

ROLE OF RURAL TOURISM AND AGRICULTURE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL, PROTECTED AREAS

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Abstract

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The main challenge in rural areas currently is facing migration and unemployment. Inhabitants of the traditional Órség region also face this serious problem. The aim of this paper is to reveal problems in the region highlighting the two pillars of local rural development solutions; the current situation and opportunities for tourism and agriculture development. The opinion of local inhabitants acquired through questionnaires bare a special role in this search for solutions. Given its geographic location, success of the region's rural development may also be achieved through cross-border initiatives and cooperation.

Keywords

Rural development, borderlands, sustainable development, sustainable agriculture, rural tourism, ecotourism, Órség

1. Introduction

The fundamental challenge of rural development is keeping the local inhabitants from migrating, creating an attractive living environment and working conditions through the rational, integrated and sustainable use of local resources. In rural regions, the key activities are concentrated around agriculture. However, rural areas have an innate multifunctional value (Póla 2004), which means, that besides economy and production, their ecological and socio-cultural role is also well-known and recognized. In the “Őrség”, this complexity of rural areas prevails in an extraordinary manner. The former agricultural area, which has unique socio-cultural characteristics, became a National Park in 2002, and thus is under the highest level of nature protection. Amongst the pillars of local rural development protection and enhancement of ecological functions occur within the frame of National Park regulation. Economic function of the land needs significant development, and serious problems exist in the socio-cultural area as well. This study reveals the problems of borderlands as well as their solutions. Small village country sides have two main breakout opportunities: to enliven agriculture and to boost tourism. It must be noted that the development of rural areas is best achieved through endogen resources and based on bottom-up initiatives with the involvement of local inhabitants. Next to the economic potential, the main resource of a rural area is a healthy, self-organizing local community. For this reason, the study of the changing society of the Őrség gained great emphasis in this research.

2. Methodology

The research area was determined by the Hungarian settlements of today's Őrség (Fig. 1). It is well known, that the former, historic Őrség enveloped fewer settlements, and that three of its former settlements now belong to Slovenia (Hodos, Krplivnik és Domanjsevc). The study area is located alongside the Slovenian-Hungarian border, and has been a protected area since 2002, and since 2003 it also became the trilateral Őrség-Raab-Goričko Naturpark area. It is important to note, that the area of the National Park itself is significantly larger than the Őrség. The National Park comprises historically and developmentally varying regions (Csapó 2007), from which the Őrség belongs to the underdeveloped ones.

In this research, we carried out questionnaire surveys on site, from which 213 data sheets could be used in the evaluation. These were later supplemented with questionnaires filled out by the village leaders. Next to the data collected through questionnaires we also used the official statistical databases (Hungarian Central Statistical Office (CSO) publications and Settlement Information System (SIS) for the chronological portrayal of the individual regional processes. Based on the collected data we strived to point out the most important problems in the region; the scales of aging, migration and unemployment and the historical reasons of the above. We studied the relationship of the agriculture and current inhabitants of the former agricultural land, as well as the current state and development opportunities for tourism. Study of human resources also received an important role, since people are a key factor to all activities.

