Shift of importance from built heritage to the local community: Story of the first Hungarian World Heritage Site

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Hollókő, the first Hungarian World Heritage site since 1987, is a perfect case study to investigate the changes in the theory, method and practices of earth-built architecture protection. The new status of the settlement led to Hungary’s acknowledged presence within the international cultural heritage community. Furthermore, it brought about the Hungarian government’s new focus on cultural heritage management, as well as new economic benefits and lifestyle for the locals. Numerous scholarly and governmental reports have been published about Hollókő in the last quarter century; these are critically analyzed to point out some elements of interconnectedness that must be reevaluated and used for future planning. The change in the use of, and perception about, earth-built architecture led to the attribution of its heritage status, and the intensive monument protection activities catalyzed the modification consequences of heritagizing a dying settlement among others in the locals’ common identity. This site is also a good case study to illustrate the changes of focus from the Venice Charter to the Nara Document as well as its most recent additions (Keitner 2000). The modified professional requirements (from mainly monument protection to intangible cultural heritage aspect and participatory management initiatives), the locals’ continuously forming responses, and the necessary preservation and adaptation actions on the protected groups of buildings create a vivid and complex picture that can serve as an example for future cases.
Hollókő is located in the mountains of Northern Hungary far from any major roads or important cities. The village that was first mentioned in the early 14th century consists of elongated parcels of land with both farm and residential buildings. Houses have earthen or mud walls supported by wooden purlin structures and are covered with reed or tiled roofs. The houses usually have three sections that have the functions of kitchen; (living-bed) room and a pantry and they also have the wooden porches (Wiebenson 1998) (Fig. 1). The international reputation of Hollókő was the motivation behind the formation of numerous other organizations focusing on the protection of earthen architecture in Hungary (Hollókői civil szervezetek 2011). It also led to many national and international specialized professional conferences, such as the Békés Vernacular Architectural Conference, which is held biannually (Népi Építészeti Tanács 2014), and meetings for the establishment of the Vernacular Architecture Charter (ICOMOS 1999). Despite the many positive outcomes, perception of the settlement and its transformation has changed drastically throughout the decades. Past processes of heritage management that focus solely on monument protection can be highly criticized within our contemporary imaginings of appropriate site management. The changing needs of the locals that are natural consequences of the modern lifestyle (instead of agricultural work more tourism related employment), which has led to the formation of a new village and the depopulation of the World Heritage site, is just one negative evolution of the site’s development. As indicated by the category of the settlement’s Facebook page, the attention for the site seems to have shifted from culture and protection of heritage, to tourism and leisure (Fig. 2). Accordingly,
the village is a perfect example of continuous transformation due to diverse time periods and the shift of emphasis in UNESCO World Heritage management.

![Facebook front page of Hollókő](https://www.facebook.com/IloveHolloko?fref=ts)

**Fig. 2 Facebook front page of Hollókő**

Different functional reuses of earth-built heritage at different periods

**What was lost completely before protection was put in place?**

It is important to state that when the nation-wide monument protection system was established in 1957, the village was on the brink of extinction. Its population had dramatically decreased; it had lost its identical prefecture status and was a co-settlement with the neighboring village, Nagylóc (N. Waigand 2013). Viola Tomori conducted research there in the 1930s that has been re-published multiple times, including in the 1980s, before the settlement received its World Heritage status. Tomori writes about the inhabitants, describing their lifestyle as being symbiotically connected with nature and completely disconnected from the contemporary human world (Tomori 1986). Such a description interprets the settlement and the locals as ancient and almost pre-civilized. Further, Zoltán Szabó describes the village of 1930, stating that “the village exists isolated within its surrounding as the nut or the pearl in its shell” (Szabó 1986). This image alludes to the timelessness of the national narrative. Hollókő was first seen as possessing national value by demonstrating the authentic and original village setting and lifestyle. It was handled as a true representation of the national identity which is grounded in timelessness, tradition, continuity, originality, a uniting national narrative (including a founding myth) and the pure, archaic community (Hall 1997). The founding myth of Hollókő that is captured in
the name of the settlement (raven stone), carries the same initiatives. It tells about a wicked noble man, who stole a young girl and captured in his castle. But the nanny of this lady was a witch who ordered the ravens to take the castle into pieces stone by stone to free the girl. According to the myth that happened and the ravens built another castle from those stones that still stands next to Hollókő on a mountain. Most of these characteristics were identified in Hollókő, not just in the settlement as a group of buildings, but also through the local community and its lifestyle.

