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Pézenas, Aix-en-Provence, Arles, Tours and Rennes

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Introduction

In the summer of 2008, I had the pleasure to learn that I was granted a one-month scholarship, which would allow me to share and exchange experiences with some of the French members of the AVEC network in October, namely with the experts (tourism and heritage management) of Pézenas, Aix en Provence, Arles, Tours and Rennes Metropole. Although Pécs was also the founding member of AVEC, yet I was curious to learn the best practices of these French cities, since handling and maintaining heritage has a very different tradition in Hungary then in France. I could also say that the principles of the AVEC Charter seem to be better implemented there and the practices (e.g. the so called Malreaux law) applied before the AVEC Charter was born seem to be more efficient. For example, the word heritage has a broader meaning in French then even in English or Hungarian. It also means 'patrimoine', whereas by heritage in Hungary we mean mainly the built heritage, but not the soft elements. (At least not in everyday people's mind). The notions of 'living heritage', cities as meeting points of cultures, sustainability, and the citizens as creators and owners of their own heritage, are pretty much new in my country. These are the aspects that are handled very differently in France, and which I liked the best as it will be illustrated by examples when talking about each city. The structure of my report aims at describing two or three best practises per city, highlighting only the most impressive experiences I had besides the many that I could list. I will also try to make a parallel with Hungarian examples and will try to show or suggest how it could be integrated into my city's life. At the end of my paper I will sum up shortly the general experiences that are not specific to one city but concerns all of them. Last but not least, I'd like to make some constructive suggestions how this very useful program can be improved in the future.

Pézenas:

Pézenas is a small but very nice town, which makes great efforts to enhance tourism. The people at the tourist office and politicians at the local council also seem to take very seriously this sector. Experts in tourism had a great idea to organize **touristic events around Moliere**, who spent 6-8 years in the town. The Moliere centre, the late 18th century theatre to be renovated, the 3D Scenovision about the writer's life and works (scenes are shown from Moliere's life, each of them is staged in a different room, and visitors are asked to move from one scene to the other), two internet blogs and a website (www.toutmoliere.net) made by researchers on Moliere, the Moliere's biennale conference, the historical reenactment are great initiatives to promote the writer, given the fact that seaside, castles, etc. are not in the near proximity to attract tourists.

The small city makes big efforts to help not only tourists but also locals to comply with the AVEC Charter. (Everyone's Heritage Built by Everybody). Local craftsmen were/are encouraged to stay and manufacture 80% of their products in Pézenas in return to low (work)shop rents in the town center. As a result, Pézenas has a very cosy atmosphere with tiny shops of **handicrafts** related to professions of theatre, wood, iron, clothes, and thus it duly merits the label 'Villes d'Art et Histoire' today. This **arts and crafts project** began in the 90's to revive the medieval town center, and today the town has a Crafts' Centre (Maison des Arts) and a festival called FILM to promote the works and profession of craftsmen. From tourism, not only craftsmen, but also the owners of the so called chambre d'hote and accommodation providers benefit. The tourist office has built confidence in them by advising how to provide '**classified accommodation**' and they, in return, try to qualify for the standards expected from them to provide a decent service for their guests. Those who don't meet the standards are not advertised in the tourist office. I myself stayed in a chambre d'hote and I was truly satisfied with my hosts, who were hosts in the tight meaning of the word. They were not occupied only with changing the sheets and serving the breakfast, but we had the meals together and we had a nice talk in the meantime. I don't know whether this system works the same all over France or my case was exceptional, but the other trainees had a very similar experience in Pézenas. A similar lodging type of this kind exists in

Hungary, too, but unfortunately it lacks the welcoming, family like atmosphere, which is the essence of it. This is something that we should apply here in my country, too.

All in all, Pézenas does a really good job to deserve the label 'Qualité Tourism' by having a clear tourist policy, cooperating very well with the heritage department (they share the same building) and encouraging cultural tourism.

Aix En Provence:

Since Pécs is about the same size as Aix En Provence, and we are trying to set up a new touristic organisation, - which besides providing information to tourists aims at doing marketing work and coordinating the work of different touristic actors in the city - the structure and activities of the tourist office in Aix is exemplary, and therefore I chose to highlight this experience. (And also because we didn't really have a 'guide' in Aix, I had to interpret most of the times, which also meant that I could not take notes simultaneously).

The **tourist office** is much larger in size than the one we have seen in Pézenas, of course this comes from the fact that the population of Aix en Provence is about ten times as much as that of Pézenas. Also, the countryside around the city (Provence) is the second most visited area by tourists in France after Paris and the Loire valley. Accordingly, the activities of the tourist office are manifold: they run the three Cezanne sites, a Congress Centre and the Tourist Office (sell bus tours around Aix, too.).

