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*EXISTING AND FUTURE TOURISM POTENTIAL AND THE
GEOGRAPHICAL BASIS OF THEMATIC ROUTES IN SOUTH
TRANSDANUBIA, HUNGARY.*

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Abstract:

Developing thematic routes in Western-Europe already began in the 1970s, recognizing the idea, that the appearance of common, interconnected themes may have entail synergy with several positive effects. The tourism attractions with a thematic character turned into increasingly more popular in the past decades. Attractions with a thematic character can be the *thematic parks*, *thematic events* and the *thematic routes*. With the increase of the thematic routes their functioning became more and more professional representing peculiar or extra special topics. Concerning supply trends they are characterised by a growing interest with also a considerable expansion of the tourist flow. In our study, beyond defining thematic routes, we wished to point out the role of the geographical conditions by concrete case studies in South Transdanubia. Another result of our research is pointing out the existing and future tourism potential of thematic routes in South Transdanubia, Hungary.

Keywords: thematic route, wine route, cultural route, South Transdanubia

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1. THE CONCEPT AND DEFINITION OF THE THEMATIC ROUTES

The direction of the tourism supply development moved towards thematic supplies in the 1980s first in Western-Europe, in the United States of America and in Australia, then in the second part of the decade in East Central Europe and other regions as well.

The thematic supply development means such a planning and realisation that is adjusted to attraction features and uniqueness including all the services that the tourist presses into service. The accentuation of the given region's featuring attraction come into prominence. The forming supplies and their originated travel products chose such a highlighted feature of the rural regions which are able to represent independently the attraction of the given area. In many cases however in the core of thematic attraction development there is an artificial attraction. (AUBERT, A. – CSAPÓ, J. 2002)

The forming of the thematic routes can be reckoned among the methods of the thematic supply development, so the foundation of the thematic parks, or the destination supply development of the close sense.

The thematic routes – according to Puczko, L – Rátz, T. (2000) – are such tourism products which row up natural or man made attractions accessible by different transport forms around a chosen topic or theme. When developing thematic routes, the more increased application of the given attractions is a general aim due to which this supply will be more strongly taking part in the tourism of the given region and area.

In recent years the number of the thematic routes multiplied, while the forms of the cooperation were transformed as well. The earlier loose networks make their co-operation system increasingly stronger, their activity can be characterised by a long-term co-ordination practice.

The participants of the co-operations in the initial period were the operators and proprietors of the attractions – so in a number of cases local governments or organisations owned by the local governments – to which later on the enterprises of the competition sector joined as well. Besides this, to the lower level of hierarchy the co-operation with only marketing functions is characteristic. In this case the aim of the given characters is the increasing of the efficiency of the advertisements besides the reduction of the specific advertisement expenses. On the higher organization level of co-operations with extended activities a standardisation process is experienced with creating a common image. The appearance of such a supply supposes the creation of travel packages as well due to the connecting attractions.

On the successful operation of the thematic routes we find numerous successful methods and examples in an outside Europe. Forming an international co-operation may have a number of advantages but challenges as well to the participants. The creation of the route is seemingly an easy task so the attractions have to be selected and developed adequate to the main theme, and applying management methods as well. It can be referred to the positive effects that considering costs these supplies are created with a small range of investment, they be diverse both spatially and timely, can contribute to the unutilised tourism resources and can captivate a new demand group for the cultural and heritage tourism.

We keep count on the benefits side of thematic route creation that

- They can be realised with a relatively small investment,
- Are able to diverse the tourism demand both timely and spatially,
- They are able to utilize unexploited resources,
- A new demand group can be captivated to the given attraction.



Apart from the above mentioned we may interpret as an additional positive economic effect,

- the motivation of the enterprises among local residents,
- support of investments, and development concerning buildings, infrastructure and human resources,
- the settling down of related services, which can also be used by the local residents,
- the effect of the income increase due to the increasing tourism flow,
- and as a result of the above mentioned workplace creation.

At attractions functioning in the long haul we can find concrete results so the spatial development effect of tourism can be shown as well. Apart from the economic effects the social effects could be of great importance as well, so as the promotion of the connection system between communities and culture.

