

Ecotourism of the Lake Tisza

Rezümé Jelen tanulmány kettős céllal született: egyrészt a Phare CBC program által támogatott, és a magyar-szlovák határ keleti részén megvalósuló kisprojekt néhány részletét hivattot bemutatni, másfelől röviden elemezzük a határ menti területeket érintő euroregionális törekvések megvalósítását – elsősorban turisztikai szempontból. Ennek azért kell különös fontossággal bírnia, mivel a WTO a 2002-es évet az ökoturizmus évének nyilvánította. Az Európai Unióba való belépés egyik alapfeltétele a szomszédos országokkal való jó viszony kialakítása és fenntartása. A határokon átnyúló együttműködések széleskörű fejlesztése egyike lehet az Eurorégió által végrehajtandó feladatoknak.

Abstract The present study has a double aim: partly to introduce some details of a Small Project realised in the eastern part of the Hungarian-Slovakian border and supported by the Phare CBC programme, and partly to give a brief analysis of the implementation of the Euroregional endeavours taking place in the border region – primarily from the aspect of tourism. It shall get a special role since the WTO designated the year 2002 as the year of ecotourism. One of the basic preconditions of the accession to the European Union is the creation and maintenance of good neighbourhood relations. The wide-scale development of the cross-border co-operations could be one of its forms of implementation which are to be carried out by the Euroregions.

By the end of the 20th century it became obvious that the direction tourism had been heading for (and still is) would cause the destruction of those natural elements that form the basis of these tourist products. Negative effects deriving from motion, staying and different forms of leisure activities lead to pollution and quantitative decrease of natural resources, to the endangerment of the unmolested and diverse wildlife, and in many places to the destruction of natural landscapes.

1. Ecotourism

According to the Hungarian experts of tourism the promotion of ecotourism is one of the development objectives of the Hungarian tourism which involves great opportunities and mostly unexploited. The weight of this sector increases at a rapid pace – at least according to the estimations because no relevant surveys have been made yet. The opportunities lying in the sector have not been analysed by anyone so far, neither the number of “ecotourists” coming to Hungary is known nor the incomes deriving from this branch of tourism. Relying on the local experience we may establish that mainly the Austrian, German, Dutch, Scandinavian and British nature-lovers come to Hungary (Dávid-Jancsik-Rátz, 2007).

This special branch of tourism grows spectacularly all over the world, thus it may be expected that this tendency shall strengthen in East Central Europe as well (DÁVID, L., 2010). For the time being, the destination points of ecotourism in Hungary are located on the areas of the national parks. Until quite recently, the parks did not urge tourism everywhere, but from the last year there are full-time employed tourism experts at the directorate of all the then national parks and the survey of the most important sights has been started. The foreign “ecotourists” visit Hungary primarily to see the rare birds, the national parks and the geological formations. Hungary has such natural resources which could be profited by both the formation of the image of the country and the promotion of tourism. Besides the national parks, there is also an opportunity for this on the areas of the landscape protection areas and the larger landscapes including these kinds of areas.

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Ecotourism brings equilibrium between the target area of tourism, the relaxation, the active recreation and the economic value formation. Since the development of tourism more and more often bumps into ecological barriers, ecotourism is often mentioned as cure for the damages caused by mass tourism.

Its contextual criteria are the following:

- preservation of the untouched nature;
- conservation of the original social and cultural conditions;
- creation of the optimal nature-friendly recreation for the guests.

The environment-friendliness of the gentle tourism may be outlined in the following way:

- there should be less intervention to the natural processes;
- smaller areas should be put in to use;
- the image, atmosphere of the landscape should be changed to the smallest extent, for example, establishments built should suit the landscape;
- the maintenance of the nature-close farming should be attempted; concise landuse plans should be prepared which include the necessary limitations as well.

For the widespread of the aims of the gentle tourism the following are indispensable:

- gathering of information and orientation for others;
- closer co-operation between the tourist organisations and the environmental associations;
- elaboration of joint concepts in some field for all economic sectors.

When understanding ecotourism, we have to consider four important aspects: small groups (and system of personal services), basement on natural values, sustainable control and criterions of education and definition. The popularization of ecotourism is undeniably true as well. (Figure 1)

