

THE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON DISADVANTAGED RURAL AREAS ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE NATIONAL HISTORICAL MEMORIAL PARK OF ÓPUSZTASZER IN HUNGARY

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Abstract: *The main purpose of the analysis was to examine the tourism demand and supply of Ópusztaszer, to take stock of the man-made and natural values of the settlement, to investigate the impact of the Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park on the local economy developments, as well as to explore the quality, existence and intensity of relationships between local tourism actors. On the basis of the test results of the study, we marked directions of development and suggestions for the future. Various forms of tourism have developed in the settlement, including equestrian tourism, rural tourism, cultural tourism and ecotourism. After considering the man-made and natural values, the settlement has many untapped opportunities. Regarding the demand for Ópusztaszer, the number of guest nights spent in commercial and other accommodations of the settlement is increasing. The number of tourists visiting the settlement has grown, as well as the tourist traffic of the Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park. However, the tourists only spend one or two days in Ópusztaszer on average. Tourist service suppliers of the settlement prefer intangible marketing tools to increase trade, such as social networking sites or websites.*

Overall, it can be said that tourism is developing in Ópusztaszer, the tourist traffic is growing year by year in the settlement, but the cooperation between the tourism actors is lacking. The Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park has an impact on the development of the local economy however, this impact is not significant. It would be important to rediscover and rethink the values of the settlement. The tourist services should be expanded in order to further forms of tourism are being formed and make Ópusztaszer more attractive to tourists, as well as to increase the length of stay here.

Keywords: *tourism, development, rural area, disadvantaged situation, Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park, Hungary*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, it is a general phenomenon that the rural areas are in social and economic crisis namely; emigration, depopulation, aging and peripheral location. As a result, higher attention must be paid to reducing

the disadvantages of rural areas in Hungary (Csatári, 2001). One possible way to mitigate and solve these problems is to stimulate a long-term sustainability in tourism in the rural areas.

Tourism can contribute to increase employment, therefore reduce unemployment, preserve local cultural and natural values and can maintain traditions. Adjust to the needs of arriving tourists, the range of services can be expanded, which can have a positive multiplier effect on the local economy and the economy of that specified area. In addition, the different locally produced products can result in a shorter supply chain, with all its benefits. The former can contribute to raising the living standards of the local population and maintaining the rural way of life.

The natural and environmental factors alone are not considered to be an attraction in the specified area because they are unable to validate their function, so they are only a potential benefit and an exploitable opportunity. In order to natural and environmental factors become a resource, it is absolutely necessary to have some basic infrastructure (Abonyiné et. al., 2005, 2007, 2011). The attraction is the core of the tourism product so it is important to develop and expand it. This has a beneficial effect on tourist arrivals and the economic performance of the settlement (Kis et al., 2016). The tourism potential can be considered to be the basic condition of the capacity of the given area. The basic conditions of the receptivity of tourism imply the basic infrastructure, built on the infrastructure and supra-structure of tourism which help to sell the attractions effectively, furthermore they embodied in residence facilities. Therefore, when we talk about the tourism potential of a specific area, we are not only talking about unexplored attractions but we also assume the existence of infrastructure that results in definite guest nights (Michalkó, 2005). The elements of tourism potential have an impact on the life of the local economy and society. Furthermore, they are capable to strengthen the development and competitiveness of the region by closely linking the tourism and regional development and the sector of tourism has a significant multiplier effect on other activities and sectors (Michalkó, 2005; FATOSZ, 2007).

The intensification of globalization, the appreciation of environmental paradigms and the changes in agriculture shed new light on the opportunities and chances of the countryside. The turnout of rural tourism is a spontaneous innovation and response of rural families for the challenges of rural society nowadays. Rural tourism can be interpreted as an opportunity to diversify the rural economy (Kovács, 2002).

Rural tourism promises a number of benefits for tourism, because the rural areas have been partially left out from development, thus retaining

their potential, which may be considered as a new attraction and be able to balance the picture of the over-centralized tourism. New supplies can become target areas for the environmentally conscious, alternative forms of tourism. The supply of rural areas is diverse and affects throughout the year, so they can reduce seasonal fluctuations (FATOSZ, 2007).

Tourism offers measurable positive points for rural development. Tourism can be considered as a means of exploring local resources and revitalizing the rural economy because the tourism can utilize those resources that would result in more modest economic benefits or underused such as national parks and nature reserves. In this manner, the natural environment and surviving traditions of the undeveloped regions can be explored as an attraction and developmental energy; tourism becomes an important area and settlement developmental factor (Lengyel, 1997; FATOSZ, 2007).

