

Educating Apostles of the Homeland: Tourism and *Honismeret* in Interwar Hungary

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Abstract: Promoters of domestic tourism in Hungary between the world wars laid blame for poor business at the feet of many causes. But their loudest and most persistent accusation was that Hungarians did not travel their homeland because they did not properly "know it." At the same time, geographers, educators, and politicians made the nearly identical claim that Hungarians were lacking in *honismeret*, or "knowledge of one's homeland," and needed to banish their ignorance if they were to truly and adequately love their country. This article explores one confluence of these two streams. Between 1934 and 1942, metropolitan authorities sponsored an ambitious educational program, the School Excursion Trains of the Capital City of Budapest [Budapest Székesfőváros Iskolai Kirándulóvonatai], which aimed to improve the *honismeret* of high school students by giving them first-hand experience of dozens of Hungarian cities and regions. Through a close analysis of the 31-volume series of guidebooks produced for the benefit of the Excursion Train passengers, this article argues that the fundamental goal of the program was to transform Hungary from an abstract territorial space into a set of concrete places to which students could feel personally attached, and therefore better "know."

Keywords: *Tourism in Hungary, Education in Hungary, Honismeret, Historical Memory in Hungary, Space and Place*

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In the eyes of domestic tourism promoters, interwar Hungarians were an unfaithful, ignorant lot. They spurned the beautiful vistas and rich culture of their own downtrodden country for the beguilements of other European lands. Tens of thousands of them flocked to Austria, Italy, Germany, Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere for mountain air, fashionable company, or to satisfy the impulse of habit by visiting the familiar summertime haunts of the old Dual Monarchy. Season after season, Hungarian travelers abroad carried off more money than foreign travelers brought in, the negative balance exceeding, on average, twelve million pengős from 1932 through 1937 (Jusztin 2006: 195). Meanwhile, Hungary's vacation spots forlornly awaited



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vacationers. As one resident of the Lake Balaton resort town Keszthely complained to his local newspaper, "there is bright sunshine playing on blue Balaton's waves, the water is 21 degrees [Celsius], the ripening sun brings a flood of Hungarian fruit, the hotels are open—and there are no guests" [*Hogy van az, hogy ragyogó napsütés játszik a kék Balaton hullámain, a víz 21 fok, az érlelő nap ontja a magyar gyümölcsösöt, a szállodák nyitva vannak és nincs vendég*] (Horváth 1934).

What was to blame for the sorry state of domestic tourism in Hungary? Some in the industry believed that the comparatively undeveloped tourist infrastructure—bad roads, uneven and unreliable railway coverage, unattractive resorts, obsolete hotels—offered few reasons for any Hungarian traveler who could afford to go abroad to do otherwise (Kallós 1934; Károlyi: 107-112). Others recognized that the prevailing socio-economic conditions of the country prevented would-be tourists from having the money or time to travel, lobbying, for instance, to extend the weekend and expand its institutionalization (see "*A magyar weekend*"). The predominant complaint, however, was that Hungarians simply didn't know or think enough about their country. They didn't appreciate the variety, beauty, or affordability of its tourist destinations. They had not seen enough of Hungary to have gotten to know it; and because they did not know it, they failed to go out and see it.

According to the discourse put forward by industry boosters, this circular trap of ignorance and feeble patriotism threatened to stifle the nascent development of Hungarian tourism. The problem was more than one of weak advertising—although industry experts blamed this, too. It was a question of basic national awareness. "It is possible to say without fear of contradiction," declared *Magyar Fürdőélet* ['Hungarian Spa Life'] in an editorial from 1932,

...that wherever anyone in any part of our little country steps out of their house, or even just peers out their window at the nearest horizon: there they will come up against a natural treasure, if they watch with open eyes. Natural treasures that virtually no one seems to know about and which nobody hurries to reveal or exploit for the common or individual good. In this, we are like the colorblind cat that sees the forms of things clearly, yet their *colors* do not exist while they are looked upon. The exquisitely beautiful red rose looks just as gray as the dried-out leaf of a tree (see "*Magyarország—fürdőország*": 3).

[*Bátran el lehet mondani, hogy kis országunk bármelyik részén lép ki az ember a házból, avagy csak kitekint az ablakon a legközelebbi horizont felé: mindenütt természeti kincsekbe ütközik bele, ha látó szemmel néz. Természeti kincsekre, amelyekről látszólag senki sem tud s amelyeket a köz és az egyesek javára feltárni, kiaknázni nem siet senki. Úgy vagyunk vele, mint a mindent szürkének látó szemű macska, amely jól látja a tárgyak alakját, de azok színe nem létezik reánézve. A csodaszép piros rózsát épúgy szürkének látja, mint a száraz falevelet.*]

To be sure, Hungarian tourism promoters were animated by a desire for good business and shaken in no small measure by the same *horror vacui* that afflicted travel industries the world over. Global economic depression after 1929 brought the blight of empty hotel beds, empty train carriages, and empty resorts, all of which portended ever more vacant coffers. This was perhaps especially true for the hard-currency-strapped, semi-industrialized countries of east

central Europe, whose politicians and businessmen struggled to expand the profitable traffic of both international and domestic leisure travelers. In Hungary, however, the threat of another kind of vacancy motivated tourist promoters to ply their trade. They saw it as their charge not only to fill beds, trains, and resorts, but to fill Hungarian minds with an appreciation of what they imagined to be a woefully unknown landscape.