2. GEOGRAPHICAL BASICS IN FORMING OF THEMATIC ROUTES

The role of an attraction structure in forming the thematic routes

One of the key factors in forming a thematic route is the given area's attractions structure. The development of the attraction structure depends on the external and internal factors. The features of the geographical–natural–social–economic–infrastructural–environment effects basically affect the appearance and structure of the tourism attractions. (BERKI, M. – CSAPÓ, J. 2006) We also take this idea into consideration at the standardisation of the attractions. The natural–social–economical conditions and processes develop those special for centuries, which may turn into travel or tourism attractions in a given era. These background factors serve the individuality which can set out an area or region in the tourism market.

The thematic routes are attached to a geographical region directly so in this case we are unable to involve the independent attractions from the geographical region. The basics for the thematic supply can be served by such attractions which are the well-known products of a given area. The cultural routes create a specific form where the central topic is the memories and values of the cultural heritage.

In Western Europe, but more characteristically in the USA such thematic routes are cherished which' central topic is based on a natural scene with peculiar beauty. In terms of relief features hilly and mountainous regions are preferred in this case. The landscape's beauty is a basic criteria, the charging and damaging of the environment's elements can endanger the basis for route creation.

In the past period another direction of attraction development process began as well characterised by artificial attraction building. In the previous ages the tourism attraction received tourism functions only after a long period of time. In their creation tourism or even spare time and recreation played only a restricted role. Based on the tourism trends of today (AUBERT, A. – BERKI, M. 2007) the popularity of these artificial attractions increase, they belong to the most visited areas of the world. Thematic routes are attached to traditional attractions organically attached to the geographical space. They emphasize the uniqueness and individuality derived from the geographical space by connecting the attractions with similar characteristics.



Thematic routes based on the geographical actuation zone

Based on the geographical actuation zone we can distinguish local/settlement, regional, national and international routes. The actuation zone of the attractions determine the actuation zone of the thematic route as well but the decisive factor is the reputation and appeal of the central site. When choosing the location one has to take into consideration that in the optimal case the route consists sites with nearly the same importance of attractions. It may oppress the others if there is one outstanding site, while in the case of low efficiency actors no intensifying effect is evolved (PUCZKÓ, L – RÁTZ, T. 2002).

The local routes attached to a settlement row up the same locations with connected themes within its boundaries. Among the tourism attractions the locations and routes connected to famous persons play a special role elaborated in most cases by settlement level routes since their spatial effect is restricted in this sense.

The regional and national routes join and coordinate regional and national attractions. It is among the difficulties in their creation solving the task of how the given locations can be connected together – since often they are situated in great distances to each other – bridging the geographical space.

Thematic routes by their itinerary

The thematic routes can be built on existing, concrete roads or on an itinerary created artificially by a thematic route in order to connect the attractions. In the previous case product development means the network organisation of the actors connected to the topic, while in the latter example part of the product development is the actual building of the route as well. At the attractions with existing itineraries the route itself can take over the central role and travelling itself will be the source of the travel experience.

3. THE EXISTING AND FUTURE TOURISM POTENTIAL OF THEMATIC ROUTES IN SOUTH TRANSDANUBIA

3.1. Hungarian examples

In the following section of the paper we would like to highlight the national scene's „best practice” examples focusing on Hungary. These thematic routes can basically be grouped around *the level of their hierarchy* and the *scale of their geographical attractions*.

3.1.1. Thematic Routes on the Low Hierarchy Level

Here in this section we present case studies of thematic routes with low hierarchy level. These routes are characterised by either only marketing functions or they are in the first phase of co-operation.

