

RESEARCH OF THE TOURISTIC POTENTIAL AT THE BORDERLAND OF THE EU - Supply and demand in the Upper-Tisza Region

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ABSTRACT: *The north east part of the Carpathian Basin is a part of the most important transport corridor of EU, furthermore there is a diverse area both from the point of view of natural and social endowments as well. The most important value of the underdeveloped areas from the point of view of economy is its capabilities concerning transport geography and tourism. Here the borders of five countries (of which 4 are members of EU) meet each other within a very small range which is a serious possibility from the point of view of transport corridor development both in the direction of northeast-south west and north-south. Nevertheless it is also important that transport and logistics should not endanger the unique natural and ethnographical values of the region. Based on the tourism flow we can state that the Hungarian side of the region possesses adequate attractions, however these advantages are not yet successfully utilised. The biggest opportunity of the region is to attract greater number of guests from the neighbouring countries.*

Keywords *Borders, Hungary, Ukraine, tourism, destinations, spa, transport, logistics, regional development*

1. Introduction

The north east part of the Carpathian Basin possesses diverse endowments not only from the point of view of its natural values but we can experience significant differences concerning its social capabilities as well. This is primarily due to the fact that numerous state borders can be found in this area which for decades separated the regions from each other. Though here extends the external border of EU, recently the role of the state borders is less and less important so there is the chance to further develop the co-operations based on the mutual advantages.

One of the co-operation areas is tourism. The present study tries to provide answer on what extent can the cross border Hungarian areas and the tourism endowments of the Szatmár-Bereg area promote to make contacts with the neighbouring regions independently from that is it EU's member or not. During the researches we investigated on the role of the neighbouring country's visitors in the borderland of North-East Hungary's guest flow.

The Hungarian plain landscape concerning its basic characteristics differs from the neighbouring country's landscapes so there is the possibility to become a more important attraction for the citizens of the surrounding citizens.

2. The spatial allocation of the area

The landscape allocated on the northern parts of the Hungarian Great Plain is surrounded by a 150 km long borderline from three sides touching Romania, Ukraine and Slovakia¹. The border section constitutes fore and aft the area of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County.

For this peripheral, economically underdeveloped area it is indispensable to launch fast and effective developments. Nevertheless the measurements underlying

¹In the paper at the guest flow analysis apart from the mentioned countries we investigated the visitors from Poland as well regarding the geographical proximity of that sending area.

the planning are based on the statistical micro regions, the realisation of the development plans are not necessarily connected to either of the impoundment types, for this realisation

any spatial impoundment could be adequate (enterprise zone, local government associations etc.) (Figure 1.).

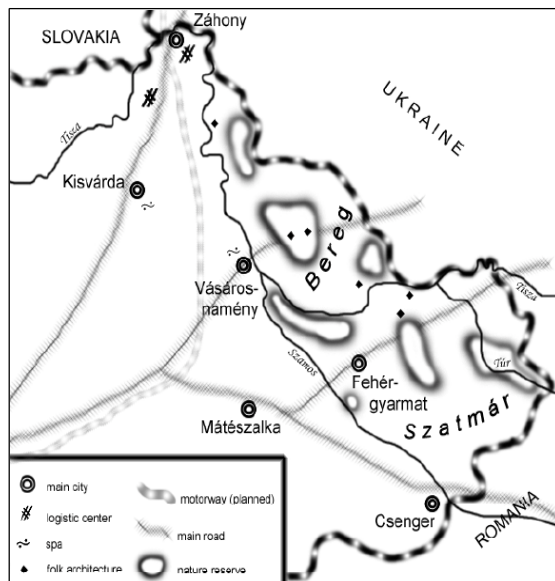


Fig. 1. The presented area

For the measurements of tourism flow the mostly accepted data are the number of arriving guests and their guest nights which are based on the data service of the accommodations so in this case one could make any collection of data by the statistical spatial units. Concerning its endowments the area itself is not uniform due to which the landscape utilisation is also not based everywhere on tourism. In the following we present the endowments framing the basics of tourism.

