

Melissza Zita Lempek Róbert Tésits** Gábor Hoványi****

**Tourism-based development
opportunities for rural areas.
Example of an underdeveloped region
(Siklós district)**

Abstract

The study aims to answer the question of how effectively cities of an underdeveloped rural area (Siklós district in Hungary) can involve the surrounding settlements in the tourism economy, thereby promoting the development of rural areas. Besides local governments and tourism organisations, our important goal is to understand the ideas of service providers and their guests related to rural development, as well as the spatial use characteristics of the latter group. The key method is the questionnaire survey, targeted at the mayors of all settlements in the district, as well as the guests of the accommodations belonging to the different product types. The primary sources are based on two further series of interviews, which explore the opinions of service providers and professional organisations. Empirical experience shows that thematic trips can play a prominent role in the development of less frequented small settlements.

* University of Pécs, Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1477-3947>

** University of Pécs, Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9575-3309>

*** University of Pécs, Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2330-7334>

The essence of this is to connect by a bike route the places offering traditional crafts and local products.

Keywords: rural development, rural tourism, spatial use, thematic road, Hungary

Introduction

Rural areas in Hungary face many socio-economic problems. Their demographic situation is gradually deteriorating, and rural societies are aging. This is exacerbated by a decline in the population's ability to innovate and adapt. The quality of life of the rural population has deteriorated due to the lower standard of basic services and infrastructure (Government of Hungary 2014). Rural tourism can generate several economic and social benefits for ameliorating these problems. In rural areas, one of the most important positives of tourism is the creation of jobs, along with the attendant multiplier effect of employment. Tourism provides a source of revenue mainly for rural SMEs, which also improves the quality of public services through local government tax revenues (Duray 2007).

Besides agriculture and the food industry, development concepts designed to improve the competitiveness of the countryside also prioritise tourism development (including rural tourism) (Government of Hungary 2014). The sector, which still largely retains the characteristics of small-scale services, has suffered from the economic crisis and price competition for survival. Problems are exacerbated by the rigidity of regulatory practice and gradual generational change, often accompanied by lower community motivation (Kovács 2016). As traditional livelihoods based on production are becoming increasingly difficult, tourism sales of rural attractions are often a new form of income. However, unfortunately, those with low capacity find it more difficult to access development resources. Hence, in smaller settlements, there has been no significant progress in either the content of the supply or the character of the stakeholders (Kovács 2016). Based on the above, the examination of the topic in the present study is of paramount importance.

The selection of the examined area – Siklós district – is justified in several respects, as part of the area belongs to the outer periphery of the South Transdanubian region. It is considered to be lagging from a socio-economic

point of view, in which, *inter alia*, the unfavorable transport geographical situation, the absence of foreign capital, weak export capacity, migration and demographic processes all play a role. Classic industrial raw materials are scarce, and industrial production has no serious tradition in the area. The development of the latter can be achieved at the most through support for the agricultural processing industry.

Although cross-border projects have had a major impact on tourism in the region, the benefits of Croatia's proximity have not been exploited for decades. Several studies have examined the strategic role of Hungary–Croatia IPA Cross-Border Co-operation Programme and the Interreg V-A Hungary–Croatia Co-operation Programme, clearly showing that tourism development has not been able to fully exploit the potential of border regions (Čelan 2014, 2021).

At the same time, the tourist facilities of the area are favourable; attractions can be a starting point for the development of health, wellness and ecotourism. However, the fragmentation of accommodation capacities and the underdevelopment of infrastructure and information systems required for quality tourism (Aracsi et al. 2006) are dampeners.

In Baranya, the position of this region is the strongest in terms of the number of guests, guest nights and beds per 1000 inhabitants. The region is characterised by a high concentration of attractions (natural and cultural values). Hence, tourism is mainly concentrated in cities with 2,000–9,000 inhabitants. Outside the three cities, there is only a negligible number of rural accommodation establishments, but in the case of cities, Harkány is dominant (Aracsi et al. 2006). Smaller villages have little or no involvement in the sector due to a lack of background service infrastructure. Another problem is the lack of coordination and communication between the settlements, due to which few villages can take part in the regional events (apart from the proximity and organisation of the wine route). Based on the above, the tourism-based development of the chosen area is of paramount importance.

The study of tourism-based rural development can be considered relevant, as the area-specific goals of the National Development and Spatial Development Concept (OFTK) include increasing the population retention capabilities of rural areas and regional catching-up and economic stimulation through the development of areas of landscape value based on landscape features (Government of Hungary 2013).

The relevance of the present study is further enhanced by the fact that the National Tourism Development Strategy 2030 is also fully aligned with the objectives of the OFTK, which affect rural areas. This is reflected on the one hand in the territorial approach to the developments placed on the destination fund, in the strengthening of the regional relations, as well as in providing accessibility and mobility. The strategy also highlights rural destinations from the viewpoint of important sending markets, to explore the reasons behind the negative trends and to reverse the unfavourable trends. At the same time, it highlights the issue of environmental-social-economic sustainability, thus emphasising the sustainable, tourism-based development of rural areas. This intention is reflected, *inter alia*, in gastrotourism (in the form of local, seasonal and organic products, slow food, producer markets, ‘take-home experiences’, etc.) or even event tourism, in which territorial deconcentration has become increasingly important in recent years (Government of Hungary, 2013). At the same time, the area examined in this study is located in one of the 11

