

ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF RURAL TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE ZEMPLÉN

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ABSTRACT - ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF RURAL TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE ZEMPLÉN

Rural tourism in the Zemplén based on unique natural and made-made heritages provide supplementary profit to more and more inhabitants, which gives the reason to examine rural tourism in the area. Critical interviews with mayors and surveys among inhabitants and rural hosts of seven communities in the Zemplén were made to reflect the situations of these communities and the operation of rural hosts. These researches happened in 2002 and 2010, which made detecting changes possible. The communities examined belong to the most disadvantageous settlements in Hungary; however, during the past eight years significant development occurred thanked to the realized touristic and infrastructural improvements. I concluded that although the communities abound in natural and architectural values, their use is under-utilized. The classical form of rural tourism is just about to develop, in which rural tourism and agriculture are present for helping each other, playing a role in saving folk traditions and maintaining rural life from. Modeling the economic aspects of rural tourism in the area, the profit relations and returns of investment are favourable in the area. I revealed that there is a real chance for the communities in the Zemplén to realize the concept of eco-villages, which together with rural tourism may contribute to basing sustainable farming and spreading environmental consciousness.

ABSTRACT - A falusi turizmus ökonómiai kérdései és környezettudatosság a Zemplénben

A falusi turizmus a Zemplénben a térség természeti és ember alkotta értékeire alapozva, egyre több embernek nyújt kiegészítő jövedelemforrást, mely megadja az indokot a térség falusi turizmusának a vizsgálatához. Mélyinterjúkat végeztem hét zempléni település polgármesterével, valamint kérdőíves felmérést a lakosok és a településeken működő falusi vendéglátók között, 2002-ben és 2010-ben, mely lehetőséget adott a változások nyomon követésére. A vizsgált települések hazánk leghátrányosabb települései közé tartoznak, azonban az elmúlt nyolc év során jelentős idegenforgalmi és infrastrukturális fejlesztések történtek. Megállapítottam, hogy bár a vizsgált települések természeti és építészeti adottságokban bővelkednek és jelentős turisztikai potenciált rejtjenek magukban, a hasznosításuk elmarad. A korábbi helyzettel ellentétben a falusi vendéglátásnak a klasszikus formája kezd kialakulni, melyben a falusi turizmus és a mezőgazdasági tevékenység egymást kiegészítőjeként vannak jelen, továbbá kiemelkedő szerepe van a térség népi hagyományainak, szokásainak megőrzésében, és a vidéki életforma fenntartásában. A falusi turizmus ökonómiai helyzetét modellezve megállapítható, hogy a tevékenység jövedelmi és megtérülési viszonyai kedvezően alakulnak a térségben. Feltártam, hogy a településeken reális esély van az ökofalvak koncepciójának a megvalósítására, mely a falusi vendéglátással karöltve hozzájárulhat a fenntartható gazdálkodás megalapozásához és környezettudatosság terjesztéséhez.

INTRODUCTION

Connecting agriculture to tourism in rural areas may help in improving the ability to economically provide for a population, decreasing rate of emigration, creating jobs and realizing supplementary profit source. This last one may result in realizing the opportunities of extensive farming in environmentally sensitive areas and maintaining and saving the rural life form in an indirect way, which is in accordance with the ecological and environmental function of rural development saving natural resources and landscape (NEMESSÁLYI ET AL., 2004).

In a classical view rural tourism supplements profit of agriculture; however, under Hungarian conditions, these two activities hardly join each other. Rural tourism may

take place not only in villages, but in small towns as well which do not belong to highlighted health and holiday districts. Basically the activity consists of providing accommodation, meals and programs; it is a cheap and active holiday form for the quests, by which the tourists may get to know the traditions, local dishes of the certain territory due to the provided services, may join in local programs, and take part in for example weaving, basket-work or harvesting. Rural tourism may be significant where because of strict rules of nature conservation intensive agriculture is limited, thus rural tourism may contribute to supplementing profit of less intensive and environmental friendly agriculture.