The tourist office was opened in 1969, and has the status of an EPIC, which means that its income comes partly by tourists paid in the form of tax (tax de séjour) and partly by the city since the office provides public service. It was amazing to hear some basic numbers connected to the office (especially that Pécs will have far less number of people working for the new touristic organisation with far less financial aid):

- 150 employees (some extra people are hired at the information desk only in summer)
- 2000 visitors/day in the high season
- 400 000 tourists/year
- 8 information desks
- 22 guides (subcontractors)

- opening hours: 8:30-7:00 pm, in summer until 9:00 pm (right now the information desk in Pécs is open from 8:00-4:00 regardless of the season with 3 people!)
- the office has 9 departments as follow:
 1. reception/information desk
 2. reservation centre (hotels, camps, guest houses, etc.-also online reservation section)
 3. guide department (organizes tours every day)
 4. department for organizing programs (leisure activities) for congress tourists
 5. dept. for organizing seminars in the city
 6. sales dept. (for individuals, groups, tour operators, travel agencies, etc.)
 7. technical assistance section (maintaining the website, IT support)
 8. mailing dept. (paper-electronic)
 9. Communications, PR, marketing

Each department's activity was thoroughly explained as well as the touristic policy. Compared to other tourist offices we have visited in France, it seems that all of them try to find a way how to expand the touristic season. Here in Aix, with low prices, in Pézenas by generating festivals and cultural, arts and crafts events, in Rennes with selling specially thought out packages. Generally speaking, most tourist offices function as associations and provide public services, but I've learned that there is a new tendency and pressure to be self-sufficient by selling products (weekend packages, hotels, brochures, maps, citypasses, thematic tours, etc.) I was told that an example is the tourist office in Lille, which gets about 50% of its budget by sales. I believe that what I learnt about the work of tourist offices during the grant in each city is essential to use at the setup of the new tourist office structure in Pécs, which was one of the themes I planned to examine through my stay. Unfortunately it was not always obvious to see (like in the case of Aix and Arles) how the tourist offices work together with the heritage departments.

Besides the tourist office, however, we had very nice hosts to show us around in museums, where there is a very active animation activity life. We also had the chance to see the depot

of the Natural History Museum, we could have a very nice guided tour at the Cezanne sites (even in Cézanne's home, which is not yet open to the public) and last but not least, we had the opportunity to see the Vasarely Museum, which is gigantic compared to the one we have in Pécs, where the artist was born.

Arles:

In the paragraph about Pézenas, I have already mentioned an event that is called **historical reenactment**, and which is unknown in Hungary, at least in this form. We have knights' tournaments occasionally in middle age castles trying to show a slice of knights' life. However, the main difference between this and historical reenactments in France is that the former

- does not try to involve visitors and locals actively in the happenings (throughout several days) by encouraging them to dress up (sew their own clothes, borrow them)
- professionals don't take part in the events, whose purpose is to give a historical-scientific interpretation of the era, but not in a folkloric way. (In Arles, the archaeologists and historians of the Antique Museum of Arles initiated this project, and still cooperate today.)

At these events, food and drinks from the age are also sold for the cc. 800 participants (Pézenas), who are directed to move from one scene to the other in the town. The aim of historical re-enactment is to show the era through pre-written scenes on the one hand, while on the other hand there is also place for improvisation to give space for the audience and professional actors. While in Pézenas the theme of this event centres around Moliere, in Arles the (antique) Festival Arléate focuses on the roman period. Since Pécs will be the European Capital of Culture in 2010, I believe it would be a great idea to depict the city's life either in the roman period or in the middle ages during the Turkish occupation (we have a lot of heritage from those eras, indeed our Unesco World Heritage Site is from the roman one). There is one factor that does not seem to let it come true, the time factor. The programs of the year are already planned out, which is

made even more difficult by the fact that in Hungary professional groups of this kind do not exist yet, theatrical groups and actors should be trained in the genre first.

Another aspect I would like to outline is the **great work of the heritage directory** of the city. The organisation of it is split in two sections: the restoration and the heritage services sections, the latter being responsible for the animation, sensibilisation and valorisation of heritage. The two sections work closely together on big projects, e.g. if there are renovation works going on (at the time of our visit, for example, the antique theatre and the amphitheatre were restored) the heritage services section provides locals with information about the works by flyers, molinos, internet, etc. What I especially liked is that inhabitants can follow the stages of renovation works by regular guided tours.

