



The Communication and Marketing Strategy of the Ratatouille Festival Based on Local Heritage in Szentes, Hungary

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Kulcsszavak

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Absztrakt

Culinary festivals are very popular and trendy in the 21st century. Local food festivals are the public events of transferring culture. What the audience sees is only one aspect of the whole picture but the main intentions of the organizers usually stay hidden behind the posters and advertisements. Consumers get a perfectly planned marketing mix which is an act of a professional team to make the organizing association, in our case, a commercial firm more popular and well-known in the local area. They want to encourage shopping and increase the turnover and the income of the store. The main feature of the festival is based on local traditions and cultural heritage. The festival's main idea consists of a constructed knowledge of the agricultural background of Szentes, a town located in the Great Hungarian Plain and called: 'the land of foil raising'.

Culinary festivals have become very popular and trendy by the 21st century. Local food festivals are public events of transferring culture. They intensify the community's solidarity and frame their identities (Simon 2015: 229-245). What the audience sees is only one aspect of the whole picture but the main intentions of the organizers usually stay hidden behind the posters and advertisements. Consumers get a perfectly planned marketing mix which is an act of a professional team to make the organizing association, in our case, a commercial firm which is popular and famous in the local area. They want to encourage shopping and increase the turnover and the income of the store (Veres-Szilágyi 2007: 197). Moreover, the main feature of the festival is based on local traditions and cultural heritage. In my study, I emphasize the role of socialization via the communication and marketing strategy of the Ratatouille Festival. Behind the social functions every festival has its own symbolism that reflects special identity factors. Festivals make the communal celebration memorable and reveal or perhaps reconstitute local cultural heritage. The examination of cultural memory is a basic step in the research. The aim of the celebration and the exchanged values depend on the purposes of the festival organizers (Szabó 2011: 10). I present the festival supplies that are revivals of local traditions and social heritage. Festivals as special celebrations are embedded in different social networks. That's the starting point of my study.

The Methodology of the Research

I started examining the local festivals of Szentes in 2011. None of them were uncommon as I have been a participant observer since my childhood. As a data collection method I used participant observation, made several interviews and searched for the online and offline media. The location of the Ratatouille Festival is an important part of the fiesta's synthesis. The town's location and history, the community's meeting spots are all parts of the organizer elements. Both place and time give frame to the whole event. I was wondering how the celebration works: when it is, how long it lasts, what the duration of the organizing process is. I made interviews with the organizers, the participants and the local people. The organizers played a central role in my inquiring aspect. The age of the participants, their belonging to groups and their participating motivation were my main questions. Using special tools that reflect to the community's past was the main curiosity of the

Ratatouille Festival. The coordinators' special aim is not to forget the town's past and to give space and place to be gathered as locals and competitors of a cooking competition.

Szentes, the 'Centre of Plastic Tunnels'

Szentes is an agricultural town located in the South-East of Hungary. With its continental climate people mostly do cultivation for a living. Continental climates often have a significant annual variation in temperature (hot summers and cold winters) and the number of sunny hours are very high (Vigh 2004: 15). In addition, the soil also makes the place worth calling 'the home of paprika and tomato'. The tradition of vegetable cultivation goes back to medieval times presented by the socages and later, in the 19th century, by peasants' vegetable gardens and day-labour fields. Until the establishment of farmers' co-operatives in the 1960's the place of cultivation was on the fields that belonged to the farms or in the town gardens. After the Turkish expulsion Austrian and German gardeners settled in Hungary and developed their own cultivation methods in the prominent loams. Bulgarian gardeners came to Szentes in the late 1800's bringing new ways of gardening with them. They are called glasshouse planting and phyto-irrigation or aquatic irrigation. Their methods, production and goods are infiltrated into the Hungarian economy (Szűcs 2003: 17-18.). The agriculture and the garden culture of Szentes were boosted by the utilization of thermal water in the 1960's. Agriculture has been the source of living for the locals since the early times even until today. (1st pic)

About the Conception of the Ratatouille Festival

At the beginning (in 2002) the Ratatouille Festival was a co-workers' day of the Hunor Coop Ltd., a commercial firm in Hungary. The main idea was born in György Horváth's mind who was the president of the Szentesi Kertbarát (Friends of Gardening in Szentes) Association and also the president of the Hunor Coop Ltd's Supervisory Committee. It has all begun as a company surprise for the workers and their families. The management of the foodstuff company found out that it would be their pleasure to invite and host their workers for a plate of a ratatouille as a team building act. They have chosen the ratatouille because of the paprika and tomato growing in town. The raw materials were given. The ratatouille is not a typical Hungarian food but it is in since the Turkish expulsion (Interview with Zoltán Mészáros 2018).