The economic crisis has had a positive effect on rural tourism in Hungary, just like in other countries (BALOGH ET AL, 2009), which resulted in the increase of host numbers and tourists by 15 and 17% respectively in 2009 compared to 2008. Today the number of hosts is about 8000 (FATOSZ 2010). Rural tourism has become a taxable activity in 2010, which may result in decreasing number of rural hosts.

The so-called rural guest table which has been renewed since July 2010, may inspire small-scale producers and rural hosts dealing with farming to produce agricultural products typical to the area through traditionally processes, which may directly be sold to the guests (4/2010. (VII. 5.) Rural Development Ministry regulation on the conditions on food production, processing and marketing of small-scale producers). Basing on local specialties, the one-time traditional farming methods and crafts may be revitalized, and introduced to visitors in festivals, events at a community level, or at a subregional level. In several other European countries rural tourism is linked to sustainability. In Norway for example the hosts provide eco-touristic services, use environmental friendly technologies, strive to save water as a measure of economy, clean sewage based on biological ways and neglect totally motorization altogether with introducing culture and folk traditions (HORVÁTH, 2009).

In this form rural tourism may have significant role in establishing sustainable farming in Hungary as well, especially if the activity takes place in an eco-village. It may assist the population retaining ability of rural areas and the ability to economically provide for a population, contribute to creating jobs for local people and serving an example to be followed to city-dwellers in case of environment consciousness and energy saving. Such an initiative may be a good community forming power, strengthen cooperation, and increase the responsibility for environment taking part in saving natural, cultural, social and traditional economic values in a sustainable form.

My aims were to examine the situation and economic aspects of rural hosts and to reveal the willingness to establish environmental conscious life form in communities in the Zemplén.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The conditions and economic aspects of rural tourism were investigated in Bózsza, Füzér, Füzérradvány, Hollóháza, Mikóháza, Pálháza and Telkibánya (Figure 1) locating in the Hegyköz in the Northern Hungary region in the northeastern part of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county. Most of the communities belong to the Zemplén of the five holiday districts in the county, which reflects the strict touristic attraction of the area. Tourism nights in the Zemplén are one third of that of the county, while the realized tourism nights in the settlements of the Hegyköz are 32% of that of Zemplén (ZEMPLÉN PROJECT 2009).

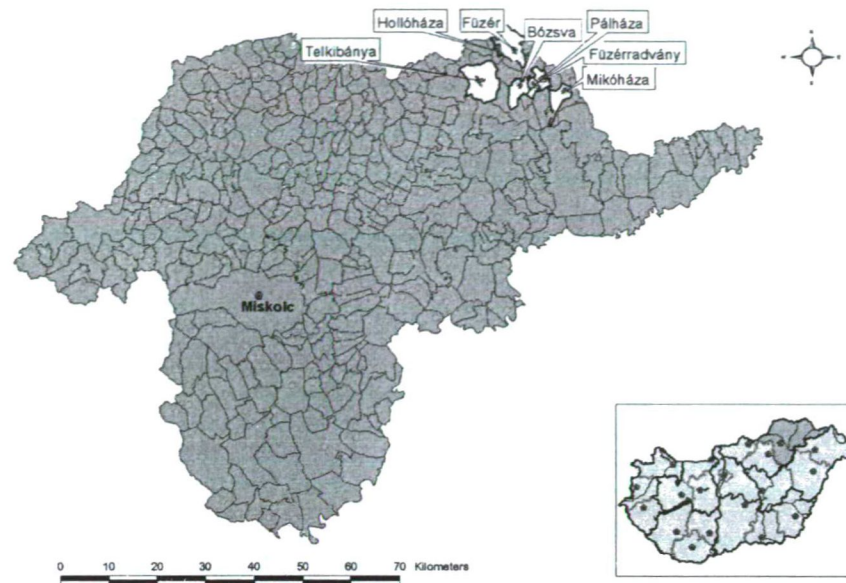


Figure 1: The Location of the Examined Communities of Zemplén in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County

Critical interviews and surveys were used both in 2002 and 2010 to reflect the situations of the communities and the operation of rural hosts and to detect changes. This study concentrates on the results of interviews and surveys done in 2010 and changes compared to 2002.