3. Natural endowments

The Upper Tisza Area is the lowland floodplain of the River Tisza and part of the alluvial fan created by the rivers coming from the Northeast Carpathians and Transylvania. Its elevation differs from 106-124 metres. The monotonous surface is in some degree diversified by shifting sand

islands, levées and abandoned river basins. The Upper Tisza Area is the coolest landscape unit of the Great Plains. The winter is cold and in the summer period the precipitation is relatively few.

The landscape unit is rich of stream waters. The area between the greater rivers is cut up by smaller, natural and channelled beds. The regime of the rivers demonstrate characteristic features. Despite of the high waters characteristic of the early summertime period and the frequent occurrence of the small waters in autumn and winter the precipitation on a certain part of the catchment area could cause floods at any time, the water level of the rivers could rise up several meters during one day (GAJDOS A. 1996.). Almost the only soil forming (natural) factor is the alluvial accumulation.

The area's remains of the original softwood grove forests can only be found in

spots. The 23 000 ha Szatmár-Bereg Landscape Protection Area was created to protect these lands which soon will become a national park.

Due to the frequent floods of the River Tisza the public life renewed the debate on how the similar floods could be anticipated: shall a re-regulation of the Tisza Valley gather greater grounds to the river setting back the nearly original water course bed and also to widen the floodplains (which significantly harms the interests of the local agricultural farmers) or continue on with the present activity and only raise the altitude of the dikes in order to prevent floods.

The first version – since it takes significant intervention – requires long preparation and decision processes and even there are more complex aspects as well. Although, during the realisation of the development plans in any case one should keep in mind the invulnerability of nature, because of the social and economic development level the development aim can not be the total restitution of the natural states. We can only take into consideration such development direction which spares the natural environment, takes the fewest possible 4 interference, but provides the adequate life quality for the local population in the present as well (GYURICZA L. 1998.).

The second version is simpler though but it does not handle the essence of the problem: the forest degradation on the higher section of the river and so the huge surface wash down and the lack of water reservoirs (HAJDÚ Z. 1999.) consequently leads to higher and higher flood levels in the years with more precipitation. In the occurrence of the higher water levels the thickly aggregating river deposits – by the time of floods in the river basin and the floodplains – contribute as well and so as a consequence the section of the river basin decreases. This process – beyond the fact that the flood danger will be further on persistent – goes hand in hand with the

creation of levées filled up within the dams, so after a certain period of time the river will be on a higher level at normal water than the surrounding protected areas, due to which even smaller floods could cause severe destructions. (This process is much faster than the natural development of levées.)

The most effective solution would be the combination of the elements of the certain ideas. The floodplains – where it does not cause social, economic tension – could be broadened and in a certain measure the raising of the dams is needed as well but at the same time the sweeping of the river basin is indispensable by which the river basin section decrease is precluded.

It is necessary to profoundly present the natural endowments since in this region the natural factors have increased significance on the social and economic processes.

4. Endowments of geography of transport

The peripheral features of the cross border region are tempered at a smaller extent by its transport geography position. The most of the present goods turnover is transacted between the two countries, but the capabilities of the region makes it possible to raise the volume of goods transport from more distant parts of Europe as well. The transport corridor crossing the area could play a significant role in the future on both sides of the border in regional development. This route connects Italy and the Adriatic region with Russia on which the Hungarian border crossing point gives pause to the transported goods (since it is stored, transhipped resorting logistical functions).

Further importance of the Tuzsér-Záhony-Csop transfer station is given by the fact that the public road and railroad passes through one point so there is the possibility to utilise combined transportation.

The chance to transact the goods and passenger transport between the two countries are at the border crossing points

besides Záhony where one could avoid the huge traffic and slow getting through the border. These border crossing points are important in the traffic of mainly Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County and the Transcarpathian Areas² especially because the roads which are parallel with the border are already added assuring to take only a small circuit when the passenger chooses a far crossing point.

There are four crossing points in the 20 km long border section but as a local initiative there is a long time planned new crossing point to be realised first aiming the so called small border traffic but at present – preparing for the future external border of the European Union – a creation of an internationally important crossing point is on agenda. The importance of the region is further on increased by the fact that there are five different states within its 100 km reach where the transport corridors determined by the Carpathians are offered on the lowland areas nearby the Hungarian border.

