

Establishing sustainable tourism in the north-eastern part of Hungary, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County

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Introduction

The economic role of tourism is already well-known today: with the help of it the elsewhere produced purchasing power may be brought in a region, through this may arise such incomes, which are suitable to diversify economy and to retain the population in a given area. Therefore is general the effort to develop tourism, all the more so, since these beneficial results can be achieved by utilising such resources, which otherwise would lie fallow or would result only more modest economic income (for example national parks and nature conservation areas, monuments, lakes, rivers and reservoirs, lands not suitable for agricultural production, rural environment and life style etc.) Thus tourism is a very important regional development factor.

However tourism effects not only on economic, but also on natural and social environment, and effects of it may be not only favourable ones, but also damaging ones (for example overcrowding, raising of prices, speculation, damaging natural values, weakening morals, devaluation of traditions and other cultural values, even managed wrong way tourism contributes to the expansion of drugs, prostitution and crime, etc.)

Therefore achieving **sustainable development** has become, for today, a basic demand in tourism. Sustainability in tourism has particular content. On one hand – as in all sides of life – the natural and cultural heritage also must be protected in tourism, since these values represent those attractive forces for which tourists may choose just a given area for their destination. On the other hand however, the task of tourism is to make use of these values, otherwise should be enough to organize only the protection of nature and monuments. So, sustainable tourism is based on coupling protection of natural and cultural values with their utilization. For utilization are needed professional active tourist structures, because if the tourist does not come, the service sector will be “bankrupt” or will leave the region. This all means that we must establish **environment friend and at the same time marketing oriented tourism**, because in long term the lack of sound protected environment and in short term the decreasing demand would endanger its sustainability.

Sustainable tourism can be achieved only by **purposeful (aware) improvement**. The purposeful tourism development presumes the planning, the establishment of essential up-to-date institution system for the implementation of the plans, the suitable economic and legal regulation, the private-investment directing stimulative system, the developed infrastructure, the qualified working force, the professional and environment-friendly acting tourist establishments, the efficient company and regional non-profit marketing work, the correct and friendly “handling” of tourists by inhabitants and institutes, the public security and suitable health conditions.

This all means, that without **expertise and the active participation of the public sector** can not be created the sustainable development. Beside the planning, regulation, infrastructure-development, education and other key-role state responsibilities, the contribution to relaxation of those in need is also a public task. From private ventures are expected profit oriented structures and proper, regulated running. Important condition of sustainable development and achieving competitiveness at the same time is the public-private partnership and good co-operation.

The starting point of purposeful development is planning. Tourism development should fit the requirement of double integration, consequently tourism – in the framework of regional (area) development – should be integrated into its own environment, inside tourism all elements of tourism supply (touristic products) should be planned together. (If an area, expects its tourism prosperity from the building of a single hotel or pension, sooner or later will disappoint. Only for an available accommodation nobody will start for, first the tourist looks for the attractive force for which is worth starting out, then searches for transport facilities, considers time and distance, searches for accommodation facilities, compares prices, inquires about security and entertainment and other services, and other possible destinations, and based on the above decides where to travel at the end.

This is facilitated if someone has already any idea about the possible target area or gets suitable information about the possible travel destinations...)

In tourism planning must be respected the principle of hierarchy and the requirement of consecutive levels. According to the principle of hierarchy **the first step is to determine long term objectives** (concept, in case of its adoption will be the country's or the region's official tourism policy or strategy), based on this the **medium term development programs**, while at the end are worked out **projects**, which are concretized on given structures or complex touristic products (investment plan proposals). During working out different plans, should be paid attention to the priority of higher levels, and the harmonization of the content of the plans. This latter can be realized in case of referring planning as a process, and not only a single action. The implementation therefore contains continuous control and feedback, in case is need the changing of the plans. This gives opportunity to make order in the actual confusion of the plans: establishing consecutiveness and harmony between plans with different timing and levels, creating parallel to this the system of the term of the implementation.

The first concrete measure, according to the above, towards purposeful tourism development in **Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County** was the adoption of this concept and program, and respectively the implementation of them. Though there are many county level tourism plans, but these were either adopted, nor made for other levels (micro /sub/ regional, municipal, or regional). Tourism is only one element in the integrate county plans (for example: area development concept and program), so there are no detailed the special conditions of the professional tourism development.

1. Area identification

Today there are nine tourism regions in Hungary, from which seven is according to the NUTS 2 level, two are special tourist entities: one being organized around to the country's biggest lake, the Lake Balaton, the other near to the Lake-Tisza.

