
THE „WINNERS” AND THE „LOSERS” OF THE BALATON RECREATIONAL AREA IN THE YEAR OF THE RECESSION (2009)**EGYED ADRIENN**

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ABSTRACT – The „winners” and the „losers” of the Balaton Recreational Area in the year of the recession (2009)

The Balaton Recreational Area has a big role in the tourism of Hungary. This is the area where you can find the greatest natural lake of Middle-Europe and the greatest thermal lake of the entire continent a few kilometres far from each other. In the last decade the number of the guest nights increased year by year, in 2008 more than 1270 thousand guest nights were registered at commercial accommodations in this area. In 2009 all the country had to count with 10% loss in this field. The data of the guest nights at commercial accommodations were used from 2006, 2008 and 2009 the settlements that produced the most significant changes from 2008 to 2009 were selected then and I focused on them in the followings. The location, the structure of the given settlement, the attractions, the type and the number of the commercial accommodation and the ratio of the weekend houses were examined.

There were more types of „winners” and losers. At some places the processes started before the recession, some settlements were thrown off their balance, and at some villages the processes changed last year. Some interesting facts from the results: there is no real „winner” settlement at the southern coast; there is no coherence between the achievement and the distance from the shore; we can find all types of villages in the Kal Basin (neighbouring little villages with similar natural background with very different tendencies). It is also can be seen that the main centres produced a slight decrease what agrees with the national average.

All in all we can say that although the permanent growth of the guest nights in the Balaton Recreational Area stopped in 2009 and approximately suffered a loss of 10%, the significant decreases were not common. We can attribute the significant changes to this special year only in case of Balatonszepezd, Nemesbük, Szentbékálla and Balatonmáriafürdő, Kővágóörs and Szentjakabfa. Of course we have to wait at least one more year to see if these changes have a long-term effect on the development of the given villages, but we could draw some conclusion right now. In those settlements where continuous, extended resort areas evaluated in the second part of the century can hardly accommodate themselves to the new flows of tourism. Three of the five „winners” are villages, that had to fight with a slight depopulation in the last decades, so it will be interesting to see if there will be one that can exploit the fortune of this year and turn this capital into a long-term positive process in the future. If we have a look at the Kal Basin we should admit the huge effect of the media. Nor the „winner” settlements have to forget that a great number of tourists can be a threat to the settlement, if they cannot handle the situation.

Keywords: tourism, Lake Balaton, recession, rural development, adaptation

INTRODUCTION

The Balaton Recreational Area has a big role in the tourism of Hungary. This is the area where you can find the greatest natural lake of Middle-Europe (Balaton) and the greatest thermal lake of the entire continent (Hévíz) a few kilometres far from each other. These lakes attract a great amount of tourists every year. In the last decade the number of the guest nights increased year by year, in 2008 more than 1270 thousand guest nights were registered at commercial accommodations in this area. In 2009 all the country had to count with 10% loss in this field. Therefore the year 2009 was labelled as „Black Year for the Tourism” in the media. In this essay I tried to lighten the changes of the guest nights in the Balaton Recreational Area in the year of the recession. The settlements were examined that count on this kind of source of income very much, and

highlight some probable consequences as for the landscape for the future in case the winners can exploit their fortune or the losers can't handle the setback they had to suffer in 2009.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The material of the study was the Balaton Recreational Area. The data of the guest nights at commercial accommodations had been collected from 2006 and 2008 for the settlements in that region (STATINFO.KSH.HU, 2010). Because the data of 2009 were still not public at the level of the settlements I asked the data directly from the Directorate of Veszprém of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. (Unfortunately they could only give data from the year 2009 from January till November, so the data in the row of 2009 are a little bit under the final data of the entire year, especially in the micro-region of Hévíz, where the thermal water attracts a decent number of tourists at the end of the year, too).

The settlements that produced the most significant changes from 2008 to 2009 were selected (reach more than 150% or less 50% of the guest nights of 2008 in 2009) then and I focused on them in the followings. The location, the structure of the given settlement, the attractions, the type and the number of the commercial accommodation and the ratio of the weekend houses were examined.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the data of the settlements with the most significant changes from 2008 to 2009. The location of the settlements of the area can be seen at Figure 1 according to the significance of the change.