The critical interview of mayors aimed at revealing the most important changes since 2002 besides collecting the most relevant data relating to the community and the chance for the community to become an eco-village. In the survey of the inhabitants, 1% of the total population got into the sample, in this way 47 persons were asked. The sample represented the basic population in age, sex and education. The most important objectives of the questionnaire were to determine the willingness of the population to carry out rural tourism, to cooperate with each other as well as to establish environmental conscious life forms in the future. Altogether 20 rural hosts got into the sample during the survey, who represented 20% of the total hosts in the seven communities. During the survey besides being involved in the issues of the operation, I concentrated even on the facts that to what rate the tourism is linked to agriculture, whether the hosts have willingness to do bio-farming, and to create an environmental conscious life form.

The survey was carried out in July and August in 2010 by myself, personally, as my aim was to have a deeper and more detailed look in the lives of the inhabitants and in the operation of rural hosts. The results were evaluated by Microsoft Excel program.

I adapted the model for reflecting the cost and profit relations and returning conditions of rural tourism in communities along the Hortobágy (BAINÉ SZABÓ 2003; SZABÓ ET AL. 2009) to the examined communities in the Zemplén, and made an economic evaluation on the rural tourism in the area, in which I modeled effects of investment conceptions to the present situation. During examining the returns of investment concepts, I supposed an operating period of 15 years and used an interest rate of 7,25%.

RESULTS

Firstly the situation and secondly the economic evaluation of rural tourism in the Zemplén are detailed.

The Situation of Rural Tourism in the Zemplén

I highlight only the most important results from the survey. On the basis of my personal experiences, the repeated critical interviews with the mayors, surveys among the inhabitants and rural hosts, the rural tourism of the communities in the Hegyköz have been stagnating having a little positive tendency since 2002; however, fallback caused by the economic crisis reflects not the same tendency.

Considering the results of the critical interviews, the mayors keep on regarding tourism as an opportunity to develop, as the examined communities are among the most disadvantageous communities in Hungary. As a result of cooperation among communities based on partnership touristic and infrastructural investments have been carried out. The nature and environmental conservation are reflected in investments, thus the harmony between area development and cooperation.

The communities in the Hegyköz had played a significant role in improving the forestry (PAP, 2002), while today sustainable forestry is typical to the area. Regarding agriculture, establishing orchards, grazing animal keeping on pastures, bio-farming and products being processed and sold locally may have perspectives in order to increase the ability of agriculture to economically provide for the population regarding natural values. It can successfully linked to rural tourism, as agricultural activities may appear as programs among the services of the tourism; furthermore, agricultural products may be directly sold to guest, which leads to market expansion of local products as well. Marketing local products may have great significance as they may have relevant touristic roles, which ensure jobs and existence for local people, and attractions to tourists.

Every mayor regards becoming an eco-village as an operating alternative for which changing the approach of the population is essential besides the necessary capital. Every community uses furnaces of firing wood chops and gassing wood, and solar collectors. The education to environmental consciousness begins in childhood in primary school.

Turning to the results of surveying the population, job creation got the first place among the problems to be solved. It is favourable that 40% in the sample plan to start rural tourism, which is mainly typical to those, whose main job is in the service sector. The inhabitants qualified themselves in a scale ranging from 1 to 5 with a 4 regarding collaboration and cooperation (5 score is the best). Although 85% of the asked do not utilize renewable energy sources, 62% plan to establish an environmental conscious life form in the future, in which collaboration and cooperation will have great relevance. People having higher education answered this in a higher ratio.

On the basis of the survey among rural hosts, the majority of the asked has been dealing with rural tourism since 10 years. 50% of the respondents are members in the local Touristic Destination Management (TDM) association, which provided rural tourism training for the hosts. 25% of the hosts do not speak any foreign language. The main reason for starting rural tourism is the supplementary profit source.

They serve 3 rooms and 8 beds in average, and had 50 guests during the last year. These data exceed the national average; however, in comparison with the situation in 2002, the number of guests is less by 30%. The average staying time of the guests relating to the seven communities do not reach three days, which is below the national average (3.5 days) and the value in 2002. The number of per host tourism night is 120, which is 20%

higher than the national indicator, but it is half of the realized value in 2002. The utilization of capacities regarding only the summer period is 16% which is around the national utilization, but lower than that in 2002. The smallest use was experienced in Hollóháza, the highest one in Füzér.

