

A REGION TORN IN TWO – THE DEVELOPMENT POSSIBILITIES OF THE BACKGROUND AREA OF LAKE BALATON

EGY KETTÉSZAKADT RÉGIÓ – A BALATON HÁTTÉR TERÜLETEINEK FEJLESZTÉSI LEHETŐSÉGEI

JELENKA, György – SARUDI, Csaba

Kaposvár University, Hungary, e-mail: jelenka@somogy.hu; sarudi@ke.hu

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ABSTRACT

Due to its touristical attractiveness the Balaton Region (i.e. Lake Balaton Resort Area, furthermore as LBRA) can be listed among to the relatively developed areas of the country. Within the region, however, significant differences can be observed among the settlements. The lake shore villages show higher economic and better infrastructural potentials as well as higher living standards than the ones being a bit further from the shore (background settlements). The authors investigate the roots of the differences and conclude that the touristical strength of the region originates from the high concentration of tourism into the shore settlements. Achieving a balanced development within the region implies the improvement of the touristical potentials of the background settlements along with the strengthening and restructuring of their own economic bases as well as the development of the environmental and landscape conserving functions of agriculture in the region. The latter positively affects the water quality of the lake and thus the attractiveness for tourism.

Keywords: Balaton region, shore settlements, background settlements, development level

ÖSSZEFOGLALÁS

A Balaton régió (Balaton Kiemelt Üdülőkörzet) jelentős turisztikai vonzereje révén az ország relatíve fejlett térségeihez sorolható. A régióon belül azonban számottevő fejlettségbeli különbségek tapasztalhatók. A tóparti települések erősebb gazdasági potenciállal, jobb infrastruktúrával, a lakosság magasabb életszínvonalával jellemezhetők, mint a tótól távolabb lévők. A tanulmány szerzői e különbségek okait vizsgálják, és megállapítják, hogy a különbségek háttérben döntő mértékben a régió turizmusának a part menti településekre irányuló erős területi koncentrációja áll. A térség kiegyensúlyozott fejlődése érdekében szükség van a háttér területek idegenforgalmi potenciáljának fokozására, saját gazdasági bázisának átalakítására és fejlesztésére, továbbá a mezőgazdaság környezet-, és tájvédelmi funkcióinak erősítésére. Ez utóbbi a tó vízminőségének védelmét és a turizmus érdekeit egyaránt szolgálja.

Kulcsszavak: Balaton régió, part menti települések, háttér települések, fejlettségi különbségek

RÉSZLETES ÖSSZEFOGLALÓ

A tanulmány a Balaton régió (Balaton Kiemelt Üdülőkörzet) partközeli és parttól távolabb eső területei között kialakult fejlettségbeli különbségek okait vizsgálja. Elemzi a demográfiai folyamatokat (természetes népmozgalom, vándorlás), a foglalkoztatási és jövedelmi viszonyokat, a térség gazdasági, infrastrukturális helyzetét a tóparti, és a háttér területek, valamint a városok és falvak viszonylatában. Rámutat a tóparti és háttér települések között kialakult jelentős fejlettségbeli különbségekre, amelyek a vállalkozói aktivitásban, a foglalkoztatásban, a jövedelmekben és a demográfiai folyamatokban egyaránt tükröződnek. A jelenség háttérében a turizmus erős part menti koncentrációja áll. Az elmúlt időszak fejlesztései szinte kizárólag a Balaton parti sávban valósultak meg, tovább növelve ezzel a tótól távolabbi térség „lemaradását”. A tanulmány megállapítja, hogy a turisztikai kereslet változásai (az aktív szabadidő eltöltési módok előtrébe kerülése) jó alapot biztosítanak az idegenforgalom területi koncentrációjának oldására, a háttérterületek az idegenforgalomban betöltött szerepének növelésére. Ezzel párhuzamosan szükség van a háttérterületek saját „gazdasági bázisának” bővítésére és diverzifikálására, a turizmust kiszolgáló ágazatok, a mező- és erdőgazdaság, az élelmiszer-feldolgozás, a kézműipar erősítésére, környezetbarát fejlesztésére is.

