

Vandalism and its prevention possibilities in the region of Lake Balaton

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Abstract — Lake Balaton – the largest freshwater lake in Central Europe – has been a favourite destination for hundred thousands of Hungarian and foreign visitors for long decades. The study area of the present paper, the Tapolca Basin that has a Mediterranean atmosphere is found on the northern shore of the lake. Nature protectional measures were able to impede mining damaging the basalt capped buttes of the basin providing scenery of European fame, however, they seem to be powerless against vandalism. Sad picture is gained while hiking on the study trails of the Balaton Uplands National Park experiencing that pointless destruction makes site tables unreadable. The main aim of the paper is to draw attention to that harmonizing current known methods and measures and applying new ideas significant improvement could be reached in protecting our natural values against vandalism at relatively low cost and with some care.

Index Terms — Environmental education, solution possibilities, vandalism, visitor conflicts



1 INTRODUCTION

Lake Balaton – the largest freshwater lake in Central Europe – has been a favourite destination for hundred thousands of Hungarian and foreign visitors for long decades thus the lake is exposed to serious and varied environmental effects primarily due to the seasonal load. The lake and its surroundings have numerous unique natural and cultural values for the protection of which the Balaton Uplands National Park was established in 1997.

Nature protectional measures were able to impede mining damaging the basalt capped buttes of the Tapolca Basin (Figure 1) that has a Mediterranean atmosphere and providing scenery of European fame. In contrary they seem to be powerless against vandalism and

pointless destruction. Sad picture is gained while hiking on the study trails of the National Park experiencing that pointless destruction makes site tables unreadable (Figure 2).

2 WHO ARE VANDALS, WHAT ARE THEIR MOTIVATIONS?

In order to take effective measures against the harms of vandalism we have to identify and define potential criminals and gain information on who with what behaviour attitudes, when and why commit their outrages. It is important to reveal motivations and to understand cause and effect relationships.

Vandalism is defined in the lexicons as follows: “word originating from Latin; meaning wild ravage, pointless destruction committed by the Vandals against the art treasures of the city of Rome. The Vandals were stigmatized forever by unwritten tradition with this word” [1].

Lake Balaton is the place of enthusiastic bathing and untroubled resting for many visi-

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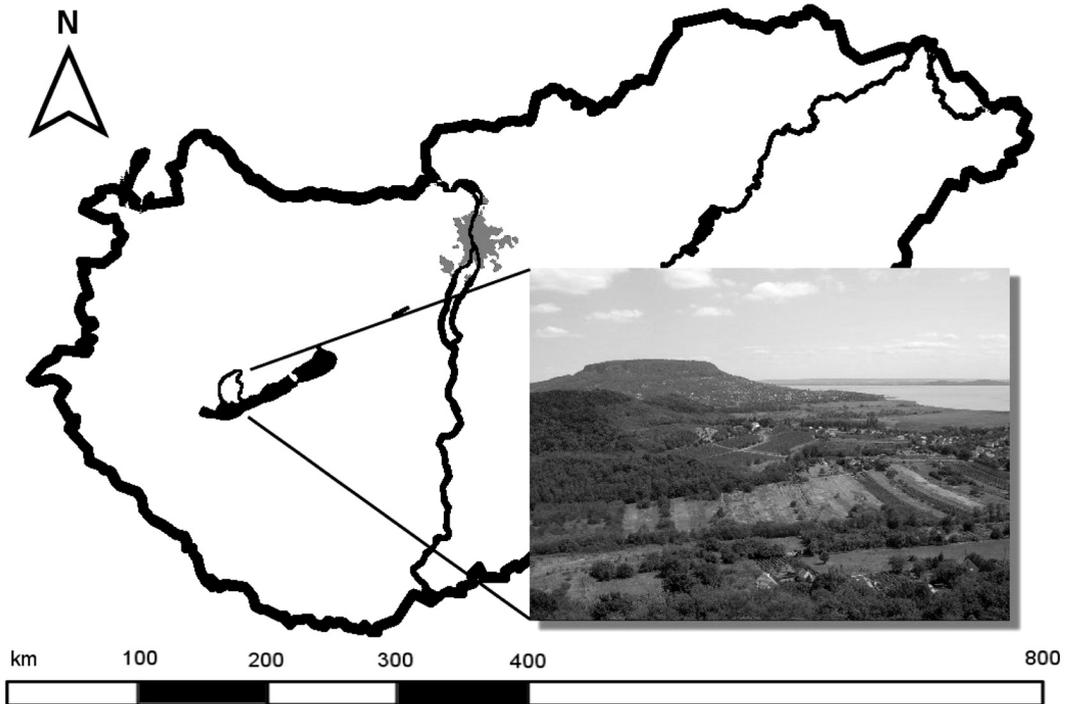