Table 1. The list of the settlements that produced the most significant changes in the number of guest nights from 2008 to 2009

	Settlement	Nuber of guest nights		
		2006	2008	2009
„WINNERS”	Alsóörs	14949	36756	68 830
	Balatonszepezd	16979	11905	21 505
	Nemesbük	530	513	928
	Szentbékáll	226	196	746
	Felsőörs	231	27	292
„LOSERS”	Balatonmárfürdő	18084	18382	8 227
	Szántód	16731	11976	5 895
	Balatonberény	24048	16159	6 789
	Kövágóörs	8496	9610	2 264
	Paloznak	71514	33551	468
	Szentjakabfa	4278	5023	354
	Buzsák	395	546	140

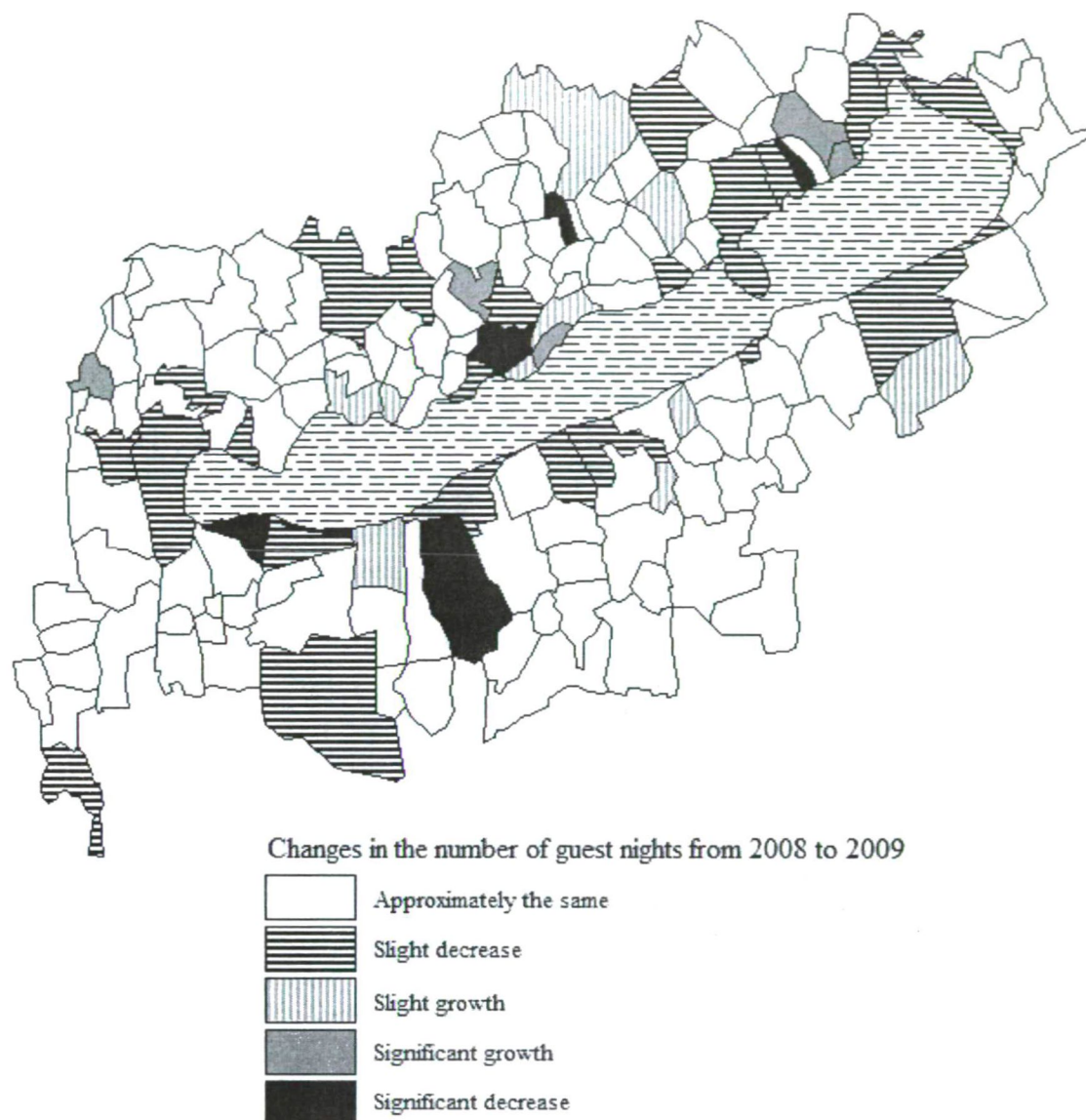


Figure 1. Changes in the number of guest nights from 2008 to 2009

The *Table 1* above shows that three types of „winners”. Alsóörs based its fortune before the recession and could stay at the top in 2009 as well. Nemesbük and Szentbékállá was not very popular among the tourists, but made their fortune in last year. Balatonszepezd and Felsőörs could perform outstanding in this lean year though they loss a part of their guests recently. The same groups were formed in the case of the „losers”: at Szántód, Balatonberény and Paloznak the negative tendency is not connected with the recession. Not in the case of Balatonmáriafürdő, which had a balanced number of tourists every year before 2009, or Kővágóörs, Szentjakabfa and Buzsák which even could improve their datas recently.

There are some interesting things to see at the *Figure 1*:

- There is no real „winner” settlement at the southern coast, though there is some settlement that could reach a slight growth.
- There is no coherence between the achievement and the distance from the shore.
- We can find all types of villages in the Kal Basin (neighbouring little villages with similar natural background with very different tendencies).

It is also can be seen that the main centres produced a slight decrease what agrees with the national average.

Alsóörs was declared in 2008 as „The Most Popular Holiday Resort of the Lake Balaton”. The settlement focused on to maintain this position in spite of the recession. They tried to make special their beach with the help of several development and tried to create ideal circumstances for a wide range of target groups. (WWW.ALSOORS.HU 2010) Their efforts turned out to be successful, because they even could attract much more tourists in 2009 than in the year before.

The location of Nemesbük is very fortunate, because two thermal baths are in its surroundings, Hévíz and Kehidakustány. The strength of this village is the relative calmness. Though the leaders of the village didn't make extra efforts because of the predicted recession, they had more visitors than other years.