1. Picture: Touristic regions of Hungary

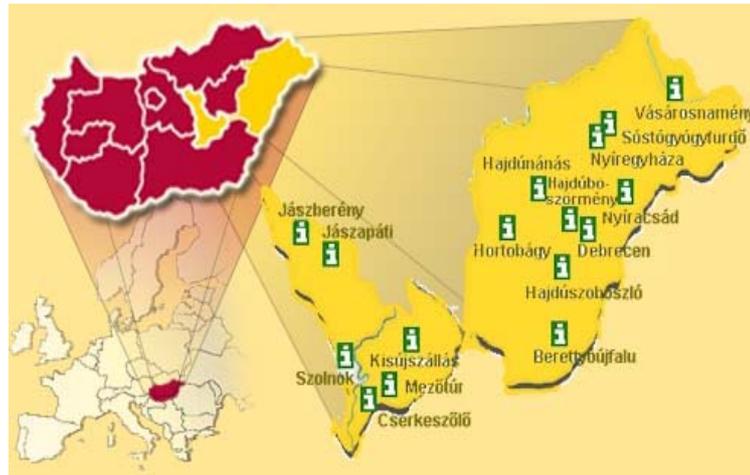


- West-Hungarian region
- Middle-Transdanubian region
- Balaton region
- Southern -Transdanubian region
- Budapest-Middle-Danubian region

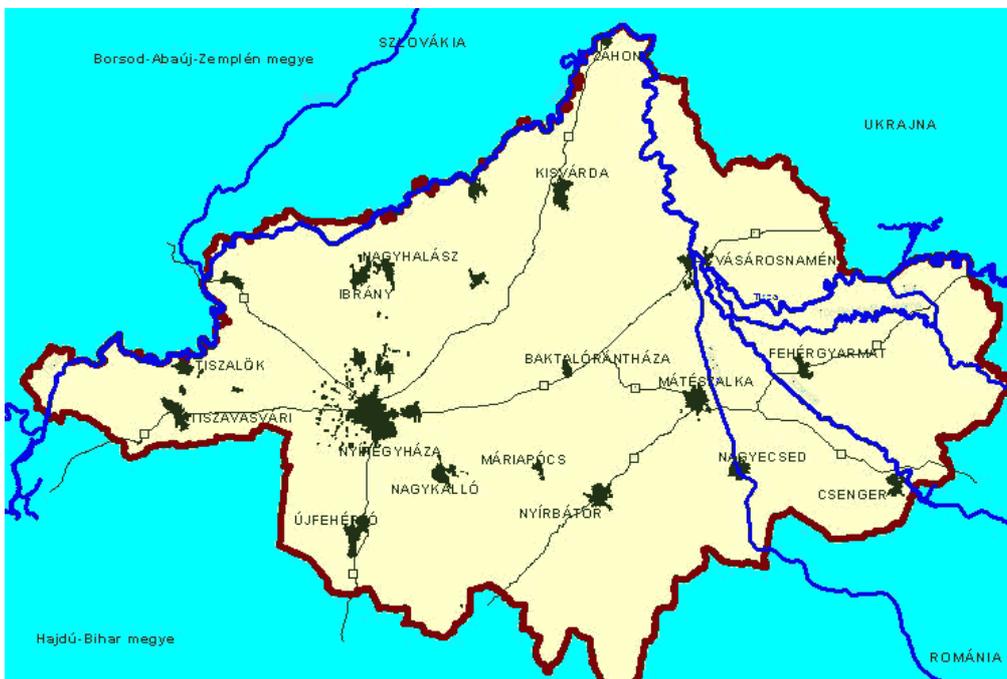
Northern Hungary region
Northern Great Plain region
Lake-Tisza region
Southern Great Plain region.

The **Northern Great-Plain** tourism region consist of three counties: Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar and Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok counties belong here.

2. Picture: Northern Great Plain touristic region



3. Picture: County Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg



Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County is situated in the North-Eastern part of Hungary, it has three neighbours: Slovakia, Ukraine and Romania. On its 5 937 km² surface, in its 21 towns and 208 rural settlements, are living 570 thousand inhabitants, with this size being the third highest populated county of the country. Except Nyíregyháza, the other towns are small ones, where the number of population is under 20 thousand. The breaking up of the population on the surface of the County is not equal, while the western areas are denser populated, while on the eastern areas there lot of micro-villages. In the county divided in eleven micro(sub)-regions the number of municipal associations in sixteen.

2. Main characteristics of the county Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg

Referring tourism county Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg is situated at the end of the ranking list of the Hungarian counties. The actual estimated level of tourism incomes is 3-4 million Hungarian Forints, which does not reach even 1 percent of the whole country income, respectively equivalent to 1 percent of the county GDP.