Fig. 1. Tapolca Basin with its beauty and basalt capped buttes on the northern shore of Lake Balaton unique in Europe

tors in hot summers. Or not?! There are few more annoying things than lumbering music of discos nearby makes our head pulsating or ramping drunken people make nights loud when we would like to rest while on holiday.

Naturally this might be true for local bored youngsters as well but as there are no statistics – due to the lack of surprise in the act – on the personality of the vandals we do not know whether they are local or irresponsible tourists. Anyway that segment among the main tourist types can be clearly determined that are liable to vandalism. This segment is fundamentally involves exhibitionist youngsters in all their strength, in abandon partying far away from parent control travelling with friends. We have to find those tasks and activities that would make these youngsters feeling useful for their environment including Nature as well.

Importance of **environmental education** is well known in Hungary today. Therefore, it is important to take measures as soon as pos-



Fig. 2. Traces of vandalism along the study trail on the hill of Badacsony

sible and as effectively as possible, bearing in mind the tight balance of strict measures (surprise in the act), strict control and environmental experience based on the “*AHA-effect*” (recognition, realisation).

This can be experienced by the youngsters when active leisure time is based on the methods of experience pedagogy as this means primarily direct experience.

Orientation, calling attention are important and widely used measures of nature protection. On the other hand publications are rare that give information particularly on the magnitude of destruction and abuse (including e.g. flower collection and wood stealing as well) and on the fines for them. Most damage is caused by ignorance. If visitors knew that which activity entails what fines most destructions would be impeded.

As this type of environmental risks triggered by tourism is increased further by that Lake Balaton is advertised as the “place of stormy parties” by the offers of some travel agencies of certain countries, it is important to draw attention to **the role of marketing**. This kind of control could be the first step towards protection.

3 ZONE SYSTEMS TO CONSERVE PROTECTION AREAS

The next step is the question of **areas** i.e. how and where to orientate visitors once they are at the site. The Balaton Act of 2000 outlines the idea of dissecting the area of Lake Balaton and its environment into 5 regions of different profiles in order to classify visitor activities of different type that even disturb each other occasionally. Logically associated activities are concentrated into one area unit [2].

This corresponds well to the ideas of foreign property investors preparing for large investments in the region according to which the western part of the Balaton Uplands – including our study area the Tapolca Basin as well – would specialise in wine and gastronomy together with ecological and wellness tourism. On the other hand amusement

centres together with outing and event sites would be concentrated solely – in order to reach the above aims as well – to the southern shore [3].

Probably this regional dissection could not solve entirely the problem that is focused in this paper as free transition would be present among the areas, however, different types of visitors would certainly be concentrated. In simple everyone would visit that part of Lake Balaton – and would probably book his/her accommodation as well – where visitor’s activities most suitable for him/her are offered. To keep those visitors at the chosen site, appropriate number and type of programmes shall be offered.

Spatiality can be studied from the nature protection point of view as well, i.e. visitor’s activities at a given area can be regulated on the basis of degree of protection. Considering categorising based on zone systems the most widespread is the IUCN categorising, most national parks apply it in Hungary as well. Its essence is based on the onion skin structure as most protected areas are situated in the innermost zone while the rest surround it as buffer zones. This system may operate not just in protected areas but turning the principle inside-out it might could be applied onto every tourist object and their surroundings.