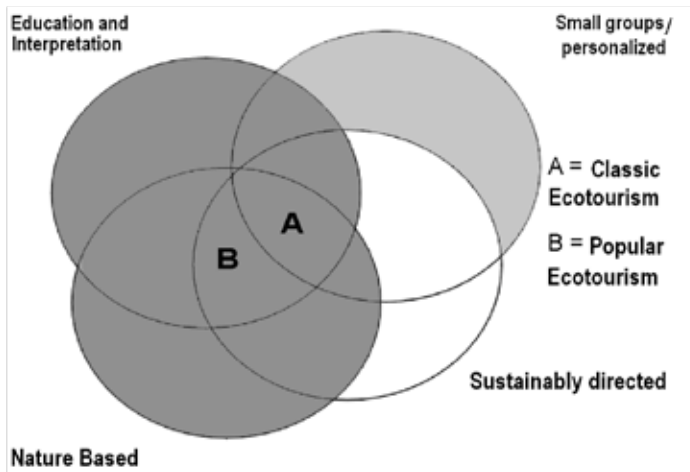


Figure 1. Dimensions of ecotourism (Source: Weaver 2003)

2. Sustainable tourism development of the Lake Tisza

After the socialist era, both the unused touristic opportunities and the question of environment protection in the Lake Tisza area (Figure 2) came in focus of the rural development policy (Michalkó 2007). Even at that time, many well-known experts urged

sustainable tourism development in Lake Tisza (Tózsza, Kovács, Z., Csordás-Kovács), and regarded the restriction of unauthorized camping as the most important step. Unauthorized camping became wide-spread in the area in the 1980's – it is still very popular among anglers – and its negative effects can be felt even today (transport, pollution, litter, destruction of the environment, eradication of vegetation on shores). Although the lack of adequate accommodation contributed to this problem, low costs and the romantic images of nomadic life motivated the families and groups of friends to stay in permanent tents set up on shores.

Despite its fast development, the tourism of Lake Tisza still suffers from many basic problems. Although it is now one of the most outstanding resorts of Hungary (Dávid, L. – Tóth, G. – Kincses, Á. – Kelemen, N.- Kovács B. 2009), sustainable tourism development is an important question in the region even today. Our question-based surveys that were made around the lake showed that both the locals and environment specialists accept the increased number of tourists in the settlements, but they also miss infrastructural developments (roads, litter containers). The elderly spending their holidays here consider noise pollution in areas that are near car parks and roads, and night clubs operating in summer (e.g. in Abádszalók) as a significant problem. The middle-aged are mainly bothered by the litter that the anglers and unauthorized campers leave behind. Anglers often leave their litter behind including plastic bait boxes, which can often be seen at fishing sites or floating on the water.

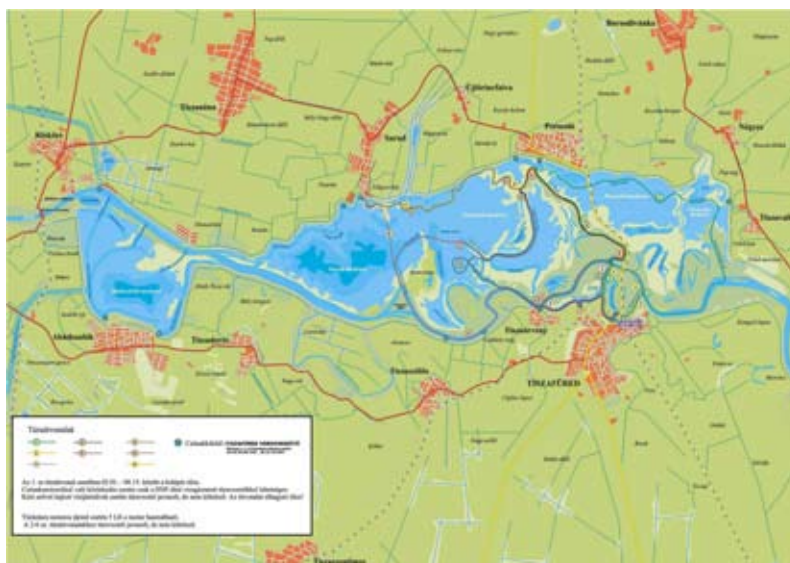


Figure 2. Lake Tisza (www.tisza-to.hu)

According to environment specialists, in the case of sustainable tourism development, Lake Tisza should be considered as a potential water base. With the improvement of the wastewater network, sewage is carried away from most of the holiday homes and from the majority of the settlements (but a complete sewage network would be necessary). Suntan products from bathers' bodies mean a direct hazard: they form a thin film-layer on the water surface so decreasing the oxygen absorbing and transmitting ability of the water and worsening the living conditions of water creatures. The use of jet-skis and motorboats, which is otherwise permitted, was appointed as the biggest problem, since the fuel pollutes the water of the lake and ruins its flora and fauna, at the same time the rotation of the

engine helps oxygen get into the deeper water layers, and increases the oxygen content of the water. Further damaging effects of jet skis and motorboats can be observed in the River Tisza, where the strong waves made by these vehicles tear the spawn off the roots of waterside trees, since these roots that stretch into the water are used by fish as spawning places (Dávid – Michalkó 2008). Therefore, during the spawning period (from the middle of April to the end of May) either general prohibition or at least a strict limitation should be imposed to protect the fish.