Restoration of listed monuments -inhabited by locals, too- gets a great emphasis by the Directory, too. Expertise, practical help and advising services are provided for locals and enterprisers to teach how to renovate houses/apartments both inside and outside. Brochures and manuals are at the service of people to consult these methods besides personal advising. One of the main ideas of renovation is based on the Charter of Venice, according to which restoration should reflect the state of the building at the start of the restoration works. Everything that is renewed and 'modernised' to serve today's needs (a lot of times public offices', companies' headquarters are located in these buildings) should be removable to be able to restore the original state if needed. This way both preservation and the animation of the built heritage is assured.

The city has a protected area/secteur sauvegardé (the green vegetation is also part of it) since 1966, and now the city is about to enlarge the boundaries of this area, as well as to make an inventory about protected buildings and listed monuments. As a result of the great heritage work -as part of it educating/sensibilizing people about heritage- the value of houses in the protected area has been upgraded and a new layer of society, the 'bobos' started to move back to the city centre.

Going back to the heritage services section, they also maintain a website about heritage, on which besides others, the urban evolution of the city, the representation of the city in

different centuries, makets and plans, restoration phases of a building are also shown. Besides the website, guidebooks are prepared, programs and animation activites are organized (European Heritage Day, etc.).

I haven' touched upon our museum visits to Arles's Antique Museum, the Réattu (with an extraordinary exhibition by Christian Lacroix), the Arlaten Museum and the Community Archives, where the staff make an exceptional **animation work** to bring the public closer to the museums by participating in tailor made activities for different age groups. The education aspect of museums is really outstanding in France, at least that's what I experienced in all the cities I visited.

Tours:

In Tours we had a great staff to welcome us. Luckily enough, Takamacu, the Japanese twin city of Tours celebrated the anniversary of its twinship with Tours, and we could also benefit from the reception and welcome dinner given in honour of the Japanese delegation. Also, we could participate in a **wine degustation** in the suburbs of Tours, which was a great and quite different experience for me from what we have in the vicinity of Pécs, in the famous wine growing area of Villány. Our degustation is more 'theatrical', accompanied by music and dance. Here in Tour we had great food and of course wine, and a great exhibition carved in the cave's wall. What was also a great revelation for me is that while in Hungary we have the caves underground, here in the Loire valley the caves are carved in the stove (mountains). Indeed, experiencing the differences in **viticulture** while tasting good wine, - which is when the best ideas come to one's mind - a new project struck my mind. Why not do international wine routes, the stops of which could be AVEC members having an old history of making wine? (starting with some Portuguese and Italian AVEC cities, then of course followed by French (Loire) and Hungarian (Villány) wine growing regions. I believe that thematic tours – and especially the ones based on the enjoyment of food and drinks - are very popular today all around the world, but they are mostly limited within a city's boundaries or to its close surroundings. I guess that if gastronomic pleasures are spiced with

a pinch of cultural diversity, this initiative could work. On top of that it does not require extra investment, the infrastructure already is given and working, with clever marketing, only new aspects of wine route practices should be shown.

Let me move from wine tasting to the other great initiatives Tours is engaged with. There's a great tradition in Tours regarding **the handling of heritage**. From an urbanist point of view, Tours was the pioneer to implement the measures of the Malreaux law passed in 1963. From that on, not only individual monuments, but also groups of buildings, areas have become protected. This law saved Tours's historical centre that otherwise would have been condemned to be demolished. In the meantime, the notion of heritage gained a new interpretation, too. It is not about restoration and preservation anymore, but it is also about **living heritage** (patrimoine vivant-AVEC Charter). The protected area of Tours was enlarged last year and it does not include only listed monuments but also recent ones that fit into the philosophy and urbanist picture of the 'secteur sauvegardé'. At the same time big shopping malls had to move out of the city centre to let the small shopkeepers live and prosper. As a result, the old town of Tours has a vivid life.

Not only the **material** but also the **immaterial heritage** receives a great emphasis. I especially liked the steps taken to sensitize people to the green heritage. A great idea is the so called Gloriette, which is a big piece of land owned by the town in the outskirts of Tours, where with the help of two employed gardeners, ancient, long forgotten plants and vegetables are grown, reintroduced to the public. Workshops are organized around them (how to make cosmetic creams, how to cook old recipes from them) thus revitalizing old practices. At the same spot, each year the town organizes the kite festival, which is built upon the wind, typical to the region. The protection of listed trees (we have seen a 200-year old cedar), the family garden project (allotment of 100-3000 m² lands given to locals for a very reasonable rent to grow vegetable on), the 'covoiturage' (car sharing among commuters from the agglomeration) are all great initiatives to protect natural heritage and to make people conscious of their environment.

