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Andrew Behrendt

# Little Data Streams to the Big Data River:

## Data-Based Solutions to Non-Data Questions and Their Implications for the CHIA Project

## Abstract

This article offers an example of how a “traditional” reading of an historical text can invite, and be enhanced by, a data-driven analysis. It suggests that historians who do not work primarily in data keep in mind the possibility that their research, viewed from the correct angle, may contribute to the collection of world-historical data. The data on the National Hungarian Weekend Association, overwhelmingly qualitative, nonetheless permitted construction of a useful dataset. The social composition of leadership in the organization revealed an unexpectedly narrow and clear pattern through an orderly investigation of organizational registration lists.

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# Little Data Streams to the Big Data River:

## Data-Based Solutions to Non-Data Questions and Their Implications for the CHIA Project

This essay hopes to accomplish two things. The first, drawing on my personal experience, to provide a brief but telling example of how a "traditional" reading of an historical text can invite, and be enhanced by, a data-driven analysis. The second is to suggest that historians who do not work primarily in data keep in mind the possibility that their research, viewed from the correct angle, might have a contribution to make to the collection of world-historical data. This exhortation follows on Patrick Manning's vision for multistage "world-historical data resource," recently outlined in *Big Data in History*, and applies most directly to the information being codified and stored in the open-access, crowd-sourced CHIA (Collaborative for Historical Information and Analysis) database.

The case that I offer here comes from a chapter of my dissertation, "Travelers of an Empire that Was: Tourism, Movie-Going, and the Formation of Post-Imperial Identities in Austria and Hungary, 1918-1944," which is nearing completion at the University of Pittsburgh. Although both my narrative and my dataset arose in responses to specific problems within that research, my hope is that this article can show how non-data-oriented historians are able to play a role in the advancement of the CHIA project as contributors at the first stage of Manning's model, Data Ingest.[1]

### Research Background

The tourism industry in interwar Hungary, just like every other national tributary of global tourist flows, felt the ravages of the Great Depression. One response of the industry's promoters (who were, preponderantly, businessmen, politicians, and intellectuals) was to try to stimulate domestic tourism to compensate for more lucrative, but now much reduced, international traffic. In the reams of visual and written materials they created to drum up trade, promoters tended to pursue three main directions of attack. They attempted to convince the Hungarian middle class that it was its patriotic and social duty to forego travel abroad and spend money at home; they chastised this same middle class for not "knowing" and therefore inadequately loving its country[2]; and they pitched cheap domestic tourism to the provinces as a way for the urban petite-bourgeoisie to get the restorative vacations that it both needed and deserved.[3] One particularly influential organization, the National Hungarian Weekend Association (Országos Magyar Weekend Egyesület; hereafter OMWE), combined all of these strategies in its endeavor to cultivate tourism to the country's impoverished villages. With missionary conviction, OMWE promoted tourism (in the guise of what it called the "paid hospitality" movement) not only as a commercial venture

but as a means of what, today, we might think of as "rural development."[4] Its objective was to encourage farmers and villagers to rent out their homes to vacationers, which would provide impoverished families extra income and, in turn, spur capital accumulation in areas hit by economic depression. OMWE promoters contended that their work would "elevate" both guest and host equally: in the former case by correcting the visitors' alleged alienation from the true "Hungarianness" that reposed in peasant culture, and in the latter by raising the peasantry to a higher level of "civilization."

In the course of my research on OMWE and its allies, it seemed to grow ever clearer that the real underpinnings of their project were not wholly as they described. Despite the language of fraternal mutualism, the apostles of the paid hospitality movement were in practice carrying out what was, essentially, a one-sided *mission civilisatrice* – a mission to civilize – that hearkened back to the imperialist-assimilationist policies on education and language that the pre-WWI Hungarian political elite had prescribed for non-Magyar speakers from the early 1870s onwards.[5] OMWE's mission was, to be sure, quite different from (and indeed far milder than) the classic examples from European colonialism in Africa and Asia. Nonetheless, this is the kind of story that emerges. The association's literature had very much to say about how villagers should alter their homes, habits, and persons to please incoming urbanites, and almost nothing on expectations for how the tourists were to "improve" themselves – let alone on the prospects of giving peasants a say in how the organization's hundreds of local offices would run their programs of "community development."[6]

As I formulated this hypothesis, however, I found my reliance on prescriptive, largely self-congratulatory sources to be unsatisfactory. OMWE's publications are rich for learning what the association's leaders envisioned for it, and they offer a fair amount of information on the group's structure, as well as on the basic shape and scope of its activities. They are much quieter on the social and political backgrounds of its agents, members, and clients, and the comparatively few surviving archival sources offer little help on this score. What my argument needed for support, I felt, was knowledge of the geographical and sociopolitical distribution of "ground-level" actors: those whom OMWE vested with its authority to organize the development of local tourism infrastructure, to recruit households as guesthouses, to connect guests with potential hosts, and so on – in short, the people who would be in positions of power to execute a civilizing mission and who, I could be reasonably certain, would have the desire to do so. It appeared that my sources were not interested in speaking on this subject, and I needed, as it were, to find a way to trick them into it.