5. The state of the economy

The social and economic endowments are significantly different in the neighbouring countries, the most important differences can be found in the Ukraine. The Transcarpathian area of Ukraine is its smallest administrative unit (12.800 km²), its population is 1,3 million persons. The seat of the area is Ungvár/Uzhorod (127 thousand persons). From the middle of the 1990s the increase of wandering characterises the area and at the same time ageing as well. Eastern Slovakia is also a peripheral area, while the northwest part of Romania is less peripheral but it does not overlap either the main economic stream.

The most important natural resources of Kárpátalja are the forests of the mountainous areas. 50% of the region is covered by forest, a part of which is an international biosphere reserve. The majority of the economic branches are connected to agricultural production (processing industry), however the area is not self sufficient of agricultural products.

Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County is nearly 5,5 thousand km², its population is 572 thousand persons. The county is relatively poor in basic commodities. The revealed mineral water assets are significant a part of which is utilised for curative purposes. Concerning processing industry we can also highlight the processing of agricultural products.

The cross border area of Hungary cannot be considered to be uniform nor from the natural neither from the social perspectives. The diversity of social-economic factors also needs a spatially differentiated analysis on which we can create the necessary developments. The northwest part of the area – derived from its transport geographical allocation – is traditionally a region of activities such as commerce and logistics. On the Bereg and Szatmár areas the agricultural activity is dominant.

In the consequence of the economic fallback after the change of the regime the already established transport and logistical activities become unutilised, the market of locally produced products drastically decreased. From the beginning of the 1990s due to the partial recovery of the eastern markets this fallback has stopped, but the 1998 economic crisis in Russia proved that the area is greatly delivered to the fluctuation of the eastern markets (TERRA-STUDIO 2000.).

An enterprise zone covers both – concerning their characteristics – altering areas which tries to generate development in the region with economy political tools.

The major objectives of the development of the area are the following:

²The Transcarpathians is a Ukrainian administrative unit which is equivalent to the so called Kárpátalja (bed or lowlands of the Carpathians) term used in Hungary.

- 1 The utilisation of the advantages derived from cross border economic cooperations;
- 1 The promotion of the connection to the international division of labour;
- 1 Strengthening the economic potential, broadening the productivity and creation of new work places;
- 1 The utilisation of the already established traffic and transportation infrastructure;
- 1 The realisation of the infrastructural developments promoting economic development;
- 1 The validation of the objectives which are in accordance with the principles of environmental and nature protection.

The Bereg and Szatmár areas as agricultural regions belong to the most underdeveloped parts of Hungary. The economic and social problems derived from the peripheral situation were even intensified by the floods and river pollutions of the near past. No significant industrial and commerce activities were elaborated in these areas therefore the landscape remained relatively untouched. There are both natural and historical-ethnographic values in great diversity in the region.

6. Possible development directions

The necessary developments on the Hungarian side could be realised by the different endowments only spatially differentiated. However the construction of the motorway is a primary question for the complete area. The motorway creating a connection to Budapest will cross the border in the north direction. The economic actors of the region make a serious preparatory work to be able to join the network of the European highways as much as possible.

6.1. Felső-Szabolcs. The established infrastructure of the transfer station in Záhony is a favourable capability concerning the development of the region. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that two parts – public road and railroad – of the

European transport corridor passes through in one common point.

The role of the Záhony border station is outstanding from continental measures as well. Concerning the east-west goods turnover the border station in Terespol/Brest (Poland/Belarus) is a significant competitor (Moscow-Berlin route) but Záhony is unique in that one of east-west corridors (Corridor IV) and the southwestnortheast (Corridor V: Italy-Slovenia-Hungary-Ukraine-Russia) as well meet each other there providing a liaison towards the Adriatic ports for the post Soviet states. The southeast-European connection can have an important role in the long run as well because more frequently nowadays the European Union is thinking about decreasing the German through traffic by evoking some by involving other eastwest routes. The most recent initiatives trend towards the transport connection development of the Baltic and the Black Sea region (north-south corridor).