Last but not least, I'd like to mention an extraordinary festival as a great example of living heritage, which is called **Rayons Frais**. The main idea behind it is to bring people to public places (hospital, school's courtyard, a military place, swimming pool, market place) through performing art that is interactive, multidisciplinary and contemporary. Since the space is limited here to describe the events that involve locals in an enjoyable way, I advise everyone to go at www.rayonsfrais.com.:-)

Rennes:

Rennes Metropole is located in Brittany in the north surrounded by beautiful nature, and although it is close to the gorgeous seaside and the famous Mont Saint Michel, the weather conditions are not so favourable for tourism. Most of the tourists stay only half a day in the capital of Brittany, and so the aim of the tourist office is to expand this period on the one hand, and to attract visitors beyond the main season on the other. How do they do it? The team of the office makes an **excellent marketing and innovative** (allovisit, 3D and mp3 tour, online conference reservation engine) **product development** (they sell weekend and thematic packages such as folklore tours that focus on Britannic dance and language, the "Food lovers' paradise" weekend or "The French etiquette", which helps tourists understand the original meanings and messages of behaviour at the table while having a nice dinner) **work** that can be exemplary to the touristic organization to be set up in Pécs in the near future. That's why I brought back a whole lot of brochures that list these packages and present the city in an irregular way. (Introduces the city not only in its present form but from a chronological point of view demonstrated with old photos showing the evolution and renovation of the city's buildings; thematic descriptions grouped around different materials (wood, metal, water, etc.)

Besides the great animation activities for kids, in one of which we could participate to see how children's sensitivity is directed towards the stained glasses of churches, I'd like to point out some best practices of the '**Les Champs Libres**'. A very similar establishment will be built in Pécs for the European Capital of Culture project in 2010, which was also one of my research

themes. The establishment houses several institutions such as the Museum of Brittany, a Planetarium, a library and a conference hall and the so-called 'Espace de Science' that functions as an exhibition to present a topic in an innovative way also comprehensible for children. (At the time of our visit it was about spiders). I liked a lot the library, which became reality after a 12 year long planning. (here in Pécs we have 4 years altogether to carry out a similar project besides 4 other ones.) The applied system of RFID – radio frequency identification- is probably not new for librarians and experts, but this system is not frequently used here in Hungary yet. What I like about this library is that it's multifunctional. Besides the reading activities targeted at all age groups from the very little ones through students and pensioners, they also have a small museum with the collection of a writer called 'Rilke', a rare book section, as well as activities such as lectures, concerts and movies shown regularly. The library of course respects and helps the physically handicapped, and they have equipments for the blind, for instance. The self check-in/out machines and the cosy and comfortable atmosphere (the building has a wonderful view on the city through its huge windows) of the place is really reader friendly and attracts many people. An interesting figure is that before the library moved into this new building, they had 800 visitors a day, whereas today this number grew to 3000. (At the time of our visit it was the All Saints holiday, and one of those days they had 10 000 visitors!)

Similarly to the da Vinci Congress Centre in Tours, which is another project of Pécs to be built by 2010, I learnt that the Les Champs Libres are public institutions that receive a lot of subsidy. The formerly mentioned has an event 250 days a year, yet it relies on substantial subsidy from the city. (2 000 000 euros a year) Unfortunately the local government of Pécs will not be able to provide this kind of financial aid, so the sustainability of those projects are uncertain today as I personally see it.

Global evaluation:

One of the things I liked a lot in France –in spite of the fact that French people do not really favour this present system saying it's too bureaucratic – the **financial support, competence and task sharing among the different levels of administration** (cities, agglomerations, departments, government). Although in Hungary, a similar territorial division exists, the different actors are unable to work together effectively unfortunately for one reason or another. Pécs is located in Baranya county, but it would not be possible even to imagine that an organization (e.g. touristic, or heritage service) would be run efficiently by the two when talking about task and competence sharing, financing, etc. An excellent example is the Moliere centre in Pézenas, or the cities labelled 'Ville d'Art et Histoire' where even some of the colleagues'/animators' wage is paid by the different levels of administration. Also in Arles, the regional restoration project for historical monuments is financed by the state, the region and the department jointly.