Main characteristics of the tourism of the county: predominance of transit and day-tripper(excursionist) traffic, strong seasonality and area concentration. Low specific expense, the structures maintaining tourism are coping with difficulties. Spontaneous tourism till now does not result the tourism integration of the high part of the county.

The co-operation skill between tourist entrepreneurs is not suitable, with insufficient co-ordinating and marketing activities and unclaimed co-ordination of activities. There are no unambiguous formulated objectives and tasks, assigned to structures.

Though tourism is present in the framework of different county and municipal structures, the implementation of efficiency ensuring harmonised active tourism system of structures is our future task. A lot of reserves are hidden in the public-private co-operation, making this active being one basic condition of successful tourism development.

At the same time there is willingness for tourism development from the self-governments and population too, because it would have favourable effects to the economy of the County and to the life conditions of people living here. Coping with different actual problems, improving the attractive forces of the county and the accessibility through conscious improvement would create the opportunity to come true the expectations. Then again, continuing the spontaneous tourism development can result increase negative effects.

Strengths:

- Diverse county touristic attractions
- Rather heavy transit traffic, due geopolitical situation
- Significant excursionist traffic in several settlements
- Significant water-tourism of river Tisza and its tributaries (limited to short season)

Weaknesses:

- Strong regional concentration
- Lack of complex touristic products
- Low specific spending – low profit making ability of tourist ventures
- Low co-operation level between touristic structures.

3. Tourist development concept and strategic program of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County

In the document made in 2002 is outlined the concept of the tourism of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county which contains the long term development objectives and the preconditions of its implementation, while the strategy contains the medium term development tasks.

The **development program** focuses on those long term objectives of the concept which can be implemented with high probability in medium term, based on the resources available. The concept parallel worked out **strategy program** outlines the target-pyramid and the condition system of the implementation. The **operative program** contains concrete development suggestions and measures, followed the concept and strategic program can be worked out later in another work phase.

Long-term objective:

Establishing sustainable tourism with purposeful development and making Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County competitive tourist target area.

Supporting the practical implementation of the concept this main objective is break-downed in partial objectives, through which the objectives relating natural environment, society and economy complete the professional ones. Realizing sustainable development is essential - during the implementation of

the plans and running structures – the success of the environmental and general socio-economic targets and principles beside the professional considerations.

Long-term tourism development objectives of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County

Main objective: Establishing sustainable tourism and making Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county competitive tourist target area.

r é s z c é l o k

NATURE	SOCIETY	ECONOMY	TOURISM
1. Undeteriorated nature environment	1. Secure income higher proportion of the population	1. Creating individual, venture and public incomes	1. Services with high level, satisfied tourists, well-running tourist sector
2. Continuous protection of natural values, establishing zones for tourists	2. Keeping youth in for the region	2. Resource to tasks relating the protection of the environment	2. Exclusive (individual) touristic products, high level partial services
3. Ensuring suitable areas for tourism development	3. Stimulating social life of the settlements	3. Multiplication effect to other sectors (local realization of products)	3. New-image: special and diverse adventure in nice and undamaged nature environment
4. Improving land and making use of it by developing environment friend tourism	4. Enriching cultural values, re-generating traditions	4. Stimulating small and medium size entrepreneur-ships	4. Significant over-seasonal traffic, extending seasons
5. Protection of land, tourists and population from "overtaxing"	5. Accelerating the urbanization (infrastructure, services) process	5. Modernizing economic structure	5. Significant inland and special market segment attracting international tourism

6. Stressed development of ecotourism	6. Up-to-date educational and vocational system, environment culture and competence	6. Stimulating local and interregional co-operation	6. Good tourist attitude of the population and municipalities.
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The suggested range of products for development, are the following ones:

- I. Character-forming, exclusive tourist products (profession-, eco-, sport-, cultural-, ethnic-, medicine tourism)
- II. Other, more customary tourist products (water tourism, rural tourism, castle-, fishing-, hunting-, bicycle-, youth-, and III. age tourism)
- III. Improvement of high level partial services in order to increase the economic value of transit and excursionist tourism turnover, respectively supporting the areas with non-specific attracting force to join in the sphere of tourism.

The strategic program of tourism of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county is made for the period 2003-2010.

For the period 2000-2010 the main strategic objectives of tourism development are the following ones:

- 1.) Establishing conditions of sustainable tourism in the county
- 2.) Improving ability of county tourism competitiveness
- 3.) Continuous improvement of life quality of those living in the county.

