is speaking about the entrepreneurs engaged in tourism as if they were his clients, as people he taught how to be self-reliant, how to take responsibility and risk. It is worth

noting that in the citations the functions and even identities of the mayor and the mayor's office (as an administrative center) regularly intermingle: *we* and *I* both refer to the mayor's office. Although the local council has already stopped granting extra financial support, the coordination function the mayor performs in terms of distributing accommodation and selling products is still extremely significant. 8-10 patronized families are involved in tourism; they typically offer accommodation to tourists or manufacture various products. Yet it has to be clarified that the system of mutual support that has emerged between the mayor and the above-mentioned families is not a classical patron-client relationship. The families typically try to enter the market with their services and products, and they are either unable to succeed on their own, or they are not successful enough. In such cases the mayor helps them, as he is capable of being a patron due to his skills and position in the local community.

The position of the mayor of Szatmárcseke can be characterized adequately using the term "authority", as defined by Ménard (2008). In the relationship between the actors on Szatmárcseke's tourist market and the mayor, the attributes of the leader have very big impact. The authority figure, working through influence and acceptance, creates private order between parties using informal frames.

4.1. The interests of the patron

1. *Political interests*: Edit Fél and Tamás Hofer drew attention to the political nature of the patron-client relationship, which is quite obvious in the case being described here. In Átány they observed canvassing patrons, while in Szatmárcseke the patron is the mayor himself, whose clients are presumably his voters as well. As a result of the vertical relations, the person who is on the top of the hierarchy gains ascendancy over those who are at the bottom, and this state of inequality is all the more obvious if this position is fulfilled by the administrative and political leader of the village community.

2. *Economic interests*: Besides gaining votes that reinforce his position, the mayor has a personal interest in supporting tourist enterprises and in promoting locally-available services. The owner of the largest lodging establishment in the settlement and the only restaurant and bar that is open year-round is the mayor himself. It is to his advantage if the number of tourists that visit the settlement increases (this can be achieved through extending the opportunities for lodging), since he will not have to decline potential guests even if he has no free rooms. Separating communal and individual interests is very difficult in this case, since they reinforce each other. As it transpired from interviews,

guiding and promoting tourism is a mission for the mayor. As he put it, the community accepts him as political leader, so long as he is “*economically a bit more ahead than the others*”.

“That’s right, I don’t want to lag behind, because people will say then: what does this mayor want of us if he can’t do it on his own? How does he dare to tell me to tidy up my yard if his own garden is unkempt? [...] So they expect me to have a little more than they do, but if I have more then I should share it with them [...] It is difficult to balance this in a way that you take the lead, but in the meantime you should not be too eager either; because then people say that you are too pushy and you want to grab everything for yourself” (Mayor of Szatmárcseke, 2012).

It is clear that, in this case, a complicated patron-client relationship prevails. One reason for this complexity is the overlapping functions of mayor and patron, and in the corresponding mixture of individual and community interests, objectives, and methods. Below I take a closer look at the elements of the hierarchical organization of the market for tourism in Szatmárcseke and the features of the patron-client relations inherent in this.

4.2. The patron as distributor of accommodation

In a tourist market entrepreneurs usually sell their accommodation and services on their own, or sometimes in cooperation with one another. In Szatmárcseke the case is different: it is typical, even nowadays, that the mayor, while organizing major events and programs that will attract visitors, distributes guests among hosts and occasionally puts subtle pressure on the owners of large unused houses to open their rooms to tourists. Besides this, he encourages and helps with all his means those people who wish to extend and/or restore lodgings or any tourist facilities. In the background of this attitude lies hope for the blossoming of local tourism and related local products.

In 2005 I experienced that the majority of tourists seeking accommodation were directed to hostels, guest houses and pensions by the mayor’s office: “*there was a lady in the mayor’s office who was responsible for it, and coordinated all this*”. In the past eight years this practice has changed: booking accommodation is usually accomplished via the internet and no longer takes place via the mayor’s office. On the website of the settlement local lodging establishments are listed, some with their own website, thus tourists usually select accommodation on their own, although a number of potential guests still ask for information and advice about local accommodation at the mayor’s office.

Despite this change, the mayor still plays an important role in the coordination of accommodation; all the more so as in the meantime he has become the largest tourist-serving entrepreneur in the village. He has built a pension with 24 beds, a restaurant and bar, where he can provide a wide range of services for guests. The pension of the mayor stands out above other similar enterprises: on the one hand it has a restaurant, which is unique to the area (thus the managers or owners of other lodging establishments without licenses or the capacity to open a restaurant send their guests to the mayor's place). Additionally, the mayor is the only entrepreneur in the area whose pension is open in winter as well, so during this season other hosts also send their potential guests to his place. In this way the mayor is practically able to monopolize the tourist market in the low season and has a monopoly with institutional catering as well. One reason for the mayor's success is that he is genuinely interested in catering and tourism (and his skills are reinforced by his specialized qualifications). On the other hand, it could be claimed that his political status has helped him to succeed.