Tourism can be linked to agriculture that can use local products as an attraction. In most cases, the rural tourism is organized around the accommodation and service offered by the local people. Therefore, the incomings converge on the spot, with this, accelerating the local economy. Tourism developments also improve the quality of life of the locals and they can provide additional incomings (FATOSZ, 2007). So, the local benefits of rural tourism are economic, social and ecological. From a financial viewpoint, the great advantage of rural tourism is that it utilizes existing living resources, intellectual, natural and environmental values. Tourism does not necessarily provide subsistence, but it can provide additional incomings for families, and through it local and personal products can be sold directly. Beyond providing accommodation, guests should be catered and entertained by which employment can be expanded. The infrastructural development of the countryside is positively influenced by rural tourism (Tájgazdálkodási Kézikönyvsorozat, 2008).

The increase in the earnings of the rural population leads to the retention of the rural population. From the social point of view, it becomes possible to “sell” and preserve the local attractions and traditions. The most important social role of rural tourism is to maintain the rural way of life because it is consistent with the requirements of multifunctional agriculture and integrated rural development. Furthermore, the rural tourism can play a significant role in conserving and maintaining biodiversity (Tájgazdálkodási Kézikönyvsorozat, 2008).

2. MATERIALS AND RESEARCH METHODS

We conducted primary research on the topic, which consists of several parts. We asked the restaurants and accommodation providers in Ópusztaszer in a questionnaire about the cooperation with other tourism service providers. We also asked them about the developments, the guest traffic, the marketing activities and the economic impact of the Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park. In addition to the questionnaires, we also had informal conversations with the hoteliers and restaurant managers, and during the personal meetings we also had the opportunity to visit the field. Nine accommodations and two restaurants were involved in the research. However, the opinions of nine persons were relevant, because two accommodations had one owner and the owner of Szeri Csárda and Szeri Kemping was one person. We conducted a structured in-depth interview with the marketing director of the Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park, the owner of the Csillagösvény Labyrinth, one member of the Cseppentő family and the head of the local Tour Inform Office. The main elements of the interview were the follows: the role of tourism service providers, local tourism supply and demand, marketing activities and cooperation between the local tourism actors. We used statistical databases to analyze tourism demand and the Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park also provided us data on guest traffic. We also used literature and internet sources to prepare the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ópusztaszer is located in the Hungarian Great Plain, in the south-eastern part of the Danube-Tisza region, in Csongrád County, in the neighborhood of Baks, Kistelek and Dóc in the Kistelek district. The location of the settlement was determined by its thousand-year-old past because the highway leading from Transylvania through Szeged to Buda affected this area. Furthermore, the past and present life of the village is determined by its proximity to the Tisza, from which it is 7-8 kilometres away. Currently, the main road does not affect Ópusztaszer and neither does its railway, so it can only be approached by road (Vályi et. al., 1996).

The Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park is one of the most significant historical monuments in Hungary. It tries to present us the most significant stages of Hungary's past with the help of various exhibitions and buildings. The most important tasks of the Memorial Park are to organise a variety of events, programs and museum pedagogical

sessions. There are also religious sites and a live open-air museum at the area of the Memorial Park. It is also possible to hold weddings, go fishing, and watch horse shows. The Memorial Park has an inn and campsite, which is currently operated by a subcontractor.



Figure 1: Services of the Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park
Source: Own editing

Opening of the Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park contribute to start the activities of the other two tourism service providers. When the Cseppentő family moved to Ópusztaszer, they thought that there should be horses as well at the site of the conquest, so the story of the Cseppentő family began. Today, the family business has already diversified its activities. The owner of the Csillagösvény Labyrinth wanted to create something that is rare and unique. That was the time when the idea of building a labyrinth was born. The location of the maze seemed to be the biggest problem. The owner first set Makó as the site of implementation, and after consultations, he was advised to look for a place that would be

visited by tourists all year and continuously. That is how he chose Ópusztaszer village.

The Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park attracts the largest number of visitors, although the impact on economy of the other two tourism service providers is also significant in the settlement.

