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The Issue of the Utilization of Thermal Resources in Somogy County (1960-1990)

Abstract

The purpose of the study. To examine how the situation of thermal tourism in Somogy county developed during the period of socialism. The importance of the use of thermal wells for tourism or industrial purposes was considered by the county council and the organizations of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP).

Applied methods. Literature review, especially the development of thermal tourism. The overview includes general processing of economic and tourism history. We place great emphasis on the use of archival materials. It is also important to examine the local press and use the collections of legislation.

Outcomes. In Hungary, more and more economic policy measures have been taken since the 1960s to develop tourism. In some rural areas, this was linked to the increased number of oil drillings at the time, as hot water was found in many cases during the test drillings, on which thermal tourism could later be built. Despite the fact that Somogy County was already a prominent tourist destination through Lake Balaton, until the mid-1970s, 22 springs were found during the test drillings where the temperature of the water breaking to the surface exceeded 35 °C. Some of these wells were closed, but the issue of their exploitation could not be circumvented, which caused a number of problems due to a lack of material and human resources. At the same time, the Somogy County Council and county organizations of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) took the issue of thermal tourism extremely seriously and developed a concept for their development on two occasions. However, this only applied only to four major spas: Nagyatád, Igal, Csokonyavisonta and Kaposvár. The smaller spas were entrusted to local maintainers.

Keynotes: thermal tourism, council, thermal water, spa

1. Introduction

After the Second World War, the Sovietization of Hungary began with nationalizations in economic terms.¹ Of course, this also affected the spas and thermal baths in the country. In Somogy County, only the spa in Nagyatád existed at that time, which was severely damaged during the World War.² During the first five-year plan period, the Rákosi regime, which focused on major heavy and military investments, did not address the issue of tourism or spa culture.³ There was no concept of treating nationalized spas beyond operating them, and tourism was only worker's holidays.

Progress was made in 1955 with the establishment of the National Tourism Council,⁴ and the following year, the role of tourism was appreciated. As a result of the revolution and the subsequent negative international response, the number of tourists from the west fell again by the second half of the 1950s. The boost in tourism became increasingly urgent as the country's general economic indicators showed a deteriorating trend.⁵ The second five-year plan, which was launched in1961, once again gave tourism an important role.

¹ Domonkos, E. (2019): 81-82.

² Kanyar, J. (1970): 232-233.

³ Kaposi, Z. (2002): 350-351.; Kaposi, Z. (2007): 116-120.

⁴ Kovács, L. -Takács J. (1966): 77.

⁵ Rehák, G. (2009): 116.

Resolution 3117/1960 on the development of tourism was finally issued.⁶ Among the areas to be developed, they focused mainly on Budapest and the shores of Lake Balaton, but there was also talk of medical tourism. The text stated that the tourism development of spas was only slow and slow, some of the examples listed did not include the Nagyatád spa.

At the same time, the county has thermal springs not only in the territory of Nagyatád, it was already known at the time of the resolution of the Government. There was a spa south from Nagyatád, in Kivadár (which was an independent village), where it was built by Earl Somssich, its ruins still exist today. Back in 1943, during a hydrocarbon exploration, the source of thermal water in Csokonyavisonta was discovered, and in 1947, in Igal. The thermal waters of Babócsa (1955), Buzsák-Csisztapuszta (1956) and Szulok (1958) were also discovered by searching for oil.⁷ The party resolution of 1957 boosted hydrocarbon exploration here as well, and a number of underground resources were discovered. By the mid-1970s, there were 22 thermal wells known in the 15 settlements of the county with temperatures above 35 °C.⁸

Further in my paper, I am looking for the answer to the concepts that were developed in the county party organizations and the county council for the operation and development of the existing spa, as well as for the utilization of the found thermal resources. Were there any plans at the county or local level for the use of thermal waters?