## The Data: Collection and Analysis

The "trick," it turned out, came in reading descriptive text as potential data points. In 1935, OMWE published the *Traveler's Book* (*Az Utas Könyve*), the first comprehensive domestic tourism guidebook produced in Hungary.[7] The volume was intended to serve as an authoritative source on all the practicalities of vacationing in 302 "tourism-ready" locales, detailing, as one would expect, options for transportation, lodging, dining, etc. For all but 26 of these places, each listing also noted which person or office was the designated OMWE representative; that is, who was the public face of the association and who was in charge of its local affairs. Fortunately, with the exception of 13 cases, the book supplied the profession of the individuals named as representatives, or, if they held some public office, the title of their position. All of this information could be transcribed into an Excel spreadsheet with little to no adaptation necessary, as captured in a snippet here:

***Excel Spreadsheet Sample***

| County | Location | Profession | Office |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pest | Kecskemét | | local tourism |
| Pest | Budafok | | notary, municipal |
| Pest | Cegléd | lawyer | |
| Pest | Kalocsa | | local tourism |
| Pest | Kiskunfélegyháza | | mayor |

With all 301 listings converted into spreadsheet rows, I then created two "master" PivotCharts in Excel based on the columns "Profession" and "Office." This allowed me to see how many of each subcategory (i.e. the occupation listed in the *Traveler's Book*) there were, to weed out subcategories that did not fit (i.e. the cases in which an individual was named but not accompanied by an occupation, or in which no representative was given), and to display the data in charts for an easy overview.

***PivotChart Excerpt***

| | Row Labels | Count of Office |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Row Labels | Count of Office |
| 2 | | 1 |
| 3 | beautification committee | 1 |
| 4 | city hall | 3 |
| 5 | clerk | 1 |
| 6 | commune magistrate | 39 |

Summary analysis of my data shows that, in essence, the initial impressions I gleaned from other sources (and from a traditional reading of the book itself) are reinforced – namely, that OMWE *was* closely connected to the traditionally-understood "civilizing" agents in the countryside. The role of OMWE representative was filled in 47 percent of the listed communities by notaries (*jegyző*) and magistrates (*szolgabíró*). Both were types of offices very strongly associated with the "civilizing" power of the central government and which, as the interwar period went on, came more and more to hold a monopoly over an understanding of the law and professional connections with both county and central government. Typically, however, no one holding such a role would have been a native of the village, or even a member of the local landowning class. They would have grown up elsewhere, been trained in urban schools or regional colleges, and then hired or assigned to work in a community that could support them.[8]

***All Listed OMWE Representatives in 1935, by Occupational Category***

| Professions | Offices | Private Citizens | No Name/Occupation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 53 | 210 | 13 | 26 |

***OMWE Representatives from "Professions," by Subcategory***

| Educators | Clergy | Professions & Other "White Collar" | State Officials (incl. retired) | Business Owners |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18 | 6 | 17 | 9 | 3 |

***OMWE Representatives from "Offices," by Subcategory***

| Notaries | Commune Magistrates | Local Tourism Bureaus | Spa Commissions | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 101 | 39 | 26 | 10 | 35 |

In an equivalent cultural capacity, the professionals that comprised 17.6 percent of the remainder also occupied privileged positions in rural communities. In particular, teachers, priests, and doctors joined notaries and magistrates as being among those that rural reformers – and OMWE itself – charged most especially with the task of bringing "culture" to the peasantry.[9] The 36 instances in which local tourism bureaus and spa commissions were named as representatives are connected to locations that were urban or otherwise directly commercially connected to the tourism industry (i.e. baths and resort facilities). In *no case*, however, was a representative named as a "farmer" (*gazda*), which was the term OMWE used in its other writings to refer to the owners of cultivated land.[10] Thus, with "civilizers" claiming (at minimum) slightly over 60 percent of the total OMWE representation, it can be argued that the initiative for spreading the gospel of paid hospitality in Hungary indeed came from the upper echelons of village society, whose origins and positions of authority likely inclined them towards viewing the cultivation of the tourism industry to be a fitting expression of their paternal mandates.

## Concluding Reflections

To the committed cognoscenti of Digital Humanities, my "data epiphany" would appear, no doubt, as a naïve stumbling-upon of a methodology they use routinely and a clumsy handling of tools they wield with precision and finesse. I would be inclined to agree with them. If reporting on my experience has any value, I hope it is to plant an idea in the heads of scholars whose stock-in-trade (like mine) is the "close reading" and interpretation of texts, that the limitations of approaching a source at face value might be overcome by approaching them from a data-oriented one. In this case, data creates, as it were, an "X-ray" view of a long, content-heavy text, revealing sociopolitical information that is not a focal point of the content itself.