4.3. Mutual interests

"You must not let a guest go away!" This slogan is often heard in villages in Szatmár. For the mayor of Szatmárcseke this is not simply a slogan, but the essence of his mentality, since he really does everything he can to attract visitors to the village. Many people complain that tourism in this area is only seasonal, and is moreover concentrated around two months in summer. In this short period there are two or three weeks at the peak of festival time and during various events when there is not enough accommodation in the village. Then comes the mayor as coordinator: if there is not enough (or not enough appropriate) lodging, he orders the opening of all public institutions in the village to provide room for guests: this includes the nursery, school, cultural center, etc. But according to the mayor, if it is necessary in wintertime (e.g. at New Year's Eve, hunting times, for a pig-slaughtering party) he will also persuade hosts to receive guests, even if the mayor (or, rather, his staff at the office) have to tidy up homes or heat them.

"And there is Auntie Klári, who has an empty house and I know that she is old and does not want to open it in winter. And then I say to her: 'Look, Auntie Klári, we need your house, because there is not enough room for the visitors. I will send a man to your place, and we shall put the heating on, warm up the house, we shall tidy up everything, because it is necessary now.' 'Well then, my son,' she says, 'just come and do as you like, but I don't have time

for it” (Mayor of Szatmárcseke, 2012).

A process of patronizing is clearly observable in how the accommodation of guests is organized and managed in Szatmárcseke, coupled with the utilization of opportunities that arise from the prevailing power relations. In the first case it happens when public institutions are transformed into lodging establishments during the high season for festivals and public property is used for the sake of the settlement. But in the second case the mayor sends employees from the mayor’s office to tidy up and prepare an old lady’s house to receive his own guests. In this case not only is the articulation of the mayor’s own interests visible, but financial support is provided to the old lady as well, since she pockets the fee for the accommodation paid by the guests. At the same time, it is worth noting that even if both partners gain from the situation, the relationship is obviously asymmetrical and hierarchical: the mayor solves the problem of the lack of accommodation by applying his authority and employing the capacity that comes from his administrative position and creates a communicative situation whereby the other party cannot say *no* – or at least it is not really easy for them to say *no*. The process has two drivers and outcomes: on the one hand the relationship is of a private-individual character, since eventually the mayor’s own guests are accommodated (and the old lady profits as well), while on the other hand it is in the public interest if one accepts the explanation that accommodating visitors by all means is in the interest of the entire local community.

During my summer fieldwork I also experienced how guests were accommodated in the village: several groups arrived at my own hosts’ residence one week, after having been sent there from the mayor’s office. But the mayor’s support for certain families is visible not only in terms of the organization and distribution of tourists. Solidarity and loyalty typical of patron-client relations has been created between the mayor of Szatmárcseke and his clients as well. This is resulting in long-term commitment from the partners in other fields of life. The mayor feels responsible for the livelihoods of families loyal to him,¹¹ and since in this area very few people or enterprises manage to live solely from tourism, he provides access for those persons who he believes deserve it to further jobs, posts, and aid. In the quotation below the mayor speaks about a host who is also a cook in the mayor’s restaurant and who, with her husband, worked for the mayor’s office or in the mayor’s own enterprises for decades. This couple could not make a living solely from providing accommodation and services to tourists, so at least one of them had

11 Not only touristic entrepreneurs are the mayor’s clients and not all touristic entrepreneurs are his clients.

to have a permanent job elsewhere.

“Or, take for instance, my little cook, who owns the ‘Panni’ guesthouse. She transformed her grandma’s house into a guesthouse, and she sends her guests to dine in my restaurant. Her place is OK, so if I have got an extra group of tourists coming then I say to her: ‘Don’t you want to take them?’ Hosts are not really happy about having guests in winter, since it is not profitable for them to start heating empty houses. Then would they rather help me, and then in summer I can help them in exchange and they send their tourists to my restaurant to dine there. So that’s why I say that, slowly, all these things will be connected” (Mayor of Szatmárcseke, 2012).