2. Questions about the utilization of thermal resources in Somogy County – balneological or agricultural?

As I mentioned in the introduction, hydrocarbon exploration had been ongoing since the 1940s and intense until the mid-1970s. In the course of these, the mentioned thermal water springs were explored, which in fact meant the springs that could actually be discovered. However, by the same date, approx. 120 wells were drilled that potentially had the potential for use. Of the usable springs with water warmer than 35 °C, six were shut down and 16 were operated.⁹ Their utilization was influenced by several factors:¹⁰

- Unreliable data provision (e.g. inadequate documentation of 120 wells),
- Lack of resources,
- Lack of technical conditions,
- Lack of human resources,
- Lack of concept.

The lack of the latter was mainly complained about when in 1957 a voluminous article entitled Our National Treasure – In the Footsteps of Our Heat Sources... appeared in the columns of the Somogyi Néplap from the pen of Nándor Szegedi. Following the example of Hajdúszoboszló, Harkány and Hévíz, they wanted to develop the thermal spas in Somogy County so that the water resources could be used for medical purposes as soon as possible. The article analysed the activities of four spas (Babócsa, Csokonyavisonta, Csisztapuszta and Nagyatád), calling on the County Council to make better use of and support existing social initiatives: "It takes a lot of social unity to use our heat sources for healing. Unfortunately, the state is currently unable to spend more on this. The population, the villages and the cities must find a way to socialize. And the County Council and the competent organizations must find a way to remove the obstacles that prevent the people of the villages from coming together."¹¹

¹⁰ Lengyel, L. (1976): 37-38.

⁶ MNL-OL XIX-a-83-b 3117/1960.

⁷ Katona, K. (2015): 111-112.

⁸ Korim, K. (1976): 36.

⁹ Korim, K. (1976): 37.

¹¹ Somogyi Néplap, 15.9.1957.

Although the county organizations of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party did not discuss the issue of resources during this period, the plans for the renovation and modernization of the mentioned baths were slowly completed. They also started building new spas in 1961 in Kaposvár,¹² and in 1962 in Igal, where was opened the well that had been plugged right after the discovery.¹³

In 1965, the county council's executive committee first discussed the issue of thermal resources more seriously.¹⁴ Several decisions were made in this regard. The development of the spas of Csokonyavisonta, Igal, Nagyatád and Kaposvár was decided, but the Csisztapuszta spa was not considered expedient. Another important decision was to set up a spa utilization company to organize social support for spas. This is all the more important as, despite the healing effects of the waters, none of the facilities had been given the rank of a spa. The other decision dealt with the agricultural use of thermal waters and ordered an examination of how this could be done.

The use continued to be primarily for tourism. It was also moving slowly. In 1966, it was decided only to winterize Igal and connect Csokonyavisonta.¹⁵

From 1970 onwards, the Csisztapuszta spring came into the council's view again, and plans were made to develop it. At the same time, it was decided to build a spa based on the thermal spring of the neighbouring village of Táska, which has not been done to this day.¹⁶

In 1974, the executive committee of the county council adopted a medium- and long-term concept for the development of the county spas.¹⁷

- Eliminating the infrastructure backwardness,
- Improving or creating (!) hygiene conditions,
- Urgent repairs,
- Renovation, modernization e.g. Igal development.

At that time, the spas operated in the following places: Kaposvár, Nagyatád, Barcs, Igal, Csokonyavisonta, Nagybajom, Csurgó, Babócsa, Kálmáncsa, Szulok and Csisztapuszta. The annual turnover of hot springs reached 600,000 people. The three largest spas, Csokonyavisonta, Igal and Kaposvár, were placed under corporate management the following year. With this step, the county tried to remedy the difficulties arising from the lack of capital by shifting the task to companies.¹⁸

In 1974, the use of thermal waters in other directions was discussed again. The reorganization of village councils and agricultural cooperatives resulted in more capital-intensive agricultural units. This provided an opportunity to build greenhouses and heated film plant colonies, the heating of which was envisaged with geothermal energy, i.e. thermal springs. The best examples of this were in the village of Tarany and Táska.¹⁹