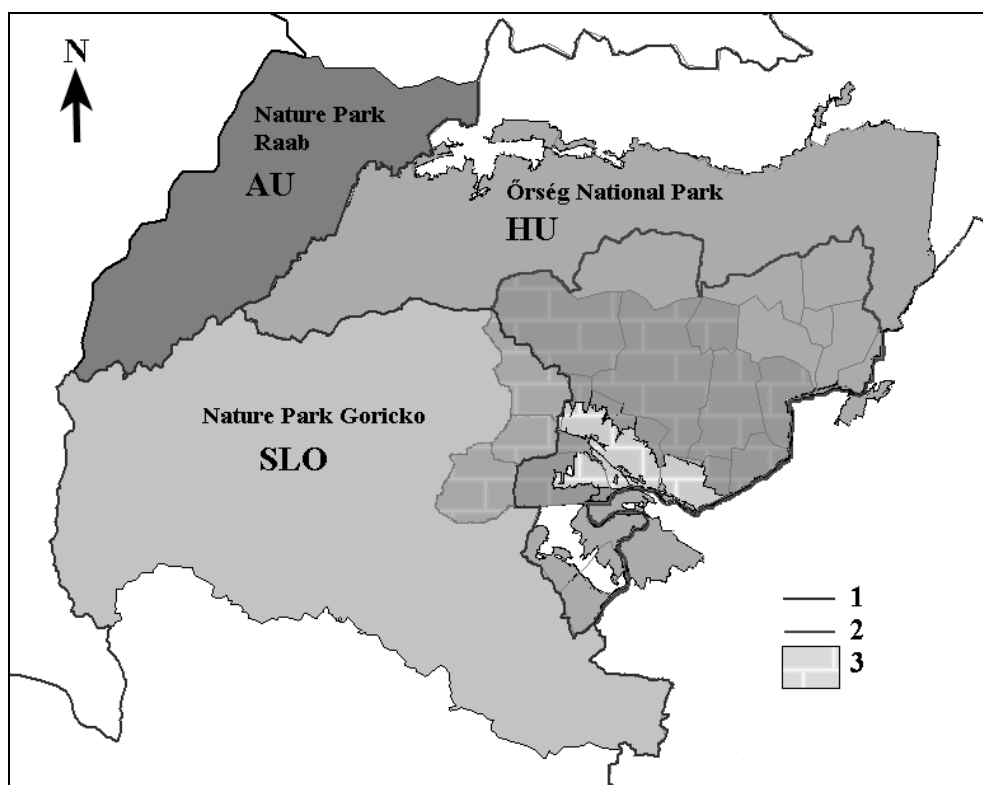


Fig. 1: Location of the Órség.

Legend: 1. national border, 2. border of the searching area, 3. settlements of the historical Órség.

Source: Baranyai 2012.

3. Discussion

During the Hungarian conquest guards were deployed for the protection of the western border. For their services, these settlers gained certain privileges, which they later lost. The typically fragmented, mosaic-like settlement pattern shows centuries-old co-existence of man and nature in the region. The ungenerous land could never sustain a large number of population, the villages did not grow big (Baranyai 2011). The inhabitants usually lived from agriculture (mainly animal husbandry) and were self-sustaining, but due to the unfavorable natural conditions they always needed additional income. Throughout history, the area was always on the periphery, but this became a disadvantage only after World War I. With the redrawing of the borders, the Órség lost family-, economic/market and geographic connections; the blood circulation of the area was mutilated on both sides of the border. The closing down of the borders, and subsequently the political milieu destroyed the small villages and the area became infrastructurally and economically poor (Baranyai 2011; Beluszky 2005; Olas, Kert 1993).

In a few villages, migration of the population began as early as 1910, yet, looking at the entire Órség region, the population decrease only began in 1949. Population count of the Órség in 1949 was 11457, which by 2010 decreased to 5056 (CSO

database). Reasons of the decrease in population are complex, and differ in different time periods. Population decrease began with the World War losses, deportations and persecutions. Later, existential difficulties and the distant availability of jobs caused people to migrate. The current volume of population decrease began approximately in the 1970-ies, and unfortunately today, the aging society “takes care” of this decrease themselves. Results of the questionnaire survey showed, that the vast majority of young inhabitants do not wish to stay in the Órség: 77.3% would like to move elsewhere either to live and/or to work. Within the population structure, the worst index is the age composition and the resulting economic activity. The biggest problem of the Órség is ageing: the index is 2.04. All this clearly has a negative effect on the economic activity of the population. The proportion of the economically inactive (37.9%) almost reaches that of the economically active (40.6%).