The accommodations are qualified by 3-sunflowers in average, but in case of 15% of the houses the qualification has not happened yet. The price for the accommodation ranges from 1800 to 3500 HUF. Unfortunately 75% of the hosts do not serve meals for the guests. The main reason is the fact that in most of the accommodations well-equipped kitchen is available for the tourists in this way the guests do not have the opportunity to taste the traditional meals. Who serve meals, the price of the breakfast is 500 to 600 HUF; that of the dinner is 900 to 1000 HUF per one tourism night. Only 30% of the asked provide programs, such as wine tasting, fishing, hunting, cooking, or feeding animals.

Turning to the economic data of the activity, the situation is rather disadvantageous. Rural hosts hardly know anything about their costs arising for the tourism, mainly variable costs depending on guest arrivals are difficult to determine for them.

It is favourable that 65% of the hosts deal with even agriculture at home, such as keeping animals, growing vegetables and fruits. Although they are not registered bio-farmers, one third of them farm without any chemicals. 44% of hosts dealing with also agriculture have the willingness to carry out bio-farming in the future.

Detailing the actual issues relating to the activity, while the guest arrival was increased by 17% at national level in rural tourism, it declined significantly in the communities in the Hegyköz by 40% in average. It is typical that hosts hardly have any information on changes concerning taxation, legal background and qualifying of rural tourism, not even if they are members of an association of rural tourism.

90% of the asked do not use renewable energy sources; however, 72% have the willingness to create an environmental conscious rural life form. Regarding the hosts' opinions, among the factors helping rural tourism in the communities, natural conditions are in the first place. The Zemplén Landscape Protecting Area is one of the most important conditions basing rural tourism. It is followed by rural life form, accommodations, folk traditions, events and art and architectural values. The art and architectural heritages are available (Fortress in Füzér, Károlyi-castle and park in Füzérradvány, Greek-catholic church in Mikóháza, cemetery with wooden headboard on tombs and Metal and mineral mining museum in Telkibánya, China museum in Hollóháza), though their renovations are necessary and the complex introduction of the touristic supply is of low-standard. The education of the inhabitants got the fewest score.

The Economic Evaluation of Rural Tourism in the Zemplén

I adapted the model (*Table 1*) for investigating economic conditions of rural tourism to these communities in the Zemplén and made the economic evaluation of rural tourism, in which I modeled the effects of developmental varieties. I determined the cost-profit relations of the rural tourism in the area, and analyzed returns of different investment conceptions in case of three service types and seven investment conceptions.

The capital requirement depends on the standard of the would-be activity and the fact that whether the already existing capacities will be used or renovation, building will be necessary. The capital requirement thus ranges within a wide interval from 70 thousand HUF to 4 million HUF depending on investment conceptions. The investment concept of already existing capacities mean that there is not any extra investment needed, the empty houses or rooms not utilized yet are used for the sake of rural tourism.

Table 1: Model for Reflecting Cost - Profit Relations and Returns of Rural Tourism

Denomination		Input data	Output data
Service	1. Accommodation	Tourism nights Prices of accommodation, breakfast and dinner	Fixed costs Variable costs Revenue Net profit Gross profit Profitability related to costs Discounted payment period Net present value
	2. Accommodation + breakfast		
	3. Accommodation + partial board		
Investment conception	1. Utilising the already existing capacities		
	2. Renovating a room		
	3. Renovating a bathroom		
	4. Renovating both a room and a bathroom		
5. Building a room			
6. Building a bathroom			
7. Building both a room and a bathroom			

Source: Bainé Szabó (2003); Szabó et al. (2009)

Table 2 contains the input data of the model depending on investment conceptions. The prices were 600 HUF for breakfast and 1000 HUF for dinner per one tourism night. These input data was based on the results of the survey among the hosts in 2010.