The re-establishment of this lost, ‘pure’ state has become highly significant to the academic professionals (such as ethnographers, monument conservators) and the ultimate factor in the realized heritagizing processes. Building structures and handcrafted motifs that were previously evaluated as a combination of regional characteristics are seen today as an identical and typical motif system of Palócz culture. The Palóczs, the ancestors of the locals, are an already integrated Slovakian minority, or even of Hollókő (Ács 1990). The traditional Palócz vernacular architecture trends (ICOMOS 1987), which are mentioned in the World Heritage nomination, date back to the 18th – 19th century, when this minority was a unique and distinct group. Their autonomous identity changed in the late 20th century when the settlement achieved its new status of international acknowledgement, and the named minority had already become integrated into mainstream society (Magyar Néprajzi Lexikon 1977-1982). Moreover, the entire village was completely burnt down in 1909, and only the structure and the architectural characteristics allude to the pre-20th century period (Koris 1992). Accordingly, the current status of Hollókő cannot be identified as original Palócz vernacular architecture (Fig. 3).
Monument protection in the Socialist time

After the monument protection specialists identified this area, they included the territory in official monument- and protected area lists. First it was mentioned among the monuments of the county (1954), then a management plan was formulated regarding the protection of the buildings, leading to the official status of group of monuments in 1979. Due to the political and policy circumstances of that period (1950s - 1980s), the State first had to buy the buildings in order to be able to protect them. Hollókő’s successful preservation was the result of the fruitful cooperation between protection and policy professionals (Dobosyné 2013). Continuity of the existence of this group of monuments and the traditions that were considered to be integral to them was ensured by the protection of the buildings and Ferenc Mendele’s ideology behind it. Mendele (1934-1994) was an Ybl-awarded architect, conservationist, and the former director of the National Inspectorate of Historic Monuments. He held and adapted the ideology that every function has to be present within the monument buildings (Mendele 1969). Along these lines, later physical

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1 Group of monuments is a category within the Hungarian monument protection system that means not just literally more than one monument next to each other but it also emphasizes that the value is in its existence as a set, for instance a street with houses from the same period but with different functions.
additions to the buildings have not been counted as mistakes or as having a negative impact on authenticity. For example, a Hopper window was added later on the roof of a house that originally served as the post office. Later this building became a post museum and hostel and to fulfill these functions the Hopper window was seen acceptable. Part of the justification for the newly added element was that it has an authentic look from outside as it resembles a garret window made of tin (Magyar Építőipar 1991) (Fig. 4).

![Fig. 4 Hopper window on Postal Museum and Hostel Magyar Építőipar magazine](image)

Beyond the protection of the houses, the natural surroundings are also preserved with great care in order to save the traditional agricultural methods, which were still in use in the mid-20th century (Mendele 2013). Similarly, the management of the Office for the Protected Landscape Area of Hollókő has required even today an old, traditional method of gardening (small plot gardens) that is considered to be neither effective nor sustainable. The management plan prohibited entirely any construction on the surrounding hillsides in order to ensure the living museum concept of the settlement (Kiss 2013). UNESCO characterizes Hollókő as “the living example of rural life,” even though the kind of lifestyle it lauds had died out during the country’s Socialist period, hence it is less a museum than a mausoleum of a certain way of life.
Both types of activities (the protection of the built and the natural values) were carried out mainly by scholars and professionals in the field of monument protection to preserve Hollókő. The conserved monument buildings went through a transformation in function due to the “socialist monument policy” that was prevalent at the time (Galambos and Román 1967). It was envisioned that the conserved monuments would serve the aims and needs of the contemporary public by becoming a venue for Socialist cultural and educational endeavors. Acknowledged values such as community, hard work and a simpler way of life could be experienced and practiced here and it was believed nature would fulfill and enrich the workers. Accordingly, the original and preserved houses were transformed into motels, artists’ residences and weekend houses. The main target groups to entice into using these transformed buildings were tourists, scouts and artists. In order to draw the attention of these groups to Hollókő, a national campaign was launched. As a part of the campaign, the village’s female chorus participated in and won the nation-wide, televised art talent contest called *Fly Peacock* in the 1970s (Farkas 2013).

**After the change of regime**

Since 1989, the scholarly acknowledgement and appreciation of the Hungarian monument protection process, realized in Hollókő, have continued. This has also helped to strengthen the role of conservators both within the country and internationally. The higher education of this profession, as well as the necessary structure of institutions nation-wide and the necessary legal frameworks\(^2\) (laws and regulations), were smoothly formulated after the political change of the country. Similarly, the fame of Hollókő was undiminished. A model of a house from Hollókő, with its original furniture, was exhibited at the 20th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention in 1993 at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. This was a representation of the village that illustrated Hungary’s architectural values and its folk art, as well as that of all of Central Europe (Koris 1993). The settlement became a special destination, a kind of exotic attraction for tourists, to whom the scenery and the folk programs were successfully offered (Őrsi 2013). Locals who had already moved away from the old village of Hollókő and established a modern section of the settlement would get dressed in folk costumes to act out old traditions, songs and professions in

\(^2\) In order to fulfill all the recommendations formulated by UNESCO World Heritage Convention certain instructions should be legally adopted by the member states. Hungary adopted some of these retrospectively after the democratization of the country.
the street of the old village, while tourists wandered through the scene participating in the events and buying from the locals. As such, the monument houses and the entire old village turned into a theatrical stage. Also, partly due to the same aim, the street of the old village has been covered with concrete and electric streetlights have been introduced for the visitors’ convenience (Mezősiné 2001).