Change of the employment structure also contributes to the current environmental problems, as the decrease in the rate of population living from agriculture on the former agricultural land is significant. In the 1930-ies, the ratio of people living from agriculture in almost all the settlements was above 70%, which ratio decreased to an average of 11.3% by 2001 (CSO database). The decline of agricultural activities did not only result in the decrease of cultivated land, but also in the reduction of livestock (which decreased to one-sixth since the 1930-ies), which sequentially results in serious nature conservation issues. Without grazing, the spread of woody vegetation increases causing the valuable pastures to degrade significantly. Development of agricultural land use would not only be desirable from the aspect of nature protection. The land cannot sustain as many workers in other sectors of economy, as many were released from agriculture. Scarcity of workplace is enhanced through the continuous closing down of numerous factories (bread-, shoe-, brick factories) that provided jobs for many. Opportunity to reduce unemployment lies in agriculture and a lively tourism.

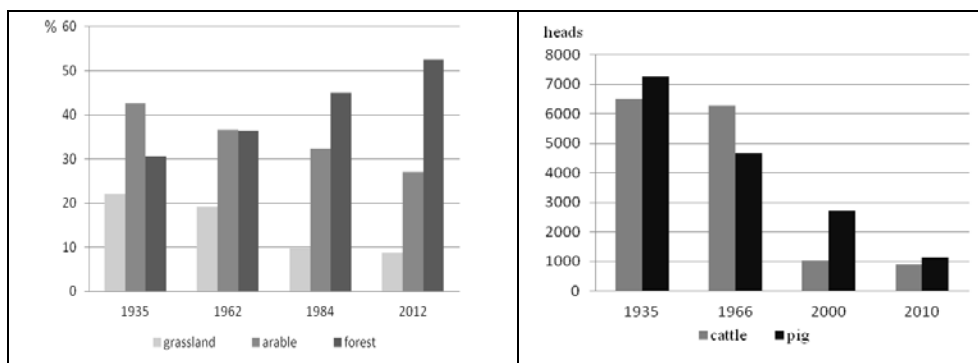


Fig. 2: Changes in land use and livestock in the Órség.

Tourism in the area is increasing; the number of guests and overnight stays are growing since 2004. In 2010 commercial and private accommodations had more than 10000 guests staying a total of 34000 overnights in the settlements of the Órség (CSO database). Tourists prefer staying in village accommodations as opposed to commercial ones. The locals (partially) recognized the possible income opportunities lying in tourism, and so the number of private accommodations is increasing year-by-year (SIS database).

Tab. 1: Tourist arrivals and tourism nights in the Órség, between 2000-2010.

Year	Public accommodation						Private accommodation					
	all guests	of which foreign		number of tourism nights	of which foreign		all guests	of which foreign		number of tourism nights	of which foreign	
		F	%		F	%		F	%		F	%
2000	5588	290	5,2	15137	629	4,2	1231	39	3,2	7365	86	1,2
2001	7586	639	8,4	18979	1689	8,9	1942	12	0,6	5928	29	0,5
2002	7206	430	6,0	19618	952	4,9	1864	9	0,5	7832	37	0,5
2003	8112	621	7,7	23585	1557	6,6	2195	15	0,7	7039	68	1,0
2004	4028	179	4,4	9893	411	4,2	1806	12	0,7	7358	36	0,5
2005	3389	229	6,8	8997	756	8,4	2452	51	2,1	7986	267	3,3
2006	4028	63	1,6	10977	115	1,1	3676	43	1,2	12929	118	0,9
2007	7193	254	3,5	15988	608	3,8	4472	44	1,0	13280	165	1,2
2008	6149	258	4,2	16452	1045	6,4	5537	39	0,7	17613	116	0,7
2009	4568	150	3,3	11905	238	2,0	7145	51	0,7	21443	145	0,7
2010	4685	237	5,1	12662	600	4,7	6010	56	0,9	21508	235	1,1

Source: by dates of Settlement Information System (SIS) Database 2000-2010 ed. Baranyai, O. 2012.

At the same time, results of the questionnaire survey suggest, that the majority of the population does not see any other reason/opportunity in rural tourism, than providing accommodation, and the arrival of tourists (58.2%). Those, who are involved somehow in tourism (17.6%), mostly offer accommodation (52%), and only a small proportion provides other services (pottery, horse riding, and selling goods). Those, who show optimism regarding the future of the Órség trust tourism as a solution for economic development (47.7%). However, not everyone can build an existence solely on providing accommodation.

