

Tourism and Sustainable Development

Medicinal and Thermal Spas in South and West Transdanubia - The Significance of Accessibility

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Abstract: Transport plays a substantial role in determining competitiveness in tourism. The **objective** of our study is to highlight the relationship between the accessibility [by road] of medicinal and thermal spas and the tourist figures of the settlements examined, and we hope in this way to build on our **prior work** in the broad, but highly important field of Spa Tourism in Hungary. Our **approach** is based on an analysis of the data from two particular regions in terms of tourist flows – centrally located West and peripheral South Transdanubia. Methods of correlation and rank correlation were used which were based on statistical data from the Hungarian Statistical Office and from our own questionnaire. The **results** clearly show the significance of accessibility to be unarguable on the basis of our questionnaire, although the rank correlation alone proved the relationship. There is also a degree of correspondence between accessibility and tourist figures, albeit with certain limitations. The **implications** are not as yet totally clear since a number of specific factors are involved which require further consideration, such as the relative prosperity of the regions, population density and the adequacy of the road network. However, work has already started on this programme.

Keywords: Health tourism; Road transport; Regional comparison; Rank correlation; Tourism Tax

JEL Classification: L83

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1. Introduction

Transport, accessibility and spatial factors are of increasing importance in business-related micro- and macro-economic decision-making processes, and the aim of this paper is to examine the links between two separate, although connected, fields of study. Transport plays a substantial role in determining competitiveness in tourism, in that it influences both quantitative and qualitative factors in destinations – and so has a direct impact on the nature of the traffic. Since our primary target is the effects of transport on tourism, we concentrate on transport which uses public roads, since the majority of both foreign and domestic - tourists prefer to travel in this way (Hungarian Tourism Plc., 2010).

The theoretical basis of the topic requires us to define accessibility, transport and tourism, showing cogent links among them and presenting an evolutionary development of touristic models of competitiveness from the transport perspective. Following this, we apply empirical analysis to produce [hopefully significant] results in two distinct fields.

The first field relates to the general preferences of tourists visiting medicinal and thermal spas and uses relevant data collected in a questionnaire (devised by us) which examines the accessibility of these spas by the public road network. [The questionnaire was created within the framework of the Hungarian OTKA project No.106283]. After drawing general conclusions, we analyse the data from two particular regions - West and South Transdanubia. In terms of tourist flow, West Transdanubia is located centrally, whilst South Transdanubia is peripheral. This contributes to the different factors which impact on these regions' spas and on the forms of transport carried on public roads.

On the same basis, the second field examines eight settlements from each of these regions – all with medicinal and thermal spas – a total of sixteen. The paper attempts to investigate the relevance of road transport to tourist traffic in respect of these settlements.

2. The Theoretical Background to the Topic

Accessibility is a universally important factor, and it is clear that, in connection with the paradigm shift in economics (as demonstrated by the New Economic Geography and the increasing importance of regional economics), the role of geographical distance is less and less arguable. When defining tourism, “transport” can, perhaps, be described as “movement beyond the normal limits of a person’s regular way of life (including both their residence and place of work) irrespective

of motivation, time-span and target field” (based loosely on the World Tourism Organization’s and the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s definition of 1989).

By examining the relationship between tourism and transport, three important factors should be taken into consideration: transport itself, as movement with the aid of vehicles; carriage as a process, when goods or people are brought from one place to another; and travel, which means the movement of people with different motivations (Tóth et al., 2012).

Any further investigation of the relationship must also take into account other factors, such as the complexity of the links between sending and destination countries, the problem of accessibility at the destination, including the accessibility of specific tourist attractions, and, finally, those types of travel when travelling itself belongs to the complex ‘treat’ (Hall & Page, 2009). This paper aims mainly to examine the first factor and so it does not take into account any local features of the different modes of transport.

The chief role of transport in tourism is that it creates a spatial correspondence between supply and demand, and so we need to examine the qualitative and quantitative conditions of accessibility. A twofold system of relationships can be seen between the demand for transport and the services provided by the infrastructure which define the character and the extent of demand for transport in terms of time, cost and other factors.

Accessibility is a key factor in analysing transport. The notion of “accessibility”¹ involves those possibilities in a given area which are available to an individual, provided that one travels to a different area to pursue activities of any form of personal interest in search of relaxation, recreation, entertainment, recuperation, etc. (Linneker & Spence, 1992, Tóth & Kincses, 2007). Transport has a significant effect on the quality and level of services provided by the infrastructure of a given area (Tóth & David, 2009), on the appeal of a given area, and on its degree of popularity in terms of the number of visitors. More forms of accessibility can be defined, depending on the perspective of the analysis. For instance, financial, social, physical, mental, and organizational accessibility can be differentiated (Tóth et al., 2012). This study, however, deals only with physical accessibility and does not deal with any other factors since these require totally different types of data.

In respect of tourism, both primary and secondary infrastructures can be distinguished. Whilst the former refers to the quantity of accommodation and its level of development related primarily to tourism, the latter refers to those facilities which assist tourism, such as ticket offices, souvenir shops, travel agencies etc. and

¹ To examine accessibility, we studied the available data provided by Route Planner with Google Maps (taking into account motorways and toll roads) between the 2nd and 10th of October 2013.

also involves the transport infrastructure (Abonyiné, 2006). Depending on the location of a given destination, and based on its level of attraction, it can be assumed that a destination can be approached by various means of transport and by different routes. For these reasons, visits to medicinal and thermal spas are primarily made by road, and so the trips can be described by the typical characteristic features of road transport.

Based on the distribution of the number of international tourist arrivals using all forms of transport, 90% of tourists arrive in Hungary by road, whilst 60% of domestic journeys lasting several days are also undertaken by car (Hungarian Tourism Plc.). Hence, in our analysis we look at data on the accessibility of spas by road. Travel by road is usually preferred for short journeys and has the advantage of greater comfort, relative safety, rapidity and its “door-to-door” feature (Veres, 2011). The preference for one particular means of transport indirectly predicts the level of attraction of a given destination. The spas selected for analysis in this study are located in domestic regional markets and we can safely assume that tourists from abroad will generally prefer to use road rather than any other form of transport in view of the notable lack of rail and air services or their low standard.

Azimi and co-authors (2013) examined and tested [by various methods] the relationship between tourism and transport on the basis of a Turkish province, Gilan. They tried to approach the issue from the perspective of development, and the authors considered whether the development processes of tourism and transport could interact or not – that is, whether these two sectors could develop more quickly together or separately.

The results clearly showed increased road traffic as a result of tourist destination development, although it is not necessarily true that this represents a development in the quality of travel. The authors revealed many difficulties by means of document- and SWOT-analyses, which may be due to the poor level of transport in general. For instance, extremely high prices for public transport, the lack of interaction between public transport companies and imbalances in the road network. Lohmann and Pierce (2012) carried out secondary data acquisition and analysed questionnaires completed by experts. Based on this work the authors defined the following factors in terms of the relationship between tourism and transport: characteristics of the sending countries and the targeted destinations, the speed of travel, the level of environmental pollution, the main directions of travel etc. Tourism can contribute to the development of transport networks, and so, to reach tourist destinations, travellers may need new corridors or road networks, but this effect is mutual. Kordel and Bentkowska (2009) focused on mega-events such as the European Football Cup of 2012 and its potential requirements from the perspective of the transport network. In their forecast the authors drew the conclusions that a road network should be developed on the basis of the potential

traffic and of the number of inhabitants able to access those locations which would be the venue of matches. Our study has a similar logic and aims to calculate the numbers who could potentially visit spas.