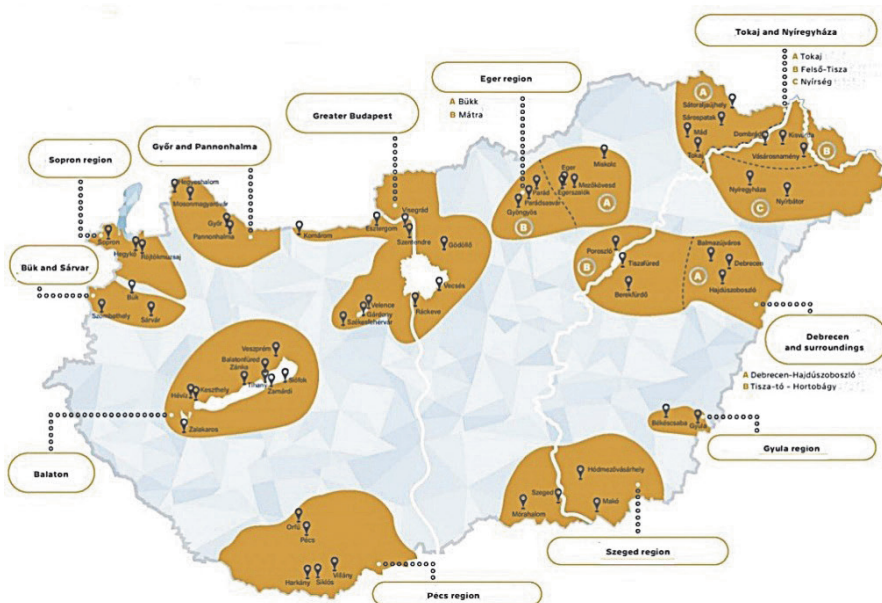


Figure 1: Eleven touristic areas designated by the Hungarian Government

Source: Hungarian Tourism Agency, 2020.

tourist areas (Figure 1) designated by the Government in September 2020 (Pécs – Villány) (Government of Hungary 2020).

The general aim of the present paper is to examine, using the example of a specific district, whether the tourist-frequented cities can integrate the municipalities of the area into the tourism economy, thus promoting rural development and, if so, how effectively. In this case, integration means not only the exchange of information but also the creation and recommendation of common packages and coordinated marketing activities. The study, which explores the interaction between rural development and tourism, achieves this general goal through the following sub-goals.

- To explore the system of the goals achieved so far and to be implemented, and their coherence with the needs of the clientele, with the help of tourism development documents, integrated settlement development strategies, the OFTK and the rural development programme.
- To examine the willingness and possibilities of urban and municipal self-governments in the field of tourism development and cooperation.
- Examining the ideas of professional organisations (TDMs) concerning the touristic integration of smaller settlements away from tourist centres.
- To examine the spatial use and rural development preferences of the clientele of each possible type of touristic product and service.
- Ultimately, to formulate a proposal for more efficient touristic cooperation between the settlements of the rural area.

Research background

Research results appearing in international literature have been drawing attention to the changing role of rural areas for decades. On a reciprocal basis, rural spaces play a role in the reproduction of tourism and in turn, the role of tourism is highlighted in the revitalisation of peripheral areas, where traditional products can be used as a proxy for rural development practices (Dinis et al. 2019). Particular attention is paid to the changing system of relationships between space and society, including increasing mobility, the decline of the autonomy of local communities and the new uses and functions of rural spaces

(Cloke 1993, 2007). This change also includes the development of the tourism trade. Not only local communities but also local and regional networks can play a major role in the revitalisation of the economy and the fulfillment of the new alternatives offered by agritourism (Perkins & Mackay 2022). This is how knowledge transfer assumes special importance in rural development (Schroeder et al., 2016). As for the relationship between agritourism and rural development, studies show that the income generated by individual households is small. However, its contribution to the sustainable development of the local economy, the appearance of rural areas, and the livelihood and survival of local communities are important (Veljković & Bročić 2017).

In recent decades, the relationship between rural tourism and regional development has been studied by several researchers, in sociological, economical and geographical terms. Even before the accession to the European Union, the need for sustainable development appeared in the development of rural tourism, i.e. the intention to combine the preservation of attractions and the return on investment of enterprises (Michalkó 2003). The studies also considered it important to explore the connections between the development and potential of the economy and tourism in rural areas. The hypothesis of these studies is that the richer rural areas are more frequented by tourists, but this is refuted by the results. The development of tourism is also possible in rural areas, namely through the development of human resources and local initiatives. The focus of research on rural tourism development has been shifting from product development to destination development since the second half of the 1990s. The studies highlight the importance of regional products and thematic routes. In practice, this also means that market success can be achieved almost only by becoming a regional brand, a geographical target area (Szabó 1996; Aubert & Szabó 2005).

Following the accession to the European Union, the issue of sustainability has come to the fore in studies discussing the possibilities of developing rural tourism. The studies explore, *inter alia*, the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism and their interrelationships, and propose minimising the negative impacts. Attention is drawn to the importance of local resources, subsidiarity, an integrated approach and local decisions, as well as the value-creating activities of local communities (Duray 2007).

In the initial years of EU membership, several ground-breaking studies were conducted on rural development operational programmes, focusing on

the touristic correlations of rural areas. To measure this statistically, the researchers also developed a complex tourism impact indicator, which quantified economic, environmental and social factors in three dimensions. The results show that by the end of the second support cycle (2007–2013), there was an increase in almost two-thirds of the micro-regions. With the help of the impact indicator, these micro-regions were also classified according to clusters. While the studied micro-regions of the Lake Balaton region are classified as mature destinations, the Siklós micro-region, which covers the area of the present study and is characterised by the concentration of attractions (spa-wellness and wine tourism), is classified as a moderately or low-saturated tourist destination (Varga-Nagy 2007).

Kóródi's (2006) doctoral dissertation, which systematises the factors influencing rural tourism development, can be included in this line of research. These studies confirm what has been described above, according to which the primary role of rural tourism is to mobilise social resources, through which the attitude of the population can change in an innovative direction. The typical product types of rural micro-regions are thermal, castle, gastro, equestrian and ecotourism, the integrated development of which is based on destination management. Concerning the phases of development, the analyses suggest an order in which the development of attractiveness is followed by the development of receptivity, then product development, on which experience management and finally destination marketing are based.

