

## ROLE OF THERMAL-TOURISM IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT – A CASE STUDY FROM HUNGARIAN SIDE OF THE HUNGARIAN-CROATIAN BORDER

### ULOGA TERMALNOG TURIZMA U REGIONALNOM RAZVOJU - STUDIJA SLUČAJA S MADARSKE STRANE MADARSKO-HRVATSKE GRANICE

**Zoltán SZABÓ**

Senior lecturer

Georgikon Faculty of Pannon University

H-8360 Keszthely

Deák F. utca 16

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**József KOCSONDI**

Professor

Georgikon Faculty of Pannon University

H-8360 Keszthely

Deák F. utca 16

**Zoltán LAKNER**

Professor

Faculty of Food Science

Budapest Corvinus University

H-1118 Budapest, Villányi u. 35

#### SUMMARY

*Hungary has an extremely high level of thermal water potential. This can be a sound base of long-term, sustainable development. This resource is especially important in south-Western part of Hungary, where there is a lack of another endogenous factor of socio-economic progression and workplace creation. After a brief description of thermal tourism in Hungary in general, and in South-Western Transdanubia in particular, the article offers a summary of a direct-question survey, aiming to understand the picture of local municipalities on the thermal tourism on the Hungarian side of Hungarian-Croatian border. Based on a direct-survey among the majors of municipalities, where there is a thermal bath, the research support the economic importance of thermal tourism for the settlements, but the workplace creating role of this activity is relatively low. The distributive mechanism of central resources for tourism development is unsatisfactory. There are numerous fields (e.g. transport infrastructure, joint promotion) where open good possibilities for cross-border cooperation between Hungarian and Croatian tourism-service providers.*

**Key words:** health tourism, medical tourism, settlement development, spa town, spa development

**Ključne riječi:** zdravstveni turizam, termalni turizam, regionalni razvoj, kupališni grad, razvijanje kupališnog grada

## INTRODUCTION

The good therapeutic effects of thermal water has been well known even in the ancient times. In ancient Greece there was a high level of thermal bath culture, in spas like Aselepieae or Heracles. This tradition has been continued by Romans. In numerous developed Western-European states the thermal tourism is an important engine of the local and regional development.

The thermal water treatment has considerable traditions in Hungary, too. The Roman army and settlers, situating in Western part of Hungary (Danubia) have build considerable baths. During the Turkish occupation of Hungary, in the Middle ages there emerged new baths. Parallel with the formation of capitalist society and with the primitive capital accumulation, there has emerged a considerable culture of bath tourism among of bourgeoisie in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the so-called socialist times the thermal-tourism has been organised mainly on base of social politics and voluntaristic decisions, the economic considerations and motivating factors have been switched off. This situation has caused considerable tensions and backwardness (Szivas, 2005).

Hungary is very rich in thermal waters (Goodrich, & Goodrich, 1987). Its position in Europe is outstanding and in the world enjoys the 5<sup>th</sup> place. Before the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War the connected medicinal services were well known internationally. All over the country there are 135 known thermal water bursting to the surface. The number of thermal baths including medicinal services are 35 in the country and there are further 30 thermal bath in phase of preparation. Beside of leisure and recreation, keeping the body in good condition, the waters are good for degenerative forms of rheumatism and other locomotor-related disorders (Arthrosis, Spondylarthrosis Discopathy), inflammatory spinal and articular diseases (PCP, Bechterew syndrome), conjunctive tissue rheumatism, muscle and articulator troubles, chronic gynaecological diseases, circulatory disturbances, respiratory diseases or curing indigestion disorders. The waters chemical composition and medicinal effects are different. In different Hungarian areas the thermal waters are not the same, there is a wide choice of waters for different diseases.

After the system –changing, the collapse of the former market structure and the globalisation have considerably highlighted the deep-rooted structural problems of Hungary and the lack of competitiveness. Shrinking of industry, transition and privatisation of agricultural production have created an extremely difficult situation especially in that part of Hungary, where there was not possibilities to offer favourable investment-possibilities for foreign direct investment. In South –Western part of Hungary the economic situation has been especially difficult, because this region can be considered as a less favoured region of Hungary, characterised mainly by relatively low land quality, lack of irrigation facilities. The industrial production has been concentrated mainly into traditional centres of heavy industry. An important part of the economy has been the oil –dwelling, but the importance of this region has considerably decreased during the last three decades. Before the system-transition, in cold-war period there were here very large housing estates for military and auxiliary personals as well as for their families, but after the demolishing of the »Iron curtain« the region has lost its strategic importance and the de-mobilisation of military personal has considerably increased the unemployment. As a summary it can be stated, that the South-Western part of Hungary, the Hungarian side of the Hungarian-Croatian border can be considered as a crisis-hidden region, having neither capital, nor enough endogenous potential for sustainable economic and social development. Under these conditions, there is a specifically high importance of such factors of development, which can be considered as long-time engines of development. One of such factors is the thermal tourism, because this activity is able to create new workplaces and exercise favourable accelerative and multiplicative effects on local and regional development.