The CHIA project offers a way for the power of "little data," as illustrated here, to connect to the global ambitions of historical Big Data. It is uniquely suited to maximizing the value of small caches of data, like this one, that otherwise text-minded historians happen to uncover. On their own, the data I gathered from my research on OMWE help to solve the questions of a specific project rooted in a handful of overlapping fields of study. However, as one brick in the expanding CHIA edifice, they could, in time, find use in other projects. And if even a modest proportion of the authors of the hundreds of history dissertations that appear each year were to contribute a micro-dataset of their own – even if their value to other projects is not immediately apparent – then eventually scholars would have access to a rich pool of information that could aid projects currently unimagined. Thus CHIA can serve as a repository – and inspiration – for crowd-sourced data on topics that were not obviously reliant on data; it can help historians aggregate small and seemingly disconnected datasets into much larger sets that bridge fields of research in unexpected ways.

## NOTES

[1] Patrick Manning, *Big Data in History* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 6, fig. 1.1 and Chapter 4, passim.

[2] For a more detailed examination of this, please see Behrendt 2014.

[3] The Hungarian tourism industry, of course, was not alone in employing the rhetoric of patriotic obligation and economic "self-sufficiency." For further examples: Rudy Koshar, *German Travel Cultures* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000); Orvar Löfgren, "Know Your Country: A Comparative Perspective on Tourism and Nation Building in Sweden," in *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*, ed. Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 137–53; Aldis Purs, "'One Breath for Every Two Strides': The State's Attempt to Construct Tourism and Identity in Interwar Latvia," in *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism*, ed. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 97–115.

[4] On latter-day "development tourism": Noel B. Salazar, "Developmental Tourists vs. Development Tourism: A Case Study," in *Tourist Behaviour: A Psychological Perspective*, ed. Aparna Raj (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2004), 85–107.

[5] The extent to which the post-Compromise "nationalities" policies of the Hungarian state were oppressive (and effective) is a matter of controversy, generally advancing or receding in accordance with one's loyalty to Hungarian or counter-Hungarian (i.e. Romanian, Slovak, Croatian, Serb, or German) nationalist historical narratives. Critical but two "balanced" analyses include Karen Barkey, "Negotiated Paths to Nationhood: A Comparison of Hungary and Romania in the Early Twentieth Century," *East European Politics and Societies* 14 (2000): 497–531 and Zoltán Szász, "The Nation-State in a Multinational Empire," in *The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy Revisited*, ed. András Gerő, trans. Thomas J. DeKornfeld and Helen D. DeKornfeld (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2009), 169–92.

[6] This comes from my interpretation of OMWE's term, "község fejlődési bizottság," for the central and local committees comprised of intelligentsia and landowners that determined, *inter alia*, which households were suitable for hosting paid guests and decided on the ways in which investment funds should be spent. Károly Széchényi, *Az Országos Magyar Vendégforgalmi Szövetség működésének rövid története 1932. évtől – 1936. évig és az 1937. évi összefoglaló jelentése* (Budapest: Czerman Nyomda, 1938), 16.

[7] Károly Kaffka and Károly Széchényi, eds., *Az utas könyve: Magyar utazási kézikönyve és utmutató* (Budapest: Országos Magyar Weekend Egyesület, 1935).

[8] Edit Fél and Tamás Hofer, *Proper Peasants: Traditional Life in a Hungarian Village* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 324-325; Péter Gunst, *A paraszti társadalom magyarországon a két világháború között* (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézet, 1987), 139-140.

[9] For instance, this idea was expressed openly on a number of occasions in the newspaper of OMWE's "rebranded" incarnation, the Országos Magyar Vendégforgalmi Szövetsége. E.g.: "A jó nyaralás biztosítéka / A községfejlesztő bizottság szerepe," *Vendégforgalmi Ujság*, March 15, 1937: 2; János Pichler, "Tartsanak irányítótanfolyamokat a falu intelligenciája számára," *Vendégforgalmi Ujság*, January, 1938: 3.

[10] It is possible that some of the professionals, especially retired state officials, or private citizens without an explicit occupation were indeed landowners, and perhaps even farmers. But notaries and magistrates were supported by a dwelling and salary provided by the community they served and therefore were likely to be little more than gardeners, not producers for subsistence or profit.

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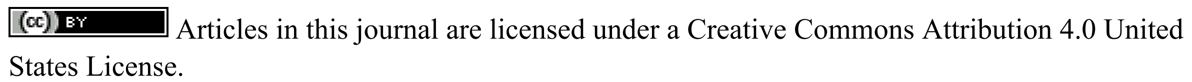

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