In their trepidation, hoteliers, railroad officials, spa doctors, and civic boosters were not alone, however. Their laments were part of—and reinforced by—a larger discourse of national self-unawareness propagated by geographers, educators, historians, and others. This was the discourse of *honismeret*, which is translatable (imperfectly) as “knowledge of one’s homeland.” Some nationalist intellectuals, seeking to explain the catastrophes of war, revolution, and partition that had recently laid Hungary low, arrived at the conclusion that their compatriots had been ignorant of Hungary’s physical and cultural landscapes and therefore emotionally disconnected from them. When crisis came, Hungarians had lacked the heart to defend Hungarian soil, because a land unknown was a land unloved. It would be a prerequisite of national resurgence to enlighten Hungarians about the territory of the nation in a way that would engender their affection—and willingness to fight—for it. Thus, according to the prominent geographer Ferenc Fodor, it was incumbent upon academics to advance *honismeret* as a pedagogical field. It was their duty as educators to illuminate the full picture of Hungarians’ immediate environments and extend local patriotism into love of country (Fodor 1935).

This article posits that the discourse of *honismeret* shared by interwar tourism promoters, geographers, and pedagogues revolved around a desire to transform Hungary from an abstract territorial entity—a vague concept, or an outline on a map—into a collection of places and distinct sites invested harmoniously by national and personal meaning. Motives for appealing to this discourse were, obviously, not uniform. Those with an economic stake in the tourism industry hoped to reap profits of a kind different from (or in addition to) the intangible rewards of successful nation-building. Nonetheless, various agendas could and did meet in the project of training Hungarians to be loyally domestic travelers. One of those agendas’ most interesting confluences was in an educational initiative called the School Excursion Trains of the Capital City of Budapest (*Budapest Székesfőváros iskolai kirándulóvonatai*). Between 1934 and 1942, the program, organized by the Budapest municipal authorities, sent tens of thousands of secondary school students on inexpensive field trips to dozens of locations throughout Hungary and abroad. The students who participated in these excursions were provided with special travel guides that instructed them not only on what they were expected to see on the journey, but also on how to be respectable young tourists. An examination of the complete 31-volume library of these booklets offers a more thorough understanding of how *honismeret* was constructed between the wars by illuminating what, and by what means, young Hungarians were supposed to learn about their country.

The term “*honismeret*” is a calque, or loan translation, of the German *Heimatkunde*. Both can be translated into English most literally as “knowledge of one’s homeland,” but this alone does not sufficiently express the layers of meaning that envelop the word. The core concept, *Heimat*, typically translated as “homeland,” is in the words of John Alexander Williams “an extraordinarily slippery and unstable idea with an overabundance of conflicting meanings” (Williams 1996: 359). The meaning of “homeland” contained in *Heimat* ranges ambiguously and fluidly from homeland as the territory of one’s nation to homeland in a radically local sense: the place where one was born and/or where feels most “at home” (Confino 2006). The most direct analogue in Hungarian is perhaps *haza* (‘homeland,’ although this carries a more immediate

association with the nation-state than does *Heimat*), but it is the archaic *hon* ['home'] that usually features in the translation of *Heimatkunde* (although some authors have used *szülőföld* ['birthland'] and *szülőföldismeret* ['knowledge of one's birthland']). The "knowledge of one's homeland" reflected in *Heimatkunde/honismeret* is managed and mediated by experts; it is a field of study. Therefore while it presumes that everyone has first-hand, untrained, and emotional—in a word, "organic"—knowledge of their home, *Heimatkunde/honismeret* organizes and "improves" this knowledge with the intervention of geographers, historians, folklorists, geologists, naturalists, and other dedicated specialists (who were not necessarily professionals).

In Hungary of the 1920s and 1930s *honismeret* was, *avant le lettre*, an interdisciplinary field whose practitioners sought to connect residents intellectually and emotionally to the land, whether at a local level, at a national level, or both at once. They had judged Hungarians on their knowledge of the homeland and found them wanting. What's more, they found this collective ignorance guilty as an accessory to national misfortune. In what we today might call a "continuing education" textbook for adults, Ferenc Fodor blamed the upheavals of 1918-1920 on a general lack of *honismeret*. The volume laid out Hungary's geography, economy, and ethnography, emphasizing how the Treaty of Trianon had diminished the country's size and strength in every category. These factors were not at fault, he wrote,

but rather the nation must indict itself of not having known its homeland. The plowman only knew and loved his own little patch of land, and did not realize how necessary it was, even for his own well-being, that every piece of the country's soil should remain the nation's. The greater part of the industrial working class was completely detached from the Hungarian soil, and it allowed itself to plant the evil lesson in its heart that it had no homeland. The educated Hungarian middle class perhaps loved the Hungarian soil, but did not know it; thus it did not love the soil of its homeland correctly (Fodor 1926: 16).

[Inkább önmagát kell a nemzetnek vádolnia, hogy nem ismerte hazáját; a földműves csak a saját darabka földjét ismerte és szerette, s nem tudta, hogy az ő jólétéhez is mennyire szükséges az, hogy az ország földjének minden darabja a nemzeté maradjon; a munkásság nagy része teljesen elszakadt a magyar földtől, s azt a gonosz tanítást engedte szívébe ültetni, hogy neki nincs hazája; a művelt magyar középosztály talán szerette, de nem ismerte a magyar földet, s így nem helyesen szerette a hazája földjét.]

It is worth noting how the passage quoted above places the burden of *honismeret* equally on urban laborers, farmers, and the intelligentsia. Indeed, despite the well-known counterrevolutionary distrust of Budapest as the "sinful city," metropolitans were not the only ones whose ignorance had supposedly alienated them from their country. University professor of agricultural science Ferenc Steinecker, for instance, opined in 1935 that village leaders and officials assigned to the countryside knew too little about the places they served, even when they had been born and raised in them (Steinecker 1935: 3-4). Viewed either with a metropolitan gaze or a local one, the provinces appeared to *honismeret* activists as the unknown quantities of the interwar period.