Fulfilment of strategic objectives is served by three **strategic sub-programs**:

The task of subprogram I is establishing effective realization (running) of tourism (prompt task)

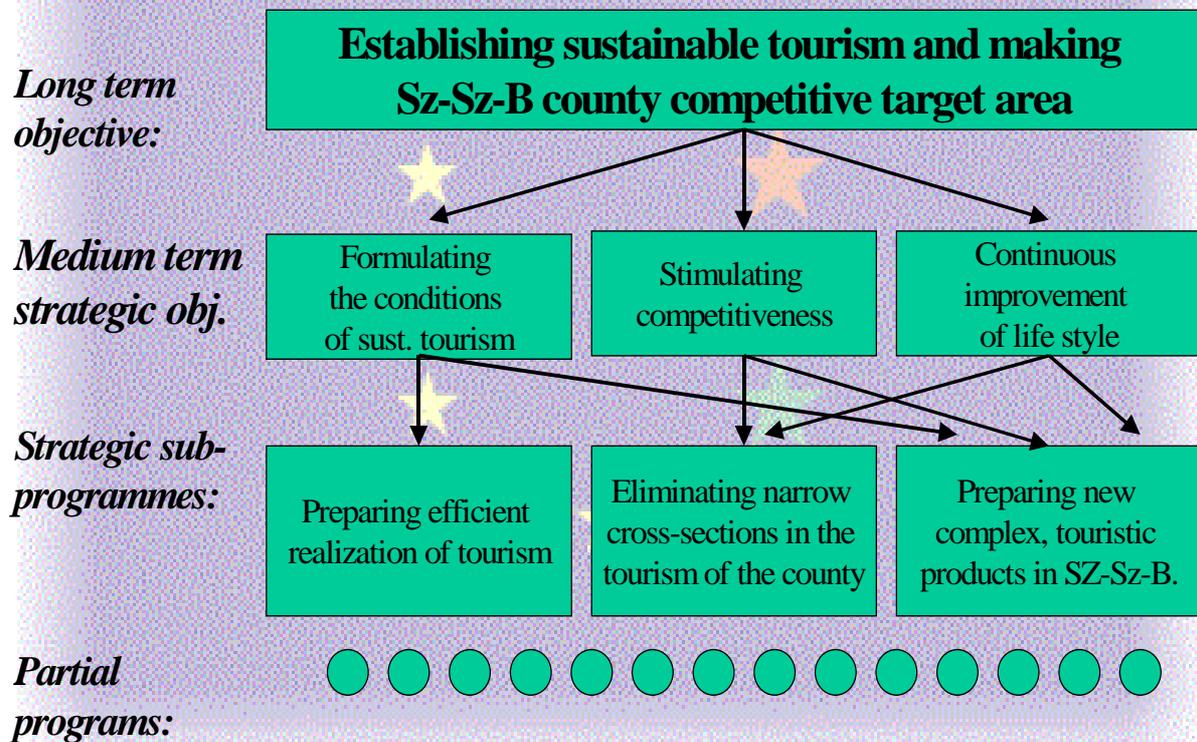
The task of subprogram II is decreasing the narrow cross sections, respectively eliminating actual lacks and making better the level of services (short term objective)

The task of subprogram III is preparing complex touristic products (continuous task, during the whole planning process).

4. Picture

Objectives and programs of the Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County tourism development

Objectives and programs of the county tourism development



4. Expected effects of the implementation of tourism strategy

From the completion of the program in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county can be expected the significant changing of the characteristics of the tourism. The gist can be summarized as the followings:

Actual tourism will be followed by purposeful improvement, which enable sustainability. This means that tourism will be at the same time environment-friendly and market oriented, so can not cause damage in the nature and in populated environment, but also protection taken as priority, it makes use of it, and from the results of this utilization – in forms of individual, entrepreneurial and municipal incomes –the region also benefits.

In the focus of purposeful (aware) development is the establishment of efficient acting system of tourism, the winding up of actual lacks and decreasing narrow cross-sections, respectively improving complex touristic products ensuring new image and competitiveness to the region.

The main ways of product development are determined by the attractive forces of the region. Regarding the ranking list the effectiveness of the attractive forces is determinant (very important is the international and the further national tourism), in this framework is important to give priority to those products which strengthen regionality or has regional impact.

The central category of the development concept is the **touristic product**, the content of which should be clearly seen. The touristic product is a set of services, based on attractive force (for what is coming a tourist in a given region) and tries to fulfil all requirements of the tourist being far away of his/her home, so contains traffic, accommodation, meals, entertainment, health, security, banking, information or other services suitable to the attractive force. These are ran by many entrepreneurship, structures and even the population, and harmonization of these diverse services and satisfaction of the tourist being far away from his/her home needs a “boss” who should manage and control.

The concept and the strategic program endeavour to outline not only investment-development tasks, but also the whole realization of tourism strategy. If this implementation can be managed together, then hopefully it achieved its target and the county is going to become a competitive destination for tourists, advantages of which should be enjoyed by both the coming tourists and inhabitants living here.

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