4.4. Patron as organizer of sale

In the Szatmár villages where I carried out fieldwork the primary locally-manufactured product for sale is plum jam, prepared in a traditional way. Other traditional and area-specific products include cornel berry jam, dried fruit, and plum brandy (*szilvapálinka*). Although villagers in almost every household are engaged in domestic brandy distillation, until recently they could only sell the product semi illegally, as to sell it legally very strict requirements had to be met.¹² In the settlements of the micro-region there are usually one or two such producers who manufacture the above-mentioned products in considerable volumes. They typically sell the products in their villages or they package the products and send them via post. There are only a few producers who are permanent suppliers of shops in cities, or who rent stalls.

Selling local products takes place at three major sites in Szatmárcseke. (1) The most important occasion is the annual, two-day plum simmering contest, attended by approximately 9000 -10 000 visitors.¹³ Everybody who has jam for sale registers themselves for the contest. At the contest, as part of a show, the entrants simmer the jam in public, but obviously the majority of the products they sell have been previously made at home. During the two days of the festival the small-scale producers can sell the majority of their products and may accept further orders. (2) Apart from local festivals and events, orders may come in to the village community throughout the

12 The legal regulation concerning brandy-making was modified in 2010 (<http://www.palinkafozes.com/palinkafozes-otthon-torveny>), but it has not visibly influenced the supply of brandy.

13 Another important occasion is the ‘cinke’ cooking contest held in February

year: “*somebody phones to say that he will come here and he needs this or that much jam*”. These requests are usually transmitted to the mayor or the mayor’s office, and rarely to the producers themselves. (3) Selling jam in bulk may occur at various festivals held throughout the country, to which access is possible only “*via connections*” (especially in cases where “*no stall fees have to be paid*”).

In Szatmárcseke, the mayor’s office, or rather the mayor himself, not only managed the social land program and tourist accommodation, but also the sale of local products in 2005. The mayor identified sales channels and the mayor’s office rented the stalls and organized vendors. Owing to the centralized management approach the products were of uniform design: there was a label on each jar on which the name of the village and data about the producer were displayed. In 2012 the mayor said that 80% of sales were “*still being coordinated by the mayor’s office*” (including the mayor’s own connections). This situation has changed only in so far as the local council no longer provides financial support for these events. However, it is the mayor’s office that defines the channels of sales and issues licenses.

“Those who come to a fair should sell the jam, get money, and make a living. Formerly, such an event cost me 200 000 HUF; now it doesn’t cost anything. What we do now is acquire the necessary licenses, because producers have to register themselves with the National Public Health and Medical Officer Service, and they have to satisfy a lot of formal requirements, and we do that for them. We give our name, and they, as agricultural producers, do what they have to” (Mayor of Szatmárcseke, 2012).

It is worth noting again how in this quote references to the functions of the mayor and the mayor’s office overlap: when the mayor says: “*now it doesn’t cost anything*”, he is referring to the reduction in costs for the mayor’s office. When he says: “*we give our name*”, he is speaking about the representation and the reputation of the village. In my view, what is happening here is not only a merging of roles and means in order to achieve “*greater cost efficiency*”, but a concrete process of identification which includes the role of patron and client: the leader almost becomes one with his settlement and he does business and takes responsibility as if he were heading his own private enterprise.

Out of the features listed by Hofer and Fél, I can highlight a factor that is of central importance to the tourist market; namely, the information that is acquired and distributed by the patron about tenders, sales channels, etc. The patron not only acquires information but he has well-functioning connections due to his position and know-how that are not otherwise available to local people. When the village is asked to be represented at a certain event this is a

great opportunity for small-scale producers. In such cases the mayor notifies producers that it is possible to sell their products without having to pay rent for the stalls they will use. Sellers who go to fairs (which may last for days and can be rather tiring) sell their products on the spot but at the same time represent the settlement. On these occasions the participants expect not only to make sales, but also to increase the opportunities for their business and to make long-term relationships.

“I made six big and about forty smaller jars of plum jam and I sold them for 70 000 HUF. The mayor brought me this business. It lasted three weeks; we sold the jars in shifts week by week and we almost froze during the week we were selling jam. It was a culinary show” (an agricultural producer from Szatmárcseke, 2005).

4.5. The mayor as quality controller

On quality control of local products

Mayors in Szatmár often say that *“the market excludes low quality products in the long run”*. However, in contrast to this opinion, and as far as the production of plum jam from Szatmár is concerned, waiting for markets to find their product is not a good idea. Food available in supermarket chains must meet strict quality criteria, but brands or products that are typical of a certain micro-regions or regions (such as the Szatmár plum), which have not yet been introduced and protected, are largely unregulated in terms of quality. Tibor Kuczsi and Lilla Tóth (2014) have highlighted the risks of exchanges made on *“markets of non-standardized quality”* when investigating the construction industry in Hungary. In these markets the access of consumers to proper information is significantly more restricted than on markets of standardized quality, so they *“belatedly, only after the transaction is complete, realize what they have actually purchased”*. This uncertainty is characteristic of the Szatmár case as well.