One cannot help but detect in this a certain ironic twist. Interwar Hungary was the Hungary of "*nem, nem, soha!*" ['no, no, never!'], and of dramatic public monuments memorializing the territorial losses inflicted by the Treaty of Trianon, and particularly of the apotheosis of the image of pre-1918 Hungary's borders into a ubiquitous icon of national suffering (Zeidler 2006). Even in a period renowned for irredentist propaganda, we find intellectuals, businessmen, and politicians united in the conviction that Hungarians knew almost nothing meaningful about their country's geography. And yet, this fear that Hungary was *terra incognita*, a blank form cut into the earth the way a cutter carves cookie dough, is in the final analysis not entirely surprising. It could be argued that the obsession with borders and zones of foreign occupation that characterized revisionist discourse encouraged Hungarians to think of Hungary more in terms of *space* than *place*. In other words, for as much as it insisted that the shape of the nation had been mutilated, this rhetoric did comparatively little to instruct its audience on the substance contained within the nation's "proper" geographic limits (other than it was composed of anguished but proud Hungarians). The country was an expanse of land out of which enemies had unjustly taken slices: one recalls the countless silhouettes of the old kingdom shaded to emphasize the "missing" parts of the whole and the smallness of the remainder. This was a kind of rhetoric that invited emptiness.

The invocation of "space" and "place" here requires clarification. Following Yi-Fu Tuan, "space" is abstract and open, permitting movement. "Space" becomes "place" when people "get to know it better and endow it with value" (Tuan 1977: 6). Put another way, places are fixed points in space with varying degrees of meaning attached. Lief Jerram, in an attempt to bring order to scholars' frequently undisciplined use of the terms, has offered a three-part explanation that distinguishes among space ("the particular proximate disposition of things in relation to one another"), location/site (where things are on the Earth's surface and the nature of the relationships between them), and place ("the values, beliefs, codes, and practices that surround a particular location, whether that location is real or imagined") (Jerram 2013: 403-404). While by these definitions Hungary known by any shape was certainly a place—because that shape was nothing if not laden with meaning—interwar proponents of *honismeret* feared that it was, for too many of its residents, not *enough* of a place. They worried that Hungarians, failing to appreciate the sacred interconnectedness of their natural and human environments, meanly and foolishly neglected to pay their land the reverence it was due (Fodor 1926: 324-235).

Many of the champions of *honismeret* were academic geographers such as Ferenc Fodor and Jenő Cholnoky who held that the adaptation of their field to primary and secondary school classrooms would lay the surest foundations for knowledge of the homeland on a large scale. They also, however, regarded tourists as the ideal frontline agents for generating and spreading that knowledge. Cholnoky maintained that tourists—specifically *túristák*: 'hikers' and 'alpinists,' in the parlance of the time—had an obligation to collect ecological and ethnographic data on their wanderings (Cholnoky 1935). Alpinist and writer Aladár Hensch concurred, eloquently praising tourism as "one of the most important, most expedient tools for focusing and cultivating love of the homeland" [*a honszeretet fokozásának, nevelésének egyik legfontosabb, legcélravezetőbb eszköze*]. It was the tourist's personal encounters with the landscape and sites of national importance that inevitably left him with an abiding affection for Hungary. "The ardor of theoretical knowledge," he wrote, "is dwarfed by those feelings which stir in us if a historical monument, the tumbledown remains of a castle unfolds in its great verity before our eyes, or if we visit the site of a battle, the stage upon which the reminiscence of an old glory appears amidst nature... Let us train tourists – and with them, we have trained patriots!" [*Az elméleti tudás*

lelkesezése eltörpül azon érzések mellett, amelyek bennünk ébrednek, ha egy-egy történelmi emlék, egy düledező várrom a maga valóságában bontakozik ki szemünk előtt, vagy egy csata helyét, a régi dicső emlékének színterét természetben keressük fel... Neveljünk turistákat – és velük honfiakat neveltünk!] (quoted in Bodor 1935: 78).

Hensch's conclusion would have heard no dissenting voices from among those with material motives for promoting tourism. The protectionist economic policies common in the interwar years transformed the "tourist experience" into the ideal commodity for small east-central European states with limited industrial capacities. When packaged and marketed abroad, it was a wonderful "export," for it derived from a limitless, domestically extracted raw material—the charms of a specific national character—that could only be consumed properly at the site of its production. Foreign tourists, especially those from the more affluent west, who carried wallets full of valuable currencies and appetites for exotic cultures, were thus the perfect "imports." Attracting too few of them was a problem; but, from the point of view of those in the tourist industry, failing to keep the citizens of one's own country from becoming another country's import was just as bad, if not worse. Not only did they not put cash into the domestic economy; they took it abroad to enrich foreign treasuries.

For many in the industry, therefore, the far more insidious threat to the survival of Hungarian tourism came from within. As the shock of global economic depression cut deep into international tourist traffic starting in 1930-31, the market of potential travelers shrank, and the loss of tourists to other countries grew into an even grimmer menace. In the journal's inaugural article in 1931, the editor of *Magyar Fürdőélet* observed with dismay that Hungarian was (too) frequently heard on the funicular railways of Switzerland, in the Thuringian forest, and at the Cap Nord—damning evidence of Hungarian tourists' disloyalty. He seemed to welcome the effects of the world economic depression out of the hope that it would slam shut the "gates leading abroad" [*a külföld felé vezető kapuk*] thus forcing Hungarians to vacation at home because they could not afford to do it elsewhere (see "*Programmunk*": 5). Such hope, alas, was premature. Two years later, the journal reported that the Hungarian National Bank, which regulated the flow of currency to other countries, had released twenty-five million pengős to Hungarians wishing to travel abroad. The sin here, it judged, was not on the head of the bank, but rather on the travelers, who preached support for the domestic tourism industry while fleeing to other countries at their first chance. It seemed that neither economic nor administrative restrictions could staunch the bleeding of the industry's customers and capital. "Cultural actions" were necessary, it judged, which would "replace the madness of love for abroad with the realistic considerations of staying here at home" [*Kulturális akciók kellenek, amelyek a lelkekben a külföldimádás örületét az itthonmaradás reális meggondolásával cseréljék ki.*] ("*Húsvéti idegenforgalmi vérveszteségünk*").