INTRODUCTION

Due to the obvious features of Lake Balaton (water related tourism attractiveness) tourism is concentrated in space to the shore settlements and in time to the summer season (July, August). Development programs of the last decades focused on the more intensive involvement of the background areas into the tourism industry aiming at the protection of the shoreline and the smoother utilization of the infrastructure [1] [2] [3]. The actual achievements of development measures, however, always affected the onshore areas [4]. It resulted in a growing development gap (that can be observed in social, economic – demographical, economic environment etc. terms) between the shore and the background areas [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10]. In the present study the roots of the differences are investigated [11] and a strategy is looked for which may be suitable for achieving a balanced development of the region through progressive ‘upgrade’ of the background settlements.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the social and economic analyses of the Balaton region primary and secondary data were used. The primary database was set up from interviews, while the secondary

database was derived from the related databases of Central Statistical Office (T-Star) and Public Employment Service. During the analysis data related to demography (population, migration), economy (employment, income patterns), tourism and infrastructure were studied for the 164 settlements of the Lake Balaton Resort Area (LBRA). The respective legal resource [12] divides the LBRA into 52 onshore and 112 background settlements.

The Balaton region is not a standalone unit either in administrative or in regional development terms. Its territory is divided among three counties – Somogy, Veszprém and Zala – and among three statistical planning regions – South-, North- and Central-Transdanubia. Originating from its “quasi” region feature the cooperation level of the affected counties can remarkably influence the development of the area.

The analysis of statistical data was segmented as follows:

- lake shore and background settlements,
- villages and towns,
- settlements of Somogy, Veszprém and Zala counties.

RESULTS

Population

The region in concern can be taken as a rural area with a population density of 68.9 pers/km² which is 77% of the country average (excluding the capital). More than half of the population is living in towns but the average headcount in the given towns is about 9 thousand and in no case it exceeds 25 thousand. High geographical concentration of the population is shown by the fact that the half of the population of on-shore area is living in two bigger towns (South-Western town of Siófok and Western town of Keszthely).

Decline of the traditional economic sectors of the Balaton region (agriculture, forestry, fisheries) and the growing tourism initiated different tendencies in case of lake shore and background settlements. Economic benefits of tourism (growing labour demand, better income status) led to a rapid growth of the population resulting in the formation of a densely populated ‘agglomeration ring’ around the lake. On the contrary, the background settlements even today can be described by small population and by low population density. Geographic location (the distance from the lake) seems to have a key effect on population. It is indicated also by the fact that only background settlements within the agglomeration zone of on-shore towns showed increase in population (Fig. 1).