The potential of thermal tourism in this region will be presented on example of Zalakaros. In the baths there are medical and thermal water available as well. The well-known medical water is 96 centigrade hot, and suitable for therapeutic treatment.

The other spring provides thermal water of 47 centigrade and the other is 53 centigrade hot. The water is excellent both from chemical and bacteriological aspects. The thermal bath and associated treatments offered in Zalakaros can be recommended for the following conditions. (Indications):

- Chronic gynaecological and gums problems;
- Post treatment of accidents, neurological, orthopedical diseases;
- Degenerative forms of rheumatism and locomotor disorders (Arthritis, Spondylarthrosis, discopathy);
- Chronic inflammatory spinal and articular diseases (PCP, Bechterew syndrome);
- Conjunctive tissue rheumatism, muscle and articulator troubles;

The Zalakaros water is contraindicated in case of high blood pressure; severe cardiology diseases; acute inflammations; feverish condition; malignant tumours; epilepsy as well as pregnancy. The most important characteristic features of the water are summarised in Table 1.

A 2-3 week complex treatment would have a positive pain-relieve effect on the neurological exhaustion. The advantageous climate, the surrounding and fresh air as well as the bathing opportunities have a positive influence on the treatment of all above cases. Following therapies are available for the guests.

Water therapy (balneological) opportunities

Under water massage (Tangentor), weight bath, sauna, bath, sparkling bath

*Special treatments:*

Special bath treatment with thermal water for dermatological diseases (acute eczema), special bath treatment in thermal water for acute gynaecological inflammations.

*Massage opportunities:*

Mechanical dry massage (Vibrax), medical massage by hand

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Mechanical dry massage (Vibrax), medical massage by hand

*Electro-therapy:*

Ultraviolet (Quartz) treatment, Solarium, Infrared-ray treatment, short wave treatment, selective current treatment, instant DC Treatment (Galvanic-treatment, Electrophoreses-treatment etc.)

As a summary it can be stated, that in the South-Western part of Hungary there are extremely favourable possibilities of the bath tourism.

Components	mg / l
Potassium	58
Sodium	1810
Ammonium	12
Calcium	136
Magnesium	47,5
Iron	0,15
Manganese	N/A
Kations total	2063,7
Nitrate	N/A
Nitrite	N/A
Chloride	2420
Bromide	6,5
Iodide	5,4
Fluoride	1,4
Sulphate	121
Hydrogencarbonate	1650
Sulphite	2,99
Phosphate total	0,12
Anions total	4207,3
Metabor acid	155
Free carbonic acid	733
Dissolved acid	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>178,0</b>

**Table 1**

Constituents of the water is Zalakaros  
Source: Zalakaros Thermal Bath

### Research goals and hypothesis development

Our research aim has been the determination of the attitudes and of local municipalities to the thermal tourism and the barriers of development. According to this basic goal, based on preliminary interviews and the literature, we have developed a system of hypotheses. These were as follows:

H<sub>1</sub>: The thermal tourism is considered as an important engine in local and regional development. This plays an important role in economic life of the settlement as well as of the region.

H<sub>2</sub>: The thermal tourism helps to forge the local communities, promotes the development of non-governmental organisations.

H<sub>3</sub>: The thermal tourism contributes to the increased openness of thinking of local population. In this way there will be an increased tolerance.

H<sub>4</sub>: The municipalities are not satisfied with the current method of distribution of Hungarian governmental as well as EU-related monetary resources, because they consider the current system to be an ineffective one.

H<sub>5</sub>: The thermal tourism-like another forms of tourism-will cause some negative effects for the local communities, which decrease the comfort and life –quality of local residents (Michalkó & Rátz, 2010).

### Methodology

The key steps of our research is depicted in Fig. 1. It is obvious, that we have followed the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

In framework of research four spas have been investigated: Hévíz, Kehidakustány, Lenti and Zalakaros.

### Results and discussion

In first set of questions we tried to get information about the experiences positive aspects of thermal tourism from point of view of majors. The most important results are summarised in Table 2.