With the EU membership, the development of domestic rural tourism gained increased momentum. Therefore, the studies also aimed to explore the character and trends of the sector. The rural embeddedness of the phenomenon is examined in the light of quantitative (duration, return) and qualitative (services, relationship systems, generational change) indicators.

The studies conclude that rural hospitality is in a competitive market situation, where previously it was more difficult for small-capacity enterprises to access development funds. Today, this has changed through LEADER applications, and the lack of entrepreneurship is much more of a barrier to the development of rural tourism. It is also an important finding that Hungarian rural tourism has not set up a uniform system, either in the content of the offer or in the character of the stakeholders, thus potentially hindering development (Kovács 2015).

During the 20th century, there were several periods of economic challenge to the countryside (most recently the economic crisis of 2008–2013), from which some rural families tried to recover through tourism (Kovács 2016). Among other things, this drew the attention of researchers to the problems, characteristics and development opportunities of rural tourism. Besides the social characteristics of rural caterers, research also reveals the factors that ensure the attractiveness and uniqueness of hospitality, as well as its economic return. Studies show that rural tourism has retained the characteristics of small-scale family services to this day, but market changes and subsidy preferences are already forcing them to transform. These are reflected in the gradual change of generations and the emergence of new business owners based on EU funds and business considerations (Kovács 2016).

Methods

Besides the secondary analysis of the background literature, an important methodological element of this study was the comparative analysis of documents and strategic programmes related to the development of tourism and the studied area. The OFTK, the Rural Development Programme and the National Tourism Development Strategy helped to map more accurately the present and potential problems and opportunities of tourism-based rural development and to determine the relevance of the study. The micro-regional spatial development programme and the integrated settlement development strategy of the three cities of the district aided in justifying the designation of the target area for study and in exploring its touristic problems.

The next methodological phase within the empirics was the design and implementation of the questionnaire survey. The first target group consists of the mayors of 53 settlements of the district; therefore it was possible to query the entire population. The main groups of questions of the questionnaire enquired about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the settlement. Other questions concerned the reasons for the success or failure of tourism developments and programmes so far. Another set of questions highlighted the inclination, opportunities and obstacles to territorial cooperation.

The members of the next target group were the guests of each product type (related to rural tourism). The five product types selected were rural, wine and gastro, horse, eco, and spa and wellness tourism. The service providers belonging to each product type are listed in the same order: Flórián Guesthouse in Villánykövesd, Crocus Gere Wine Hotel – Resort & Wine Spa in Villány, Apró Paták Equestrian Sports Association in Siklós, Csicseri Guesthouse in Diószvizsló, Ancient Dráva Visitor Center in Szaporca, and the Thermal Hotel Harkány. During the selection of the service providers, we tried to represent the settlements of the district with large and small populations, more socio-economically developed, and in a disadvantaged position as well. The clientele was queried by simple random sampling. Besides the basic socio-demographic data, the questionnaires enquire about the leisure and travel habits of visitors, as well as their needs and development preferences related to the types of tourism products. Regarding the guests, 120 questionnaires (20–20 per product type, considering the territorial aspects, 40 in accommodation establishments related to rural tourism) were completed. We did not aim for weighting by product type or representativeness by market share, as our goal was to explore territorial inequalities. Nearly half the tourists participating in the questionnaire survey have permanent residences in Pest and Baranya counties. Another fifth of them came from Central Transdanubia. Fillers came from a smaller part of Northern Hungary (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Nógrád) and the Great Plain (Békés, Hajdú-Bihar County). There are also significant differences by product type, based on place of residence: while those interested in wine tourism came mainly from Pest County and Central Transdanubia, the majority (one-third) of those using ecotourism services were from Baranya County. Those concerned with classical rural hospitality live mainly in Western and Central Transdanubia. There was no significant difference in the gender distribution of the respondents (55–45% in favour of men), as mainly couples arrived at the accommodations. This is also indicated by their marital status, as more than 80% of respondents are married or in a relationship. The average age of the respondents is 40, which, however, varies slightly from one destination to another. Those involved in wine tourism can be characterised by below-average ages, and those interested in ecotourism and rural hospitality can be above-average ages. More than 50% of all guests surveyed have tertiary education, while a quarter have graduated from high school. The remaining 22% have a certificate of vocational or primary education. Nearly three-quarters (according to their own statements) speak some foreign

language, mainly English or German. In addition, we found examples of Italian, Spanish and French. Another important structural feature of the respondents is their employment and income situation. Three-quarters of them work as employees, 16% are entrepreneurs and only 10% are inactive (economically inactive or retired). Based on their income situation, more than one-fifth belong to the net category of up to HUF 251,000–300,000. This corresponds to the 2020 IV quarterly average net earnings for full-time employees without benefits (CSO, 2021). Almost the same number earn HUF 151,000–200,000 per month. Thirteen percent of the respondents have a net income of less than HUF 100,000. However, income data show regional differences by product type. Guests staying in Villány represent a category well above the average net salary.

The last phase of the empirical study was the conduct of the interviews. The first group of interviewees was the accommodation providers (owners and directors). The main purpose of the semi-structured interviews with them was to assess opportunities for cooperation and development. The target group of the interviews was also expanded to the mayors of the three cities, who were asked to clarify the possibilities for developing cooperation between municipalities as well as between self-governments and service providers. We also conducted interviews with officials of the Harkány Tourism Association (TDM organisation), the Villány–Siklós Wine Route Association and the Siklós Tourism Association. The semi-structured interview examines the possibilities of establishing competitive tourist destinations, increasing the number of guest nights, improving the quality of sustainable rural tourism, cooperation between the stakeholders involved, as well as touristic integration in settlements far from the centres. At the end of the interview, we received a proposal to plan potential thematic routes in the study area.

Results

The role of service providers in touristic developments

Integration possibilities of the more developed, eastern settlements of the district.