Many papers have been written attempting to examine the relationship between tourism and transport - not on the basis of statistics and quantitative factors, but by examining the connection by the help of qualitative factors or from a management perspective (Sorupia, 2005). These studies are suitable mainly for investigating local relationships – as opposed to those studies which deal with regions or countries.

The studies dealing with the connection between tourism and transport differ in their results. However, it is unarguable that accessibility plays a decisive role in determining competitiveness in tourism, and more and more model creators and experts in tourism recognise the relevance of factors supporting tourism in this particular context. Competitiveness in tourism refers not only to one single settlement, but to the broader spatial unit - to the destination as a whole since, although an attraction may be specific to one single settlement, the effects should be considered in relation to the wider area in view of what is often a problematic definition of the actual destination (Michalkó & Rátz, 2010). It is not only a question of the distance from one place to another, but also the means of transport and the level of accessibility which are significant. Tourism and transport complement and support each other in many ways, and the two fields are in a specific relationship system (Michalkó & Rátz 2010).

When looking at the destination competitiveness models created to date, transport and accessibility clearly feature in most. According to some models, the two factors are not designed to measure competitiveness directly since they are only complementary factors contributing to competitiveness, although other approaches claim that both belong to the key competences of competitiveness.

In adapting the diamond model to tourism, transport is regarded as a vital factor, its function being to provide the environmental embeddedness of the touristic attraction (Jancsik, 2007). According to Vengesay (2003), however, transport cannot be directly connected to tourist attractions. He used a different approach in his own analysis in which, although tourist attractions and activities were included as complementary services (e.g., public works and catering establishments) he also emphasised the relevance of accessibility. The most detailed and workable model created to date was developed by Crouch and Ritchie in 1999. In their model they scrutinised the micro- and macro-environment of tourism and defined the key competences whose existence and level mainly determine the competitiveness of a given destination. For these key competences to have the desired effect,

complementary factors are needed, and, within these factors, accessibility is treated separately and differentiates land, sea and air transport.

Go and Govers in their study (2000) assert that accessibility is the main factor and they elaborated their concept of competitiveness from a series of factors such as image, climate, environment, accessibility, facilities - and the touristic appeal of a given destination. As opposed to earlier works in the field, Dwyer & Kim (2003) regard the development of the demand factor as a dominant factor in determining the competitiveness of a given destination. In order to evaluate competitiveness, they distinguish three component groups. The first of these comprises natural factors and basic touristic attractions whilst the second relates to issues involving the management of a given destination (the potential for government and business support, image-building together with accessibility and transport). The final embodies the actual demand characteristics.

In the adaptations of the models of competitiveness in tourism created at the end of the '90s and the turn of the century, transport plays an increasingly important part. One of the best studies in the field was produced by Armenski, Marković, Davidović and Jovanović (2011) who deal with investigating the competitiveness of health tourism in Serbia.

Their model includes two factor groups - one involving natural and cultural resources and the other concerning tourism-related settlement infrastructure, together with accessibility and quality. The authors of the study created individual index groups to define the accessibility of each key competence - which clearly accords with contemporary trends in economics. Kayar and Kozak's model (2010) represents one of the latest adaptations in the field. They examine the competitiveness of Turkey in respect of health tourism based on the WTTC index of 2007 (Gooroochurn & Sugiyarto, 2005): they identify 13 significant factors which determine the competitiveness of a given settlement. As with earlier models, official policy, environmental protection regulations, health and safety and human resource management issues, as well as cultural peculiarities ascribed to nations play important roles. In Kayar and Kozak's model, accessibility is a specific key factor.

3. An Analysis of Accessibility based on Preference Questionnaires

This section of the paper is based on data recorded between the 20th and 24th of February 2013 within the framework of OTKA project No. 106283 entitled "The Examination of Competitiveness Factors of Medicinal and Thermal Spas in Hungary and in Central European Regions". During our research a questionnaire relating to consumer preferences was used as the survey method, the survey itself

being conducted by telephone. The respondents were drawn from the adult population (over 18) and were selected by quota sampling, representative of the Hungarian population's age and gender distribution. After data recording and cleaning, a database of 1,000+ respondents was ready for analysis. In the questionnaire three questions dealt with accessibility. One asked how far the respondent would be willing to travel if he wished to spend his/her holiday at a medicinal or thermal spa. The other two referred, respectively, to the importance to the respondent of the distance from home to destination, and to the question of accessibility when using public roads or public transport. The following analyses were mostly justified on a five percent significance level. Since the variables operate on a low level scale, the test of independence was executed by Chi-Square test. The effect size of correlation was evaluated by the Cramer index. For further analysis the AR (Adjusted Standardised Residual) Index provided guidance.

First of all, it is worth looking at distance as linked to the willingness to travel. Of the total number asked, 912 people answered the question relating to travelling distance and their willingness to travel. Nearly half (48%) indicated the longest distance (in excess of 100 km) when showing the extent of their willingness to travel (assuming their desire for a spa holiday). The data assessed suggest that distance in itself might not be a primary factor in selecting a destination, as the distance involved in their willingness to travel could have been lower. However, this assumption requires further explanation on the basis of an analysis of the distance (home to targeted spa) and of accessibility. Competition for guests among spas is, therefore, greater even within borders. The remaining respondents (28%) are willing to travel a maximum of 50 to 100 km, and less than a quarter (24%) indicated that they would be willing to travel no more than 50 km for the purpose. From the results it can be deduced that, in terms of willingness to travel, there is a statistically supported correlation between the length of stay and spending patterns. The study will elaborate on this later.

A second aim of the analysis is to show the relationship between travelling distance and length of stay. When examining the figures it became clear that nearly half of the potential guests (48%) willing to travel less than 50 km choose to stay for only a long weekend. Further, the majority of respondents (58%) willing to travel 50 to 100 km prefer the same length of stay. However, 40% of respondents willing to travel farther prefer a 4-7-day holiday, 22% choose a minimum of a week and only 36% of this particular group opt for a long weekend. In analysing the correlation between acceptable travelling distances and length of stay, it was observed that, on the basis of the p-value¹ (0.000), beside every logical level of significance¹, there is

¹ By the p-value of Chi-Square or, in other words, the significance value, is meant the assumption with which the rejection of the null hypothesis results in error (Pintér & Rappai, 2007, p359).

a correlation between the two items, and not only 5%. According to the Cramer index, this correlation is considered weak ($C=0.237$). Among respondents willing to travel 50 km or less, there is a greater willingness to go away only for the day ($AR=7.8$), as opposed to a declining interest in a 4-7-day holiday ($AR=-3.1$) away from home. A logical explanation could lie in the different income levels of different consumer segments. For respondents willing to travel 51 to 100 km it is more typical to spend a long weekend of 2-3 days ($AR=4.8$) at a desired destination, while trips lasting for at least a week are less common ($AR=-3.7$) in this particular segment. Respondents willing to travel at least 100 km more typically prefer to be away for 4 to 7 days ($AR=3.7$) or for even longer ($AR=4.2$). Based on these findings we can assume that the distance factor in willingness to travel and the length of stay are related ($p=0.000$; $C=0.237$). In planning the services to be offered by spas, it would be rational to take these trends into account since most potential guests do not plan a whole week of recreation at a given complex, but prefer to take advantage of the various offers and reduced prices available for long weekends. However, the segment spending 4-7 days at a given spa should also be considered worthwhile since, as mentioned above, 48% of respondents would be willing to travel 100 km or more in order to visit their preferred spa. Clearly, service packages and marketing should be adjusted to these trends.