Analysing the table it is obvious, that the respondents practically unanimously accepted the importance of thermal water as a factor, which helps to increase the importance of the local community. The thermal water is an important carrier of the positive image of the community, too. The practical accelerative and multiplicative effects of thermal tourism can be proven by the fact, that the respondents accepted the place and role of the thermal water in development of tourism and catering industry as well as service providers. The thermal tourism exercise a positive effect on development of the cultural life of the communities as well as on increasing of the social capital. This is an especially important factor, because the tight relations between the local actors are necessary preconditions of development.

At the same time it is interesting, that the thermal tourism does not seems to be enough to increase the workplaces and to be an important factor in infrastructural development. This fact can be explained by the relatively low level of domestic purchasing power (Puczlió & Rátz, 2011).

This later fact is especially heavy question, because historically this part of Hungary has one of the weakest-developed transportation infrastructure. In this field there seems to be a necessity to cooperate between the Hungarian and Croatian municipalities, because under the current conditions the lobby power of this Hungarian region does not seems to be enough to obtain additional resources for the development. The majors do not experience, that the increased income, generated by the tourism could contribute to the improvement of local life quality. This fact highlight the negative consequences of the re-distribution policy of central governments.

It is a difficult socio-economic question, why do not experienced the respondents the positive aspects of thermal tourism in increasing of tolerance, but the response to this question would go far beyond the scope of the current study.

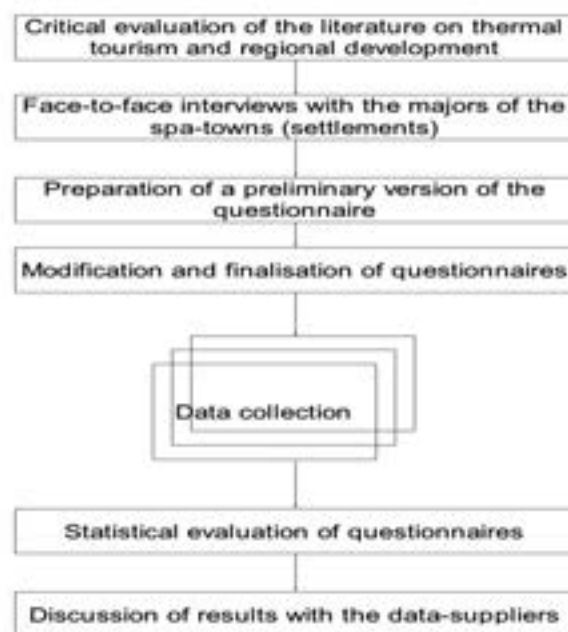


Fig. 1 The basic steps of our research

Statement	Average	Standard deviation
Increasing lobby – possibilities of local governments	4,75	0,50
Improving image of the settlement.	4,75	0,50
Increasing demand for cultural programs	4,25	0,50
Increasing number of catering service providers and restaurants.	4,25	0,50
Increasing number of accommodation providers	4,25	0,50
Increasing in the quality of accommodations	4,25	0,50
Local social cooperation for the development of tourism	4,25	0,50
Increasing the publicity and public interest for the specific places in the environment.	4,00	0,00
Increasing demand for diversification of cultural programs and touristic attractions.	4,00	0,00
New settlers (mainly as ) in the settlement	4,00	0,00
Increasing number and activity of civil (non-governmental) organisations	4,00	0,00
Tighter relations between the bathing area and the local municipality	4,00	0,00
Improvement of quality of catering service providers and restaurants.	3,75	0,50
Improvement of IT infrastructure (e.g. internet-access, WIFI, etc.)	3,75	0,50
Increased local tax-income	3,50	0,58
Increasing income of local population	3,50	0,58
Increasing income of local enterprises	3,50	0,58
Increased number of guests	3,50	0,58
Increased environmental burden	3,50	0,58
Improving public safety	3,50	1,29
Increasing motivation for foreign language learning of local population	3,50	0,58
Increasing of tolerance	3,50	0,58
Increasing demand for tourism-related services in the surroundings of the settlement	3,50	0,58
Higher quality of work of public-sector bodies or private-law entities with a public service mission	3,50	0,58
Increasing self-respect of the local population	3,50	0,58
Increased culture of hospitality	3,50	0,58
Better understanding and higher evaluation of local culture and values	3,25	0,50
Increasing number of local entertainment programs	3,25	0,50
Increasing attention to the local traditions and ethnographical values.	3,25	0,50
Creation of new workplaces	3,25	0,96
Stabilisation of the economic position of the settlement	3,25	0,96
Increasing of the environmental conciseness	3,25	0,50
Increasing market opportunities for another, joining and supporting enterprises	3,25	0,96
New impetus for local population life	3,00	0,82
Increasing number of part-time jobs.	3,00	0,82
Increasing qualification of the local population	3,00	0,82
Improvement of the behavioural culture of local population	3,00	0,82