Among the rural settlements, those located in the eastern part of the district, near Villány, promise the maximum development opportunities. The rows of cellars, the clean, tidy village pictures, the parks and the proximity of Villány,

together with appropriate advertising activities (online), ensure a continuous full house. In some of the settlements, both the linear infrastructure and the transport are adequate, with developments continuously taking place (creation of tourist routes, renovation of community centres). The rich programmes of the area (pig slaughter, devil's cauldron, SVÉT: stylish country restaurant, the smell of bread) area year-round attraction.

The results of the interviews conducted with the accommodation providers reflect that continuous cooperation with the other service providers of the settlements and with the local government, possibly with the village manager, will make the guest reception more efficient. However, according to their opinion, the joint initiatives within the settlement are not yet emerging. The majority of the service providers are participating in the Kisfaludy tender, which aims to modernise boarding houses and increase energy efficiency (mainly through the replacement of doors and windows, roofs and furniture, as well as the installation of solar systems). One of the keys to the touristic integration of the smaller settlements of the region may be the development and implementation of authentic local programmes (mainly related to crafts and professions), as well as participation in festivals. One strategy for this is the establishment of gastronomic spots and culinary workshops building on the primary commodities of local producers, as the offer of the wine region can be expanded with the related cultural programmes. One of the prerequisites for this and an important development in the near future is the construction and extension of the bicycle path, which also connects the guests waiting for active rest with the service providers in a physical sense.

Of course, Villány, although not its duration of stays, stands out in terms of the number of guests. This can also be an important starting point in getting to know the surrounding settlements. The wine hotels are able to provide almost all important services (wellness, cellar tour, wine dinner, swimming). In addition, though the shorter stay of the guests limits the possibilities, the occupancy can be further increased with a suburban spa complex. The post-epidemic period somewhat overwrote previous trends, with hotels being prepared for longer-term bookings of guests. VR goggles that take advantage of state-of-the-art technology, can be supplemented by an interactive wine tasting and are suitable for getting to know the area in the first round. However, the service providers view cycling (possibly electric cycling) programmes covering a radius of 20 km as a possibility for greater involvement in the countryside.

In doing so, visitors add colour to the programme by getting to know the traditional crafts (e.g. blacksmith shop, watermill, blue painter, candle-maker, cake-maker, palinka-maker). The active involvement of the local population, by raising awareness of the benefits that can improve their quality of life, is a prerequisite for the success of these programmes. Overall, the settlements of the region have cultural and gastronomic values on which thematic bicycle routes can be established.

The district's less developed western settlements and those along the Drava

The touristic infrastructure and superstructure of the area are underdeveloped, with two or three houses for rent per settlement. Besides the village days, the Bőköz Festival in early September is offered by Szaporca, Kémes, Tésenfa and Drávacsehi. It aims to preserve traditions and develop cultural and ecotourism through the creation of traditions. It is clear from the results of the interviews that the municipal relations of the ecotourism service providers (Ancient Dráva Visitor Center) are particularly good, based on mutual benefits and assistance. Visitors to the area do not spend the night here but typically use the accommodation in Harkány, Siklós, or Villány. However, the lack of programmes and accommodations has left its mark on tourism in the region as a whole. According to the accommodation providers, a bicycle path going from east to west and the asphaltting of the Drava embankment would help the development of cycling tourism in the area. Within the framework of the student exchange related to the Majlápuszta study trail in the southern part of Kisszentmárton, nature study programmes are organised, which are organically connected to the programmes of the Ancient Dráva Visitor Centre. The visitor centre itself introduces the natural values of the Ormánság through study trails, a croft and an interactive exhibition. Besides professional management, it also provides sports and transport equipment, as well as programmes based on individual needs (odlk.hu). The developments implemented here (making the study trail walkable) may facilitate making guided tours more popular in the future. It follows from the interview that perhaps the lack of a buffet in the visitor centre presents an unmet demand. The development of the service infrastructure of the fishing lakes located in certain settlements would enable the implementation of the visitors' own outdoor programmes. In the

future, several settlements in the area could be connected to a cycling route that would present the sights along the Drava, using the example of Révfalu or Felsőszentmárton, which can be downloaded to a mobile phone.

In some of the small settlements further away from the Drava, the deteriorating condition of the monuments, the lack of programmes, the less inclusive attitude of the locals, the lack of interest of some municipalities as well as the lack of community cooperation make the situation the most difficult. Although bus stops, car parks and public berths have been renovated in most settlements, some accommodation providers do not plan to develop due to the dissuasive power of administrative burdens on tenders. However, besides energy efficiency in the accommodation, the comfort of the guests can also be increased through the improvements implemented through tenders (furniture, household appliances, etc.). It follows from the opinions of the service providers that results could be achieved by creating community places, renovating churches and monuments, creating opportunities for bicycle rental, as well as working with winemakers and producers. Venues showing local producers, boarding houses and traditional crafts could be attached to a bike trail, where the use of services could generate income for the locals.

The use of space and rural development preferences of the tourists

The basis for the conscious and long-term planning of destinations and the product development of the target areas is information regarding the use of space by the tourists arriving there (Horváth et al. 2016).