In the LBRA a natural decrease of the population can be

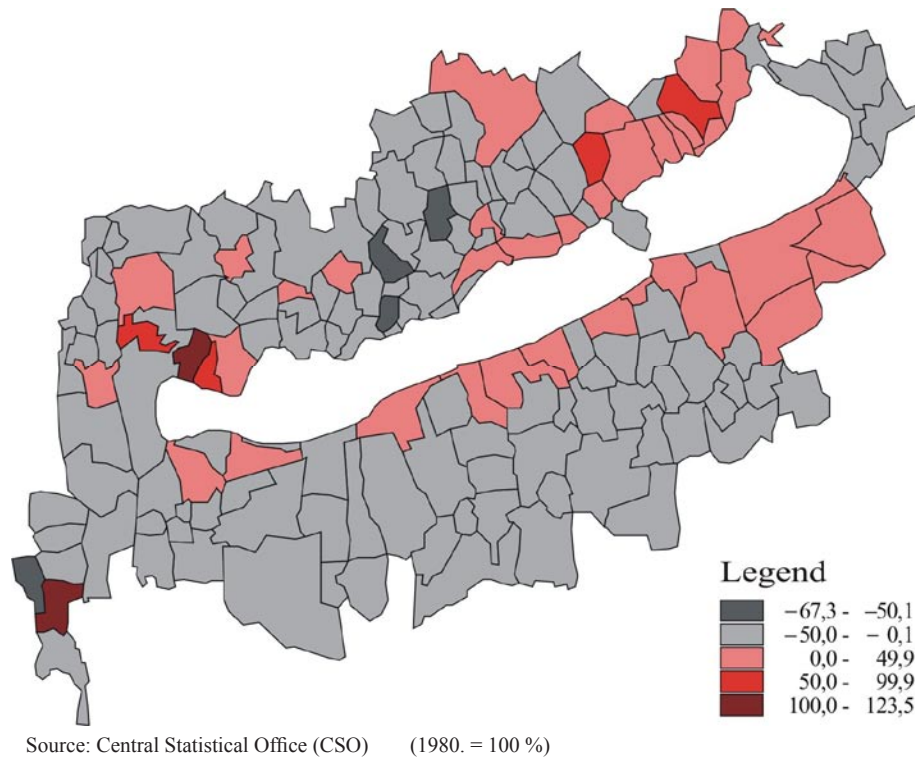


Fig 1: Changes in Population of the Settlements in the Balaton Region (1980-2003)

observed from the 1980s. As for the differences within the region, natural fertility decreased similarly in on- and off-shore settlements but the same results are driven by different tendencies. In the shoreline area the intense drop in natality, while in the background areas faster growth of mortality indicate the tendencies. Since the age structure of the two subareas showed no relevant differences [7], it can be assumed that lower natality in the shore settlements is caused by a “modern” way of life being accompanied by higher income and living standards, while the higher mortality rate of the other settlement group can be explained by the unfavorable health conditions of its population. In the 70s (and partly in the 80s) the direction of the migration was determined only by the town or village like character of the settlements. During this period the rural population migrated towards the towns offering better living standards, employment, services regardless of the onshore or background location of the given town. After the transition the tendency turned around.

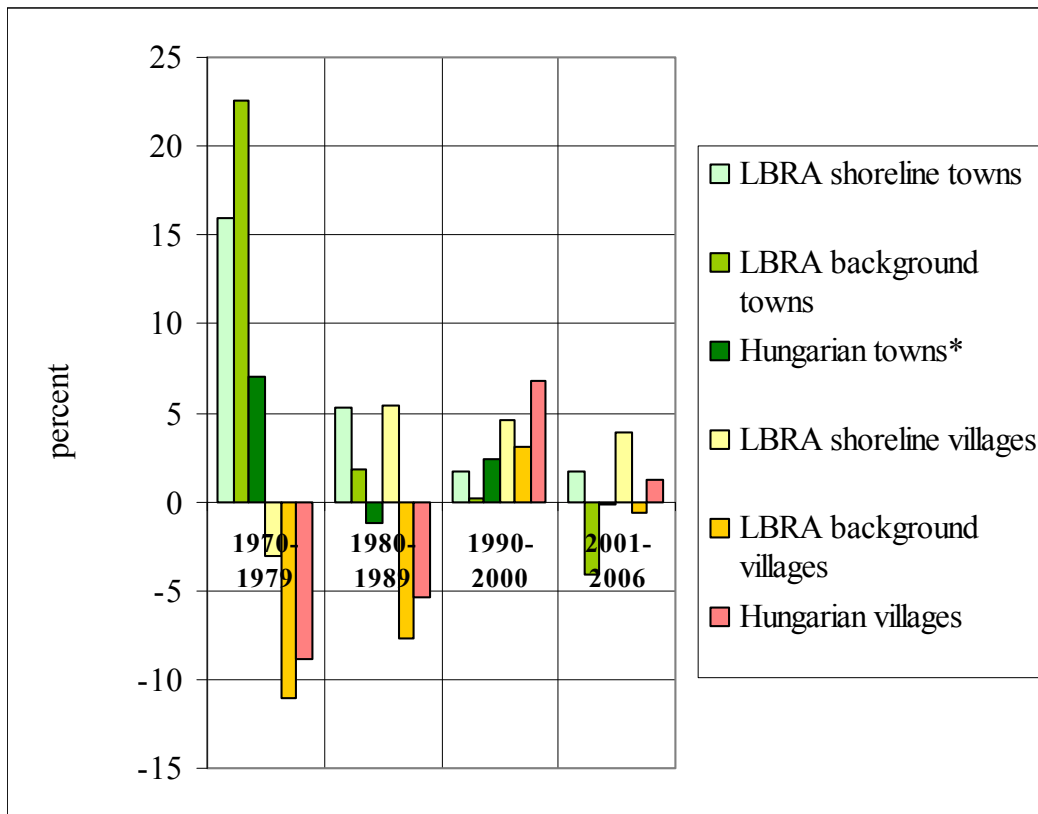
On one hand, the unemployed people looked for cheaper living and moved to the villages [13] and, on the other, the process of suburbanization appeared (wealthier segment of the population is moving to agglomeration areas, which offer calm and healthy living conditions.). Nowadays the