From the geographical point of view *The Castle Road Association (Kastélyút Egyesület)* thematic route based on architectural heritage of northwest Transdanubia, Hungary can be grouped to the regional level. The association was formed in 2004 creating only a loose co-operation of 12 castles of the area. This type of co-operation escalates only local programs and their only common action is their joint marketing scene on their website. (<http://www.kastelyut.hu/hu/>)

Such an example of cultural heritage in Hungary with a loose co-operational level is the *Kálvária (Way of the cross) thematic route* sticking together the important religious sites of Western Transdanubia. However there is a



certain tourism potential for this thematic route, this programme is still in its initial phase so the only advertising and marketing area is its website again. (www.kalvaria.info.hu)

Such thematic routes with only a low level hierarchy can also be the majority of the *wine routes of Hungary* since they were formed to appear on the national and international market theoretically representing a more strengthened and professional manner, but only the Villány-Siklós Wine Route, created in 1994 functions as a thematic route presenting a common and standardised image (information signposts, common marketing etc.). (www.villany.hu)

Here we can also mention the thematic routes that presently are to be created for example in the *northeast region of Hungary*. These “initial” routes are connected to industrial heritage (the route of iron culture), architectural heritage (Baroque route) or wine regions (Mátra, Eger, Bükkalja, Tokaj-Hegyalja). (www.nordtour.hu)

3.1.2. Standardised Thematic Routes on High Level of Hierarchy with Common Image Presenting International Co-Operation

Here in this section we would like to highlight both cultural and natural attraction-based co-operations that are characteristic and greatly important in Europe’s thematic route structure.

The Heritage Tour project

This international project on *cultural thematic route development in rural areas* is co-financed by the European Union within the INTERREG IIIB CADSES Programme. The project’s “main objective is the protection, thematic organisation and promotion of local cultural heritage in remote/rural/mountainous/border areas in forms of regional and transnational cultural routes. The project’s long term objective is the preservation of local cultural heritage in European villages, and the economic development of rural areas of the EU by assessing and developing their local cultural values into a tourist attraction, providing a good basis for further development of rural tourism.” (HeriTour <http://project.heritour.com/>)

However the programme is only launched in 2007 we consider it as an important representative for international and cross-border co-operation. The four thematic routes of this programme will be based on Church history, industrial traditions, natural values and folk traditions.

3.2. Tourism potential and features of thematic routes in South Transdanubia

The articulated relief, the diverse landscape and the multiple ethnic background of South Transdanubia provides advantageous conditions to the thematic based tourism developments. Among its physical geographical features apart from its main rivers and their background areas we have to highlight the high level of wine culture characteristic to the region while among its cultural values provides a chance for a so called linear attraction development very much favoured in tourism. Such a location of attractions offers the linear bound of tourism attractions (GYENIZSE P., 2000, GYENIZSE P., 2008). Beyond the classical thematic route creation it could further serve as even building a tourism destination representing the spatial characteristics of the region.

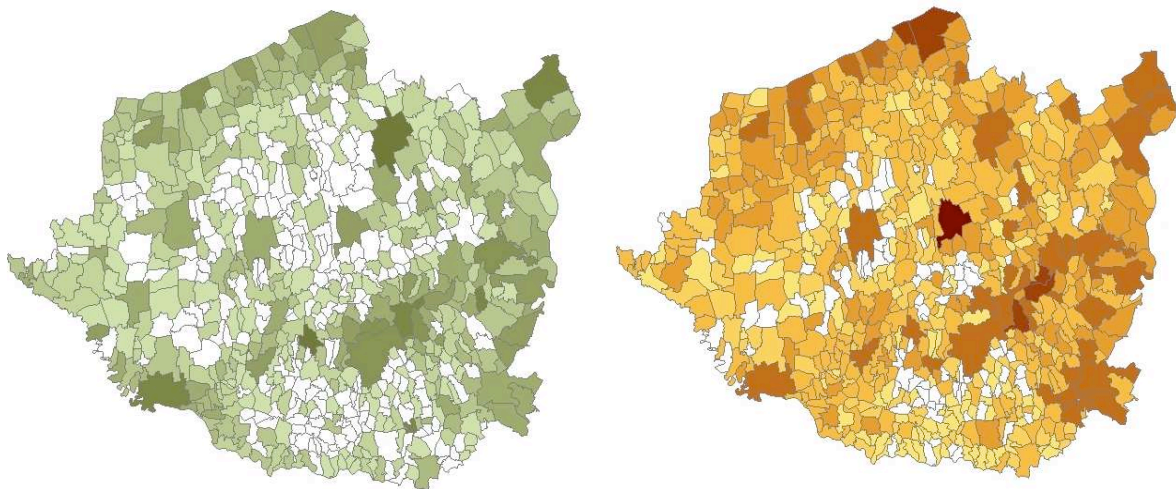
The formation of thematic routes, besides the local governments, was started by the initiation of the Regional Marketing Directorates. This development is competent to invigorate the domestic demand since most of the thematic routes process such regional or national attraction which maintains values for mainly domestic tourists. On the supply side we can see an important role in colligating the actors, in creating the cooperation and in