In 1979, however, the MSZMP County Party Committee's report complained about the lack of such developments: "In the case of one of the most important tourist elements of the county, the utilization of thermal waters (Igal, Csokonyavisonta, Táska, etc.), the progress is modest overall. Nevertheless, the spas are now visited by 6-700 thousands of guests a year. The vast majority of these come from unorganized tourism. The reception conditions for organized tourism at thermal spas are not yet in place. "20

- 13 Somogyi Néplap, 29.12.1964.
- ¹⁴ Somogyi Néplap, 22.4.1965.
- ¹⁵ Somogyi Néplap, 13.5.1966.
- ¹⁶ Somogyi Néplap, 18.9.1970.
- 17 Lengyel, L. (1976): 38.
- ¹⁸ Lengyel, L. (1976): 38-39.
- ¹⁹ Korim, K. (1976): 37.

¹² Somogyi Néplap, 3.5.1967.

²⁰ HU-MNL-SML XXXV-1-c-139. 8.11.1979.

Following their urging, the 1986 party committee meeting merely reiterated the plans it had mentioned in 1979: "In order to make better use of the potential of thermal tourism, the focus should be on the implementation of the planned Igal spa hotel complex. The cultivated utilization of the thermal waters of other settlements (Csokonyavisonta, Szulok, Babócsa, Csisztapuszta, etc.) must be encouraged. "²¹

3. The oldest spa in Somogy: Nagyatád

The Bath of Nagyatád is the oldest facility in the county. Its source was found in 1906,²² the following year opened its spa, which in 1910 received the rank of a spa (150,606/1909. B. M. nr.)²³ and from 1923 it became the property of the village, which announced a tender for its operation later that year.²⁴ After the devastation of World War II, a major renovation took place in the 1950s. In December 1955, the Somogy County Construction Company began the renovation, but by the autumn of the following year they only completed the demolition of the old buildings.²⁵ After another year, after a continuous criticism in the press, the works finally started, after which the renovated spa was opened in March 1958.²⁶

Picture 1: Nagyatádi artesian spa²⁷



Ten years later, the spa was again dealt with at the county level. The county council transferred 850,000 forints for modernization and renovation after the 1965 decision.²⁸ In 1968, a new

²¹ HU-MNL SML XXXV-1-c-181. 29.10.1986.

²² Zákonyi, F. (1983): 237.; Somogyi Hírlap, 26.7.1906.

²³ Belügyi Közlöny, 30.1.1910.

²⁴ Budapesti Közlöny, 28.6.1923.

²⁵ Somogyi Néplap, 15.9.1957.

²⁶ Somogyi Néplap, 23.4.1958.

²⁷ György Thúry Museum - Museum Historical Documentation Library - Postcard Collection. Registration number: TGYM.87.37.16. Internet: https://mandadb.hu/dokumentum/543027/TGYM_87_37_16_e.jpg [2021.11.19.]

²⁸ Somogyi Néplap, 7.1.1967.

wing was added, and mud-packing and massage rooms were opened. The party committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party reported the establishment of a physiotherapy healing department in 1969, and at the same time an application for the declaration of its thermal water as medicinal water was submitted to the Ministry of Health: "The development of the Nagyatád spa is at the most advanced stage. After the spa has been declared a spa and its thermal water a physiotherapy healing department, a planned physiotherapy department will be launched. [...] The declaration of the thermal water and the bath as a spa is at the Ministry of Health." ²⁹

The 1974 concept required the development of the spa, but it was not until 1980 that a decision was made to renovate it again. The following year, only the well was repaired and renovated, and only then did the renovation of the spa begin.³⁰ The third major construction of the era was completed in 1987. By this time, the spa had been completely renovated, and a year later it had the coveted spa rank.³¹

4. Igal

Its source was discovered shortly after World War II in 1947 during hydrocarbon exploration.³² Not counting the possibilities, the source was still plugged in at that time.³³ In 1962, the village started building the spa on its own and with social work. The first pools were handed over as soon as this year. By 1964, it had more than 50,000 visitors, so there were few municipal resources for its development.³⁴