Table 2: Input Data for Modeling Rural Tourism in Zemplén

Investment conception	Tourism nights	Accommodation (HUF/tourism night)
1-4.	150	1800
5-6.	200	2500
7.	250	3200

Source: own survey (2010)

The cost, revenue, profit relations and returns are favourable in the Zemplén (Table 3). When calculating the yearly costs, only those arising for rural tourism have to be taken into consideration, separated from the costs of the household. I examined the costs dividing them into fixed and variable costs. When calculating variable costs, the per tourism night inputs were determined on the basis of HORVÁTH (1992)'s suggestions. The revenue depends on the number of guests, average staying time, the number of tourism nights as well as on the prices of the accommodation and meals. By expanding services, the revenue increases and the same is true for investment conceptions, where the higher accommodation price and higher number of tourism nights result in increase. I calculated gross profit including wages. In case of only accommodation the per tourism night gross profit ranges from 1075 to 2065 HUF, when serving accommodation and breakfast it is between 1375 and 2365 HUF, while providing accommodation and partial board, the gross profit is 1975 to 2975. On the basis of the model, building room and bathroom is in the first place. By serving meals, the profit may be one and a half higher. Regarding the returning conditions, in case of net present values, I did not indicate HUF-values, just the fact, whether it is worth realizing the given investment. It is clear that every investment conception returns within the planned 15-year-operation period. The conception of utilizing already existing capacities returns during 0.2 to 0.4 year; renovation conceptions during 0.7 and 2.3 years, while the building conceptions

during 2.5 and 7.1 years. The cash flow and returning conditions are more favourable if hosts serve meals for the guests besides providing accommodation. The conceptions of using the already existing capacities and renovation bathroom return the soonest within the operational period.

Table 3: Profit and Returning Conditions of Rural Tourism in the Zemplén

Service	Already existing capacities	Renovation			Building		
		Room	Bathroom	Room and bathroom	Room	Bathroom	Room and bathroom
Fixed costs (HUF/year)							
Fixed costs	49000	56000	55000	73000	156000	103000	225000
Variable costs (HUF/year)							
(1)	36000	36000	36000	36000	48000	48000	59000
(2)	81000	81000	81000	81000	108000	108000	134000
(3)	141000	141000	141000	141000	188000	188000	234000
Total costs (HUF/year)							
(1)	85000	92000	91000	109000	204000	151000	284000
(2)	130000	137000	136000	154000	264000	211000	359000
(3)	190000	197000	196000	214000	344000	291000	459000
Revenue (HUF/year)							
(1)	270000	270000	270000	270000	500000	500000	800000
(2)	360000	360000	360000	360000	620000	620000	950000
(3)	510000	510000	510000	510000	820000	820000	1200000
Gross profit (HUF/year)							
(1)	185000	178000	179000	161000	296000	349000	516000
(2)	230000	223000	224000	206000	356000	409000	591000
(3)	320000	313000	314000	296000	476000	529000	741000
Per tourism night gross profit (HUF/year)							
(1)	1235	1185	1185	1075	1480	1745	2065
(2)	1535	1485	1495	1375	1780	2045	2365
(3)	2135	2085	2095	1975	2380	2645	2965
Net present value							
(1)	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
(2)	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
(3)	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Discount payment period (year)							
(1)	0,4	1,4	1,2	2,3	7,1	3,6	6,2
(2)	0,3	1,2	1,0	1,8	6,2	3,2	5,6
(3)	0,2	0,9	0,7	1,3	5,0	2,5	4,7

Note: (1) - Only accommodation, (2) - Accommodation + breakfast, (3) - Accommodation + partial board

Source: own calculation (2010)

CONCLUSIONS

I concluded that the examined communities abound in natural and architectural heritages but their utilization is lagged behind. The utilization of the capacities and the average staying time is low, which may be led to the lack of complex program packages. The hosts are not aware of costs and actual changes relating to their activities; besides accommodation serving meals and providing programs is not typical.

Significant development occurred thanked to the realized touristic and infrastructural improvements as a result of cooperation among communities, thus the **problems to be solved in the future narrowed to the task of creating jobs in the communities.**

The number of private hosts providing accommodation has increased. The standard of the accommodations has improved, guest houses of three-sunflower-qualification dominate, but the number of houses having a four-sunflower-qualification is increasing. The organization has improved due to the coordinating work of local TDM associations. The efficiency indicators of arrivals are more unfavourable than experienced in 2002, as the economic crisis caused a fallback of 40% in the tourist arrivals in rural hosts despite the favourable national tendency.