The third area examined is the relationship between travelling distance and the willingness to spend calculus. In respect of operating spas, these figures are considered the most important, although the average length of stay should not be ruled out since there seems to be an indirect link with average daily consumer spending.

On the basis of this distribution, a relationship between travelling distance and consumer spending can be predicted as follows: 42% of those willing to travel less than 50 km would spend a maximum of HUF 5,000, a further 42% from HUF 5,000 - 10,000, and only 1% would be ready to spend over HUF 20,000 per person. In terms of those willing to travel between 51 and 100 km, only half (21%) would spend less than HUF 5,000, whilst more than half (59%) would spend from HUF 5,000 - 10,000, and 17% from HUF 10,000 - 20,000. Under 3% would be willing to spend over HUF 20,000 per person. In terms of the longest distance (100+ km) category, 19% of respondents would be willing to spend less than HUF 5,000, a little over half from HUF 5,000 to 10,000, almost a quarter (23%) from HUF 10,000 to 20,000 and a significant number (7%) over HUF 20,000 per person (*Chart 1*). The average spending of respondents willing to travel less than 50 km is

¹ In Social Sciences a 5% level of significance is considered typical but in some cases 1% and 10% levels are also accepted. All three levels of significance mentioned comprise the group of 'logical levels of significance'.

HUF 6,685, of those who would accept 51-100 km the figure is HUF 8,200 and for those willing to travel more than 100 km the average is HUF 9,490.

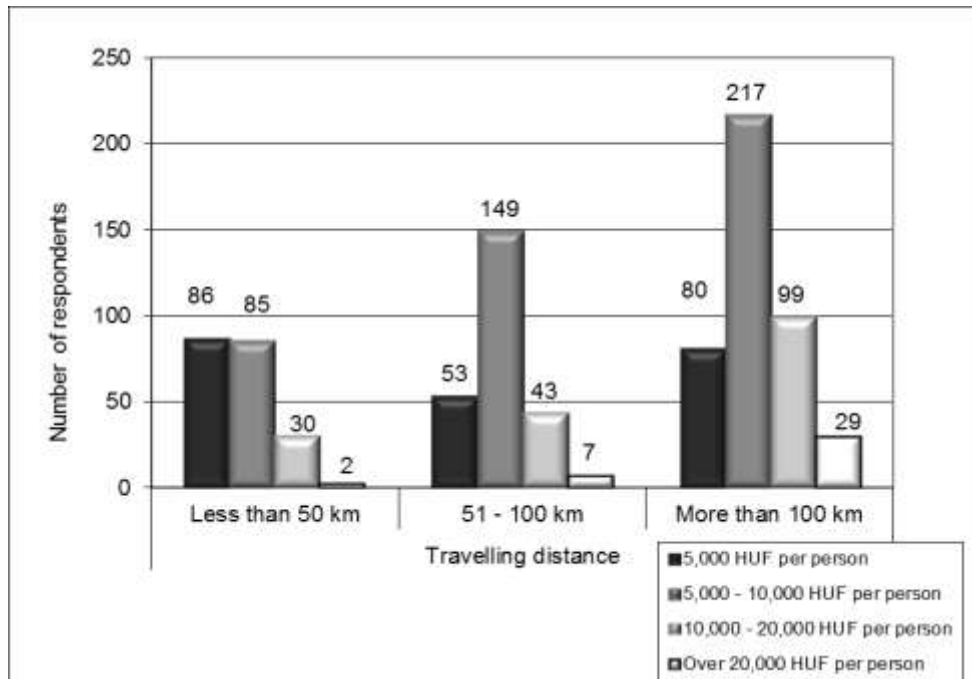


Chart 1. The Relationship between Travelling Distance and Consumer Willingness to Spend

Source: Authors' construction

The p-value of the Chi-Square test is 0.000, and so there exists a correlation on 5% significance level between the distance respondents are willing to travel to reach a spa and consumer spending patterns. On the basis of the Cramer index, the degree of correlation is weak ($C=0.182$). The interconnections shown in the above chart can, again, be explained by the financial circumstances of the guests. In relation to income, a “typical” holiday destination decision could be determined on the basis of the assumption that, for potential guests who are willing to spend only a modest amount on visiting a spa, distance itself seems to be a major factor - that is, they are only willing to travel shorter distances; but those willing to spend a substantial amount on their holidays when visiting a spa, are willing to travel greater distances - in which case travel expenses amount to a significant sum of money. The detailed results also support this trend - that is, among people willing to travel less than 50 km, the rate of spending less than HUF 5,000 per day is much higher than expected (AR=6.6), although, at the same time, among the same group of respondents, the

rate of daily spending from HUF 5,000 to 10,000 (AR=-3.0) is less than expected, as in the case of higher spending (HUF 10,000 to 20,000) (AR=-2.7). For respondents willing to travel between 51 and 100 km, the willingness to spend HUF 5,000 to 10,000 is higher than average (AR=3.0). When taking respondents willing to travel over 100 km into account, on average, they spend from HUF 10,000 to 20,000 (AR=2.7), or even more than HUF 20,000 (AR=3.5). Less expected is that they spend HUF 5,000 or less (AR=-4.0). From the results we can deduce a correlation between acceptable travelling distance and willingness to spend ($p=0.000$; $C=0.182$).

The fourth field which we examined deals, firstly, with the accessibility of spas, secondly, with the home-to-destination distance and, finally, with the assumed relationship between the two issues. It is, again, good to study the distribution of these two variables separately.

The home-to-destination distance is regarded as highly relevant for over a quarter of the respondents (28%), but it may be more interesting to note that three quarters identify this as moderately significant. On the basis of the responses, the importance of accessibility seems to more significant since half of the respondents (50%) noted this as highly relevant, and nearly 90% as moderately significant. These observations clearly deny our hypothesis which supposes that the acceptable travelling distance indicated by the respondents would already determine the relevance and preference of accessibility and that of distance in an indirect way.

Table 1. The Relevance of Distance between Home and Spa Destination and of the Accessibility of the Spa (person, n=927)

Relevance		Accessibility of Spa or Thermal Bath Resort					Total
		No Relevance	Preferred No	Yes-No Relevance	Preferred Relevance	Full Relevance	
Distance between home and spa	No Relevance	35	7	28	23	70	163
	Preferred No	8	7	12	15	24	66
	Yes-No Relevance	7	17	55	95	96	270
	Preferred Relevance	4	2	17	69	72	164
	Full Relevance	6	2	15	34	207	264
Total		60	35	127	236	469	927

Source: Authors' construction

The table (*Table 1*) demonstrates the notability for respondents of two examined dimensions: the distance between home and spa, and accessibility of Spa or Thermal Bath Resort. The table shows 207 respondents who considered both issues - that is, distance and accessibility - as highly relevant. In terms of correlation this exists at every logical level of significance between distance and accessibility ($p=0.000$), and that its degree is weak ($C=0.252$). Respondents indicating total relevance in connection with distance chose the lower categories of accessibility less than expected (1 (AR=-3.3), 2 (AR=-3.0), 3 (AR=-4.5), 4 (AR=-5.5)) excluding the category of full relevance, although this was chosen by more respondents than expected (AR=10.7). Similarly, those regarding accessibility as being highly relevant seemed to prefer the lower distance categories less than expected (1 (AR=-2.2), 2 (AR=-2.4), 3 (AR=-5.9)) with the exception of the category of full relevance which, on the other hand, was favoured by more respondents than expected (AR=10.7).