"Cultural actions" to combat such "madness," which presumably included better advertising and effectual changes to consumer habits, were already underway. In a 1931 guide/promotional pamphlet forcefully titled "Let's Travel Our Native Land!", the Hungarian State Railways (MÁV) exhorted the weekend traveler to refresh his or her "weary body and worn-out soul" [*a fáradt testnek és kimerült léleknek*] by taking a short excursion to one of twenty-nine provincial destinations. It hoped that the little booklet would open a "path to the public's heart" [*utat a közönség szívéhez*] and make room for the following mantra: "Let's get to know our country! Let's travel our native land!" [*Ismerjük meg hazánkat! Utazgassunk a hazánk földjén!*] (Koller 1931: 1). The following year, MÁV took a much more decisive step towards encouraging domestic tourism when it initiated a program of *filléres gyors* ['penny express'] trains. These

specially-designated runs, modeled after the *treni popolari* of the Italian *dopolavoro* cultural scheme, allowed passengers to journey to select destinations at fares reduced by fifty percent or more. From the first train in March, 1932 until the last one in November, 1940, approximately 1.4 million passengers (or, on average, 163,170 each year) availed themselves of these discounted fares (Klaudy 1943: 74-75). The *filléres gyors* system had its shortcomings: patrons complained of inconvenient schedules, long waits at the ticket office, and uncomfortable travel conditions, often to be able to spend fewer than twenty-four hours at their destination (see "*Filléres kritika...*"). Yet in spite of such faults, "penny expresses" became an important fixture of tourism in Hungary between the wars. They helped cement the concept of the weekend as an attainable and desirable block of leisure time by providing—at least on paper—a means for traveling relatively quickly and cheaply. This offered hope to *honismeret* activists, who hailed the prospect of ever greater numbers of Hungarians being able to see their country first-hand. Tourism industry leaders were happy to affirm that this had been MÁV's plan all along and that the "penny expresses" were patriotically serving the goal of greater national self-knowledge (Bogsch 1938).

The successful institutionalization of the *filléres gyors* allowed *honismeret* activists to draft plans for the program's use for directly pedagogical ends. Writing in *Magyar Szemle*, the young physical geographer Pál Zoltán Szabó spoke out against what he judged to be "our ghastly lack of *honismeret*" [*honismeretünk borzalmas hiánya*] especially among the educated. For him, the root causes of this affliction lay in the secondary school system. It was bad enough that the flat, flavorless geography curriculum could do little to inspire pupils to a love of homeland, but the fact that their instructors were scarcely more familiar with Hungary than they were made it that much worse. The country's degraded economic and cultural conditions prevented teachers from traveling and seeing it firsthand and, consequently, they were hindered in their mission to spread the gospel of Hungarianness. "The apostles saw the Savior; the Hungarian teacher has not seen the Hungarian Homeland. The apostles' strength was that they had experienced Him, felt His warm breath, believed in His immensity. The apostles of the Hungarian Homeland have only studied it, after a fashion, from what stands at arm's length from them. They have absorbed letters, not the breath of the Hungarian Homeland" [*Az apostolok látták az Üdvözítőt, a magyar tanár nem látta a Magyar Földet. Az apostolok ereje az volt, hogy tapintották, érezték meleg lehelletét, hittek hatalmasságában. A Magyar Föld apostolai csak tanultak arról jól-rosszul, ami karnyújtásnyira áll tőlük. Betűket szedtek magukba és nem a Magyar Föld lehelletét*] (Szabó 1934: 275).

The (in his words) "cheap solution" that Szabó put forward was in harmony with an idealized vision of budget travel culture in the "penny express" era. He envisioned a scheme whereby newly-minted young teachers would spend their vacations from school riding the rails at discounted fares, experiencing Hungary for themselves. They would be equipped with guidebooks, as well as journals and cameras (or sketchpads) to record their travels. They "could merrily camp out in tents like old scouts" [*öregcserkészmodra vígan táborozhatnak*]¹—if they were male that is: "lodging is the concern of the young ladies" [*a megszállás inkább a leányok számára probléma*]²—and, "with song lyrics, florid hearts, and hats on their heads," could set out on "grand journeys of discovery" [*nótaszóval, virágos szívvel és kalappal elindulnának a nagy felfedező utakra*] in which Hungary would "reveal before them its secret, sainted beauties" [*a magyar föld kitárná előttük titkos, szent szépségeit*]. Thus Szabó envisaged tourism as the capstone of teacher training and, by extension, a foundational part of the education of generations of future students. The "warm spring rain" [*meleg tavaszi esője*] of travel

experiences would revive the "souls left parched by letters" [*a betűktől kiszáradt lelkekre*] "A new love of the homeland would be born, a deep one, inseparable from the Hungarian soil" [*Új hazaszeretet születne, mély, a magyar földből kiszakíthatatlan*] (Szabó 1934: 276).

Szabó's article serves as a vivid, if grandiloquent, example of how tourism intersected with the discourse of *honismeret* without an ulterior profit motive steering its course. It reflects from another angle the apparently pervasive fear that Hungary was *terra incognita* to those who should have loved it best and the parallel insistence that travel was the surest path to discovery. What Szabó possibly did not know was that at roughly the same time as his article appeared, the city of Budapest was implementing a program similar to the one he had outlined. Rather than dispatch teachers to be trained as evangelists of the homeland, however, this program reached out to the pupils themselves. Dubbed the School Excursion Trains of the Capital City of Budapest [*Budapest Székesfőváros iskolai kirándulóvonatai*], it was the brainchild of Dr. Gyula Bodnár, instructor of Hungarian and French at the *József Eötvös Gimnázium* ['József Eötvös High School'] located in Budapest's District IV.