It is evident, that the local tourism is this lively due to the presence of the National Park, and having high cultural and natural values (Baranyai, Baranyai, Csapó, Balogh 2012). Most important directions in developing the tourism of the Órség is the regional construction of tourism destination management (TDM) and discovering further potentials in tourism. Opportunities are given for the growth of ecotourism, the utilization of thermal water supply and the involvement of agriculture in tourism (organic farming, demonstrational farms). All the above could be a solution for providing a livelihood for the locals and can be achieved in two ways. One way is to introduce businesses into the area that offer more employment opportunities, or, the individual conditions of the inhabitants must be created in order to seize opportunities. An exemplary farm, where agricultural activities are joined with providing accommodation can already be found in the region (e.g. Ferencz Porta, Szalafő).

Tourists arriving to the area stay on an average for 3-4 days. A lack of foreign tourists can be observed: in year 2010, only 2.74% of tourists were foreigners (SIS database). In order to increase these numbers/ratios, the locality (borderland) of the area could be used to its advantage. The area is part of the trilateral Órség-Raab-Goričko Naturpark, and is a successful winner of numerous cross-border tenders. The expansion of cross-border thematic routes, or the market created to sell local produce from the Naturpark may be of interest to many arriving guests. Protecting and aiding local goods the Órség National Park created a trademark called "National Park Product". The idea of creating a trademark also arose on the Slovenian side (Štaus, Bavec, Bavec 2011). Accordingly there could be a Naturpark brand as well. It is known, that on the area of the Naturpark, the Slovenian, Austrian and Hungarian side are all engaged in producing pumpkinseed oil. It could be interesting producing a product-package, which contained each of the three

country's pumpkinseed oil. Other, local goods could be found in the package (local fruits, cheese, honey, pálinka, pottery). Equally big interest surrounds organic products. Although Slovenian researchers and their studies (Štaus, Bavec, Bavec 2011) confirm, that organic farming is still in the initial stages of development, and the local inhabitants see better perspectives in tourism development, organic farming on protected sites has great opportunities. Undertakings in this direction are typically initiated by settlers (organic apple juice factory, jam factory). Unfortunately these initiatives were not always successful, and also, the native inhabitants do not often appreciate these attempts of the newcomers.

The villages of the Órség have a unique history, and the trials of the past 50-60 years made the inhabitants quite withdrawn. This is why some of the locals (mainly the elderly) disapprove of the settlers and the increasing number of tourists arriving. Tourism requires a different life pace, and an adaptive lifestyle, but could, at the same time, have a positive effect (Palancsa 2007). Unfortunately, in the Órség the multiplication effect of the tourism prevails only slightly. Infrastructural developments lag behind (e.g. road development), larger scale job creation in the context of tourism did not occur, and part of the seasonal workers arrive from outside the region. Most of the inhabitants like the tourists (90.1%), but they still fear their environment from them (22.6%).

Foreign house buyers and settlers have appeared in the region, but even more so, "refugees" from other homeland cities, similar to the Goričko region (Lampič, Mrak, Potočnik Slavič 2012). Starting from the 1970-ies, the interest of the wealthy city people in the Órség region arose. While the local youth who lost their livelihood fled from the region, urban people moved into the empty houses (some temporally, others permanently), quasi creating a second home for themselves. In the questionnaire survey, one third of the local inhabitants (29.6%) claimed to be settlers, which is a very high ratio! Settlers usually have higher qualifications, and often bring enthusiasm or some sort of novelty – may that be cultural, spiritual or technical. Some of them (47.6%) are retirees, who just wish to spend their time on good air and a nice environment. The majority however is eager to do something and often arrive with solid ideas and plans, and if they have sufficient capital, expertise and a will to act, they can contribute significantly to the economic development of the region by starting up their business. Actually, this is something the native inhabitants do not have anymore. Hopelessness of the ageing society on the verge of identity-loss is evident. Human resources development and creating a strong social network are the heart of all further developments in the region.