The analysis offered in this chapter clearly indicates a plausible relationship between travelling distance and the average length of stay just as between distance and spending patterns when studying consumer opinion and their preferences. The next chapter aims to analyse the above relevance study by examining randomly selected settlements.

4. Rank Correlation, Correlation between the Number of Guest Nights, Tourism Tax (TT) and Accessibility Parameters

The accessibility study used specific examples taken from a database of 16 settlements in which a given settlement with a medicinal and thermal spa can be accessed within 120 minutes via public roads (*Chart 2*).

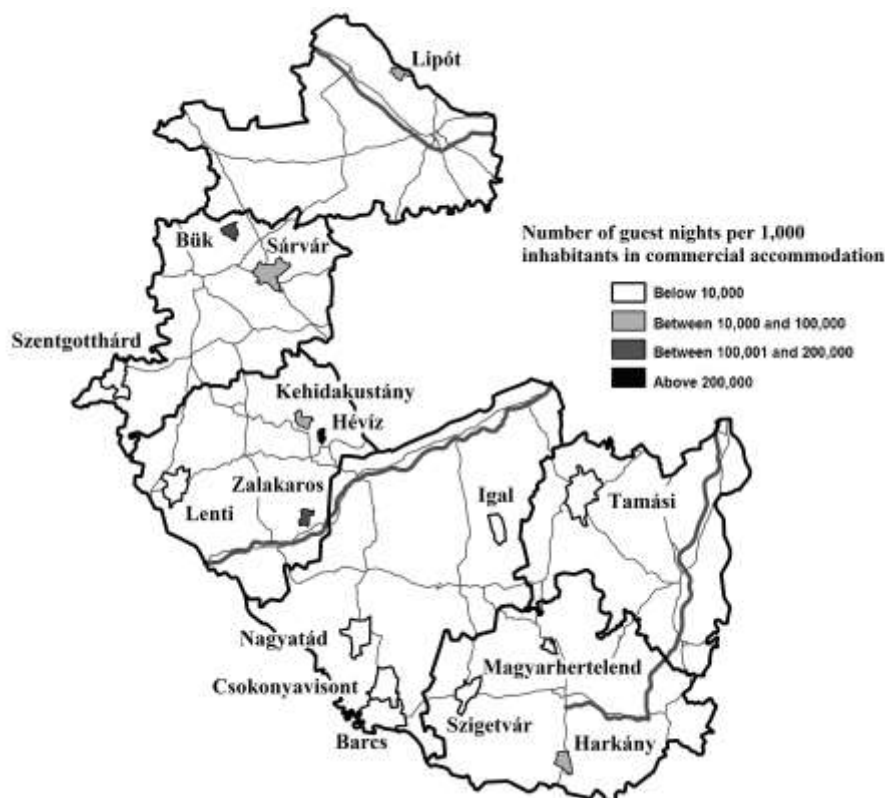


Chart 2. The Distribution of 16 Spas in South and West Transdanubia and the Number of Guest Nights per 1,000 Inhabitants in Commercial Accommodation in 2011

Source: Authors' construction on the basis of KSH data

We have in particular stressed two factors: first, we looked at the number of permanent residents of all settlements in the area, and, secondly, at the accessibility of each settlement in terms of time - that is, how long is needed to reach a given spa. The next step was to create accessibility indices – in fact, two versions. When creating these, “complexity” was considered an important factor, and so, in each case, both access time and the number of people in a given destination (the population) were taken into account. The first index was entitled “Population numbers able to reach a given spa within 30 minutes,” and the second, following this form, was entitled “Population numbers able to reach a given spa within 60 minutes.” Next, a correlation study of the most important data was carried out with reference to the size of the resident population, actual guest nights, guest nights per

1,000 residents, tourism tax¹ allocated from the local authority's revenues (HUF '000s), the contribution of the TT to local revenues (%), and, finally, to the accessibility indices. To be able to draw conclusions, we employed the Pearson correlation coefficient². There is no correlation on any level of significance ($p > 0.1$) between the accessibility indices and the number of visits for tourism purposes. Discrepancy is very high with respect to both the quantitative criteria and accessibility data.

To introduce one further factor, by using the same quantitative criteria discussed earlier, we were able to draw conclusions from rank correlations created from the rank correlation coefficient³. On the basis of the data provided by the 16 medicinal and thermal spa resorts examined, the correlations relating to rank, such as the number of guest nights per 1,000 residents, the TT (in '000s), the TT rate and the correlation between the three accessibility indices, were focused on. There is a correlation on a 5% level of significance ($p = 0.049$) in respect of the number of residents accessing a given spa within 30 minutes and the number of guest nights calculated in thousands. It can also be seen that this correlation points in a positive direction and the strength of correlation is moderate ($r = 0.500$). Consequently, if the number of people accessing a given spa resort is growing (e.g. the area is moving up-market, new residents move into the area) we can expect a rise in the number of guests. On a 10% level of significance ($p = 0.097$) we can also see a correlation of moderate strength pointing in a positive direction ($r = 0.429$) between the number of people accessing a given spa within 30 minutes and the ratio of TT defined in relation to local revenues. Regarding the other pairs of indices, there are no correlations on any logical level of significance ($p > 0.1$).

It is clear that the accessibility study is not capable of justifying expectations in full when taking the above approach into account. The reason for this could lie in the discrepancies in the accessibility figures and those of the number of tourism-related visits, and also in the fact that accessibility appears to be a complementary function in the competitiveness of tourist destinations. In the previous chapter we discussed in detail that accessibility is considered a major factor in selecting a spa, implying a need for a more comprehensive analysis of correlations with moderate strength.

¹ Hereinafter TT.

² Correlation refers to the stochastic statistical relationship between two relevant quantitative criteria or variables (Pintér & Rappai, 2007, p 247). The linear correlation coefficient between two (X and Y) variables is measured by the application of the covariance of the variables and the product of their standard deviations (Pintér & Rappai, 2007, p 253)

³ Spearman's rank correlation coefficient measures the linear correlation coefficient constructed from two rank correlations. The index, instead of measuring the actual values of the variables, makes use only of the information attributed to the ranking of variables. (Pintér & Rappai, 2007, p 257)

The table below (*Table 2*) shows the ranking of variables in relation to each settlement which show rank correlations. Since both the ranks of the variables representing the number of tourist visits appear in correlation exclusively with the 30-minute ranks (no correlation with the 60 minute ranks), and so it seems sufficient to display the results in a single table.