Contrary to the previous situation, **the classical form of rural tourism is just about to develop, in which rural tourism and agriculture are present for helping each other, playing a relevant role in saving folk traditions and habits of the area and in maintaining rural life form.**

The touristic supply has expanded, which has not been reflected in increasing average staying time yet, which should appear as complex program packages to guests based on the work of local TDMs.

In order to make the operation of rural host more organized, it would be necessary that **every host should join an association relating to rural tourism, which would result in informing regularly the hosts, organized hosting and qualifying the accommodations.**

The average staying time and the utilization of capacities may be increased by **expanding services, by providing special, traditional programs** by which the tourists may enter local habits, they may get to like it, and the chance for returning may rise. Such traditional programs are getting to know the local peasant farming, traditions of agriculture and forestry in the area, folk arts of villages, folk dances, rural life form reflecting small crafts such as weaving, basketwork, plate painting. **All these may be helped if serving meals appears among the services, in which guest may taste the local dishes.**

In this way rural tourism may have a great relevance in saving the folk traditions and habits and maintaining the rural life form. **The renovation of the house and yard should be based on local traditions, and renewing the settlements should save the rural image by establishing and renovating simple houses and yards typical to Hegyköz.**

In order to complete **the capacity utilization**, the hosts should strive to deal with tourism even during spring and fall. Rural tourism **may be completed during the winter time by hosting hunters** with the help of hunting associations and land owners' communities.

Rural hosts are not aware of the changes in taxation, legal background and qualifying. Thus **I recommend that the tasks of local TDM associations should spread to inform rural hosts even on the changes concerning their activities in a personal meeting** as they hardly use internet or e-mail independently of their ages.

I revealed that besides using already existing capacities, **it is worth investing rural tourism in this area**, which may lead to higher service prices and increasing number of guests and tourism nights. All these may further improve the profit and returning conditions of rural tourism.

Regarding the willingness of the inhabitants and rural hosts to collaborate and cooperate with each other and basing on the mayors' opinions, **I concluded that there is a real**

chance for the communities to realize the conception of eco-villages, which altogether with rural tourism may contribute to establishing global view approach and realizing the sustainable development, mentioned several times in theory, in practice. This could be linked to the social co-operatives according to the example in Mikóháza concentrating on landscape farming, using traditional animal and plant varieties, in which rural tourism might play an important role in spreading the concept to tourists and changing the view of city-dwellers.

In this way I wish to investigate the connection of environmental consciousness and rural tourism in the Zemplén concentrating on sustainable development in the practice in the future. Revealing the situation and operation of already operating eco-villages, I plan to examine the investment issues of an energy saving and environmental conscious life and to adapt the operating conditions of living eco-villages to the Zemplén territory and to carry out the economic evaluation of all these. My aim is to establish and spread environmental conscious life form by modeling exemplary villages, in which inhabitants strive to utilize renewable energy sources, natural materials during building houses and in their everyday lives, farm without chemicals based on bio-farming. Rural tourism might play an important role in changing the tourists' approach to natural and environmental values, the guests might take part in realizing sustainability in practice and it may be expected that after leaving, they would strive for environmental consciousness and energy saving in their homes showing approach and behavior to be followed to other people. Such a concept is a huge community forming power and urges for cooperation to a great extent. As eco-villages the communities may serve examples to retain population, more and more city-dwellers losing their faiths in consumer society would visit these places, which could have job creating effects in agriculture, tourism and services. By this it is expected that inhabitants will not commute any more and they will utilize local conditions for their livelihood, which may decrease unemployment. Creating eco-villages in the Zemplén, especially in the area of Hegyköz, would strengthen the three functions of rural development. From the economic aspect it may provide opportunity to sell products locally by expanding local markets; from the social aspect it may result in increasing living standards due to profit generation; from the ecological and environmental aspect it would represent the practical example of saving natural values in a sustainable way; all these giving possibilities to communities to recover from regional depression and to develop.

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