The construction of the spa also made it necessary to create local infrastructure. In the first years, it was already visible that the increased tourist traffic required more serious investments. In 1965 the local press wrote: "They have to deal more and more with the growing tourism. Although the paid guest service is still adequate, they can still accommodate visitors who want to spend several days in Igal, but it will be necessary to create a new opportunity later. The development is urged by the favourable location of the village, the good composition of the water and the fact that the spa is easily accessible from Kaposvár."35 However, this was not smooth and had to start from scratch. In the early days, even running a bakery was a topic. The Somogy County Bakery Company did not open a shop in the village for a long time; it was replaced by Tamási's company. However, due to the distance, the business was not economical, so the council contacted the county company again. During the negotiations, the issue of the store's supply was also quarrelled, and the debate was also brought to the attention of the public.³⁶ The network of shops and the spa were built in the seventies, after which the naming and numbering of the streets and the disposal of municipal waste were settled: "The council also helps: every weekend house owner gets a garbage bag. The bags are emptied regularly with a garbage truck and there is no charge for garbage collection. However, anyone who does not comply with the public cleanliness measure must pay for the violation. The street names and house numbers of the resort will be arranged later this year. In addition to simplifying information, this also allows for the rapid delivery of postal items. The local Afész expanded its six stores by one last year, with freshly baked scone and pancakes available throughout the season."37

- 34 Somogyi Néplap, 29.12.1964.
- ³⁵ Somogyi Néplap, 23.7.1965.

²⁹ HU-MNL-SML XXXV-1-b-18. 29.4.1969.

³⁰ Somogyi Néplap, 15.11.1981.

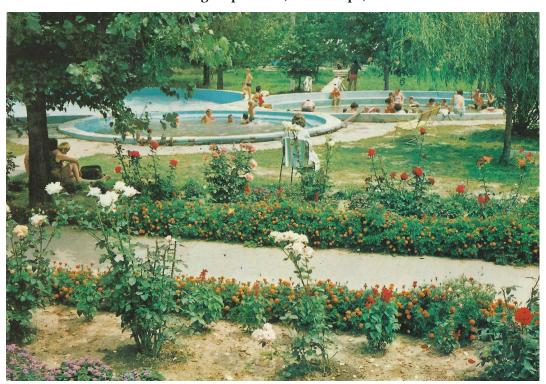
³¹ Somogyi Néplap, 21.6.1988.; Szociális és Egészségügyi Közlöny, 1988/7.

³² Katona, K. (2015): 111.

³³ Katona, K. (2015): 112.

³⁶ Somogyi Néplap, 1.4.1970.

³⁷ Somogyi Néplap, 22.4.1973.



Picture 2: Igal - postcard, thermal spa, 1974.³⁸

In the meantime, the spa was expanded, so by 1979 the Ministry of Health authorized Igal to be declared a resort.³⁹ As both the 1965 and 1974 concepts included a plan to develop it, the plan to set up a holiday cooperative with four resorts under construction was also raised in the early 1980s. The Executive Committee of the Somogy County Council finally decided to establish the cooperative,⁴⁰ so its establishment could begin in 1981 with the establishment of an organizing committee.⁴¹ It was only declared a spa in 2001.⁴²

5. Csokonyavisonta

Csokonyavisonta village was established in 1942 when a decree of the Minister of the Interior (24.396/1942.B.M.nr.)⁴³ ordered the merger of the villages of Erdőcsokonya and Somogyvisonta. Its thermal water source was discovered in 1943, when the Hungarian-American Petroleum Society (MAORT) discovered 75 °C water at a depth of 1,300 metres during oil and gas exploration. The well – apparently in connection with the events of the war – was closed in 1944 and opened only the following year. At that time, there was only a ditch spa, which meant that the water was drained into a drainage ditch where the locals opened the spa. They also discovered the beneficial effects of mud packs, making the spa increasingly popular. In 1946, the first pool was opened.⁴⁴

In 1954, it was decided to develop Csokonyavisonta into a modern spa. At that time, the County Council earmarked 150,000 forints for the construction of a 300-square-metre

³⁸ Hungarian Museum of Commerce and Hospitality (MKVM). Registration number: VF_2013_347_2. Internet: https://mandadb.hu/dokumentum/562730/VF_2013_347_2.jpg [2021.11.19.]