Table 2. Ranks of Settlements in relation to the Number of Residents Accessing the Settlement to the Number of Guest Nights per 1,000 Residents, TT Ratio

Settlements	30-minute Ranks	Ranks in Relation to the Number of Guest Nights per 1,000 capita	Ranks of TT Ratio
Barcs	16	16	16
Bük	9	2	3
Csokonyavisonta	13	9	5
Harkány	1	4	6
Hévíz	6	1	1
Igal	4	10	9
Kehidakustány	7	5	4
Lenti	14	11	11
Lipót	8	7	7
Magyarhertelend	2	12	12
Nagyatád	11	15	14
Sárvár	3	6	8
Szentgotthárd	15	8	10
Szigetvár	10	13	15
Tamási	12	14	13
Zalakaros	5	3	2

Source: Authors' construction

When taking a closer look at the rankings, it can be seen that Harkány performs surprisingly well in the 30-minute accessibility category. It should be remembered, however, that Harkány is situated in a part of the country containing a large number of small villages, which fact alone had a great effect on the degree of the measured index designed to show destinations accessible within 30 minutes. Still, an assumed relationship can be suspected between the indices measuring the touristic performance of a given settlement and accessibility itself due to the fact that, for Harkány, it would seem futile to expect better performance figures compared to those of rivals in Western Transdanubia (especially Hévíz, Zalakaros and Bük). Magyarhertelend appears to be in a very similar situation, but here the effect produced is more pronounced. Despite the favourable accessibility of Magyarhertelend's thermal bath, the indices do not promise any outstanding results. This particular assessment can be interpreted in two ways. It could firstly be deduced that, on the basis of ranking, accessibility has no influence on tourist arrival figures, and, secondly, that the favourable location of the bath may be interpreted as having the "capacity" as well as a relatively large number of

potential target group of guests. To make things more complicated, the index in question analyses the number of residents -which implies only a potential consumer circle, whereas the spending preferences of residents relating to the services of a given medicinal and thermal spa depend, among other things, on their personal income and liquidity.

The case of Igal can be described as a stalled development project. Though the accessibility figures mirror positive results and the services of the spa are exceptionally wide-ranging compared to the regional average, neither the settlement itself, nor the spa is visited to the extent one would expect from the positive accessibility figures and the generous number of services provided. Igal should make better use of its resources such as its favourable location and its level of transport infrastructure. In addition, operating the spa more effectively and increasing guest numbers could also provide better prospects for the settlement as a whole.

In respect of the accessibility index, the performance of West Transdanubia's flagship medicinal and thermal spas can only be considered as average. In terms of tourism figures, the best results are provided by Hévíz (6th place) whilst Zalakaros achieves 5th place and Bük 9th. For these settlements there is no direct relationship assumed between accessibility and tourism potential, although the poorer performance of Bük may mean a competitive handicap in relation to the two direct rivals. Since changing complementary resources seems to be cumbersome due to interests working outside tourism, in relation to setting prices, providing services and in the targeting a consumer segment, Bük should attempt to combat its apparent disadvantage in accessibility. In Western Transdanubia the most favourable accessibility index is accorded to Sárvár - which, similarly to Igal, is under-utilised in spite of its potential capacities. The ranking positions of Lipót, Lenti, Szigetvár, Nagyatád and Tamási show a similar tendency, although to determine a direct correlation would require organising further case studies with a different approach.

The poorest performance is, undoubtedly, that of Barcs. Its popularity and the number of Hungarian tourist arrivals are very low, and, moreover, its geographical situation does not meet the demands of domestic medicinal and thermal tourism. For Barcs the reason for failure could be not only poor marketing communication, but poor accessibility.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this study has been to analyse the role of accessibility and that of distance in relation to the decision-making of tourists visiting certain medicinal and thermal spas. An examination of the result shows that the relevance of accessibility has been clearly justified from different angles. The analysis of travelling distances points to the assumption that the majority of guests (48% of respondents) are willing to travel farther to reach their desired spa. There is a clear parallel linking travelling distance and length of stay - which essentially doubles the potential for tourist traffic. Hence, selecting the best marketing strategy for a medicinal and thermal spa is vital; it needs to be decided whether it aims to welcome guests preferring long weekends, or whether it targets another group of guests who are not only willing to spend 4 to 7 days at a given spa, but are ready to travel longer distances and to spend more than average when there. Finally, when elaborating their plans, marketing experts need to consider a variety of preferences. For the majority of potential guests, the distance between their home and the given spa seem to be highly relevant - together with accessibility. The latter factor could be a basis for further analyses in the conflict between supply and demand.

The significance of accessibility has proved unarguable on the basis of our sample of 1,000 people - which seems to justify the appearance of particular studies dealing with the competitiveness of tourism in which the infrastructure, transport and accessibility become the key factors of the complementary resources of tourism. In the course of our analysis of the selected settlements, it was rank correlation which alone proved the relationship existing between the number of tourist arrivals at each settlement and accessibility data. However, the correspondence between these two factors requires further examination, which may be due to a variety of reasons. On the one hand, the sample involving 16 settlements may be considered as having limited scope and so general conclusions cannot be drawn. On the other hand, regional differences also generate inequalities. The accessibility indices simply measured the number of potential consumers but not the extent of their willingness to visit spas – a fact which should not be ignored when analysing the results. Moreover, the geographical location and the natural and economic embeddedness of a spa settlement have different characteristics. The population within the 30 minute range, for example, could amount to a much higher figure for such a settlement in Baranya County than for any settlement in Vas County, and, in addition, there are substantial differences in income in the two regions, which influences the spending pattern of households. The data relating to catering facilities and accommodation in West Transdanubia shows an average extra spend of HUF 2,000 per capita (KSH, 2011). This, presumably, influences the number of arrivals at a spa. The limited scope of the present study means that further opportunities exist to investigate other issues within the field.

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Tourism and Sustainable Development. Implications at Local Community Level

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Abstract: Tourism represents an economic activity with a special growth potential and rate that, managed in a proper way, can represent an important means for ensuring a sustainable development and to promote and sustain local communities. During the past period, the development of tourism raised awareness among policy makers, local governments, tourists, etc. about the effect of tourism on the environment, this way the development of a sustainable tourism being a necessity. The present paper aims to outline a series of implications at communities' level that the relationship between tourism and sustainable development may generate, focusing on one of the most representative and important components of sustainable tourism, respectively ecotourism and its particular forms of rural and agrotourism.

Keywords: tourism; sustainable development; local communities; ecotourism; rural tourism

JEL Classification: Q01

1. Introduction

A series of changes occurred lately in terms of tourism services' consumer behaviour. Tourism market grew more segmentary and heterogeneous as a result of the diversification and fragmentation of social groups (Munster, 2008). Thus, the niche tourism becomes more and more attractive through adventure tourism (such as underwater journeys, trips to unexplored locations or around the world, etc.), luxury tourism (like cruises), or various kinds of sustainable tourism, etc. With regard to this latter case, the raising in the awareness on environmental issues the society is faced with, as well as an increase in public's responsibility for the protection of the environment and resources has determined and is prompting a lot of people to take up different forms of sustainable tourism.

The idea of sustainable tourism development is becoming more popular and refers to "achieving a kind of tourism growth that prevents environmental degradation, since such a fact could have serious consequences on the future quality of life" (Nijkamp, 1999, p. 2). In this very respect, sustainable tourism grew into an

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extremely popular area of research as of late 1980's (Liu, 2003). Buhalis and Fletcher (1992) cited in Nijkamp (1999, p. 2) point out the fact that sustainable tourism means that "the demand from a growing number of tourists is satisfied in a way which continues to attract tourists while the needs of host communities are met through the improvement of their life standard, and the environment and the cultural heritage at the destination are safeguarded".

