

DEFINITION OF RURAL TOURISM AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS IN THE NORTHERN GREAT PLAIN REGION

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Abstract

Natural environment has been appreciated in our urbanised society. The essence of the rural tourism is that the urbanised people enjoy rural lifestyle; they make connections with rural communities, they find a remote ideal, relaxing environment with positive experiences. Regional tourism has a significant importance in the development of employment, and increases the incomes of the inhabitants in the Northern Great Plain region. However rural tourism is just one way of development possibilities in the region.

Keywords: definition of rural tourism, rural development, Northern Great Plain region

INTRODUCTION

The majority of Hungarian territory can be characterised as rural area. The employment situation is unfavourable in rural areas with low possibilities of employment agriculture. Local agricultural product markets are mostly missing, the direct marketing forms has not been established. Expansion of possibilities to generate alternative and supplementary incomes is one of the main areas of development of rural regions. Rural tourism is an efficient way to increase the income of rural inhabitants. Only the rural accommodation business has been regulated in rural services in Hungary.

Definition of rural tourism

Expressions of Rural tourism, agro tourism, and village tourism are used many times as synonyms by experts and developers. This fact can be explained with the diverse activities of the area. Countryside hospitality is more or less connected to the agribusiness and this marketing product consists of accommodation services, catering and leisure time services (KOVÁCS, 2002). Rural tourism can be defined as a tourism product, which approach accentuates the importance of supply management and marketing activities. The rural tourism, as an element of the Hungarian tourism supply, as a tourism product, is a complex rural supply of a given settlement (or group of settlements) which involves the special elements of hospitality and attractiveness and these elements are organised into special products (ANTAL, 1996). Regional tourism can be characterised as a cooperation of local organisations and service providers operating in a well-

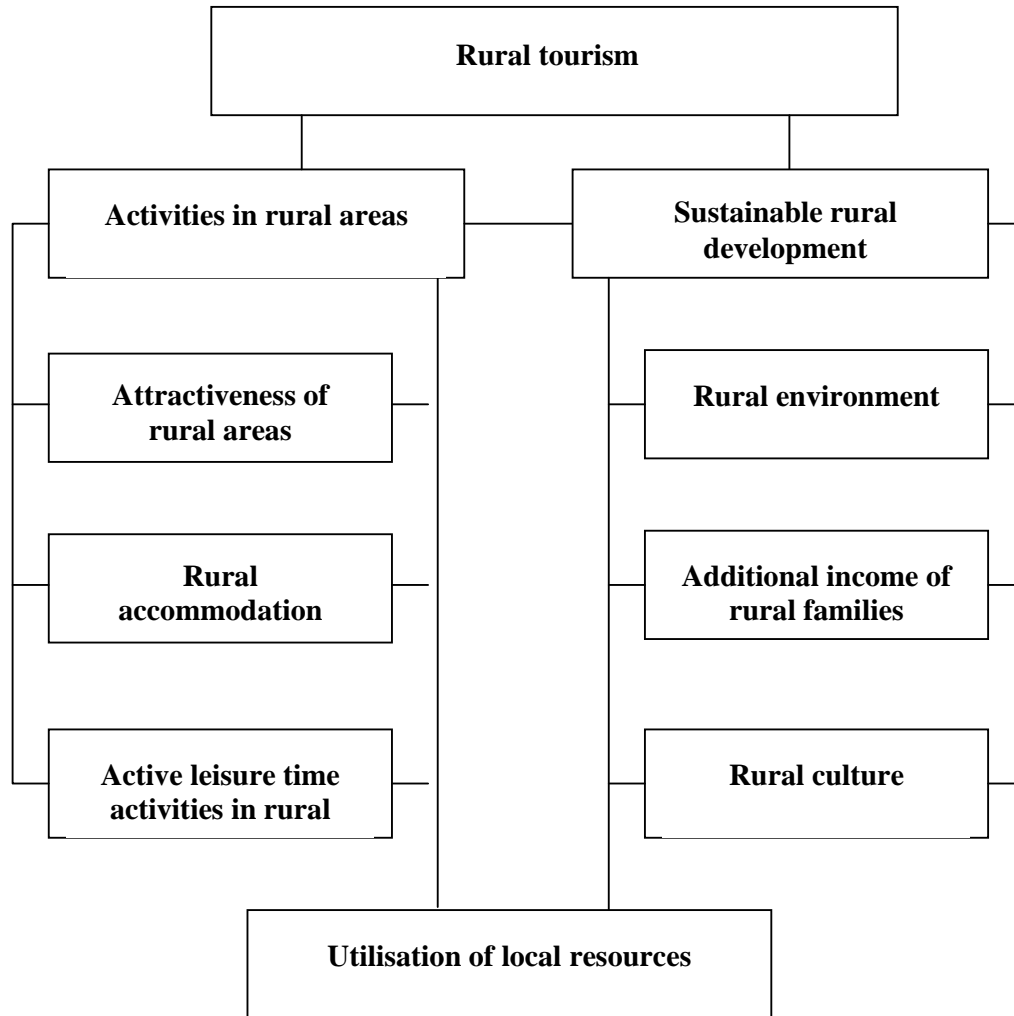
looked-after rural environment, having a regional attractiveness, serving the resident and non-resident tourists' demands of leisure activities, and providing commercial services for the customers (CSIZMADIA, 2000). Rural tourism is a tourism product that is built for introducing rural regions, and to utilise other attractions and provide diversified services. Tourism provides authentic special emotions for the tourists, alternative income and the preservation of local natural values and culture for the local inhabitants.