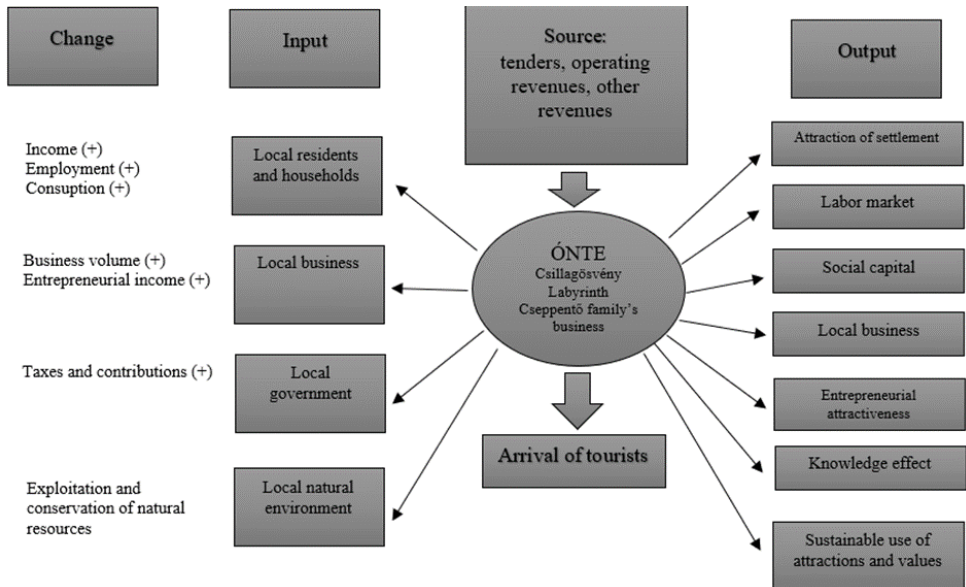


Figure 2: The effects of the Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park, the Star Trail Labyrinth and the Cseppentő family's business on the local economy
Source: Own editing

In the settlement, the operation of tourism service providers on the input side contributes to increase the employment of local residents and to increase the volume of the local businesses as well as to increase taxes paid to the municipality, in addition preserving and exploiting local resources. On the output side, tourism service providers contribute to increase the attractiveness of the settlement, expand the labour market, and strengthen the social capital and the sustainable use of attractions and values. Researches take place in the Memorial Park, play a very important role in expanding and transferring knowledge.

The Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park has been developing since its establishment. A number of development projects have been implemented since 2011. The biggest project was called "Enter the Past! -Historical time travel in Ópusztaszer". They created the new exhibitions of the Rotunda, the Guest Gate at the entrance, the Visitor

Centre and the Heritage Workshops. In 2017 the Szeri Herb House and Garden was built within the framework of the project entitled “On the Paths of the Past to the Paths of the Future”. In the recent years, there has been a reformation in the Memorial Park in almost every year. New buildings were built; new exhibitions, new events and new performances were held. Developments and innovations play an important role in bridging seasonality, and on the other hand, they are also important because they attract and bring back guests who have already seen the Memorial Park.

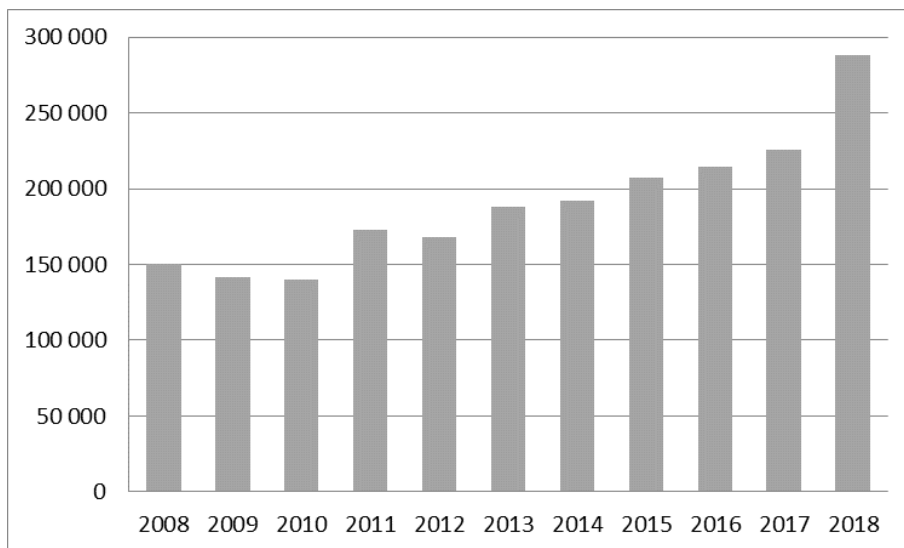


Figure 3: Development of the number of visitors in the Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park (persons/year)

Source: Own editing, based on the data of the Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park

From 2008, the number of visitors decreased, then in 2011 compared to 2010 it increased significantly. In 2012, compared to 2011, the number of visitors decreased, and from 2012 onwards, it has been increasing again. There are many reasons for the growth, but the changing marketing strategy and developments have also played a role.

The Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park has the greatest impact on ensuring the possibility of spending free time, raising the quality of cultural services, and increasing the quantity and quality of restaurants and accommodation. In addition, we can highlight the maintenance of public safety in the settlement and the provision of job opportunities, which is significantly affected by the Memorial Park based on the results of the study.

The Memorial Park has the least impact on the general infrastructure and transport conditions, land and residential property prices, income and living standards, and neither changed the quality of life.

4. CONCLUSIONS

We made a list of the untapped potentials of Ópusztaszer which was based on the research participants' opinion and on our own experiences following the research. The settlement has a number of untapped opportunities, which are illustrated in Figure 4.

Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Destination Management • Tourinform Office
Man-made values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ópusztaszer-Csontospart • Pallavicini Palace • Hantháza barton
Natural values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bird and flora of Ópusztaszer (Pusztaszeri) forest • The rich natural values of Ópusztaszer • Thermal water
Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference tourism • Incentive tourism • Cycling tourism

Figure 4: Unused values in Ópusztaszer
Source: Own compilation based on test data

Strengthening cooperation is the first and most important step in the settlement. The local Tourism Destination Management is not working properly because it does not play a role in increasing sustainability and competitiveness and does not help local tourism actors to work together. One solution could be to revive the local TDM organization and promote its active operation. In addition, the local Tour Inform Office could have a more active role in strengthening cooperation among tourist operators, for example via team building trainings, presentations and forums. The Tour Inform Office is located within the Memorial Park, which reduces its role

in the flow of information, so it would be important to have a location where it becomes accessible to all tourists. Thus, in our opinion, local and surrounding tourism operators would turn easier to the Tour Inform Office for help or for cooperation. We considered it to be important to cooperate not only with local but also with surrounding tourism service providers. In addition, besides helping each other, it would be possible to create joint program packages, which would help the guests visiting here to stay at the settlement or in the area for more days.

It would be important to create a joint marketing activity in the settlement, which would bring together the local tourism actors and, on the other hand, would help the individual tourism service providers with their marketing work. We ascribe an important role to the local government in the development of the joint marketing activities of the settlement, which currently does not play such a role.

Among the untapped man-made values, the Hantházi Croft, the Ópusztaszer Bone Shore and the Pallavicini Castle are the ones we would like to highlight. By the end of the 19th century, the Pallavicini families built 11 crofts for farming. However, from the crofts, only the Hantházi has survived in its old condition, most of its buildings are still inhabited today. Csontospart is located in the border of Ópusztaszer and Baks. Traces of a Neolithic settlement and a cemetery of unknown age can be found in this area, but have not been excavated yet. Pallavicini Castle was built in the second half of the nineteenth century and it can be attached to the nobleman, Sándor Pallavicini. The castle today functions as a psychiatric institute.

The historically significant places and buildings should be excavated, renovated and used, thus enriching the offer of the historical attractions of the settlement. Rethinking of the use of the castle is an important task, as it could function as a museum and hotel in the settlement. Among other things, it would be necessary because this would expand the offered accommodations, towards a higher category. The operation of the castle as a hotel could provide a basis for the development of conference and incentive tourism in the settlement.

The rich natural values of Ópusztaszer could provide a basis for the development of ecotourism and the development of other forms of tourism, such as cycling tourism. Thermal water is located below the settlement which provides an opportunity to build a spa which could further increase the possibilities offered by Ópusztaszer.

The use of existing attractions and additional values would allow the development of new forms of tourism, which would attract a wider range of tourists to the settlement. Some of the conditions for conference tourism are

given, as a conference room was recently built in the Memorial Park, but there is still a lack of accommodations of the right quality. Incentive tourism is a means of reward that offers participants some unique and special path. Ópusztaszer boasts many unique things, such as the Csillagösvény Labyrinth, the Feszty Panorama or the Akhal-Teke Stud, but the services and infrastructure based on them are still incomplete, such as the accommodation offer.

The new forms of tourism would also attract a larger number of foreign tourists to the settlement. In addition to the appropriate infrastructure, it would be necessary for Ópusztaszer to be prepared to welcome foreign guests. By this, we mean that those who are working in hospitality should speak at least one foreign language and especially, online advertisements could be also published in a foreign language.

Overall, it can be said that tourism is developing in Ópusztaszer, the guest traffic is growing year by year, but there is a lack of cooperation between the tourism actors. The Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park has an impact on the development of the local economy, but this impact is not significant.

It would be important to rediscover the values of the settlement, to rethink them and to expand tourism services in order to develop further forms of tourism and attract more guests to the settlement. It would also be essential to increase the residence time, contributing to the alternative income generation in Ópusztaszer and in the surrounded rural settlements, besides this would contribute to the sustainable economic and social development of the countryside.

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