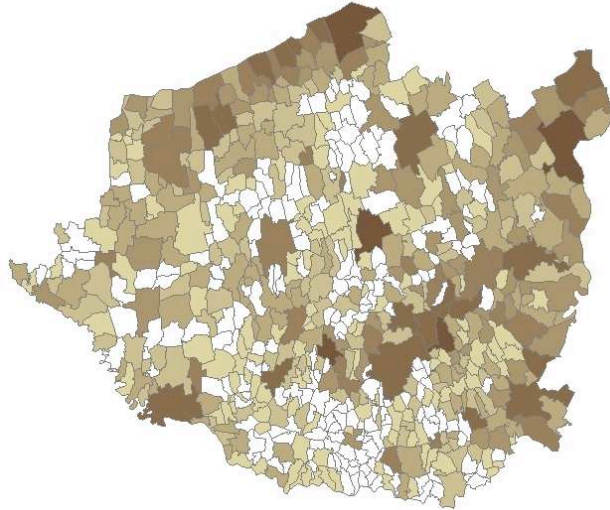


increasing the promptitude to cooperation. The Hungarian Tourism Development Strategy (2005-2013) puts forward the preservation of Hungarian culture above all developments promoting the major aim to sustain the characteristic features of each domestic destinations. The HTDS uses two kinds of spatial preferences in developing the aim areas in other words destinations. It formulates the so called accentuated destinations and further development directions as well, out of which the so called “Network developments of rural areas” organically can be fitted to the research area of this paper. These priorities formulated in the development programmes unfortunately served only a few realised results. The lack of capital in South Transdanubia is very much problematic which also stagnates the development of thematic routes. It is a further disadvantage that the competitive sphere see no direct advantage in functioning thematic routes that is why they play only a restricted role in such initiations. Of course we can find positive counter examples as well but unfortunately in only a few number.

The South Transdanubian region of Hungary possesses a great potential in functioning thematic routes in the area of wine routes since the well functioning Villány-Siklói wine route is situated in its southern areas. Further possibilities are provided by the area of heritage tourism, in which the limes area can be developed to an international attraction as well. The multiethnic background of the region possesses optimal features in creating further thematic routes as well. The following figures show the natural, cultural and special attractions of South Transdanubia.

Figure 1-3. *Number of natural, cultural and special attractions in South Transdanubia*





(Ed.: Pirkhoffer, E. - 2008)

Wine Routes in South Transdanubia

As we mentioned earlier the *wine routes of Hungary* are such thematic routes with only a low level hierarchy since they were formed to appear on the national and international market theoretically representing a more strengthened and professional manner. In the given region, only the Villány-Siklós Wine Route, created in 1994, functions as a thematic route presenting a common and standardised image (information signposts, common marketing etc.). (MÁTÉ A. 2007, www.villany.hu)

Figure 4. The map of the wine routes in Hungary

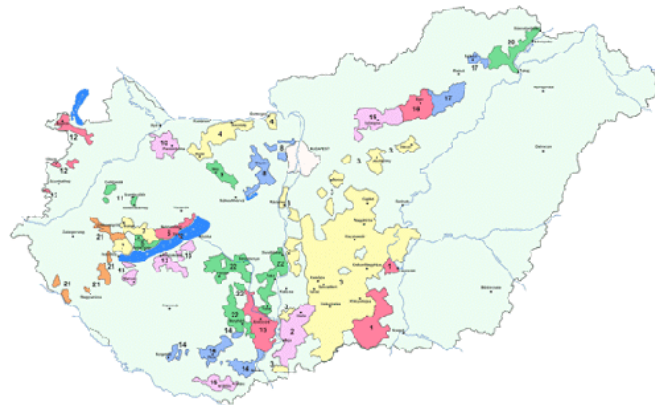


Figure 5. The map of the Villány-Siklós wine route



(Source: www.borut.hu)