Statement	Average	Standard deviation
More resources for the life quality improvement	3,00	0,82
Better understanding of another ways of thinking and approaches	2,75	0,50
Increasing connection network of local people	2,75	0,50
Increasing possibility for improvement of local shopping possibilities	2,50	0,58
Improving public transportation	2,50	1,29
More resources of the improvement of transportation infrastructure	2,50	1,29

**Table 2** The positive aspects of thermal tourism, id decreasing average of responses. The intensity of acceptance has been evaluated on a 1-5 point Lykiert scale, where the 1 means the total denying of the statement, 5 the total acceptance. Source: own research

In second part of the questionnaire we have analysed the hindrance factors and negative effects. Analysing the Table 3 it is obvious, that in opinion of majors the most important hindrance factors are the lack of system based approach in development policy, that's why the importance of tourism is relatively low in preparation of different decisions.

As we have seen from the analysis of Table, there is not enough local income to improve the infrastructure of the thermal-tourism. That's why the involvement of governmental and European Union resources in a question of strategic importance. At the same time, we have to see, that the respondents are not satisfactory with the distribution system of this resources, because they do not experience enough flexibility and simplicity. In our preliminary expectation, the experienced negative effects of the tourism.

Statement	Average	Standard deviation
The tourism development goals are not taken into consideration in central decisions on development	4,25	0,50
Too difficult application system	4,00	1,41
Cumbersome, long procedure in case of applications, with purpose of financing of tourism-related investments	3,75	1,26
The post –financing system of applications does not work	3,75	1,89
Low level of work culture in the region	3,25	0,50
Low number of well-accomplished touristic specialists	3,25	0,50
Low level of domestic purchasing power	3,25	0,50
High tax burden of local tourism-related enterprises	3,00	0,82
Low level of state support, jointing to the tourism tax	3,00	1,83
Low level of professional knowledge of the local population in field of catering ant tourism	3,00	0,82
Transition and disappearance of the traditional landscape	3,00	1,63
Emergence of monotonic landscape or aesthetically alien constructions	3,00	2,31
Increased danger for endangered species and natural values	3,00	1,41
Increasing congestion	2,75	1,26
The thermal tourism is favourable just for a relatively small circle of entrepreneurs	2,75	1,26
Too much noise	2,75	0,96
Social tensions between different logal social groups	2,50	1,00
Low developed transportation infrastructure	2,25	0,96

Statement	Average	Standard deviation
Lack of own capital	2,25	1,50
Low number of local entrepreneurs	2,25	1,26
Unfavourable image of the settlement	2,00	0,82
High level of corruption	1,75	0,96
Presence and activity of the organised crime	1,50	0,58

**Table 3** The hindrance factors and negative aspects of thermal tourism, in decreasing average of responses. The intensity of acceptance has been evaluated on a 1-5 point Lykiert scale, where the 1 means the total denying of the statement, 5 the total acceptance. Source: own research

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## SAŽETAK

Mađarska raspolaže s izuzetno povoljnim potencijalom ljekovitih voda. To može predstavljati čvrsti temelj za održive regionalne razvojne programe na duge staze. Taj resurs je izuzetno važan na području južno-zapadnog Zadunavlja, gdje ima malo mogućnosti za razvoj gospodarstva utemeljenog na mjesnim resursima i za stvaranje radnih mjesta. Studija nakon pregleda turizma koji se bazira na ljekovitoj vodi Mađarske i južnog Zadunavlja, na temelju mjerenja putem anketiranja prikazuje mišljenje o termalnom turizmu (grado)načelnika naselja na mađarskoj strani uz mađarsko-hrvatsku granicu koja su neposredno vezana za turizam koji temelje na termalnoj ljekovitoj vodi. Davatelji odgovora jednoznačno priznaju značaj termalnog turizma u razvijanju mjesnog gospodarstva, ali uloga turizma u stvaranju radnih mjesta je vrlo mala. Svi su davatelji odgovora bili nezadovoljni sa sporim i kompliciranim mehanizmom dostavljanja mađarskih i EU-izvora. Na brojnim područjima (npr. razvijanje prometne infrastrukture, zajedničke promocijske kampanje) se otvaraju povoljne prilike za suradnju između hrvatskih i mađarskih davatelja turističkih usluga.