The logistical centre development based on the optimization of production, storage, packing and transport appeared as a highlighted priority in the earlier 7 ideas of the development of the region. There was also a separate work programme in the accepted development plan of the zone.

One of the attendance places of logistical centres can be found where the movement of goods has stopped for some reasons in need of an obligate vehicle change (land-sea, railroad track change etc.) (DONKA A.-GYURICZA L. 2002.). In the bordering region the most important element of the present infrastructure is the transition of the different track railways to another state's area. On both sides of the border these tracks are established on quite a long section. Among the most modern plans there is an initiative to establish track changing Intercity trains among the two countries.

Since in the area of Záhony-Csop there is a special economic zone on both sides of the border established on logistics functions, the improvement of accessibility is inevitable for

the region. So the improvement of transport infrastructure is very much depending on the future establishment of the highway. The transition of this highway earlier on was planned much south but this was objected by the untouched natural environment having a highlighted role on tourism development. Bereg – despite of its geographical proximity – could be able to join the logistical developments of the Záhony transfer station only in a limited way. This is unlikely because of the lack of transfers on River Tisza and also the lack of infrastructural endowments.

6.2. Szatmár-Bereg. Based on its natural capabilities the Beregi-Tiszahát is adequate for the development of soft tourism (ecotourism, active tourism, cultural tourism). Tourism represents at present as well a significant force in the region, but in quantities it is realised in recreational activities (water tourism) with a relatively underdeveloped service quality and with a high environmental charging (DONKA A. 2011.). Besides the recreational sports, the role of village or rural tourism is strengthening in a significant measure where the major attraction – apart from the lifestyle – are the local folk architectural values and the events.

Szatmár is also an underdeveloped agricultural area also with favourable endowments of tourism. Here also both the natural and architectural attractions are present in a great number. The joint tourism development of the two regions is supported by the similar endowments (River Tisza and its tributaries are determining factors on both areas) and also that the two landscapes constitute such an area on which tourism development and marketing plans could be elaborated effectively.

6.3. Ukrainian development concepts.

On the other side of the border in the county of Transcarpathia a development zone was established as well the so called Zakarpathia

Special Economic Zone. The major aim of this zone is also the investment generation which they would like to achieve by financial tools. The zone is created of spotted objects in the Ungvár-Munkács-Beregszász (Uzhorod-Mukacheve-Berehove) area out of which we can find train transfer station, airport and truck terminal. Significant scale investments are already settled down in this zone.

6.4. The possibilities of cross border cooperation. The development of the Záhony logistical centre – just like the tourism developments – could be more effective if the cross border areas would cooperate with the Ukrainian areas.

On both sides of the borders development concepts were created which proclaim the necessity for cooperation. There is even a plan which aims to realise a cross border regional development planning. The areas of joint developments – based on the differentiated capabilities – could be the following: economy development (joint development of economic zones), transport development (public road, railway system, water route on River Tisza), tourism (mountainous, curative and village tourism), higher education, environmental protection (flood protection, the debate on river pollution).

Out of these we could highlight the initiation to become the Tisza an international waterway on which the owner of the Ukrainian economic zone possesses an accomplished investment plan. This plan demonstrates the advantages of the transition of a certain amount of the transport to the waterway. In this framework from the European post Soviet states and Poland a significant amount of transports towards the Black Sea would be transitioned to River Tisza and the Danube. Parallel with the pronouncement of the international waterway the construction of an inner port have already been launched.

7. The turnover of guests

The tourism attractions (protected natural values, water banks, folk architectural values) of the Szatmár-Bereg area serve primarily soft tourism. The interest of the region is to be able to preserve these values during the tourism developments. It needs a special planning process since it is very hard to harmonize the developments enforced by the competitors. Also the increased guest flow and its effects needs to be handled parallel with the preservation of the values. Apparently the area does not dispose outstanding guest flow. The majority of the tourists arrives aiming water tourism and curative tourism.