For example (Figure 3) **zone one** can be the visitors’ centre where the average visitor gains every important information concentrated in a building, briefly, however, in entertaining form. The **next zone** can be the site of exhibitions established in the park or garden of the visitors’ centre. This is a higher grade of meeting Nature as presentations are held outdoor, however, still in closed and controlled environment.

Zone three is the largest regarding spatial extent and it has the highest degree of protection as well. Today in Hungary study trails operating completely without control are most prone to vandalism even if most of them runs through protected areas (e.g. national park, landscape protection area, nature reserve) and they are under the control of the given

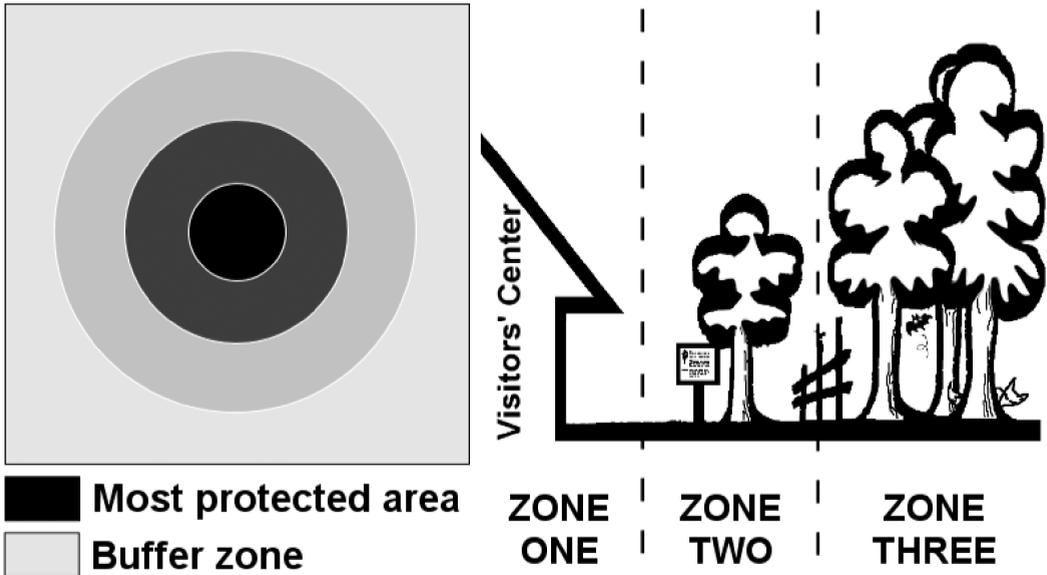


Fig. 3. Sketch figure of IUCN categories and zones according to intensity of visitor interest Draw: Sz., Molnár

nature protection guard in theory. This means complete lack of control in practice because in contrary to the European practice (1000 ha/guard) in Hungary areas of around 4000-5000 ha are under the control of one nature protection guard [4]. With such areas and number of guards continuous presence and effective control is impossible.

On the other hand most of the study trails in Hungary are free of charge in order to enable more-and-more people to improve their environmental attitude in a country that stays significantly behind other European countries in this respect. However, this aim is worth nothing if people demanding information and knowledge gain only annoyance when information tables are unreadable (see Figure 2)...

Regarding the above, the idea is worth consideration to establish entrance systems – similarly to caves that can be visited by tourists – in the study trails of Hungary the operational costs of which would be financed by an entrance fee chosen well from every aspect. This means a fee that does not frightens away visitors enjoying Nature and demanding environmental information but keeps out those who enter the trail only to destroy. Thus

spending willingness is also a kind of differentiating factor and may prove to be a filter among visitors.

4 OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS TO ELIMINATE VANDALISM IN NATURAL SITES

In the following some concrete ideas and simulation practices regarding effective measures against vandalism are given.

1. Simulation: Entering study trails only with professional guides, park guards, vigilantes or volunteers wearing national park T-shirt would solve the problem. Continuous presence of authority (liveried) would prove to be retentive. The operation costs of patrol services should be financed by those charged for destruction giving even further emphasis to deterrence and prevention.