The aim of the first family day of Hunor Coop Ltd. was not only the team-building process but the establishment of a modern department store as well. The location of the celebration was in front of the Kála Department Store (former: the Skála Warehouse). About 200-250 participants tasted the ratatouille in 2002 (Interview with Zoltán Mészáros 2018). (2nd pic)

The History of Food Trade in Szentes

The Hunor Coop Ltd. is a commercial company that dates back to the first half of the 20th century. The predecessor of the company called Szentes és Vidéke Körzeti Földművelésszövetkezet (Agricultural Co-operative of Szentes and its Region) was established in 1945. Before the 2nd World War, the 'HANGYA' co-operatives did the same job. They had headquarters buildings, commercial exchange points, credit union partnership in towns and had the motto: 'convention is the only way to be successful in the market' (Interview with Zoltán Mészáros 2018). The progenitor of the Hunor Coop Ltd., the Szentes és Vidéke ÁFÉSZ was a typical department store of the countryside. Their biggest store in Szentes was and still is, the Kála Department Store. It is located near the city centre in a residential district. Its name changed from Skála Warehouse into Kála Department Store in 1994-1995. After a short period of time the idea of the store's total renovation came up. It was renewed in 2011 and sponsored by the Hunor Coop Ltd. and other funds (HunorCoop. hu é.n.). Looking through the history of Kála Department Store helps to understand why this festival is unique. It is held in a special part of the town which has always been an important commercial spot not only because of the warehouse but the vegetable market nearby. It is not a festival organized and sponsored by the town but Szentes definitely takes part in it and invites international guests, give some support and made this celebration one of the town's emblematic features. The Rataouille Festival is the biggest event of tourism as well and the town presents it in the Tourism Fair (Exhibition of Tourism) in Budapest. (3rd pic)

The Communication and Marketing Strategy of the Ratatouille Festival

The secret of the Ratatouille Festival's communication strategy is easy – it stayed cozy and family-friendly despite its large size (around 15.000 visitors). The first proposal was such a success that everyone looked forward to the continuation. The festival's fame and its news spread all over the region, later in the country and abroad as well. The amount of the cauldrons and the participants of the ratatouille cooking competition were getting higher and higher from year to year. Its enthrallment is in its family scale (Interview with Zoltán Mészáros 2018). There are numerous gastro festivals in the region which are solely about business (for example the Fish Soup Festival in Szeged where the caterers cook their soups and sell them to the visitors [thousands of people]). The Ratatouille Festival in Szentés is not one of them. They do not sell the food for their own profit but sell support tickets for good cases every year – for example children's ward in the local hospital: the participants can buy a plate of ratatouille with these support tickets. The organizers' target audience has always been the families and friends of the coworkers. The Ratatouille Festival does not have profit: it is rather a PR event of the Hunor Coop Ltd. The philosophy of the firm is the following: 'the most important thing is to make the consumer happy and satisfied' (Interview with Zoltán Mészáros 2018).

Communication is the act of conveying meanings from one group to another through the use of mutually understood signs, symbols and semiotic rules. In our case the first group is the organizers' group (Hunor Coop Ltd.) and the other one is the visitors' and co-workers' group. The company sends messages to the people through advertising. The firm needs to know the consumers' needs, behavior and habits (Veres-Szilágyi 2007: 199-201). The company aims to do so: they have a professional communication and marketing strategy. The organizing project restarts when the festival ends. The inner organizers' circle consists of the Commercial Department's co-workers and the shopkeepers. Moreover, there are volunteers from the retired workers and family members, cc. 30 people) (Interview with Zoltán Mészáros 2018).

Public relations activities are also very important for the company. Being there, taking part, cooking and competing are all parts of these activities. The aim of public relations is to inform the public, prospective customers, partners, employees and ultimately persuade them to maintain a positive view about the company. The general manager invites the co-workers, pays their additional costs, gives the cooking ingredients for free and provides a cozy tone by giving them a place to be together and have fun. The aim of the external PR activities of the firm is to bring good reputation of the festival and the stores. People connect the festival with the store and call the manager 'Ratouille Zoli'. 'Do something good and do not keep it a secret' – sounds the president's slogan (Interview with Zoltán Mészáros 2018). Corporate social responsibility is an internal organizational policy or a corporate ethic strategy. The Hunor Coop Ltd. gives sponsorship to more than 50 institutions – kindergartens, schools, sport clubs and pensioners' clubs. It is already a great achievement if people enjoy themselves in the Ratatouille Festival – says the manager (Interview with Zoltán Mészáros 2018).

The company's Commercial Department manages the advertisements. They place the festival's elements into the store's ads and promotions. Numerous photos are taken from year to year and most of them are posted on the company's website and social media pages (<http://hunorcoop.hu/>). The invitations and the first advertisements appear in the local media in July. They use only local advertisements because it is not part of the main aim to boost the size of the celebration directly. Although a few national and regional TV channels (M1, Ozone TV) also visited the Ratatouille Festival to make reports. The company's stores are in the South-East of Hungary so they can reach their targets there.