Before the war, Bodnár had developed and fulfilled a plan to integrate countrywide excursions into seven years of the school's eight-year curriculum. Building on the existing practice of annual one- or two-day field trips in various subjects, he saw much more ambitious trips of seven to nine days as a way for students to gain "more intensive knowledge" of a different region of the country every year. By the time a student had completed all seven journeys, "he [would have] become thoroughly familiar with his entire homeland" [*a tanuló egész hazáját alaposan megismerhesse*]. But the trips had other purposes, too. They were to "endear the youth to the idea of traveling, guide them toward self-sufficiency, and teach them to travel using real-life experience" [*az ifjúsággal az utazást megkedvelteti, önállóságra vezeti, valósággal megtanítja utazni*]. They would, moreover, give the chaperoning teachers "a thousand times more opportunities to descend into the children's frame of mind, to study it, to become familiar with it, and to be able to influence the developing young character with their own example" [*ezerszer több alkalma van arra, hogy a gyermek lelkivilágához leszálljon, azt tanulmányozza, megismerje, és a fiatal fejlődő jellemre a maga példájával hatni tudjon*] (Erődi and Bodnár 1931: 72).

Bodnár's original vision was never realized in full. The program kicked off in 1909 and carried on through the 1914 school year, but the First World War forced it to end before the seventh trip in the cycle—to Transylvania—could take place. After the war, general economic instability prevented the school from organizing regular field trips on this scale, until a series of tours abroad in the late 1920s (Donászy and Kollár 1954: 22). Nonetheless, when the city of Budapest adopted the program as its own in 1934, Bodnár remained the mastermind and the *József Eötvös Gimnázium* served as its base of operations. The essence of Bodnár's prewar mission thus found a second life. What had once been one school's innovative plan for offering its students a practicum in *honismeret* now became the basis for a way to bring national self-awareness to the youth of a metropolis.

Complete statistics on the execution of the Excursion Train program are difficult to come by, but a sense of its dimensions can be gained from municipal statistical yearbooks as well as yearbooks and histories issued by the host school. It began on an experimental basis of 2,843 participants in the spring semester of 1934, making day-trips to Eger, Pécs, and Szeged. Evidently this was a strong start, because the volume and breadth of the program only expanded during the next academic year. 9,595 students went on twenty-five journeys—not including one to Vienna—to eight discrete destinations. This trend continued, and by the end of the 1936-37

school year a total of 36,579 students had participated since the program's inception. Although most travelers attended *középfokú* ['secondary'] and *polgári* ['upper elementary'] schools in the capital, students from provincial schools—and even schools in Vienna—did take part in certain excursions. Twenty-five percent of the students participating in the spring semester of 1937, for instance, were not from Budapest (Erődi 1937: 30-31). Table 1 below displays the distribution of participants by school year and indicates where in Hungary each year's trips were headed.

Table 1: Excursion Train Trips by School Year, 1933-1937

School Year	1933-1934*†§	1934-35†	1935-36‡	1936-37‡
Students participating	2,843	9,595	12,519	10,681
Destinations visited				
Eger	X	X	X	
Esztergom		X	X	X
Győr				X
Kaposvár		X	X	
Kecskemét/Bugac		X		
Lake Balaton		X	X	X
Lower Danube				X
Pécs	X	X	X	
Szeged	X			X
Székesfehérvár			X	X
Szombathely			X	
Tatabánya				X
Vác		X	X	X
Vértes Mountains				X
Visegrád		X	X	X

*Spring semester only

† Source: *Budapest Székesfőváros statisztikai és közigazgatási évkönyve*

‡ Source: *A budapesti IV. kerületi községi Eötvös József-Gimnázium értesítője*

§ Source: *A budapesti »Eötvös József« gimnázium centenáris emlékkönyve*

It is unclear just how much and what kind of support the Excursion Trains received from the municipal authorities, but it seems to have been quite a respectable amount. The program's organizers made an effort to ensure that even students from backgrounds of lesser means could have the experience of *honismeret* tourism. Participants only had to contribute the cost of their railway fare and were exempt from any fees for lodging and dining, as long as they brought provisions with them (Donászy and Kollár 1954: 29). Furthermore, they were provided with impressive travel guides published by the city government's official press to ensure that they could "read" the passing landscape from the train, appreciate their destinations on arrival, and know how to behave themselves as travelers. The guides were richly illustrated inside and out with full-color covers painted by volunteer contributors (usually teachers), photographs donated by local helpers, and high-quality maps, most of which were drawn by Bodnár himself.

A summary glance at the series allows for some sense of the Excursion Train program's ambitions and longevity. Of the thirty-one published volumes, four corresponded to trips to other countries: one volume each for Vienna and Innsbruck/Salzburg and a double volume for Rome

and Napoli. (Bodnár had designs on an installment for Warsaw, but apparently this plan never materialized (see *Magyar Szemle Társaság* 1934)). The guide for Budapest was published in German for the benefit of Viennese schoolchildren. Some of the volumes made it into third and fourth editions by 1942 (Eger and Vác/Visegrád, respectively), and the last new books in the series appeared in 1941 (for destinations in recently re-annexed northern Transylvania). Bodnár worked as series editor and principal writer until his retirement in 1939, at which point two of his *gimnázium* colleagues took over: József Dombi, a history and geography teacher, and László Farkas, who also taught history and geography and was the author of many textbooks on these subjects (Erődi 1941: 31-34).