Hungarian law recognises the trainband as a volunteering civil social organisation and its operation is regulated by Act LII of 2006. This act emphasises the importance of the organisation and strengthens and institutionalizes the possibility of volunteer participation of inhabitants as a social or-

ganisation in environment and nature protection that are important in our study as well. Adding the 75000 members of the trainband [5] to the **nature protection guards** and **foresters** their work can be made more effective and problems caused by the lack of staff described in the previous chapter can be solved by the **harmonized work** of 4 officials if they are completed by the **police** [6].

2. Simulation: A solution would be presented regarding visitor control if a volunteer would work at the start points of study trails who has basic psychological and sociological knowledge – that could be obtained in courses organised by the affected national parks or local governments – and who based on the above mentioned criteria could easily recognise visitors of potential danger. The only task of such a volunteer is to detect and filter “suspicious visitors” and still to behave so that tourists would not feel this kind of discrimination. The volunteer would sign at detection – via mobile phone or any other non striking sign – to another volunteer guard e.g. with a bicycle.

From this point the guard with the bicycle takes over the task and companies the group inconspicuously. For example he/she cycles past the group as if working on some sort of a task and as if he/she would ignore the group. In several cases the fact that a guard in a national park T-shirt cycles here-and-there around the group would prevent (prevention) destruction. In more serious cases the cycling guard could record (e.g. photo) destruction while he/she is in continuous connection to authorities having tether for surprise in the act ¹ (the police in Hungary) who could take measures following the alert of the volunteer guard.

The task of the so called psychological

observer at the starting point of study trails could be extended by a moderator role as he/she offers programs – discussed above – for visitors targeted from vandalism point of view to spend their time actively thus his/her activity may has double use. On the one hand the target group may get closer to the **“AHA experience”** via participating in the programs (mountaineering, castle siege, etc). On the other hand his/her energy is spent for an activity that he/she likes and chose and he/her will has no time to cause trouble by destruction.

3. Simulation: For protection the modern technology can be applied as well for example for subsequent calling to task. Its practical implementation could be an expensive, however, effective method if the visitor may enter and exit the study trail via and entrance gate – similar to the line number issuing automats. Visitors would receive a decorative ticket or card, etc. when entering that can be a memory and it has a number registered in the computer system. Damage could be recorded by for example web cameras operated by PV-panels and hidden in e.g. the bushes in the surroundings of the objects prone to destruction – e.g. information tables, sheds – of course with appropriate law background (e.g. information on camera in action).

The system can be further improved when for example the camera that is in electric connection to the information table records only if the state of the observed object changes (e.g. tear in the covering foil). The automate ticket with recorded list number and microchip received at the entrance can identify those people who were at the place of destruction at the time of recording. Identification can be performed on the basis of bank data recorded on the microchip at purchase or on the basis of mobile phone number if the purchase of the ticket was made by mobile phone. Of course this method may seem to be futuristic, however, as we have experienced so far technology can develop rapidly with large steps...

¹ According to the Hungarian legislation only surprise in the act can be accounted regarding calling to task. Thus modification of the Act could be recommended in order to accept photos and videos, etc. on destructions as evidence in such cases.

5 SUMMARY

Vandalism leaves its traces not only on the walls of houses and in mass transport vehicles of large cities but it deteriorates our nature protection areas and natural values. Besides the methods of environmental education – informing, giving environmental experience, etc. – returning in long term numerous other measures and methods like the principle of regionality, marketing, harmonized work of authorities, civil organisations and volunteers – and the list could be continued for long – are present to restrain pointless destruction.

None of the methods mentioned in the paper is new, all of them are currently in operation in some kind of form and the principle of all of them is applied directly or indirectly in numerous fields. The main aim of the paper is to draw attention to that harmonizing current known methods and measures and applying new ideas significant improvement could be reached in protecting our natural values against vandalism at relatively low cost and with some care.

In conclusion the methods and measures mentioned in the paper alone or in combination, adjusted to the local conditions can be applied in most of the visitor destinations both in Hungary and abroad where appropriate le-

gal background is present and/or there is wish to modify the present law in order to serve the effective protection against vandalism.

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