This paper attempts to outline a series of implications at communities' level that the relationship between tourism and sustainable development may generate. In this sense, the paper is organised as presented in the following paragraph.

This way, besides the introduction and the conclusions parts, a synthesis of some of the main approaches on sustainable tourism provided by the specific scientific literature is outlined. Afterwards, a series of principles and instruments for sustainable tourism are highlighted, while the last part of the paper focuses on the main forms of sustainable tourism, with implications for local communities.

2. A Synthesis of Various Approaches on Sustainable Tourism

Nistoreanu et al. (2003) consider sustainable tourism as "a development of all kinds of tourism, tourism management and marketing that respects the natural, social and economic environmental integrity, while ensuring the exploitation of natural and cultural resources for future generations". Another approach is built on the idea that "sustainable tourism meets the needs of the present tourists and tourism industry, while protecting the environment and future opportunities, attempting to address all tourism actors' demands of an economic, social, aesthetic, etc. nature, and maintaining the cultural and ecological integrity, the biological diversity and all life-supporting systems" (WTO, 1995, cited in Sava, 2006, p. 59). Following the same idea, Agnati (1999, p. 79) emphasizes the fact that sustainable tourism embodies "all forms of development that allow the meeting of its own needs and the achievement of its own objectives without compromising the possibility of future generations to meet their own needs and achieve their own objectives". Another series of approaches on the concept of sustainable tourism with an impact in the specialty literature was synthetised by Trumbic (1999, p. 53), as follows:

- "Blangy, 1997: sustainable tourism applied in a particular area is any form of development, supply of facilities or tourist activities that takes into consideration the respect for communities and long-term conservation of natural, cultural and social resources, and positively and equitably contributes to the economic development and well-being of the human communities that dwell, work and live in such areas;

- Thibal, 1997: sustainable tourism is based on the development of natural, cultural and social resources with the aim to improve the life standard and quality of local residents, while visitors' expectations and needs are met and natural habitats and cultural identity are preserved for future generations;
- Ashiotis, 1995: sustainable tourism should guarantee the integrity of all non-renewable resources while maintaining its economic viability in a highly competitive international market;
- Travis, 1994: sustainable tourism is represented by all forms of tourism development, tourism management and tourism activity that allow a long-term operation of the cultural activity which is called tourism, implying a series of tourism products that are compatible with the preservation of protected heritage resources of a natural, cultural or anthropogenic nature, all of which make possible the tourism activity;
- Middleton, 1998: sustainable tourism calls for a certain combination of numbers and types of visitors that show a cumulative effect for a given destination; such cumulative effect added by active businesses in the services sector may carry on during the foreseeable future without impairing the quality of the environment where the activities are carried out."

A good conclusion of the various approaches to sustainable tourism would be that of Băc (2012). This author points out that the concept of sustainable tourism emerged as an attempt to obtain a precise estimation of tourism's negative impact on host communities. Moreover, it can be noted that in general the definitions emphasize elements associated to sustainable development as promoted within official documents (e.g., the Brundtland Report) such as ecosystems integrity, economic development and equity within and between generations. Also, the ideas of equity, environment and development are promoted; these elements are best highlighted in the so-called "magic pentagon" of sustainable tourism, considered as a system where economic welfare, visitors' satisfaction, local communities' welfare, local resources' and culture protection are balanced. (Muller, 1994; Nijkamp, 1999 cited in Constantin & Mitruț, 2009). However, the last two definitions, along with those identified in Nistoreanu et al. (2003) and in WTO (1995) cited in Sava (2006) are better oriented to the tourism industry and even emphasize aspects related to the management of tourism.

3. Principles and Instruments for Sustainable Tourism

Tourism and more precisely the whole tourism and travel industry can act as a catalyst to sustainable development since, along with other characteristics, it also contributes a great deal and has a strong economic, social and ecological potential

in the development of all nations, especially of emerging countries (Dickinson, 1999).

Tourism's sustainable development calls for different kinds of performance: economic (for instance, an increase in the level of exploitation of tourism resources), social (for example, an increase in employment, development and preservation of traditional crafts), as well as ecological (such as recycling, avoiding environmental degradation). But in order to accomplish such performance and to develop a sustainable tourism, the specialized literature (Selke, 1999; Jamieson & Noble, 2000 cited in Nistoreanu et al., 2003; Sava, 2006; Denman et al., 2007; Pitoska, 2009; Choi & Murray, 2010; Ruhanen, 2012; Saufi, O'Brien & Wilkins, 2014) highlights a number of underlying principles, as follows:

- the adoption of a global and integrated approach that would allow - especially in the phases of tourism planning and development - the identification and highlighting of the impact of tourism at all levels and also the integration of tourism in all the activities having an impact on the society and the environment;
- the sustainable planning of tourism must be carried out on the long run and must consider the needs of current and future generations;
- the action by all parties involved, especially by the local and national administrations; the struggles for power, a superficial involvement of authorities, as well as a strong influence over the local structures from the part of the local authorities are not recommended as they practically hinder the sustainable tourism development;
- the decrease in the seasonality of tourism demand;
- the management of tourism transport's impact on the environment;
- permanent improvement of labour conditions for the tourism personnel;
- preservation and even improvement in the level of local communities' prosperity and quality of life, in spite of all changes that may appear;
- minimization in the use of resources and waste production;
- preservation and capitalization of the natural and cultural heritage;
- an appropriate development of the technical infrastructure is necessary so that an easy access to water resources, sewage and waste recycling systems is ensured;
- it is recommended that tourism activity be developed on the basis of local communities' own means;
- it is recommended that local communities maintain control over the tourism development in their regions;
- the full involvement of local communities is a key factor for a sustainable tourism in the region;

- tourism should contribute to the creation and development of new jobs for the resident inhabitants and implicitly to an increase in local communities' living standard and quality of life;
- it is necessary to have a balance between the economic activities that are already performed in the area and the tourism activities;
- based on the recognized international standards, a code of tourism practices at the national, regional and local level should be prepared, developed and complied with;
- the development of educational and training programmes aimed at improving the management in the field of natural and cultural resources' protection is recommended;
- tourism must be considered a positive activity beneficial to the environment, local communities and visitors;
- it is necessary to develop a relation between the environment and tourism so that the environment can support long-term tourism activity and such activity, on its turn, will not damage the environment;
- the performance of tourism shall respect and be circumscribed to all features of a concerned area;
- it is recommended that there is a balance between the needs of tourists and those pertaining to the destination, implicitly those of tourism personnel (the hosts, in particular);
- all tourism-involved actors must be active in the observance of the basic principles of sustainable tourism development and bear responsibility in case of non-observance;
- there is need for international cooperation in the field of tourism, including exchanges related to tourism's sustainable development, that would help, support and assist national and local administrations in the improvement of their environmental and socio-cultural performance in relation to the tourism industry;
- it is necessary to draw up financial reports to establish various environmental monitoring systems that would allow tourism administration from destination countries to more efficiently regulate the environmental performance of private tourism operators;
- it is necessary to prepare and implement a strategy in the field of tourism that would be based on three key elements, that is competitiveness, quality, and environmental sustainability;
- tourism's sustainable development can only be achieved in a collective manner, by putting together "ecological alliances" between political institutions, authorities dealing with regional/landscape planning, tourism services suppliers, NGOs and local communities.