![Fig. 5 Festival scene in Hollókő](http://bagyinszki.eu/archives/186)

A more recent social movement called ‘festivality’ has also manifested in the community (Gábor 2000). Today, festival after festival is organized in Hollókő. Not only is the traditional Easter festival celebrated (Hollókő Easter Festival 2015), but other diverse events are organized almost every month. Such events include wine feasts and the celebration of Saint Stephen, which recognizes the first king of the country and the anniversary of the establishment of Hungary on 20th August every year (Hollókő’s official website). At these occasions, both more traditional performances as well as their popularized and commercialized versions are performed that also shows the decreasing importance of authenticity over the aim of serving the aims and needs of the widest possible audience. These touristic events are advertised not just on the homepage of the settlement, but on various social media channels as well. Moreover, Hollókő exists outside its physical boundaries not just with the help of social media, but also by participating in programs outside the village.
They also create their own events outside the settlement, such as press conferences or introductory events in the capital, which is located nearly 100 kilometers away (A Centrál Kávézóban mutatkozik be Hollókő 2014). These events represent the shift of importance from the earth-built houses to the intangible elements of heritage, meaning the traditions and other elements of the folk culture, in which the architecture serves only as symbols or metaphors of human activities (Fig. 5).

Globalization, as the leading force of the current time period, has often opposing effects, as Stuart Hall points out (Hall 1997). If we apply his theory to Hollókő and see the UNESCO World Heritage initiative as a kind of cultural globalizing trend, we can understand why the participating actors have different views and possibilities. Based on this chain of thought, the village represents this complexity depending on whether Hollókő is connected to the past or to the present and if it is researched in its smaller or wider location. These views can also be mixed in numerous ways providing new combinations and understandings. For example, while the inhabitants moved out almost completely from the monument buildings and established a new settlement next to the authentic one, they earn their income from the tourism and marketing activities of the historic settlement (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6 The map of Hollókő (the yellow spot north to Dózsa Gy.u. is the new village)

As such, they maintain their unique local identity, while they use the benefits of the World Heritage status. It is important to note that there are not many career
opportunities in that region; tourism is almost the only way to earn a living. Accordingly, those who stay in the village look for any manner of participating in the local tourism industry, either by joining any folk ensemble in the village, working at the tourist office, or providing accommodation. Locals intended to buy back the monument houses from the State in order to have bigger role and higher level of independence in the management of the local tourism, but this initiative failed. An agreement that would ensure the protection of the monuments and the level of management freedom the local community wanted to achieve could not be achieved (Kovács-Molnár-Farkas 2000).

Even though many try to maintain the original and traditional identity of Hollókő, the settlement is not a living village anymore and never will be again. Homi K. Bhabha offers a possible solution through the notion of translation. Translation is a type of identity construction or reestablishment that on the one hand connects strongly to the past and to the traditions, but on the other hand it incorporates no intention to turn back to the past because such an endeavor is impossible (Bhabha 1994). If this notion is adapted to the case study of Hollókő, the researched Hungarian settlement and its local community need to have a dual identity that is interconnected. This identity must both protect and pass on its heritage as values (tangible and intangible elements alike), but also needs to develop a contemporary Hollókő identity (not just as the keeper of the lost values and lifestyle) (Fig. 7).

Fig. 7 local girl with modern jewelry and in flip-flops acts out intangible heritage

http://kalandok-cirm.blogspot.hu/2010/06/holloko.html
Hollókő would not have reached such success only through the activities of the locals. Rather, both scholarly professionals and political support were needed and still play a vital role. Similarly, without the daily activities of the inhabitants of the village, not only the heritage values but most probably the settlement itself would have disappeared.

**Conclusion**

Based on certain scholars’ views, these changes are signs of the natural adaptation to modern times (Fejérdy 2013). Others would initiate a rethinking of the concept of Hollókő, as the originally defined values of the settlement, the named characters for which the protection started at the beginning, are not fully present there—for instance, the locals have moved out from the old buildings, hence there is no example of a living settlement anymore (Sonkoly 2010). The representation of the settlement changed from the romanticized nationalistic interpretation of the frozen former lifestyle in “a nut shell” to the consciously protected heritage by the inhabitants. It is important to point out that even though Hollókő has lost the features through which it gained its World Heritage status, there has not been any complaint or reaction in this regard from the international community. It is partly because the national heritage professionals as well as the members of the international professional institutions have understood that it is impossible to force the local community to live a pre-19th century lifestyle, and the transformations—such as the enactment of the traditions and the protection of the monument buildings without living in them—are still serving the aim of preserving and sharing the heritage values of Hollókő. Another reason for accepting these changes is due to the modifications within the international organization which has moved the focus from the solely tangible heritage to the lifestyle and the local community and culture as well as emphasizing cultural relativity, participatory actions, local values and intercultural tolerance over authenticity, originality and continuity (Fig. 8).
Fig. 8 Montage of Hollókő with its tangible and intangible heritage
http://www.itthon.eoldal.hu/cikkek/termeszetvedelem/holloko.html

Bibliography


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