³⁹ Somogyi Néplap, 13.12.1979.

⁴⁰ HU-MNL-SML XXIII-2-a 150/1980. 9.9.1980.

⁴¹ Somogyi Néplap, 21.1.1982.

⁴² Somogyi Hírlap, 11.1.2001.

⁴³ Belügyi Közlöny, 15.3.1942.

⁴⁴ Dombóvári, L. – Kuminetz, Gy. – Mészáros, Á. (2014): 217.

swimming pool, a bathtub and a changing room, as well as landscaping.⁴⁵ The second pool was also built in 1962 and divided into two parts to cool the thermal water.⁴⁶



Picture 3: Csokonyavisonta spa⁴⁷

However, the spa operated to maintain a local production cooperative that did not have enough facilities to serve an annual audience of 72,000. All this created a situation where the county council had to intervene. In 1962, a study plan was drawn up for the development of the spa in two phases, the first planned phase of which lasted until 1965 and the second in 1970.⁴⁸ In 1965, a cold-water pool was opened, and after the parcelling of the surrounding land, the construction of the holiday zone began.⁴⁹

As a result of the 1965 Council concept, a 5-year program plan was drawn up for its development in 1969, which was confirmed by the fact that the settlement was given a prominent role in the 1974 concept.⁵⁰

In 1972, the water from the first well was officially declared medicinal water. At that time, a second well was drilled,⁵¹ for by the 1970s the annual number of visitors had risen to over 120,000. The spa was placed under corporate management, which increased the capital strength of the maintainer.⁵² The declaration of medicinal water further increased the attractiveness of the spa, which was accompanied by the development of infrastructure. A changing room and a row of cabins were built, and in 1985 so was an air-conditioned spa. After the change of regime,

⁴⁵ Somogyi Néplap, 12.8.1954.

⁴⁶ Dombóvári, L. – Kuminetz, Gy. – Mészáros, Á. (2014): 217.

⁴⁷ Balaton Museum Postcard Collection. Registration number: 2018.9.4. Internet: https://mandadb.hu/ dokumentum/1017598/201894_e.jpg [2021.11.19.]

⁴⁸ Somogyi Néplap, 21.28.1962.

⁴⁹ Dombóvári, L. – Kuminetz, Gy. – Mészáros, Á. (2014): 217.

⁵⁰ Lengyel, L. (1976): 38.

⁵¹ Dombóvári, L. – Kuminetz, Gy. – Mészáros, Á. (2014): 217.

⁵² Lengyel, L. (1976): 38.

the developments continued, so the spa can still be considered one of the most successful resorts outside Lake Balaton. 53

6. Kaposvár



Picture 4: Promenade Ferenc Csík 1 Kaposvár in 1969., Thermal bath and indoor swimming pool. The creator of the mural is Hédi Majoros (1967)⁵⁴

Before 1960, Kaposvár had a small beach, which was reportedly visited by 480 people a day. In order to increase capacity, a new five-year plan envisaged the construction of a new one next to the existing beach in 1962 from 18.5 million forints.⁵⁵ Finally, construction began as early as in 1961, but it was very slow and slow. Medicinal thermal water was discovered during the renovation. The water came from a depth of more than 900 metres and was utilized by a compressor. Temperature is 50 °C,⁵⁶ which was cooled to 37 °C and discharged into the pool. The spa was built from a total of 33 million forints and opened its gates on 30 April, 1967.⁵⁷ One of the explanations for the higher investment cost is the decoration of the spa: "*The huge hall of the thermal bath is decorated with a ceramic wall covering the entire wall, the work of Hédi Majorosy. The decoration of the room is also the two gargoyle figures, one fish on the edge of one of the pools, and in the other pool an interesting solution of water spraying from the mouth of a double ram, the work of Ödön Metky. József Simo made the ceramic wall picture of the indoor swimming pool. The building also includes an inner courtyard; here is a life-size statue of a mother with her child, made by the sculptor András Kiss Nagy."⁵⁸*

⁵³ Dombóvári, L. – Kuminetz, Gy. – Mészáros, Á. (2014): 217-218.