The general travel habits of the surveyed guests reveal that more than 50% travel several times a year, and only one-third of them plan a single trip. The guests staying in Villány were overrepresented among those travelling several times a year. Nearly half of the above-mentioned visitors travel both domestically and abroad, while 51% target only domestic destinations. The vast majority of trips are for recreational purposes. In order of importance, the next category is visiting relatives and only one-fifth of the visits are for business purposes. The difference between the guests of each product type is most pronounced in the case of those interested in wine tourism, where recreational travel clearly dominates. Concerning the users of the ecotourism service, the

purpose of visiting relatives appears more emphatically. The average travel times associated with each destination do not differ significantly. Annually, an average of 12–15 days can be linked to both visiting relatives, and leisure and business trips. Characteristics of the trips reveal that a minimal proportion of those who completed the questionnaire arrived alone or with friends. Half of the visitors came here with their family, 30% with their partner and 10% each with friends and alone. The high proportion of those arriving with their families gives cause for optimism in light of the prospect of tourism integration in less frequented settlements of the region. A further condition for this, of course, will be the longer duration of stay in the examined accommodations. The average number of nights spent in the accommodation is five; however, this value shows significant regional differences. The stay of those involved in wine tourism within Villány is half of this average value, while the similar value of those interested in classical rural tourism is around average. For the ecotourism product type, this value is slightly above average. This suggests considerable opportunities to introduce smaller settlements in the region to the latter two target groups. It is also true that the number of nights spent in Villány has also increased significantly since the first wave of the COVID epidemic in 2020. As already mentioned in the methodological part, the accommodations of the respondents are in addition to the three cities, Diószvizsló and Szaporca as well.

In the case of Villány and Siklós, the type of accommodation is clearly the hotel of a higher category, while in Harkány, besides the accommodation with a three-star rating, the resort, the boarding house, the holiday home and the guest house were also typical. The exclusive accommodation of the guests participating in the study and staying in Diószvizsló was the guest house. The Internet (settlement website, mobile application, website of a professional organisation) was considered to be an important source of advance information for the selection of accommodation (about 50%), but one's own experience, as well as the opinion of friends and acquaintances, should also be mentioned, but in lower proportions. This may be important in the future concerning the promotion of service packages or thematic trips to be developed later. The same proportions are typical for information obtained in advance about the municipality you want to visit. Compared to these, there was a significant difference in the sources of information obtained/obtainable about the settlements during their stay. In the latter case, the promotional role of accommodation providers

and brochures is emphasised. This again provides important information about the marketability of the services.

Most of the guests arriving in the area involved in the study came in their passenger cars. Only for those visiting an ecotourism destination, was there an example of a bus and/or train. During their stay, however, the possibility of using both bicycles and buses, as well as water transport, also arose. However, these are strongly linked to a certain type of product and the length of stay. A small proportion of guests visiting Villány for one or two nights used other means of transport to get to know the settlements outside the accommodation. This is well illustrated by the purpose of the visit and the spatial use by the guests as well. Those arriving in Villány mainly sought recreational, wellness and gastronomic experiences. In contrast, the goals of visitors to ecotourism destinations are supplemented by nature walks, the use of health services and the search for cultural experiences. Besides the above, sightseeing and waterfront recreation were also popular with guests involved in classic rural tourism. While the motivations of those staying in Villány are relatively one-sided, the goals of the other guests spending the night in other important inns in the region are more complex (Figure 2).

The spectrum of services used also follows the spatial dichotomy already analysed above. While guests staying in Villány visit local sights besides gastronomic and wellness services, the needs for overnight stays in other settlements of the region are wider (museum visits, bicycle and water sports equipment rental, spa, festival, cruise ship, fitness, public transport, etc.). The

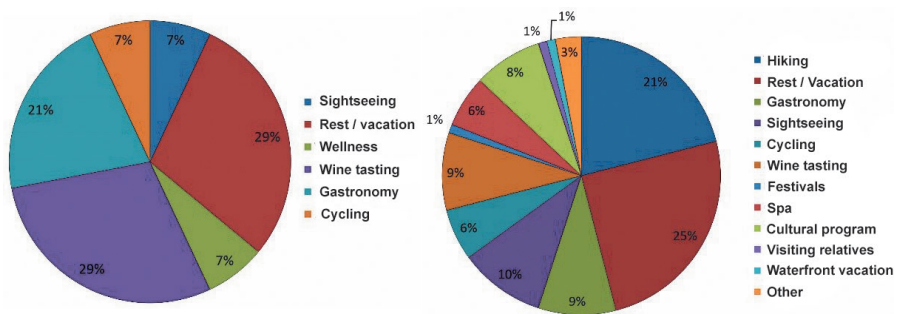


Figure 2: The distribution of the main purpose of travel among the guests staying in Villány and the other examined settlements

Source: own survey

former mainly use the mentioned services in the settlement of the accommodation, while the latter show a need to use the services of other settlements too. This is again closely related to travel motivations and travel duration. All this can be an important aspect in the planning and outlining of thematic routes, which focuses primarily on the western areas of the region. These service-area focuses are almost invariably the same as the preliminary plans of guests (Figure 3).

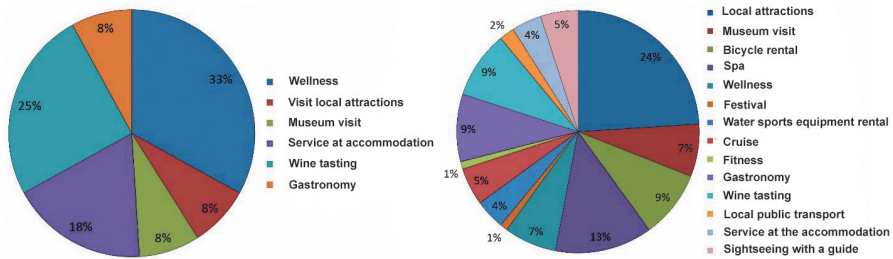


Figure 3: The distribution of the use of touristic services among the guests staying in Villány and the other examined settlement