The revival of rural farming – especially livestock – is important also in the aspect of the region's nature conservation. Although the ratio of farms which also have livestock is quite high, 74.8% (General Agricultural Census 2010), in the entire Órség region the number of cattle is only 908. This means, that the stock is highly fragmented, and the inhabitants have typically 1-3 cows at home. Unfortunately these animals are rarely sent out grazing by their elderly owners, the hay is mostly brought to their barn. Cattle above the average numbers (above 50 cows) are kept only in few settlements, consequently only smaller areas of the land can be covered by grazing. A higher level of local livestock product processing (milk, meat) and their marketing could provide solutions for numerous problems. Not only would it preserve the pasturelands, it could also open up local workplaces (as has been partially achieved by the milk factory of Szalafő). Numerous governmental and national subsidies are available for the revival of livestock farming and the

maintenance of pasturelands. The number of applicants however is few: in the first half year of 2012 only 53 tenders won (www.mvh.gov.hu). The situation for arable cultivation is quite different, the requested area payments are high (270 successful applications), yet the sown crops yield sometimes only subsidies.

The National Park established in 2002 has an outstanding role in the economic development of the region, the growth of tourism and of course nature protection, nature conservation. With the support of the National Park, many farming projects started up and were realized from which some are related to cropping, some to animal husbandry. The National Park is the constant organizer of farmer's forums, and helps the local farmers with guides introducing ecologically desired, sustainable farming practices. The National Park is the regional organizer of ecotourism, coordinating numerous programs and presenting nature trails. These programs and trails can be interesting for both tourists and locals, since they are unique to a specific area in the Naturpark. The questionnaire survey shows, that the inhabitants know and acknowledge the cultural heritage of their living environment, however, are not aware of the natural values of the region. Churches (mentioned by 89.4% of the inhabitants) and the monuments in Szalafő (47.9%) were the most cited built environmental elements which the locals would show to tourists. Nature itself and natural trails were less attractive to the inhabitants (36.6%). The region's unique charm lies in the fusion of nature's unparalleled beauty, the many-faced land and the cultural heritages and traditions. This feature is something that can certainly be utilized in the region's economic development.

4. Conclusions

Due to its history and geographic location, the region of Órség struggles with similar problems as the neighboring Goričko region (Ólas, Kert 1993; Lampič, Potočnik-Slavič 2007; Torkar, Rodela 2011). The once halved land became part of two countries, and also a periphery within their own countries. Population decrease, the high ratio of elderly and the consequent low economic activity is a characteristic of the Órség. Next to the migration of native inhabitants – typically the youth -, there is a growing number of city folk and foreign settlers moving into the area causing tension in the community. Reasons of migration are complex, mainly hopelessness regarding the future and the lack of work opportunities. The locals, giving up their agricultural farming practices are not able to make a living solely of tourism. Therefore, the region needs a complex rural development notion, which promotes the weakening agricultural industry as well as tourism, creating job opportunities and giving an attractive vision of the future to the local youth. This of course must be accomplished in cohesion with the needs of the local population and their collaboration.

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Summary

Due to its history and geographic location, the region of Órség struggles with similar problems as the neighboring Goričko region. The once halved land became part of two countries, and also a periphery within their own countries. Population decrease, the high ratio of elderly and the consequent low economic activity is a characteristic of the Órség. Next to the migration of native inhabitants – typically the youth -, there is a growing number of city folk and foreign settlers moving into the area causing tension in the community. Reasons of migration are complex, mainly hopelessness regarding the future and the lack of work opportunities. The locals, giving up their agricultural farming practices are not able to make a living solely of tourism. Therefore, the region needs a complex rural development notion, which promotes the weakening agricultural industry as well as tourism, creating job opportunities and giving an attractive vision of the future to the local youth. This of course must be accomplished in cohesion with the needs of the local population and their collaboration.