⁵⁴ Fortepan/FŐFOTÓ. Internet: https://fortepan.download/_photo/1600/fortepan_208269.jpg [2021.11.19.]

⁵⁵ HU-MNL-SML XXXV-1-b-5. 17.9.1960.

⁵⁶ Korim, K. (1976): 36.

⁵⁷ Somogyi Néplap, 3.5.1967.

⁵⁸ Somogyi Néplap, 16.4.1967.

However, the operation of the newly handed over bath was not without problems at the beginning. It soon became clear that the condition of the building was constantly deteriorating: "In ten years, the large – south – glass facade of the swimming pool was destroyed. The iron structure holding the glass was eaten by rust. The improperly placed metlachilates in the pool are loose and fragmented. The exterior tiles suddenly began to crack: it was life-threatening to go near the building."⁵⁹ This is why, in 1977, it was decided to demolish part of the building and completely rebuild it.

The plans were completed slowly, eventually closing the facility in 1984, which was renovated over three years. It reopened in the summer of 1987 and has been operating ever since.⁶⁰

7. Smaller spas

It is characteristic of the smaller baths of the county that their construction was due to the activities of the village councils. With the exception of Csisztapuszta, these baths were missing from county-level concepts. The 1965 concept, as mentioned, did not consider it appropriate to develop Csisztapuszta, but five years later plans were made to modernize it.⁶¹ By the eighties, there were finally three outdoor pools and one smaller indoor pool.⁶²

However, Babócsa, whose spa was opened in 1955 but was in need of development in the mid-1960s, did not reach the scope of the county council. The plans were completed in 1964, but the necessary 1.2 million forints could not be raised.⁶³ At 1986 Szulok and Babócsa they tried to persuade a company to maintain their spas.⁶⁴ Szulok did not open a county reserve, either, but ten years after the discovery and plugging of the source, it was opened and operated with the help of compressors at the request of the villagers.⁶⁵



Picture 5: Buzsák - Csisztapuszta 1957.66

- ⁵⁹ Somogyi Néplap, 25.8.1977.
- 60 Somogyi Néplap, 17.6.1987.
- 61 Somogyi Néplap, 8.12.1970.
- 62 Zákonyi, F. (1983): 170.
- 63 Somogyi Néplap, 22.10.1964.
- 64 Somogyi Néplap, 24.7.1986.
- 65 Zákonyi, F. (1983): 300.
- 66 Fortepan/ Berkó Pál. Internet: https://fortepan.download/_photo/1600/fortepan_78719.jpg [2021.11.19.]

Until the change of regime, some smaller, village-managed spas were opened in Kálmáncsa, Nagybajom and Tarany. The history of today's successful spa in Barcs also began at this time.

8. Conclusions

Looking for the answer to the original question, we can conclude that the Somogy County Council took seriously the development of bathing places based on thermal water sources in addition to the beaches of Lake Balaton. Twice, in 1965 and 1974, they developed a concept for their development. Igal, Csokonyavisonta, Nagyatád and Kaposvár played a key role in this. At the same time, the lack of resources and the poor quality of the implementation of the plans were a constant problem. The buildings of the spas usually had to be renovated or modernized every ten years. The secondary role of the issue can be mentioned as the main reason for the lack of resources. We must not forget that Lake Balaton is located in the northern part of the county, which is a major tourist destination nationwide. Development resources were so mostly directed there, also at the county level.

However, it is a fact that after the improvements, most of the spas were in operation and a significant portion of them are still in operation today. Although Nagybajom and Babócsa are closed, there are several baths that did not fall within the scope of the County Council before 1990.

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