On the other hand Balatonmárfürdő lost its decent number of tourists used to go there year by year. This village counts on the tourists very much, 88% of the estates are weekend houses that fact have a great role in the character of the settlement. This villages had a successful strategy and they couldn't accomodate themselves to the changed customs. The situation is the same in the case of Szentjakabfa (I mean the settlement couldn't react in a proper way to the recession), but this village practically lost its resort function in 2009.

CONCLUSIONS

All in all we can say that although the permanent growth of the guest nights in the Balaton Recreational Area stopped in 2009 and approximately suffered a loss of 10%, the significant decreases were not common. Some of these settlements suffered from negative processes began rather in the middle of the decade, years before the recession. We can attribute the significant changes to this special year only in case of Balatonszepezd, Nemesbük, Szentbékálla and Balatonmárfürdő, Kővágóörs and Szentjakabfa.

Of course we have to wait at least one more year to see if these changes have a long-term effect on the development of the given villages, but we could draw some conclusion right now:

- The settlements with a dominant rate of weekend houses are in the worst situation. The exploitation of these weekend houses are less and less efficient year by year. In those settlements where continuous, extended resort areas evaluated in the second part of the century can hardly accomodate themselves to the new flows of tourism. The best example for that is Balatonmárfürdő, where all the structure of the village is inferior to the weekend houses. This means an enormous site that can't be used in an optimal way nowadays.
- Three of the five „winners” are villages (Nemesbük, Szentbékálla and Balatonszepezd), that had to fight with a slight depopulation in the last decades. It will be interesting to see if there will be one that can exploit the fortune of this year and turn this capital into a long-term positive process in the future.

- If we have a look at the Kal Basin we should admit the huge effect of the media. These villages are neighbouring each other, have approximately the same natural values, have the same micro-regional and regional attractions in the Basin and at the Balaton Highland. Some of them were successful in 2009 and some of them were not. Their achievement has a coherence with their marketing. Szentbékállá was the „winner” of the micro-region. This settlement did everything to stress the highlights and attract the tourists while the other settlements were not so „aggressive” in this field.
- Nor the „winner” settlements have to forget that a great number of tourists can be a threat to the settlement, too, if they cannot handle the situation. Even a relative „crowd” could ruin the image of a settlement, and the calmness is the main strength for lots of the villages in this area. Positive, that some settlements, like Nemesbük already recognized this danger, so they are conscious to handle this process.

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