direction of migration is defined by the distance from the lake – on-shore settlements (regardless to their size) are still the winners of the migration, while the attractiveness of background settlements is decreasing. (Fig. 2)

Economy, enterprises

Seasonal labour demand of tourism causes a cyclic (and far above the average) swaying in the unemployment rate of the region. Apart from the seasonal fluctuation, the unemployment rate of the background areas is still higher by 3 percentage points than that of the shoreline area (Fig. 3).

It can be explained by the relatively low mobility of labour originating from its unskilled features that do not match with the labour demand and by the traffic conditions (availability gaps between on- and offshore settlements, un-harmonized characters of public transport etc.). Comparing the counties it was found that – as for the terms of employment data – the best one is Veszprém and the worst one is Somogy county. It seems to be an acceptable explanation that Veszprém (being practically adjacent to the LBRA) represents relatively strong labour demand, while the same effect of the other two county towns (due to their distance from the region) is relatively limited.



*excluding Budapest and towns of county rank
 Source: own compilation based on CSO data

Fig. 2: Migration Balance of the Settlements in the Balaton Region (1970-2006)

Special characteristics of the resort area are reflected by per capita values of enterprises and by the distribution of incomes. Due to concentrated tourism on the shoreline and to the higher and permanent demand in the towns the average income level and therefore the density of enterprises are also higher. In the shoreline settlements and in the towns the infrastructure is better, and the highly concentrated demand indicates high density of enterprises and higher income levels. In shoreline settlements there are 98 operating enterprises per one thousand inhabitants (higher density can be found only in the capital), while the background territories show up a value of 57.3 which seems to be lower than the rural average of 61.9.

Strong geographic concentration of tourism can be traced in the sectoral distribution of the enterprises. There are almost twice as many tourism related enterprises in the shoreline area than in the background territories. The “noisier” branches, like the building industry, however tend to find their place in the background areas (Table 1).

The most remarkable difference between the shoreline and background areas is represented by the geographical distribution of tourist traffic. As much as 93% of the

guests visiting the region take up quarters in the shoreline area, another 5% visit Zalakaros, which represents the only reputed thermal spa among the background settlements. As for guest nights, the values are 92% and 5.2%, respectively. It means that the hosts in the background settlements – excluding Zalakaros – share the remaining 2% of the tourist traffic of the region. Most of the problems affecting the tourism in the region (therefore most social, economic employment problems) can be derived from the weaknesses of the shore-tourism (high seasonality, weather dependence, poor and low quality services, low expenditure levels).