During the research it was analysed the composition of the guest flow. From this we can state that the ratio of foreign guests is much lower than the national average but .

among the sending areas the neighbouring countries play a more vital role. In the bordering areas the ratio of inbound tourists is between 5-50% while the national average is 75%

Within the inbound tourists we investigated on what ratio the neighbouring countries represent. We can also find here significant differences but it exceeds by far the Hungarian average of 12%. Further on we can ascertain that on the areas where unique attractions (for instance curative spas such as Nyíregyháza, Kisvárd, Vásárosnamény) are to be found, the inbound tourists are coming in a much higher rate from the neighbouring countries. Apart from this the ratio of the Polish, Slovakian, Ukrainian and Romanian guests is also higher where accessibility is much easier, namely the destinations are along the major transport routes.

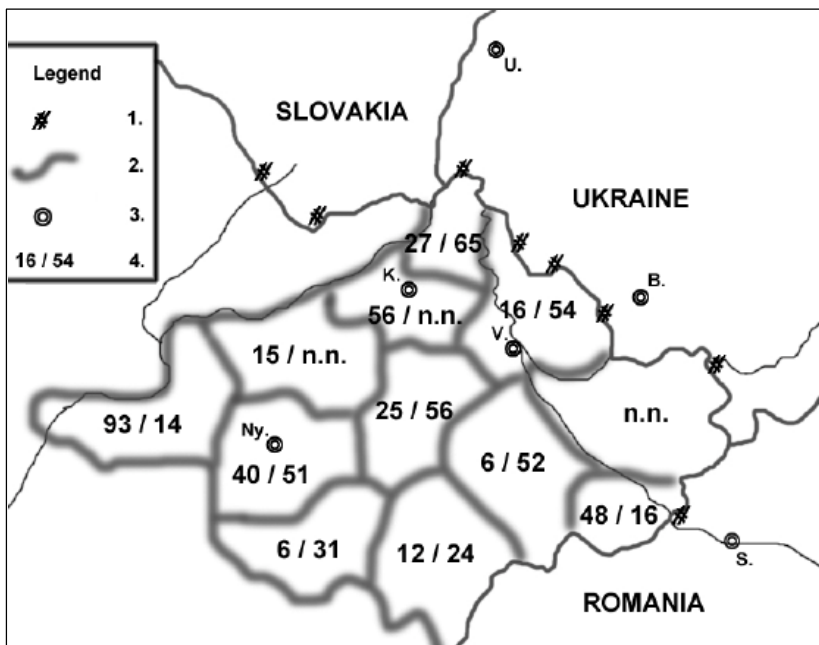


Fig. 2. Rate of inbound guests at North-East Hungary

- 1. Border crossing, 2. Border of microregions, 3. Main city, 4. Rate of inbound guests / rate of guests from neighboring countries (RO, UKR, SK, PL) of inbound guests
- Ny. Nyíregyháza, K. Kisvárd, V. Vásárosnamény, S. Satu Mare/ Szatmárnémeti, B. Berehove/Beregszász, U. Uzhgorod/Ungvár

The analyses proved that destination development has a highlighted role in the areas with unique endowments and within that the targeting of the neighbouring countries' guest flow. These target groups know the area relatively well (the ratio of guests coming without tourism purpose is really high) but with the tourism services their reception is not completely prepared. In favour of this it is necessary to develop the quality services with which on the one hand we can preserve those values which would mean the future basics for tourism and on the other hand there are numerous attractions (mainly curative waters and protected natural attractions) on the other side of the border creating a really strong competition in the area.

8. Summary

The cross border area of Hungary belongs to one of the most underdeveloped areas along the Ukrainian border. Although the exploration of endowments and values is

continuous due to the lack of capital no economic development has been launched yet

The capabilities are altering even along the relatively short border section as well.

Due to the transport geography situation and already established transport infrastructure, the northern parts are adequate to fulfil central logistics functions, but we have to take into consideration the strong competition with the nearby Slovakian and Polish transfer zones.

The greatest value of Bereg and Szatmár is its untouched natural environment and folk architectural monuments. All this – 10 taking into consideration the relative sustainability of the landscape – provides an opportunity to develop certain branches of tourism as it is characteristic to the Szatmár areas as well.

The guest flow data prove that there is a great chance in the development of tourism co-operations and further on to target the guests of the neighbouring countries. For this the adequate endowments are available.

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