One way of surveying the Excursion Train guides' subject matter is to tally up how many times they call attention to certain kinds of sites, facts, or concepts. I have taken a rough-and-ready approach to this by noting the number of paragraphs of text that mention items in the following categories: national history; art and architectural history; contemporary economic activity; descriptions of landscape and geography; rail and other forms of infrastructure; evocations of railway lines; nationalism and national identities; and irredentism. Table 2 lists the results below. It should be noted that these figures represent non-exclusive categories; that is, most paragraphs mention items on more than one subject and have therefore been counted once (and no more) for each relevant category. Moreover, they reflect my interpretation of the meaning of a paragraph (or portion of paragraph), and do not accord to a predetermined list of keywords. Thus, for instance, a paragraph is counted as being "about" architectural history if it assigns a structure to a particular style or describes its technical features; simply mentioning a building was not a satisfactory criterion. I must acknowledge that this is not an especially robust methodology for data analysis, and I make no claim to "scientific" rigor. Nonetheless, I believe the results provide a useful (if approximate) overview of what fields of knowledge the authors of the Excursion Train guides considered important and where, in turn, they wished to direct the attention of the student-tourists.

Table 2: Relative Proportions of Excursion Train Guidebook Subject Matter

Subject	Mentions by Paragraph	Percent of Total (972 paragraphs)
National History	579	60
Art/Architectural History	309	32
Contemporary Economic Activity	155	16
Descriptions of Landscapes and Geographical Features	326	34
Rail & Other Infrastructure	199	20
Evocations of Railway Lines	210	22
National Identities & Nationalism	117	12
Irredentism	71	7

Landmarks of "high visibility and public significance, such as monuments [or] shrines," notes Yi-Fu Tuan, "encourage awareness of and loyalty to place" (Tuan 1977: 159). It is no surprise, then, that national history, along with the more European-oriented history of art and architecture, was unquestionably the Excursion Train guides' primary mode of constructing

place. Sixty per cent of the series' paragraphs connected locations to historical events or eras in Hungarian history and thirty-two percent discussed the significance of a structure or cultural object within the framework of a canonical narrative of Western art. The historical analysis actually offered in the text was not "thick." Most references to history were simple and perfunctory; often they did not consume more than a sentence. Some were morsels of interesting apocrypha, such as when students traveling the Budapest-Vienna line were informed that a certain promontory near Budaörs, the Törökugrató ['Turk-Jump'], was supposedly a place from which the Turks cast their prisoners into the valley below (Bodnár 1934c: 4). Others were merely allusive, as when pointing out a monument visible from the train, e.g. the giant statue of the legendary Turul bird erected at Bánhida in the 1890s to commemorate the arrival of the Magyar tribes (approximately) a millennium before (Bodnár 1934c: 5). A representative example of the general method comes from this description of Budafok:

Already in the time of the Romans a *castrum* stood on this spot. After the Mongol invasion German settlers lived here. After the expulsion of the Turks, it became the property of Prince Eugene of Savoy, and at the beginning of the 18th century it begins [*sic*] its first flowering as a wine-cultivating region. Since the end of the last century the city's industry, too, has taken on appreciable development (Bodnár 1938b: 2).

[*E helyen már a rómaiak idején castrum állott. A tatárjárás után német telepesek lakták. A törökök kiűzése után Savoyai Jenő herceg tulajdona lett, s a XVIII. század elején kezdődik [*sic*] első virágzása mint szőlőtermőhely. A múlt század vége óta a város ipara is jelentékeny lendületet vett.*]

The guidebooks did not aim to explain the significance of past events or even to construct coherent narratives of national history. Indeed, they presupposed that the student with volume in hand already has history in his/her head. The point was rather to "sync up" that history with the locations where it took place, making historical knowledge more vivid and personal while transforming otherwise unremarkable buildings or monuments into sites of national memory. Thus two abstractions were simultaneously made concrete and melded: the nation's past (according to certain professional historians) and its territory. Bit by bit, with each alignment of history and location, the borders of Hungary were filled in with places.

The frequent focus on art and architecture reflects a dominant attitude generally held by guidebooks published for what was, prior to the end of World War Two, a bourgeois traveling public. Guides affirmed and perpetuated a reverence for objects of "high culture" by diverting their readers towards churches, monuments, museums, and the like while for the most part ignoring institutions of "low culture" (Palmowski 2002: 121). It is not at all surprising that this attitude should find a prominent place in the Excursion Train series, which had even more forcefully didactic aims than standard guidebooks. Because all of these cultural treasures were part of the national heritage, because their presence helped create the land- and cityscapes of the homeland, and because they were rooted in the Hungarian past and joined (literally) to the Hungarian soil, they fell into the realm of *honismeret*. Churches in particular reinforced the notion that Hungarian history was essentially Christian (and more specifically Catholic) history, for although the guides make passing mentions of Jewish synagogues, there are no detailed walkthroughs as there are for churches. (One might note, though, that the Esztergom Basilica

received a thorough description in nine paragraphs, while the Reformed Great Church in Debrecen received only a single paragraph (Dombi 1941: 25-27 and Bodnár 1938a: 13)).

A less generous observer might note that the art-and-architecture approach calls to mind Roland Barthes's memorable critique of the *Guides Bleus* ['Blue Guides'] ubiquitous in post-WWII France. He picked apart the books' tendency to depopulate tourist destinations of actual, living people and replace them with stereotypes that did little more than serve as complements of the "real" attractions: famous buildings and other spectacles. A country's inhabitants amounted to nothing more than "charming romantic décor destined to impose on the country's essential nature: its collection of monuments"—and these mainly religious monuments, for the *Blue Guide* "knows only one kind of space," that of churches and other forms of ecclesiastical architecture (Barthes 2012: 135). Something similar was at work in the Excursion Train guides, in which the lived communities of contemporary Hungarians were largely implied and only the "imagined community" of the nation, ostensibly bound together by a single historical narrative, required explication.