The festival's respectability and the communication of the locals are so strong that the Ratatouille Festival does not use any paid commercial in the national media. Newspaper reports can be found such as donating and supporting cases, cultivating good relations and partnership.

The newest aim is to make the stores more 'sexy' because 'sexy' in the language of commerce means showy and eye-appealing. They made a photo wall with people in bikinis and they set up stocks with the following line: 'a ratatouille addict'. 'Giving positive experiences, believing in the future and good things attract good things' – says the owner of the company (Interview with Zoltán Mészáros 2018). The company has a continuous interaction with its environment. In the firm's field of operation the consumers' impact plays the most important role. The communication strategy is part of the marketing strategy that helps the company to reach its goals (Magyar 2010: 104).

Ferenc Vidovics (local photographer, graphic artist) is the designer of the festival's graphic elements, leaflets and promo videos (Interview with Zoltán Mészáros 2018). His plans were accepted and chosen by the manager, Zoltán Mészáros. The main idea of the whole campaign was to be merry and have a family-friendly atmosphere. He used vivid colors and showy figures (mostly vegetables from Szentes) to achieve this goal. Paprikas, tomatoes, onions are the symbols of the festival – they used these elements for promotional aims: they appeared on headbands and aprons. The national flag's colors also appeared in the festival because every co-worker had a national colored T-shirt. It was designed by the ex-commercial manager, István Csiszár (Interview with Zoltán Mészáros 2018). The T-shirt strengthens the workers' national identity and their attachment to the company – in addition, it also symbolizes the Hungarian ownership of the firm. Beyond the paprikas and the tomatoes the Hungarian national character also plays a big role. The Rataouille Festival does not have its own logo the company uses the Hunor Coop Ltd's logo. But the main characters of the festival are definitely a smiling paprika and a smiling tomato for the outsider onlookers. The contesting teams also became the symbols of the festival. For other companies and institutions the festival and participation in the cooking contest means a teambuilding opportunity.

The Rataouille Festival has broadened every year considering its size, territory and visitor numbers which signifies its success. At the beginning the event lasted only one afternoon but later it became a 2-day-long festival: the programs begin with bacon roasting on Friday evening and then continue with the cooking contest on Saturday afternoon. The organizers installed a fun park for children from the beginning of the 2000's. A few years ago only two stages were set up but nowadays they provide three of them with different kinds of entertainment (popular rock concerts, concerts for children). More and more celebrities are invited to give a show which strengthens the festival's potential. Huge successes were: Kovács "Kokó" István, the boxer; Norbert Növényi, the wrestler and Ágnes Kovács, the swimmer. Countless photos were taken and some of them ended up in the star guests' social media sites. The celebrity guests and the symbols of the festival all enhance the good atmosphere and help to enlighten the contesting cooking teams activities (Interview with Zoltán Mészáros 2018).

Summary

The Rataouille Festival is one of the most important events of the year in Szentes's calendar. A for-profit company's family day became an expansively celebrated festival: locals can express their identity by participating in the cooking contest. The event is also popular among foreigners: the general manager maintains a good relationship with Hungarians who live outside Hungary and he invites his foreign acquaintances every year (Interview with Zoltán Mészáros 2018).

The local bonding and the usage of local heritage ensure the festival's success: making it into the centre of attention has good effects on tourism besides the local communities and the company's goals.

Agriculture and cultivation is part of the town's history and a form of subsistence. Growing vegetables defines the town's gastronomy even today. That is the reason why the organizers chose the ratatouille which consists of paprikas, tomatoes and onions. Several vegetable and fruit species are connected with the town: a plant research institute used to work in Szentes and eight species were chosen into the local heritage database. One of them is the main cooking ingredient of the ratatouille – the white paprika. The event and the company support local economy as they provide the local grower's goods for their customers and participants. That is the way the Rataouille Festival could become the most popular festival in town.

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INTERVIEW:

Zoltán Mészáros – general manager, Hunor Coop Ltd.

Interviewer: Zsófia Pintér

Plot: Hunor Coop Ltd., 5. Petőfi Str., Szentes, Hungary

Date: 10.01.2018



1. picture: Szentes, 2009. Unknown author. Source: <http://www.szentes.hu/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/DSCN8909-1.jpg>



2. picture: The place of the event: Kála Maxi Coop Supermarket, Szentes, 2018. Author: Hunor Coop Zrt. Source: <http://www.hunorcoop.hu/>

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3. picture: The poster of the Ratatouille Festival, Szentes, 2017. Author: Hunor Coop Zrt. Source: <http://www.szentesilecsosfesztival.hu/>



4. picture: The Ratatouille Festival, Szentes, 2016. The author's photo.