

Economic and Social Effects of the Development of Recreation and Environmentally Sound Tourism through the Example of a Hungarian National Park

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Introduction

The Aggtelek National Park, fourth in Hungary, was established in 1985. Its extension is 20 170 ha, the main part of which is nominated as Biosphere Reserve. The caves of the Aggtelek and Slovak Karst were designated as a world heritage site by the World Heritage Committee of the UNESCO in 1995 becoming the first such site among the Hungarian natural values. The World Heritage Status, the outstanding natural values, the landscape and climatic conditions and the traditional culture together provide excellent conditions for the complex tourism developments of the region.

The geographical position of the Aggtelek National Park is favourable regarding both domestic and international tourism. This is due to the fact that large international traffic is present on the M26 and E71 routes – that encircle the national park – because of the presence of the Slovakian border. However, protected areas are found distant enough from these routes – considering dis-

turbance and air pollution (figure 1.) The national park is found in the vicinity of the former heavy industrial triangle marked by the towns Miskolc-Kazincbarcika-Ózd having a total population of around 252 thousand people. The Aggtelek National Park is a favourite recreation destiny for people living here but numerous visitors arrive from other points of the country – around 200 thousand people a year (Domán 1998).

The economic restructuring in Hungary after 1989-90 found the heavy industry in drastic recession. Its negative effects affect this region in multiple ways, considering both the environment and the community. The social effects of the economic structure's change are even more highlighted. Mass dismissals generated a significant unemployment rate, leading to the increase of the so-called "living crimes". This process is unfavourable from the aspect of both environmental protection (e.g. wood stealing) and coming visitors. Besides unemployment, the poor infrastructure (e.g. lack and poor provision of roads, railway) together with poverty give reasons of the transmigration of the younger generation resulting the accelerated ageing of the population (Statistics Handbook of B-A-Z County 2004).

Undeveloped infrastructure and the difficult accessibility prevent the development of tourism. However, this isolation assists the preservation of the motives of folk architecture and the craftsmanship traditions presenting opportunities for the development of country tourism.



Figure 1: Geographical position of the Aggtelek National Park.

Village housing would provide a solution to the poor standard of commercial accommodation that is the result of the general poverty in the region and to the weakness of the entrepreneurs.

The direct consequences of the transit character of tourism are the low number of visitors and the low level of revealing of tourist values, so the guarantee for a return of investments is relatively low. Thus the senescent resident population shows distrust in relation with tourist developments. The recently performed GEF program is trying to solve these problems.

Methods

The necessity of the program is proven by the fact that, though there are several unfavourable effects on the natural environments of Central Europe, not less than 30 % of it is still rich in natural values. In the frame of the GEF program we perform a direct analysis on the support capacity of a defined research area, determining the loadability of the landscape. We developed a system of aspects essential in the course of planning the tourist utilization of a given object.

The contentment of attendants (as customers) and inhabitants (relating their disturbance) is measured by questionnaires, while to detect the contribution of the tourism to the local economy we also made a data collection among tourist service companies, especially focusing on the effects of tourism on employment conditions, on living standard and on general price level.

Results

In the researched area, significant, but recently idle cultural and natural capacities – related to the sustainable development of environmentally sound tourism – are available, the development of which can improve the competitive power of the tourist sector, decreasing at the same time the undesired concentrations in space and time. However, the development of capacity for acceptance of tourism and the establishment of services of high quality promoting the raising of resident times and spending are essential. From the development of tourism, the region can primarily expect the rising of

employment level, the spatial equalization of economic development, the advancement of the image, and an acquittal from the stereotype of the “citadel of heavy industry”.

References

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