The Excursion Train guides were not blind to the present-day, however. Sixteen percent of their total paragraphs pointed out sites that held economic importance, marking, for example, where in the country Hungarians mined coal, cultivated grain and grapes, made wine, rolled cigarettes, and generated electricity. Unlike many tourist guides produced for foreign consumption, these volumes largely avoided treating provincial communities as timeless repositories of traditional culture. Modern productive forces had brought "Progress" to the countryside—if not without some aesthetic damage. In describing the Alföld plains around Szeged, Bodnár explained that the region was "no longer Petőfi's Alföld" [*már nem a Petőfi Alföldje*]. Gone were the "desolate, endless sand dunes" [*a sivár, végtelen homokbuckák*], the "ramshackle inns" [*omladozó csárdák*], and the "solitary sweep-pole wells" [*magukban álló gémeskutak*], though with them, Bodnár wistfully admitted, had disappeared the "most singular magic" [*legegységibb varázsa*] of the *pusztas*'s melancholy isolation. In their stead the last four decades had delivered "new sources of income" [*új jövedelmi források*] such as orchards and vegetable gardens, and the "spread of culture" [*a kultúra terjedése*], in the form of new schools and churches and the improvement of public safety (Bodnár 1938a: 5-6). Moreover, several of the guides were dedicated to tours through destinations known specifically for their industrial significance: the mine works at Tatabánya (No. 8), the Herend Porcelain Manufactory near Veszprém (No. 22) and the shipyards and factories of Csepel Island (No. 24).

After history and art history, the next most frequent topic of discussion in the Excursion Train handbooks is the description of landscapes and geographical features. If students were supposed to feel an emotional connection to the Hungarian soil, presumably Bodnár and company wagered that the landscape would declare its own beauty. The guidebooks favored an analytical gaze to a touristic one, as though narrating a topographic and political map. Their descriptions of landscape are generic and repetitive. Stock phrases dominate: hillsides are often simply "forest-covered" [*erdőborított*] and other vistas, notably cityscapes, are summed up as "picturesque" [*festői*]. Articulations of particular geographic facts, on the other hand, were more precise. If a student closely followed the text, he/she would learn not only the names of the mountain ranges, forests, rivers, etc., that could be seen out the window, but even when his/her train had crossed from one county into another—an experience that required expert mediation in order to be comprehensible.

One might expect that a public, government-supported nation-building project of the Horthy era like the Excursion Trains would lean heavily on the rhetoric of national identity, nationalism, and irredentism. Yet this was not the case. A mere twelve percent of the guidebooks' paragraphs spoke in the voice of nationalism (for example, by presenting the nation as an autonomous subject with intentions and possessions) or even referred explicitly to national identities—any nationality, not Hungarian alone. Most of the invocations of nationality come when the books describe the demographic composition of certain cities and towns encountered on a given journey. Hence we find, for instance, that the population of Veszprém is *színtiszta magyar* ['purely Hungarian'] (Bodnár 1938c: 8) and that of Kaposvár is *teljesen magyar* ['completely Hungarian'] (Bodnár 1936b: 9), but Győr, with ca. five thousand individuals of a different mother tongue is only *túlnyomóan magyar* ['preponderantly Hungarian'] (Bodnár 1937: 6). Admittedly, one could argue that the entire context of the series was so clearly a nationalist enterprise that recourse to overtly patriotic language was gratuitous. And, from time to time, such language did arise, since the editors shared the common elite conviction that the old Hungarian imperium over the region had been (and presumably would be again) a righteous and necessary thing. Witness the editor, describing Novi Sad (Újvidék), haughtily claiming that "until the World War Újvidék was the center of Serb literature and intellectual life, thanks to Hungary's protection and gallant support" [*a világháborúig a szerb szellemi élet, irodalom központja volt Újvidék Magyarország védelme és lovagias támogatása alatt*] (Bodnár 1936a: 11). But, even in the shadow of this and similar moments, and even if the centrality of Hungarian nationhood was taken for granted, the guidebooks' tone remained mostly free of the jingoistic and purple prose that typified interwar nationalist discourse.

Also notable was the fact that the series paid little attention to revisionist territorial aims. Only seven percent of the series' paragraphs mentioned the Treaty of Trianon, its consequences, or the goal of undoing it. Indeed, it was principally *after* the Vienna Arbitrations of 1938 and 1940 and the occupation of Carpathian Ruthenia in 1939—that is, after much of the loss incurred by the Treaty of Trianon apparently had become consigned to history—that the editors dedicated themselves to the subject. Certain volume editions published before 1938 referred to the current boundaries of counties bordering Czechoslovakia as "provisional" [*ideiglenes*], hinting that future circumstances would merit their return to their pre-1920 dispositions. The itinerary for a boat trip down the Danube to Orșova and the Iron Gates, published in 1936 and carried out in May 1937, made it clear that the students were to remember that they sailed "through the stolen sections of South Hungary" [*Délmagyarország elrabolt részein*] and therefore through a landscape of injustice (Bodnár 1936a: 3).

It was not until the final six volumes of the series¹ that the guides fully turned their gaze on sites memorializing the recent suppression of Hungarian culture and other signs that non-Hungarian occupation had, here and there, effaced the "original Hungarian spirit" [*az eredeti magyar lelke*] of the cities (Bodnár 1939: 13). In the tour through Nagyvárad (Oradea), for example, the guide reproduced the entire text of two commemorative tablets that, sometime after

¹ These were: No. 26 (Rozsnyó/Kassa) and No. 27 (Érsekújvár/Komárom), formerly in Slovakia; No. 28 (Nagyvárad/Félicsfürdő) and No. 29 (Bánffyhyunad/Kolozsvár), formerly in Romania; and Nos. 30-31 (Erdős-Kárpátok vidéke [the Eastern Beskids] /Ungvár, Munkács, Kőrösmező), also formerly Slovakian territory).