Source: own survey

While the spatial use for the entire range of guests covers more than a dozen settlements in the east-west direction, there are significant regional differences depending on the geographical location of the accommodation within the settlement and the typical product type. The guests occupying the western settlements of the district (Diószvzló, Szaporca) can be characterised by the most extensive spatial use, as they visit the county seat, perhaps Orfú, the three cities of the district, as well as Villánykövesd, Drávaszabolcs and Nagyarsány, which are more frequented from a touristic point of view. In terms of the decreasing intensity of land use, the next category is the guests occupying Harkány, who prefer to visit, besides the three designated settlements, Nagyarsány, because of its sculpture park, as well as Szaporca, which is affected by the Ancient Dráva Visitor Center. The most restrained spatial use is represented by the number of guests occupying Villány, which travels as far as Siklósto the west and Palkonya to the northwest. The use of services is concentrated to an even narrower group of settlements, of which smaller settlements outside the accommodation are currently almost com-

pletely excluded. Besides the realised spatial use, the range of settlements that guests wish to visit during their stay has arisen. Those interested in wine tourism did not mention such a settlement; however, apart from the surrounding smaller villages, the clientele related to the other product types also mentioned Pécs, Szigetvár and the smaller but more notable settlements of the Mecsek (Abaliget, Óbánya, Orfű). With the planned visit, their main goal is to discover the beauties of the natural environment (hiking, cycling, cave visits, and local attractions). Therefore, in the future, it may be an important developmental task to find service opportunities in these untouched settlements that are adapted to the needs of the guests and to acquaint the guests with them.

The guests see the most important tasks of the development of the region in the development of transportation and the modernisation of the road network. This, of course, also affects the expansion of bicycle paths, the development of existing ones and the modernisation of public transport. Some of the possible ways to achieve this are to develop thematic routes, expand outdoor programme opportunities and preserve monuments. Equally important are the involvement of less frequented small settlements, and the development of rural tourism, marketing and human infrastructure. The main direction of human resource development can be the foreign language training of restaurant and hotel staff. Concerning marketing, the expansion of information obtainable via the Internet and the modernisation of regional destination management are also emphasised. This is followed by the development of services, the renovation of attractions and the improvement of the quality of accommodation. The development area with the least relevance for the clientele was the expansion of accommodations.

Opportunities for local governments in tourism development

Most of the settlements located on the outer periphery of the region are lagging from a socio-economic viewpoint. More than three-quarters of the settlements are small villages belonging to the population category of 100 to 500 residents. According to the municipal questionnaires, the strengths of the disadvantaged, small-population settlements of the district include, apart

from the proximity of cities, the natural environment, wine culture, and quite a few cultural-historical and architectural monuments. At the same time, mayors mentioned the unfavourable physical and human infrastructure, the lack of tourist attractions and efficient destination management, which can lead to stagnant or declining visitor numbers, which hinder development from a touristic point of view. The favourable condition of settlements, mainly in the eastern part of the district, whose number of visitors is growing, is mostly due to the offer of suitable, well-managed accommodation, the development of infrastructure based on natural conditions, and festivals of greater interest. In the case of settlements where the number of visitors is decreasing or stagnating, the mayors associated this change with a lack of attractions or a deterioration in the condition of existing attractions. Only one-third of the examined settlements are characterised by their making important investments in tourism in recent years. These focused mainly on the development of accommodation and bicycle paths, as well as the development of background infrastructure related to natural attractions. According to the assessment of the mayors, these investments had a demonstrable impact on the tourism of the settlement, reflected mainly in the growing number of guests. However, the majority of local governments did not implement such a development, which was not intentional, but due to a lack of resources. An example of this is the unsuccessful tenders, as well as the amount of money obtained no longer being sufficient to conduct the planned technical content during the implementation. The source of the implemented investments was mainly the LEADER and DDOP tenders.

The leaders of the majority of surveyed settlements reported that at least one major event would take place during a calendar year. However, these include not only the Ördögkatlan of national significance, the European Drinking Song or the Red Wine Festival of Villány, but village days, fishing competitions, cultural meetings, and local gastronomic events, while balls and Mayans also get a place. In the case of these events, financial success does not dominate in the slightest, as these are non-significant municipal and non-profit programmes without consumption. The truth, of course, is that they generate revenue indirectly, mainly through tourism and local business taxes. These programmes can be accounted for rather as organisational success, which

improves the perception of the general public and the clientele concerning both the municipality and the partner organisations.

Assessing the characteristics of the present tourism, it came as a surprise that with one or two exceptions, the mayors did not know of a person in the settlement who would engage in any folk craft. A further nuance of the situation is that only one-third of the smaller settlements have a tourism development concept. This is due mostly to the absence of financial resources or low tourism importance. Where there is a concept, there is a greater emphasis on development capacity, which relies on local conditions, natural attractions and active tourism based on it, in line with the touristic role of the three core cities.

A crucial factor in developmental ability can be the evaluation of the relationship system of the municipality. Based on this, both in terms of the strength and efficiency of the relations, the cooperation with the population and the surrounding settlements can be highlighted. In contrast, service provider–association relations are perceived as weak by mayors. The root of the problem is mostly seen as the lack of interest, the preservation of tradition becoming secondary, and the lack of wide-ranging cooperation. Most of the settlements do not think in a regional approach; they try to exploit their own opportunities independently and the arena for vertical cooperation hardly exists. In the economic sphere, competition dominates more and municipalities try to attract entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs in larger centres show no interest in disadvantaged peripheries, but professional organisations focus on only a few principal areas of activity, in line with the tendering system.

In the development of cooperation, effective communication and the willingness to compromise, emphasising the importance of cooperation and considering the needs of local residents, at least the balance between the needs of tourists and locals can be emphasised. In the near future, the majority of the examined municipalities are planning tourism development mainly from EU tenders. Besides the expansion and quality improvement of the accommodation, the aim is to improve the service infrastructure of the excursion spots and fishing lakes, renovate village houses, ensure the availability of Wi-Fi in public areas, and build a bicycle path. Municipalities that do not have sufficient resources would support service providers and entrepreneurs in realising their vision.