“The Villány-Siklós Wine-Route is the first wine-route of Hungary, established in the autumn of 1994 on the basis of the endowments of the Villány region, with the joint efforts of eight settlements, private vine-growers and wine-makers, entrepreneurs, and NGOs, following the example of German, Austrian and French models. As the result of the gradually growing interest in the past years, today the wine-route winds along 11 settlements.” (www.villany.hu)

This wine route was then followed by the Szekszárdi, the Tolnai and the Mohács-Bólyi wine routes. These wine routes of the region are catering the visitors with up to par services and provide a determining element of the tourism supply of South Transdanubia but we also have to highlight that there are significant differences comparing the wine routes in their organised services, cooperation and harmonisation as well. However they can serve as a good example for the service providers of the tourism products in terms of cooperation between the actors and the share of professional experiences. (Dél-Dunántúli Turisztikai Régió Turizmusfejlesztési Stratégiája, 2006)

On the other hand the region still lacks those catering services which could organically be connected to wine tourism and wine routes and the gastronomy of the area. The local traditional foods could provide the uniqueness of the region’s gastronomy and could contribute to the resuscitation of the long forgot traditions and their conservation as well. There are numerous festivals and events connected to wine and gastronomy in the region. Their majority is wine contests and harvest festivals of mainly local importance.

The possibility of the South Transdanubian limes section to become a thematic route

The “limes” is the border area along the former Roman Empire which nowadays is a source for possible cooperation of European countries’ tourism and cultural industry as well. We can find efficient examples in Western Europe for utilising the limes in terms of tourism. Creating an international cooperation could be very advantageous but also it carries a huge challenge for the actors as well. The creation of the route is seemingly simple, one has to choose and develop the attractions adequate to the central topic and utilise the management tools.

Reviewing the section of the Limes in the South Transdanubian region we can state that it appears in the market with only a tight supply portfolio however based on its endowments it would be able to purchase more favourable positions as well. The attractions are spatially situated in the southern areas while its northern areas of

Tolna County show a rather poor supply for the visitors (GYENIZSE, P. –NAGYVÁRADI, L. –PIRKHOFFER, E. 2006), known mainly from the two wine routes of Szekszárdi and Tolnai. The product supply is much differentiated in the area of Baranya County (wine tourism, ethnic traditions, gastronomy, handicrafts and active tourism) (BERKI M.–SZABÓ G. 2008).

In 2003 the Hungarian limes has been listed to the planned domestic world heritage sites list. In connection with this there is an international (British, German, Austrian, Slovakian, Hungarian, Croatian) cooperation and verification in terms of preparing the tender (common web page, choosing and impoundment of factual locations, database phasing, maintenance plan harmonizing). All this would be promoted by a possible cooperation of the Hungarian limes settlements and the creation of a planned cultural route. This cultural route is already promoted by important events and festivals in the region such as the Lugio Day series (gastronomy, and culture) in Dunaszekcső, the International Limes Camp and several other cultural initiatives promoted by the Cultural Heritage Office and the Savaria Legio Traditional Association.

SUMMARY

It can be well observed what changes the increasing interest on thematic routes induces in product development. The attraction zone of the core of the product can be regional, national or international as well. The other factor of the successful market presence is the services completing each other processing similar topics and themes.

In Hungary, in developing thematic locations we find more often thematic routes. In the product development they possess the lower level of hierarchy since they only collect the attractions with the same features at the given regional level. Their market value is represented by brochures and publications.

On the contrary, based on international case studies and examples, we can observe well functioning, factual tourism products. The Hungarian regional locations could adapt and utilise their functional methods as a benchmark. Just like on the international scene, the emphasis is on cultural attractions in South Transdanubia as well – complemented with wine routes and gastronomy – promoting the creation of a new – natural and cultural heritage based – image.



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