Another best practise I liked a lot in France is **labelisation** such as the *Les Villes et Pays d'arts et d'histoire, Qualicities, les Plus Beaux Villages de France, Ville et Métiers d'art, Musées de France, Qualité Tourisme, (AOC)* etc. It seems to me that to qualify for these labels, candidates must fulfil certain standard requirements, which make the label a brand, thus providing the visitors and tourists with a guaranteed service. Similar initiatives have been launched in Pécs and Hungary (*Les Villes et Pays d'arts et d'histoire, Qualicities*) unfortunately with little success. However, I was very pleased to see as a former Qualicities project assistant, that the requirements set up during the Qualicities project are put into practise by more and more cities! (Aix en Provence, Pézenas, Arles, etc.)

The notion of **living heritage** of the AVEC Charter (lively museum activities, protected area/secteur sauvegardé) seem to be really very well functioning in France, which roots go back to the Malreaux era. The activities organized by the museums' animators are really great. They target different age and social groups, attract and manage to bring people into museums. Most activities fall in line with the museums' profile, and of course with the

school program. What is really important is that organized events are (inter)active, which is the source of enjoyment for visitors. Unfortunately in Hungary and Pécs, the visitors are mainly passive ‘voyeurs’, whose only task is to look at the showcases with the presented objects. Also, I like the idea that not only listed monuments, but protected areas –even with more modern buildings—are organic part of a city, which nowadays is again posh to live in. In Arles, I learnt the French word ‘bobo’, which very well represents local people’s attitude towards a living heritage I believe.

Generally speaking, I benefited from the program much more than I expected, and I had some ‘backstage experiences’ e.g. I was able to look at the storage rooms of the Natural History Museum’s in Aix En Provence or in the Museum of Brittany, Rennes, I could see very different, yet working examples of how the management of heritage can work efficiently for example in the case of Arles and Tours where they have a very different structure, so from what I gained is way a lot more compared to the tiny inconveniences that occurred. Hereby I would like to mention some to make the program even better in the coming years.

- ✓ Very little was known about the grant’s detailed program, the itinerary of each city was sent very late, which made planning both technically and professionally a little difficult for me personally.
- ✓ Another proposal for improvement: it would be nice to see better the working relations between tourist offices and heritage service departments where they are not integrated into one organisation. In Arles and Tour we were not taken to the tourist offices at all, in Aix en Provence we got a very deep insight how the tourist office works, but had practically no insight about the work of the heritage services.
- ✓ Practical issues: in the case of hotels’ quality or stars, I really had no great expectations. I believe that something very simple but clean would do for a grant like this. However, in Arles and Aix en Provence cleanliness was a problem for me. I know hygienic standard is very relative from person to person, from culture to culture, but since this grant is about tourism and management of heritage, I believe all cities

should give the best reference about their hotels. In other places quality and hospitality was really excellent for the same types of hotels.

- ✓ Language barrier: To profit the most from the program, I think it's very important that either grantees have a good command of French or French hosts have a good command of English. In a lot of cases the language barrier was broken because translation was provided, or because our hosts mastered English. In certain cases, however, inconvenient situations occurred because neither some of the grantees didn't speak French nor the hosts didn't speak English. In these cases I was happy to help out and translate, but taken into account that none of the languages are my mother-tongues, it was very difficult, on top of that at these times I was unable to take notes at the meetings.

Conclusion

As a summary, I have to emphasize that I feel very lucky and grateful to everyone who made possible that this grant could come true. For AVEC and the enthusiast experts of the member cities who hosted us, the Ministry of Culture and Communications that financed this trip, the Municipality of Pécs, who allowed me to leave abroad for a month. The experiences that I gained are very unique, and not only for professional reasons. I very much appreciate that I had the chance –as ‘extra-curricular’ programmes to visit the rural Aix en Provence (the area of the Luberon mountains), Avignon with the magnificent Palace of the Popes, the Camargue Natural Park with its beautiful fauna and flora, the tide and low-tide with very typical Britannic weather and with an extraordinary sight of the ocean at Saint Malo. Other everyday experiences are also unforgettable: gastronomic pleasures (tasting the crème brulée and Beaujolais wine that I just had read about before, and finally being able to eat some famous what Hungarians call “French onion soup” (which was very precious indeed, since practically no soup was found in any restaurants throughout my stay, so big thanks to Mme Marie-Annick Poulin in Arles and Mme Veronique Bourdais in Rennes, who were extremely kind to invite us to their home for dinner!!! This is only one of the examples of hospitality of the French people I experienced, which is more than I expected. (I’ll do my best to spread this, which hopefully will break the false idea of those who think about the French as not foreigner lovers.) I was also very impressed by the French people being fond of pets (see all the photos at <http://picasaweb.google.com/hornyak.miklos>.) It was great to travel around by the famous and really quick TGV trains, and I also loved to experience the stereotypes like people come and go with baguettes. So all in all, thank you!