Water, electricity and gas supply network practically covers the whole region, while significant differences can be found in the case of sewage network. While in the shoreline agglomeration (almost) every property is connected to the sewage network, about one third of the background settlements still lack access to the sewage system, and it is an important hazard factor on the water quality of the lake and hence on tourism, which is the strongest pillar of economy in the region.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of our research confirm the experience of the analyses and studies referred to in the introduction, so our conclusion and suggestion are attuned to the statements of the above documents. Balanced spatial development of the region requires the progressive ‘upgrade’ of the background settlements and improvement of the role they play in assisting the tourist industry (employment, touristical features, unburdening the shoreline areas in terms of environment and economy). Consumer habits showed remarkable changes on the touristical market during the past years. The demand turned towards the innovative products, quality became more important, unique features, active recreation, health conservation came into the foreground [14]. The new tendencies require on one hand the diversification of supply and on the other the severe improvement of the quality of services, the raising of the complexity of touristical products. Development of the competitiveness of the region and establishment of a balanced touristical structure require the spatial and timely deconcentration of tourism. It is favourable that the background settlements have excellent natural, ecological features and these can be a base for developing new touristical products to be able to reach the following goals:

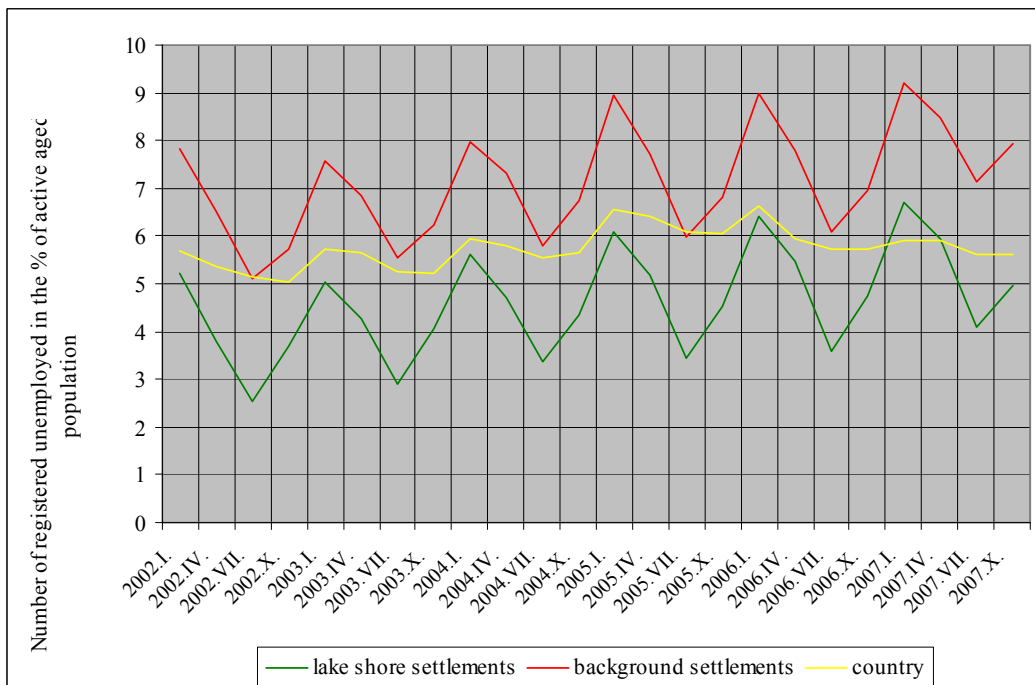
Cure and thermal spas are independent from seasonal changes and a number of additional services can be

connected to them, so they are among the internationally reputed attractions of the region and they have high development potentials;

Due to the traditions and the acceptance of the Balaton wines [15] the possibilities offered by wine tourism should be exploited;

The natural and geographical characteristics of the region offer good chances to develop the services connected to ‘silent’ tourism (wandering, cycling, horse riding) [16]; Although sailing tourism is connected directly to the Lake the additional services and programme choice can improve the attractiveness of background settlements.

In the period of 2007-2013 financing the touristical developments of the Balaton region is based on the operative programs of the New Hungary Development Plan (regulating the usage of the resources of the Structural Funds) and from the measures of the New Hungary Rural Development Plan. It is favourable that most of the supported actions should serve the reduction of seasonality [17] [18] [19] [20]. The volume of the available funds, however does not seem to be enough to finance large developments that can have effects on the whole region, so involvement of private resources can be of crucial importance. A sign of the improvement of the region’s capital attracting ability is that more investor groups are planning remarkable developments in the region that can raise the competitiveness and



Source: own compilation from Public Employment Service data

Fig. 3: Unemployment in the Balaton Region (Jan. 2002 – Oct. 2007).