The rural tourism is outstandingly developed in Austria and France in the European Union. In Austria rural tourism businesses receive government subsidies and they may apply for loans on preferential terms while in France government beyond the financial promotion education plays a significant role. In Hungary the history of rural tourism, similarly to the beginning of the Hungarian tourism, started in the thirties. The new age of rural tourism is 10-15 years old, it started in 1989-90 when local governments recognised the rural tourism as a possibility for economic achievements. Generally businesses of rural tourism were initiated by civil associations. Rural tourism connects tourism products. Rural tourism connects areas of rural leisure activities. Therefore the rural tourism, based on the rural circumstances, is a type of tourism which can be combined with the elements of cultural and active tourism (e. g.: horse riding and hiking). Synthesising the elements of rural tourism the system of definitions of rural tourism is shown in figure 1.

Economical importance of tourism is not calculated from objective data. There are only expert guesses about the contribution of the tourism to the GDP. Expert estimate that the contribution of the tourist industry to the GDP is about 5-15% and there are 200-300 thousand people employed in the industry. There are huge reserves in the diversification of rural employment in which the rural tourism is a significant factor (SZABÓ, 2003).

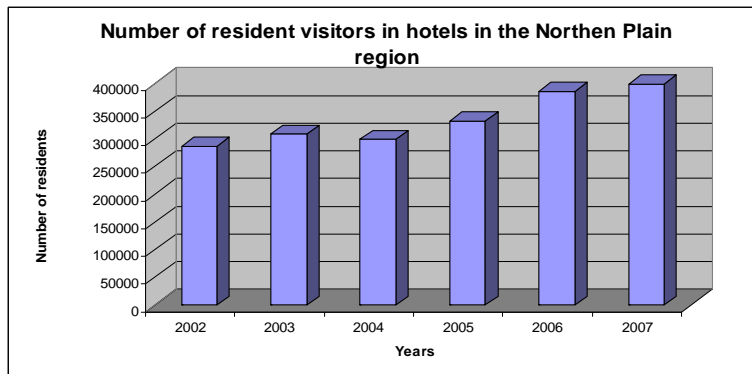
The role of the Northern Great Plain region in the development of Hungarian tourism

The Northern Great Plain region has had a local regional Tourism Concept and Development Programme since 2000. The concept defines the long-run principles and priorities of regional tourism development. The development of regional tourism has showed an increasing trend in case of resident visitors (Figure 2). For the visitors of the region interested in rural areas and nature worth to see the first and biggest national park, Hortobágy National Park, which have unprecedented national curiosities and values. Hortobágy National Park received the title of World Heritage Site as an outstanding example of the symbioses of people and nature. Grazing ancient domestic animals as the Hungarian grey cattle, racka sheep are special attractions.



Source: Könyves, 2001

Fig. 1 System of definitions of rural tourism



Source: Eurostat

Fig 2. Number of resident visitors in hotels in the North Plain Region

Especially important sights are the high number of ancient monuments that can be found in the region. The majority of monuments are churches and home buildings. The region is rich in cultural and historical sites; some villages preserved the original features where the most important tourist attractions are the sacral buildings of the countryside, churches, and wood belfries. The increasing number of peasant houses preserves the elements of folk art. The most important tourist sites are the towns. First of all the tourism attraction of Debrecen can be emphasized where there are given the conditions of conference tourism in the hotels of higher categories. The development of the economy has facilitated the evolution of the tourism in Debrecen however the dominant tourist attractions of the town is the thermal bath and spa in the Nagyerdő. Nyíregyháza – Sóstófürdő has thermal bath and spa too but despite of this fact the zoo is the most visited site by the resident tourists. Hajdúszoboszló, as a significant tourist site of the Northern Plain region, became world wide famous for its spa. Nowadays the water park has the same importance for the Hungarian and foreign tourists than the spa.

Table 1

Region	Number of tourists (1000)				Nights spent by tourists			
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2004	2005	2006	2007
Northern Great Plane	125	125	134	161	576	593	609	643

Source: I2

Tourism products developed in the Northern Great Plane region attracted a significant number of tourists. From 2004 to 2007 in the Northern Great Plane realised a notable increase in the number of tourists where the nights spent by foreign tourists increased continuously in each year.

CONCLUSIONS

Rural tourism as supplemental income can contribute to the increase of wellbeing of the rural inhabitants, the reduced out-migration and to the development of the rural areas. Tourism is increasing the life quality of the inhabitants of the Northern Grate Plain region and it reduces the differences between the rural and urban regions. It seems important to note that the tourism can not be a dominant sector of the region itself however it may be a driver force with the other branches of the regional economy.

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