Yet the case of the construction industry and the case of local products such as plum jam from Szatmár differ: although both of them involve non-standardized markets, in the former case the lack of standards results in distortions in the market, in the latter case the unique nature of products may be an advantage. The authors illustrate this point using an example from the market for wine, where it is obviously favorable if a product has distinct, individual features. In the market for local products there are no strict quality standards, yet certain criteria have to be met. There are regional brands which

define the reference framework (e.g. only certain wineries that satisfy certain criteria may use the name ‘Hungarian Tokaj’ or ‘French Bordeaux’). Regional brands, then, are protected, but there are products with unique features which may compete on the market with their unique products.

The protection and registration of plum jam from Szatmár area as a regional brand is in progress: it has not yet been clarified what this category means and a system for monitoring and regulation has not yet been defined. A non-governmental organization from the region recently nominated the simmering of plum jam as a ‘*Hungaricum*’ (an officially-recognized and legally-protected traditional Hungarian product): the traditional process of jam-making was documented on the basis of ethnographic sources and information collected from elderly inhabitants of the area. In this way the criteria defined for the product may yet provide a basis for selecting trade-mark qualified products. The branding process exclusively refers to a sugar-free, thick jam that is simmered for two days while being constantly stirred in a traditional manner. The plum should be the regionally prevalent plum, a small, sweet fruit.

At this point it is worth remarking on an important contradiction: the local, indigenous variety of plum becomes ripe in September, while the related tourist events are held in August. This means that the plums that are sold in large quantities in August at the Plum Jam Simmering Contest or during other Szatmár Festival events are not of the traditional plum species. The interests of promoting tourism and promoting the regional brand clash: a large number of visitors cannot be attracted to the village in autumn since tourists usually combine attendance at the festival with bathing, canoeing, and hiking. The mayor of Szatmárcseke commented that his enterprise organizes ‘real’ plum jam simmering events in autumn, when guests may take a look at the way plum jam is made from the authentic plum varietal.¹⁴

Means of sanctioning and monitoring

At present there is no means for monitoring and controlling how the criteria defined for the regional brand are observed, nor sanctioning of the destruction of brands. Therefore, as a provisional solution, informal quality controllers are trying to defend the reputation of Szatmár area. These ‘quality controllers’

14 Dean MacCannel (1973) named this process staged authenticity, when the reproductions of the original phenomenon are on display while local people behind the scenes live their ‘real’ lives. In this case traditional plum jam simmering has been exchanged for a form adaptable for the stage, and the authentic raw material is no longer used. Although it is of regional interest that the traditional plum brand be registered and protected, the festival has been held for more than ten years.

are usually the mayors of the region.

As I mentioned above, due to the low autonomy of actors, authority plays an important role in coordinating the Szatmár tourist market. This is intensified by the lack of quality standards with which to characterize local products and services, and the willingness to create a local trademark. The combination of these two factors results is very likely to result in the centralization of the coordination of market actors. (Ménard 2008). The risk of uncertainty and opportunity can be handled efficiently only by economic actors with authority. Protecting the Szatmár brands and substituting formal regulation, leaders emerge who claim that support and authority is needed to coordinate the market – and that they are the actors who should coordinate these cooperative efforts. In this way the mayor is almost ‘forced’ to play the role of quality controller if (s)he wants to protect his/her own, the settlement’s and, in broader sense, the region’s reputation. Putting the name and contact information of producers on labels on jars will be in vain if a low-grade product enters the market and corrupts the reputation of the region and its plum jam as well.

“So if I take jam to market under my name, then at first I taste it. And I know that, for example, it’s sure I wouldn’t buy jam from XY, because I know how he makes jam. It is not of a high standard, and it’s sure that I wouldn’t give it to anybody. He should solve his own problems. So when we take somebody’s products to market, then I know for sure they are quality products. Because when I take jam to market for sale, I taste it beforehand, obviously” (Mayor of Szatmárcseke, 2011).

At the same time, the mayor only monitors external sales while transactions within the settlement are not supervised. This means that tourists who visit the literary and cultural sights of the settlement are entering into a blind bargain by buying products that are of uncertain origin and quality, just as in the cases described by Kuczi and Tóth (2014). This segment of the market is completely unregulated at present.