Table 1 Sectoral Distribution of Operating Enterprises in the Balaton Region (2005)

Item	Shoreline	Background	<i>Combined</i>	<i>Hungary</i>
	settlements	settlements		
Agriculture, forestry, game production and fisheries	3.2	8.2	4.6	3.4
Mining, processing	7.1	8.5	7.5	9.3
Building industry	12.2	16.6	13.5	10.2
Trade and repair	23.3	21.7	23.0	22.1
Tourism, catering	12.5	6.8	10.8	4.6
Transport, storing, post, telecom.	5.3	5.5	5.3	5.2
Financial services	2.9	3.5	3.1	3.5
Real estate, economic services	19.9	16.2	18.8	27.3
Education	2.2	3.0	2.4	3.5
Health and social care	3.3	2.4	3.0	3.4
Other communal and personal services	8.1	7.6	8.0	7.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Source: own compilation based on CSO data

have favorable effects on employment [21]. The hazard however, is still present that these investments (just like the former ones) are concentrated to the shoreline area and can deepen the gaps between the on- and off-shore settlements.

During the development of the touristical potentials of the background settlements it must be considered that spreading the guest traffic is possible only to a limited extent. The water of lake Balaton remains the main “commodity” of the LBRA, so the background settlements have to build up simultaneously their own economic bases, like the development of agriculture, forestry, food processing, handicraft etc. The restructuring of agricultural production is highly recommended, changing its focus from the production towards a new attitude which keeps the conservation of the traditional landscape, biodiversity, surface waters always in consideration with special respect to the following issues:

Promoting the production of local specialities (food and nonfood features). Establishing the integration of local production and trade. Creating the marketing chain with the touristical centers;

Developing touristical products related to agriculture and nature. Adding new services (lodging, catering, programme choice) to the basic attractions (riding, wandering, biking, wine tasting);

Exploiting the touristical and ecological potentials of the forests;

Improving the technological backgrounds of food

processing and raising the level of processing (wine, vegetable and fruit production, forest products etc.), Reviving the traditional crafts and switch them into the touristical attractions.

Developments connected to the production and other functions of agriculture (environment- and landscape conservation, environment protection) are to be financed through the measures of the New Hungary Rural Development Plan [20]. If it is assumed that the producers of the regions can obtain development resources in the rate they represent themselves among the producers of the country then about 100-140 million Euros are to be expected during the next seven years.

Measures that have been taken during the past two decades for improving the water quality of the Lake Balaton (sewage system, eliminating large scale animal production and highly polluting industrial factors) resulted in the significant improvement of water quality [4]. Vulnerability of the ecological system of the lake and its effect on the economy of the region – especially on tourism – requires that in case of all future developments the water quality must be kept in foreground. In this respect it is of vital importance that the sewage system should cover the whole watershed area of the lake. These investments – due to their high costs – can only be financed by local administrations through central resources. Environmental developments of the 2007-2013 period are regulated by the Environment and Energy Operative Program and within this the extension

of the sewage system in the background settlements of the Southern shore got high priorities [22]. The affected circle of settlements, however, is getting narrower due to the cutbacks in the budget. That is why introduction of other resources and “local solutions” would be beneficial, especially in areas with lower population density (where the per capita costs are higher, so the investment is not “economical”). Upon reaching the above goals, the focus is expected to be changed from large communal investments to the regulations of land usage and landscape conservation.

Public road connections of background settlements with the shoreline area quite are gappy (especially on the Southern shore), several settlements can be reached from the Lake through quite a long way about [23]. Opening up the “closed” settlements is an important step both from touristical and employment aspects. The development of communal transport and the harmonization of public transport network are also unavoidable.

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