The ideas of professional organizations for the touristic integration of remote settlements

The sources of income for the associations and organisations participating in the management system have now fallen significantly due to the end of the five-year maintenance period (they received municipal support by reclaiming 20% of the tourism tax). Thus, tenders and membership fees remain the source today. One of the intentions of the transformation of the organisational system is to ensure long-term sustainability, in parallel with which the professional and fundraising room for the manoeuvring of TDMs is narrowing, and its task is to focus on coordination and advocacy in closer partnership with the local government. The Harkány Touristic Association differs from the organisations based on tourism cooperation in the region through its registration based on the fulfilment of professional criteria. The organisation, which has a large membership (around 60–70 members) and representativeness, as well as performs more serious strategic and development tasks, has enjoyed several advantages through its participation in previous TDM tenders and access to the IT system. The smaller Siklós association with about 20 members – although similar in its structure to the organisation of TDMs – does not have a TDM title.

The latter organisation was associated with a significant proportion of local service providers (confectioneries, restaurants, boarding houses, hotels, winemakers, castles, etc.), but as the number of members was relatively low despite recruitment, their expansion stopped; so, the amount of money accruing from membership fees is minimal. They liaise with other organisations, the county government, or the tourism agency through the local government. In the absence of TDM registration, resources and a sufficient number of skilled workers, the opportunities for independent professional activity (strategies, programme packages, thematic trips, etc.) also remained limited. Besides gift distribution, information provision, media coverage, participation in travel exhibitions and ticket sales, their activities are aimed at organising events financed by the municipality.

At the same time, an important element of the cooperation is the joint media appearance (image films, brochures, website, selfie points), marketing activities, transportation development and the development of a common image of the associations and local governments of the three cities (Harkány, Siklós, Villány), based on the concept of “Castle, wine, water”, thus also designating the

priority product types. Another effective means of regional development can be the organisation and offer of coordinated events and programme packages, as well as the introduction of a tourist card, providing discounts even for several people when using local services. The most important marketing tools are the online interface and social media, but they are also present on the radio and television.

The basis for the integration of non-central, smaller settlements is the application for the title of „European Gastronomic Region” at the time of the study. In addition to Villánykövesd, the range of settlements to be “mobilised” by the association focuses primarily on Beremend, Kásád, Kisharsány and Nagyarsány. This European recognition would enable presenting gastronomic and cultural values, local products and the natural environment through community collaboration.

Proposals for the development of rural tourism: thematic route plans

Empirical experience, both from the questionnaires and the interviews, shows that different programme packages, but especially the thematic trips, can play an important role in the development of tourism in less frequented small settlements. In the absence of some professional organisations, resources and a skilled workforce, the possibilities of such trips are fewer, but at the same time, they can become effective tools for development through the cooperation of the three cities. At the same time, the service providers of the settlements in the region would place even more emphasis on such developments. They also recognised that the individual municipalities, although not on their own, have such cultural and gastronomic values, to which several settlements can be attached in the future. The essence of their idea is that it is worth connecting the places where traditional crafts and local products are presented with a hiking trail that can be explored by bicycle. This idea is reinforced by the opinion of the clientele and the mayors of some settlements in the less frequented area of the region.

The cycling thematic routes developed below are in fact organised and guided thematic hiking route proposals, the starting point of which was the accessibility of most of the settlements in the area, as well as the spatial

concentration of the guests. When developing the route plans, we considered the previously prepared attraction inventory and strived not to exceed a maximum distance of 30–35 km, which can be comfortably travelled by bicycle in half a day. Another aspect of the designation of the routes was to include both the settlements along the Drava river with ecotourism values and the north-western settlements as well which are more disadvantaged from the viewpoint of tourism. Of the three cities in the region identified as tourist centers, only two appear in the route proposals, which is justified by their geographical location and the availability and thematic connection of the settlements affected by the routes. Among the aspects of route management, the fact that cyclists primarily use low-traffic roads or bicycle paths that have been built or planned for the near future has been given a special role (Figure 4).

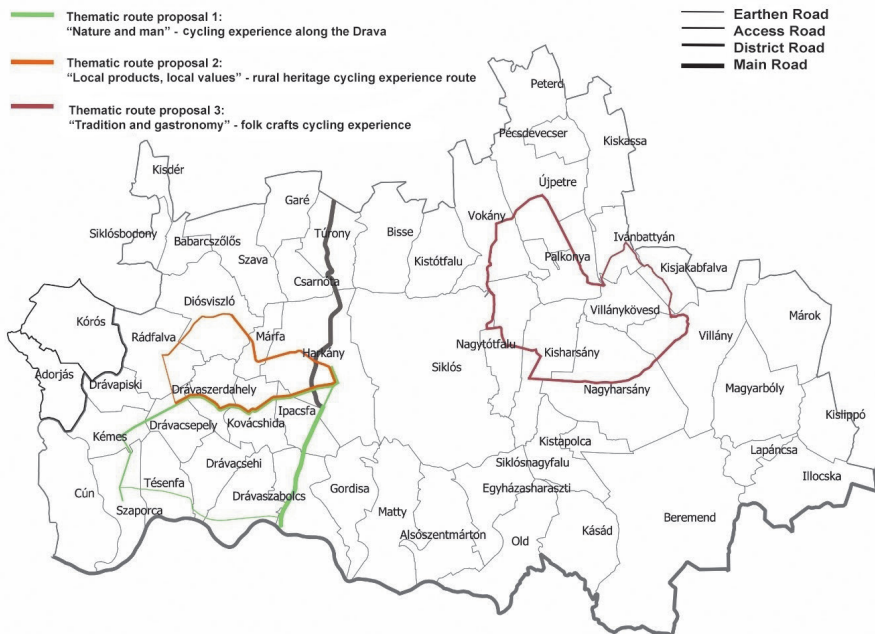


Figure 4: Outline of proposed thematic routes

Source: own editing

Thematic route proposal 1: “Nature and man” – cycling experience along the Drava. (32 km). 8:00 departure from Harkány on the rich shoreline of Drávaszabolcs, Drávapalkonya, Drávacsehi and Tésenfa. Between Harkány and Drávaszabolcs on a bicycle path, then along the Drava until Szaporca on a solid flood protection embankment. 11:00 arrival to Szaporca at the Ancient Dráva Visitor Center (listening to a lecture and seeing the backwater). 13:00 lunch in Kémes in the Fisherman’s Tavern of Ormánság. 15:00 departure from Kémes on a low-traffic road on the Drávacsepely, Drávaszerdahely, Kovácshida (Reformed church) route. Arrival in Harkány at 17:00.