1918, the "Wallachs" [*az oláhok*] had removed from buildings that had once housed obscure historical figures (Farkas 1941a: 10-13). The guide to Kolozsvár (Cluj) piously maligned the (Greek Orthodox) Dormition of the Theotokos Cathedral as an "oversized" [*túlméretezett*] eyesore of reinforced concrete "built out of human ostentation rather than in praise of God" [*inkább emberi hivalkodásából épült, mint Isten dicsőítéséből*] (Farkas 1941b: 17-18). However, moments such as these, though sharp-edged, were numerically few and concentrated in the last years of the Excursion Train program, a period when mobilization for war had stoked nationalism to full flame in Hungarian public life. Furthermore, they seem to confirm the guides' preponderantly historical mindset, as they treat the effects of Trianon as objects from the nation's past and sites of (admittedly recent) national memory.

Overall, the Excursion Train guides' preoccupation with sites and structures of (national) historical significance and relatively indifferent attitude towards the present-day place them within a pedigree of genre conventions established by Baedeker (and others) in the mid-nineteenth century. Guides in this tradition, according to Rudy Koshar, ostensibly cataloged the canon of "great monuments or artworks" that comprised the "national heritage" (Koshar 2000: 49-50). They supposed that the traveler, a liberal bourgeois (male) subject of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, had a "quasi-mystical relationship" with these sights and would plan meticulously-budgeted trips to "collect" experiences with them (Koshar 27). To a certain extent, therefore, the Excursion Train books aimed at not only improving *honismeret* as such, but also hoped to inspire students to strike out on future journeys of their own by introducing them to the habits of middle-class travel culture. Nine of the volumes presented them with a list of "Things to Know about the Journey" [*Tudnivalók az utazásról*]. Students were instructed to "comport [themselves] with humble, calm, and considerate behavior" in front of their provincial hosts [*Tegyük magunkat szerény, csendes, tapintatos viselkedésünkkel kedvessé a vendéglátó vidéki városok szemében.*] by not littering, not shouting, not fiddling with the train's emergency brakes, not elbowing their way on board, and, when visiting churches, not grabbing or leaning on anything (Bodnár 1938a: 2 and Dombi 1942: 23). Certainly, these commandments were designed to enforce discipline and shepherd young (and undoubtedly rambunctious) travelers through the many stages of an ambitious field trip away from home. But they also can be read as a primer on the code of civility expected of any well-behaved tourist. In the spirit of the trips that Bodnár had organized before the war, the tours were to whet the students' appetite for future travel and train them how to do it on their own (Erődi and Bodnár 1931: 72).

This is also evident (though somewhat obliquely) in the guidebooks' tenacious commitment to making students aware of the railway they traveled on. Twenty percent of the guidebooks' paragraphs directed their attention to bridges, stations, and other elements of railway infrastructure, at times even going into detail on when and by whom they were constructed. Another twenty-two percent of the paragraphs included what might be called "railway line evocations," or call-outs of the lines that branched off from the one that the Excursion Train currently followed. Thus a student starting out on the excursion to Pécs could read that he/she was on the Budapest-Mohács line and that, at the right moments, the Belgrade-Istanbul line, the Győr-Vienna line, or a line heading to Gödöllő could be seen splitting away to other parts of the country (Bodnár 1934a: 3). The effect of these frequent interventions was place the reader at one node of a vast network, only a tiny part of which he/she can view. It provided, by inference, the knowledge that more nodes existed in the web and that the network bound other such places in Hungary together—and to the continent beyond. Thus, subtly, the student was asked to cast his/her mind's eye over the horizon and imagine for a moment all of the other

sights of the homeland that perhaps one day he/she might go out and visit. In combination with the narration of geographic features, this rendered less abstract the space within Hungary's borders by showing students it was accessible by means of the very railway that transported them at that moment. It planted a suggestion in the students' minds of "penny express" rides in time to come.

For the present, however, Excursion Train students did not perfectly fit the mold of the typical bourgeois tourist. They were, at most, liberal bourgeois subjects in training. They could not move as they pleased; their direction was already decided and their activities closely monitored. It is therefore misleading to read the guides as one would a Baedeker, because they were not intended to be exhaustive sources of knowledge for use in planning a trip from beginning to end. They include absolutely nothing on the subject of how to acquire tickets, find accommodations and restaurants, or seek information on local services. They were pedagogical tools for telling a captive readership of travelers what they should look at, when they should expect to see it, and what meaning they were to take from it. They were itineraries, carefully and completely planned, not catalogs from which an itinerary could be assembled from scratch (albeit with much mediation, indeed coaching) in the way that Baedekers or Blue Guides were. Students were led on their journeys by a predetermined, present-tense narration of their movements through space, in which each plot point of the "story" represented their encounter with site of national significance. Yi-Fu Tuan has argued that "place is whatever stable object captures our attention" when we are in motion (Tuan 1977: 161). By this measure, then, the Excursion Train guides created Hungarian national *place(s)* out of Hungarian national *space* by turning the latter into a travelogue: each step of the narrative was a "stable object"—a place—located within the ostensibly "unknown" territory of the nation. *Honismeret* was to come to the student from his/her role as the protagonist who faced these "stable objects" firsthand.

As rich and extensive a source as the Excursion Train guidebooks provide for historians of *honismeret*, tourism, and nation-building, in the final analysis they are fundamentally prescriptive texts. And so they were intended to be. But, as such, they do not illuminate much of the students' or teachers' personal experiences of travel. Indeed, it is easy to imagine that the students—being adolescents, after all—had their own agendas for making field trips interesting, some of which may have had little to do with becoming good young apostles of the homeland. Nevertheless, the guides serve as a resource for understanding how the agendas of *other* interwar actors (pedagogues, tourism promoters, and academics among them) met at the confluence of state-organized educational travel.

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