Selecting participants involves considering quality and pricing policy, but this does not completely happen in compliance with market conditions. As it turns out, there is an informal guide to price: quality plum jam can be sold for 1200–1500 HUF/kg. People who want to make a large profit quickly by raising their price are excluding themselves from the group of ‘honest producers’ and can be classified as *“self-seekers”*. In these cases the mayor may withdraw his support for them, no longer be willing to do business with them, and will not invite them to sell their products any longer. Sanctioning the destruction of reputation is a common practice, not only in this village, but in the micro-region as well. During my fieldwork I observed that the small-

scale producer mentioned in the following quote, due to his market behavior, was not welcome at other events in the micro-region.

“I don’t really like to do business with him because we formerly made an agreement that in Szatmárcseke everybody who sells products via us should set their price at 1200 HUF, and in the capital, in Budapest, at 1500 HUF. And then he comes and violates the agreement and sells jam for 2700-2800 HUF. I don’t like this because I like long-term business. He is a self-seeker. Other producers come to us and observe the terms of our agreement” (Mayor of Szatmárcseke 2012).

With respect to the sale of products in Szatmárcseke, once again we can encounter hierarchy manifesting itself in the marketplace. The direction and coordination of market actors is necessary for many reasons: on the one hand, in the tourism market in the Szatmár area the formation and protection of local products is in the making and no clear rules have been defined yet. Lacking guides, villagers who became accustomed to having external support in the Socialist past still desire this. They are more willing to accept direction from a person who is above them in the social hierarchy because of his position, and the mayor’s reputation is reinforced by the fact that he has a tourist enterprise as well.

The tasks he performs definitely go beyond the scope of the regular duties of mayors and the means he uses are similar to those of an informal patron. The former examples provided show how the relationship extends beyond legal regulation and rules. The local community ignores such cases or does not question the legitimacy of these actions (c.f. the ‘umpiring’ of the mayor, identified as his duty). These facts indicate that the authoritative patron has created a special form of sovereign internal order with which he can coordinate market actors, and which is based on the acceptance of the majority.

When I asked the mayor how selection of producers takes place when a favorable opportunity for sale is approaching, the semi-humorous answer said a lot about his methods of coordination: *“Well, if by chance it occurs that, for example, nobody wants to go to a fair, then, since we live in a democracy, I name and appoint two or three persons who have to go. But this happens very rarely”* (Mayor of Szatmárcseke, 2012).

5. CONCLUSION

In Szatmárcseke, with the help of authority, the mayor organizes the tourist market along patron-client relations and, in doing so, he not only coordinates but also creates the actors themselves. As a patron he provides the missing

network and know-how, reinforces entrepreneurial willingness and, last but not least, sets an example. Owing to the desire of the population to be directed, and the willingness and management skills of the mayor, a comprehensive process of paternalistic settlement management prevails in the village. The local tourist market that has been taking shape for about a decade also bears the features of this paternalist attitude: the mayor himself has ‘trained’ a group of entrepreneurs, many of whom have started independent enterprises since then. At the same time, the full independence of market actors is against the interests of the mayor, so he tries to maintain patron-client relations: he still takes part in distributing tourist traffic among lodging establishments, and if he finds it necessary, he delicately puts pressure on potential actors to participate in providing accommodation. To achieve this aim, he uses all means at his disposal due to his power and position.

The defense of the micro-regional brand and local products is in process (Szatmár plum ‘pálinka’ and jam have already been qualified as a ‘Hungaricum’). Because of the free riders who exist this does not automatically mean that the market for products made from Szatmár plums can be completely standardized in terms of quality requirements. In reality it means that customers who purchase products on such markets do not know in advance what they are really buying, therefore purchasing is risky. At this point the mayor enters the scene as he monitors his own business, just as well as businesses that are in the interests of the local council, tastes the jam and takes responsibility for the quality of the product.

Having a mayor who is the chief organizer of local tourism is not unique to this area (on the contrary, his ideas and actions could be seen as typical). In my opinion the simultaneous presence of a number of factors – which Ménard (2008) defines – has resulted in the emergence of a model of coordination based on the mayor’s authority in the field of tourism in Szatmár. A lack of quality standards that leads to feelings of uncertainty, along with opportunistic market behavior, have resulted in a centralized model of leadership. I chose Szatmárcseke as the subject of my analysis because this field site is exceptional taking into consideration how market mechanisms can be coupled with patron-client relations, where the mayor with the help of the authority vested in his position not only coordinates but ‘pushes’ people who would not otherwise have had the opportunity or motivation into participating in the market.

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