3. Eco-tourism of the Lake Tisza

In the past few years, eco-tourism generated the most investments among tourism products. The Bird Reservation of Tiszafüred – as part of the Hortobágy National Park – became protected by the Ramsar Convention in 1979 (the Tiszafüred Nature Protection Area was established in 1973). The most valuable part of the Poroszló Basin, the area bordered by Tisza- Little Tisza Channel No.5 and Balázs Cape (a part of Poroszló and Sarud Basins) was rendered under protection in 1996, which is considered as an international protection area on the basis of the Ramsar Convention. With this enlargement, almost two-thirds of the reservoir area, in other words 7080 hectares, are protected by environment protection laws. Those parts of the bird reservation where the fauna is especially sensitive to disturbance can only be visited by special permit, or for the purpose of research or control (this regulation applies to the Bird Reservation of Pély, too). The construction of the Lake Tisza Water Promenade and Study Path was the greatest development in the region in 2005. With the help of this facility, the visitors can walk along a 1500-metre boardwalk and have a glimpse of the wonderful wildlife of Lake Tisza (Dávid – Bujdosó 2009). The port of the study path, which is about 500 m from the ports of Poroszló, can be reached by boat, but of course, it is also accessible from other settlements by boat. Visitors can take an excursion along a raised boardwalk to sites that used to be inaccessible earlier. Orientation and learning about the natural values are helped by large illustrated information boards. The study path is also accessible by wheelchair, with the only exception being the observation tower. In the year 2007 dedicated to Green Tourism, The Hungarian Tourism Closed JSC paid special attention to the development of the background infrastructure of active tourism and eco-tourism. Besides waterside relaxation, sports and fishing, there is a 70-kilometre-long bicycle path around the lake waiting for cyclists. The last section of the bicycle path between Kisköre and Poroszló (23 km) was finished last year. From the aspect of tourism, it is an important stage in the realisation of the plan that makes cycling round the lake possible. Water tourism is also widespread: it is possible to explore the lake by hiring a boat, canoe or kayak (Molnár – Szabó 2003).

In Tiszaörvény, the “Tiszavirág – May-fly” Floodplain Footpath was constructed as a part of the Szabics port investment in 2007. This study path allows access to Lake Görbe and the floodplain forest that are situated in the protected area of the Hortobágy National Park. Thanks to this footpath, the public may learn about this untouched world in terms of eco- and sustainable tourism. The footpath itself is a 1500-metre-long study path with 10 stations where visitors can learn some information about the life of may-flies. The flora and fauna of Lake Tisza are demonstrated with the help of a special water-mill. The old crafts of the floodplain villages, such as making wattles and carving, are also shown in practice, alongside the old fishing tools.

A 600-litre freshwater aquarium, which shows the wildlife and natural values of the Tisza, is being built in the Poroszló Eco-centre (Table 1), and visitors will be able to admire the panoramic view of Lake Tisza from a look-out tower. The construction is planned to be finished by the end of September 2010. The building will also offer a 3D cinema

with 50 seats, a climbing wall for the extreme sport fans, an eco-market, conference room, event hall, an animal petting zoo, permanent and temporary exhibitions, a freshwater tank and a souvenir shop.

Fishing sites and bird watching towers accessible for physically handicapped people will be developed. This improvement is in connection with the water study paths and ports of Poroszló, and the construction of more study paths are planned that can be followed with the help of GPS. 200 thousand visitors are expected per year, and the investment will provide employment for 20 people (Molnár – Szabó 2003).

Table 1. The increase in the number of visitors at eco-touristic sites in Lake Tisza

	2006 (number of visitors)	2007 (number of visitors)	2008 (number of visitors)
Poroszló, Water Promenade on Lake Tisza	18,000	27,000	30,000
Tiszaörvény, "Tiszavirág" Floodplain Footpath	-	4,500	8,600
Erdőtelek Botanical Garden	4,303	4,607	5,200

Source: Lake Tisza Touristic Project Office, 2009

The professional presentation of Lake Tisza is an elementary interest, and the coordination of the environment protection and tourism is also a primary task. The appearance of crowds of irresponsible and disorganised visitors threaten the lake with a tragic future. In this case, the pressure on the environment can reach such an extent that the attraction of Lake Tisza cannot be preserved in the long-term due to unauthorised camping and unethical behaviour (Dávid, L. – Tóth, G. – Kincses, Á. – Kelemen, N. – Kovács, B. 2007). The current plans (Óhalászi Island, Eco-centre, new study paths) focus on the realisation of these ideas. The purpose of sustainable development, tourism development and the improvement of life standards can be carried out this way.

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