Thematic route proposal 2: “Local products, local values” – rural heritage cycling experience route (32 km). 10:00 departure from Harkány on the Kovácshida (Reformed Church), Drávaszerdahely, Drávacsepely route. Lunch at 12:00 in Kémes in the Fisherman’s Tavern of Ormánság. Departure from Kémes at 13:30. The route runs along a low-traffic road, but there are plans to build a bicycle path between Adorjás and Harkány (Arató & Novothny, 2012). The road directly connecting Kémes with Rádfalva is not paved. On the way back, the programme includes a visit to the local producers and handicraft workshops in Diósvizlő. Arrival in Harkány at 16:30.

Thematic route proposal 3: “Tradition and gastronomy” – folk crafts cycling experience (35 km). 10:00 departure from Villány on the route to Kisjakabfalva, Ivánbattyán (German country house). 12:00 lunch in Palkonya at the Palkonya village apartment restaurant. 13:30 departure from Palkonya on the Újpet, Vokány, Nagytótfalu, Kisharsány, Nagyarsány route. A visit to a basket spinner, a consumer goods maker from natural materials (willow along the Drava). Stop at the sculpture park in Nagyarsány. Arrival in Villány at 17:00. The road runs from Villány to Kisharsány on a light traffic road, and from Kisharsány to Villány on a bicycle road.

Of course, we must not forget to bring the planned thematic trips to the market and promote them. The phases of this can be digitisation and virtual display. The established heritage thematic routes, therefore, become available with mobile devices on the Internet. In the future, it will be worthwhile to further develop the route plans and to create a real thematic route that can be explored individually by establishing a connection between the three routes. Another important element is the presentation and promotion of local products and values. This is done with a rating for gastronomic values, and the full range of products, with short videos showing the production phases of the product.

Conclusions

This study revealed that despite the favourable conditions of the studied area, the deteriorating tendencies can be attributed to the lack of infrastructural conditions necessary for quality tourism and the weaknesses of the information systems. The eastern part of the region has the most opportunities for the touristic integration of small settlements. One of the important prerequisites for this can be the implementation of authentic local programmes and involvement in larger festivals. This process would be facilitated by the creation of gastronomic workshops based on the ingredients of local producers, as well as the extension of bicycle paths, which also connect guests and service providers in a physical sense. The smaller settlements of the area, therefore, have cultural and gastronomic values on which thematic cycling routes can be planned.

At the same time, tourism in less developed western settlements is affected by the lack of programmes and accommodation. In the future, however, several settlements could be attached to a cycling route that presents the attractions along the Drava. It is unfortunate that in some settlements further away from the Drava, the deteriorating condition of the monuments, the less inclusive attitude of the residents, in some cases the lack of interest of the local governments, and the lack of cooperation complicate the situation. Here, too, service providers feel that following the creation of community sites and the renovation of monuments, local producers showcasing traditional crafts could be attached to a cycling route.

The services used by the tourists also outline the territorial duality presented in the study. Those staying in Villány use services which focus on gastronomy and wellness, mainly within the settlement. The needs for overnight stays in other settlements of the region are on a wider scale, as well as covering the services of other settlements. This information is relevant to the planning and guidance of thematic routes and draws attention to the western areas of the district. There were significant regional differences in the spatial use of the guests, depending on the geographical location of the accommodation within the settlement and the typical product type. The guests with the most extensive spatial use spend the night in the western settlements mentioned above. The other extreme is the group of guests spending the night in Villány, where smaller settlements outside the accommodation are almost completely

excluded from their spatial use. Therefore, in the future, it may be important to explore the service opportunities in these areas and introduce them to the clientele. Visitors highlighted two important directions for the development of the area, focusing on physical (bicycle paths, public transport) and human (foreign language skills) infrastructure.

Among the factors hindering development, like the guests, the mayors also highlighted the unfavourable physical and human infrastructure, as well as the lack of effective marketing and destination management. However, due to a lack of resources, the majority of local governments have not implemented any significant development in this direction recently. At the same time, in the background of the problem is the lack of interest, the preservation of tradition becoming secondary and the lack of cooperation. This is especially true of relations between service providers and municipalities. Most of the settlements do not adopt a regional approach and try to exploit their own opportunities. At the same time, competition also dominates the economic sphere, the municipalities trying to lure entrepreneurs, while the economic stakeholders of the larger centres show no interest in the disadvantaged areas.

As for the issue raised at the beginning of the study, the tourist-frequented focal points are currently unable to integrate the municipalities of the area into the economic-tourism mainstream. Although cities cooperate to some degree, basically, each destination focuses on its own development.

Empirical experience thus shows that besides the consistent implementation of the „European Gastronomic Region” programme, thematic trips can play a prominent role in the development of tourism in less frequented small settlements. The essence of this is to connect the places where traditional crafts and local products are presented with a hiking trail that can be explored by bicycle. The marketing of these thematic trips is also important, through their digitisation and virtual display.

The present study correlates with the international literature results focusing on the back-and-forth relationship between rural development and tourism. The present investigation also confirms the results of international studies, that in the dynamisation of rural areas, social networking and regional contact systems should also have a prominent role, which should be reflected in development strategies as well.

Based on the above results, further directions of research can be the assessment of the population preferences in terms of the liveability of the

settlements and their touristic development. Another study direction is the monitoring of the rural tourism development projects that won the Kisfaludy Tender, and the examination of the crisis resilience of rural tourism based on the 2020–2021 pandemic, in connection with the reorganisation of the district spatial structure.

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