The development of sustainable tourism policies may be a very efficient way to stimulate the emergence of new businesses and jobs and to promote environmental conservation and protection (Castellani & Sala, 2010). Thus, along with the aforementioned principles, one can emphasize a number of policies-related instruments that may be used in order to support the implementation of sustainable tourism, as presented in Nijkamp (1999):

- the information, education and increase in the level of citizens', tourists' and companies' awareness with regard to environmental issues and their role in the society;
- the involvement of governments in the stimulation of companies for the development of an environmentally friendly behaviour, by resorting to various instruments such as subsidies or taxes;
- the development of different legal instruments aimed at developing and stimulating population's accountability for environmental issues;
- provision of an infrastructure necessary for facilitating the development of an environmentally responsible behaviour from the part of individuals and companies (for instance, waste treatment facilities); such infrastructure can be provided by public authorities, by private actors, or even by both parties, through various ways of collaboration, such as public-private partnerships, agreements, etc.;
- implementation of quotas associated to the maximum pollution quantity admissible for a company.

Moreover, according to Blaganje (1999), there are a number of elements and instruments that are highly important for *ensuring the balance between tourism and sustainable territorial development*, such as:

- tourism activities must be planned so as to allow the integration of different socio-economic, cultural and environmental elements, at all levels;
- the ecological, social and cultural value and capacity of each region must be respected;
- tourism activities must be submitted to compulsory environmental assessments;
- in the case of coastal areas, an integrated areas management is needed; such management shall form the basis of a sustainable development that would mitigate or even eliminate pollution or other types of negative impact of activities against the environment, and that would prevent their future occurrence;
- tourism should be restricted in ecologically and/or culturally "sensitive" areas;
- tourism activities promoting and encouraging the use of public transportation and/or non-motorized transportation means should be supported.

The concept of sustainable tourism developed pursuant to the framework documents Bruntland Report and Rio Conference and clearly materialized through "Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Sector" adopted in 1996 by the World

Travel and Tourism Council. However, there are a number of other documents having an impact on the idea of sustainable tourism development, such as the “Charter for Sustainable Tourism” (Lanzarote, 1995), “Manilla Declaration on the Social Impact of Tourism” (1997), “Berlin Declaration on Biological Diversity and Sustainable Tourism” (1997), or the “Global Code of Ethics for Tourism” adopted by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 1999 and by the United Nations Organization (UN) in 2001; the latter document highlights the most important elements from the previous documents and promotes the establishment “of a new world tourism order in a free and open international economy” (Pascariu, 2006, p. 189). Also, in the European Union, the “Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion” mentions the concentration of policies related to the insurance of territorial cohesion through the sustainable use of the specific features of the different territories having a potential for mitigating disparities and increasing competitiveness (European Commission, 2008), with the tourism potential being par excellence such an advantage. The environmental regional and sectoral operational programmes of Member States also reflect this target in a correlated manner.

4. Variants of Sustainable Tourism. Implications for Local Communities

The most important component in the field of sustainable tourism is ecotourism, deemed as a means for a sustainable “use” of wild lands and for protecting communities (Campbell, 2002) and for promoting environmental responsibility and sensitivity (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2010).

Ecotourism, often defined in the specialty literature as ecological tourism, has different meanings and a synthesis of such meanings was identified in Dinu (2002, p. 268):

- “Ceballos-Lascurain (1983) - travel in a pristine and uncontaminated environment aiming to study, admire and enjoy watching landscapes, wild plants and animals, as well as cultural manifestations (past and present) of such areas;
- Hetzer (1965) - a form of tourism that explains the relations that occur between tourists, environment and culture and that is based on a number of principles such as minimum environmental impact, minimum impact on the local culture, maximum respect for the local culture, maximum economic benefits for the local hosts and maximum recreational satisfaction for tourists;
- Fennell (2001) - a form of sustainable tourism, based on natural resources, concentrated mainly on the direct contact with nature and on learning various knowledge about the nature, and that should have a low impact on the

environment, with no consumption, targeted towards the welfare of local communities (control capability, benefits, dimensions). Also, it is a sort of tourism that is carried out in natural areas and must contribute to their conservation and protection.”

The latter definition is considered by Dinu (2002, p. 267) as one of the most complete, the author having her own definition of ecotourism: “travelling in natural areas so as to learn about the host communities, thus generating economic opportunities for the support of ecosystems’ conservation and protection”. Also, another definition of ecotourism identified in Cocean, Vlăsceanu and Negoescu (2002, p. 223) emphasizes that this is “a particular form [of tourism] practiced in pristine and culturally traditional areas that tend to become areas for the protection of nature and perennial human values that substantially contribute to the evolution of local communities”. Following the same idea, Nistoreanu et al. (2003) consider ecotourism as “a form of tourism performed in natural areas with the aim to learn about and treasure the local nature and culture, that implies conservation measures and ensures an active involvement, and that generates benefits for the local population”.

On analyzing the previously presented definitions one can note that most of them emphasize the fact that ecotourism takes place in natural and cultural areas, has a minor impact on the environment, is based on conservation principles and even on principles related to the improvement of natural, cultural and in general environmental resources, promotes the involvement of local communities, contributes to the increase in local communities’ welfare, involves the obtaining of high levels of tourist satisfaction through the direct contact tourists have with the environment and local communities.

Ecotourism must preserve, protect and even develop the natural environment. In this respect, a strategy for this kind of tourism is needed. Such strategy should be based on various principles, such as: the areas where ecotourism is practiced must be considered of continental or global interest, must be a part of the Earth’s tourist heritage; the negative effects on the natural environment and local communities must be mitigated through ecotourism; ecotourism must contribute to the management of protected areas; ecotourism must generate economic and social benefits to local communities; ecotourism must facilitate and favour an authentic interaction between tourists and the local population; ecotourism must create different opportunities for the local community in order to obtain a sustainable development as well as the conservation and capitalization of special cultural and natural objectives; etc. (Bran, Simon and Nistoreanu, 2000 cited in Cocean, Vlăsceanu and Negoescu, 2002).

Thus it follows that ecotourism is considered a significant factor for local development. In this respect, there are many links between ecotourism and ecosystems, the involvement of the local population, the economic opportunities for the local community and the eco-development as shown in Figure no. 1. The respect of ecosystems' integrity is an important point in most sustainable development projects and emphasizes the importance of natural environment in obtaining tourism benefits. On one hand such benefits cannot be obtained without the involvement by the local population. On the other hand, the economic opportunities for the local communities are varied; important parts of the revenues obtained from tourism activities may be used for the continuation and support of projects already started, as well as for performing new projects that are beneficial to the local community.

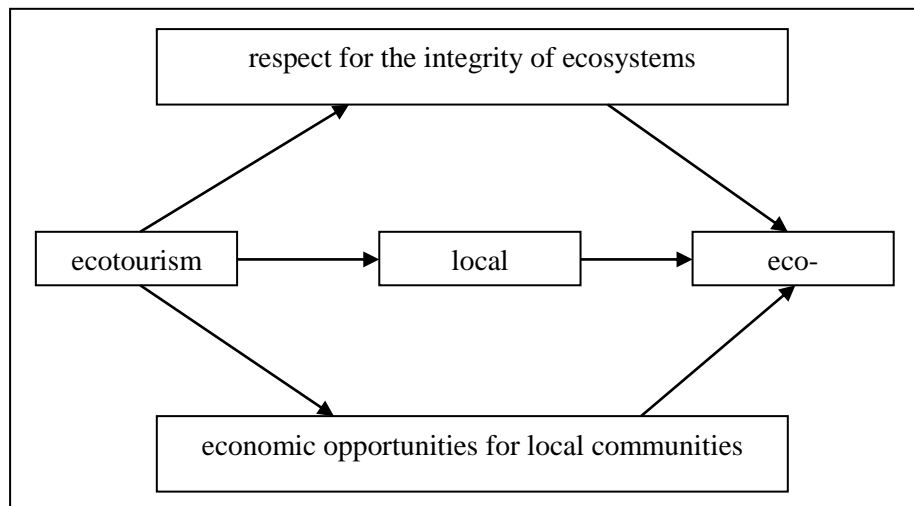


Figure 1. Links between ecosystems, local involvement and local community development

Source: Howkins and Maryam, 1998 cited in Dinu, 2002, p. 270

Within ecotourism diverse forms of sustainable tourism are practiced such as rural tourism, religious tourism, pilgrimage tours, etc.; of these, rural tourism is probably the most practiced form. Last year's socio-economic evolution and the rural environment's outstanding cultural attractiveness has led and continues to lead a growing number of tourists to choose rural tourism (Simion, 2011). This is a kind of tourism that "is practiced in rural areas and has a heterogeneous functional structure of services and accommodation facilities consisting in guest houses, motels, camping, school camps, art camps, ecological activities camps, vacation villages, etc." (Dinu, 2002, pp. 261-262), highly characterized by particular aspects based on territoriality, a fact that emphasizes everyday life, the local communities'

history and traditions (Ciugudean (Popa), 2009). Nistoreanu et al. (2003) argue that rural tourism activities show a number of features such as rural location, tourism products created following the characteristics of rural communities, the rural and traditional features, the diversity of presentation forms, preservation of cultural identity, etc. Moreover, the same authors argue that rural tourism has particular features, such as closeness-to-nature, serenity, close knowledge of places and local communities, knowledge of local businesses, the chance of integration into the local community during the stay, contact with local people and local authorities, etc.

The revaluation of cultural values and landscape importance, as well as the increase in personal mobility and the possibility to freely organize their leisure time determines a growing number of tourists to choose rural tourism. Rural tourism attracts more and more tourists since this kind of tourism is deemed by specialists as a diversity generator for rural economies (Vogelij, 2004). In this respect, there are particular aspects associated to the supply and not only to the demand. Thus, farmers diversified their available supply and enhanced the quality of their services. The development of rural tourism triggers different mutations within villages, such as an appropriate capitalization of village-related resources, changes in the field of rural area planning by developing new tourism constructions and information kiosks, sport facilities, etc., changes in the structure of crops, avoidance of villages' depopulation by creating new jobs, development of small rural businesses that capitalize agricultural products, revival of traditional crafts, generation of new income sources for local communities, fighting environmental pollution, designing sustainable development solutions for the following sectors: agricultural, forestry, animal farming, agrotourism, etc. (Cocean, Vlăsceanu and Negoescu, 2002). Also, rural tourism contributes to an increase in local tourism circulation, a growth in the cultural, educational and civilization levels of villagers, an economic growth of local communities, development of regions where rural tourism is practiced. Rural tourism is considered in many regions as a way to safeguard villages, especially those with a strong agricultural character, but that for various reasons have lost such character. Moreover, during the last decades many rural areas from industrialized countries were affected by different issues of the regional, national and local economies, such as: local populations' decline, migration towards urban areas or other countries, income decreases, reductions or worsening of public services, losses to local cultures and identities, etc. Thus, according to Holland and Crofts (1992) and Potts et al. (1992) cited in Dinu (2002), the issue of implementing new structures so as to allow for the economic, social and cultural recovery of local communities as well as for their prosperity is increasingly raised, with tourism being a solution. The persons involved in the preparation and implementation of local development policies consider tourism as

a method to re-establish the economic and demographic balance of local communities. For instance, in the European Union, within the Rural Development Policy 2007-2013 the LEADER methodology is promoted. Such methodology is a way to achieve local development partnership promotion, increasing territorial development, using the endogenous development potential and innovation and cooperation stimulation by local actors (European Network for Rural Development, 2013).

Moreover, tourism is part of the strategy of many local development agencies. In this respect, there are a number of associations that promote rural tourism. For example, in Europe there is the European Federation of Rural Tourism (EuroGites) which, among other aspects, works to promote the European cultural, social, historical, natural and environmental heritage through a tourism concept based on the direct contact and interaction with local communities, in the context of sustainable rural and tourism development (EuroGites, 2010). In Romania, the National Agency for Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism (ANTREC) functions as of 1994 as a non-governmental organisation, member of the EuroGites network, with the aim to support the organized development of the Romanian rural tourism, to encourage and promote the ecological conservation and to preserve the Romanian traditions. The association has 2,500 members - owners of tourism and agrotourism guest houses - from 800 locations in 32 counties, and starting from 2007 its activity is structured on the eight Romanian economic development macro-regions having a highly important role in regional development (ANTREC, 2011).

Within rural tourism, agrotourism is one of the most frequented forms of tourism. Agrotourism is a complex form of tourism which merges natural environment, accommodation facilities and agrotourism services and capitalizes natural resources and the economic potential of local households through the development of accommodation services and the promotion of local produces and products. Furthermore, by practicing rural tourism tourists are involved in various household activities, as well as in activities of the local community and region, and implicitly in the regions' economic growth (Dinu, 2002). This explains why the National Programme for Rural Development includes special provisions on the diversification of the rural economy and the improvement of the quality of life in rural areas. The orientation towards the protection of the cultural and natural heritage from rural areas, "the creation, improvement and diversification of tourism facilities and attractions" (Romanian government, 2012, p. 85) are also mentioned.

5. Concluding Remarks

Managed in a proper way, tourism can represent an important means for ensuring a sustainable development and to promote and sustain local communities. One of the most representative and important components of sustainable tourism, respectively ecotourism that has a minor impact on the environment and that is based on conservation principles and even on principles related to the improvement of natural, cultural and in general environmental resources, promotes the involvement of local communities and contributes to the increase in local communities' welfare. Also, from another perspective, through preserving, protecting, and even developing the natural environment, ecotourism can represent a significant factor for local development. In this respect, there are many links between ecotourism and ecosystems, the involvement of the local population, the economic opportunities for the local community and the eco-development. The respect of ecosystems' integrity is an important point in most sustainable development projects and emphasizes the importance of natural environment in obtaining tourism benefits. On one hand such benefits cannot be obtained without the involvement by the local population. On the other hand, the economic opportunities for the local communities are varied; important parts of the revenues obtained from tourism activities may be used for the continuation and support of projects already started, as well as for performing new projects that are beneficial to the local community. Also, by promoting different forms of sustainable tourism within ecotourism, such as rural tourism and agrotourism, local communities can benefit from different positive changes, such as an appropriate capitalization of village-related resources, changes in the field of rural area planning by developing new tourism constructions and information kiosks, sport facilities, etc., changes in the structure of crops, avoidance of villages' depopulation by creating new jobs, development of small rural businesses that capitalize agricultural products, revival of traditional crafts, generation of new income sources for local communities, fighting environmental pollution, increase in local tourism circulation, growth in the cultural, educational and civilization levels of villagers, economic growth of local communities, in few words: *the development of regions where sustainable tourism is practiced.*

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