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Toward Complex and Sustainable Tourism in Hungary



Summary

In the late 20th and early 21st century, social and economic sustainability and the mitigation of environmental destruction have been issues of key concern. Tourism is intensely affected, as this sector is among the most polluting and least sustainable activities. Repeated pandemics, including the Ebola, AIDS, SARS, MERS, and then COVID-19, have been destroying the economy all over the world and, not surprisingly, they hit tourism the hardest of all sectors, as mass travels accelerate the spread of contagious diseases. But tourism already encountered problems long before the pandemic. As excessive tourism and the resultant pollution had already increased in the past few decades, anti-tourism attitudes spread rapidly. The current health hazards could be used to transform the unsustainable, polluting tourism into an ecologically and socially sustainable activity. This article analyzes the options we have.

Journal of Economic Literature (JEL) codes: Z30, Z32, Z38

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WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM?

According to the UN World Tourism Organisation, sustainable tourism should

1. make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity;

2. respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance;

3. ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation (UN WTO, 2020c).

It is important to note that “overtourism”, i.e. excessive tourism, when too many tourists arrive at a limited place, is one of the major causes of pollution.

MARKETING GENERATED DEMAND AS A MAJOR CAUSE OF UNSUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

During the 1960's and 1970's, resource scarcity was thought to menace economic development, as it was presented by the Report of the Club of Rome (Meadows et al., 1972). However, today it is rather the unsustainability of economic growth and the pollution caused by it that seem to threaten mankind. Such a polluting economic growth has largely been caused by the “marketing generated demand” underlying our economy. Since the early 20th century, instead of people's natural needs, demand has been generated rather according to the needs of producers, seeking increase in production and profits, and using a wide range of marketing tools to incite increasing demand. Such a “marketing generated artificial demand” is practically endless, as it has no natural limits. The economic development emerging from artificial demand is not a natural process, and consequently, the slogan that the consumer is king becomes empty and meaningless. Moreover, the tools available for an information society provide far wider opportunities for influencing consumers (Várhelyi, 2007).

Not surprisingly, “artificial demand” is also present in tourism: a destination is often made fashionable by suggesting that those who have not yet visited it are less valuable. Certain places are considered a “must” that should be visited at any cost, and the more expensive they are the better it is. This is reminiscent of former religious pilgrimages: a believer had the moral obligation to visit certain holy places (Jerusalem, Mecca, the River Ganges or the El Camino de Compostela). This has given rise to “overtourism”: when a given destination is flooded by too many visitors, who destroy its environment and make life unbearable for the local people – and sometimes also for the tourists themselves.

There are numerous examples of overtourism from party tourism in the Mediterranean (Ibiza, etc.) through cities like Venice to the small Pacific islands and even to Mount Everest.

MARKETING AS A PART OF THE SOLUTION TO OVERTOURISM

In addition to being part of the problem, marketing may also be part of the solution. Methods of reducing overtourism may include the geographic dispersion of tourists: in the most crowded destinations the number of tourists can be reduced, while elsewhere (by proper attractions) it can be increased, and thus the total revenue of the service providers need not be reduced.

THE DANGERS OF THE COVID-19 FOR THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND SOME POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

By the end of the summer in 2020, the number of people infected by COVID-19 had exceeded 20 million worldwide and the number of deaths had reached nearly 1 million.¹ As some experts believe that this virus may never completely disappear but live with mankind for a very long time, it might radically change our behaviour, the economy, globalisation and, above all, tourism.

In terms of the effects of the pandemic on the economy, and increasing number of articles suggest that the panic could be used to introduce improved and more sustainable forms of economic development, also in tourism.

Economists define recession as two consecutive quarters of falling gross domestic product (GDP), the broadest indicator of economic prosperity. Consequently, the United Kingdom has fallen into recession, as after a 2.2% fall in Q1 2020 and a historic 20.4% plunge in Q2, the COVID-19 recession is the deepest one in the modern age. Other countries have also followed it. As the World Bank report announced in June, 2020: “COVID-19 has triggered a global crisis like no other – a global health crisis that, in addition to an enormous human toll, is leading to the deepest global recession since the second world war. While the ultimate growth outcome is still uncertain, and an even worse scenario is possible if it takes longer to bring the health crisis under control, the pandemic will result in output contractions across the vast majority of emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs). Moreover, the pandemic is likely to exert lasting damage to fundamental determinants of long-term growth prospects, further eroding living standards for years to come. The immediate policy priorities are to alleviate the ongoing health and human costs and attenuate the near-term economic losses, while addressing challenges such as informality and weak social safety nets that have heightened the impact on vulnerable populations. Once the crisis abates, it will be necessary to reaffirm credible commitment to sustainable policies – including medium-term fiscal frameworks in energy-exporting EMDEs suffering from the large plunge in oil prices –and undertake the necessary reforms to buttress long-term growth prospects” (World Bank, 2020b, pp. XV-XVI).

COVID-19 AND GLOBALISATION

In the last third of the 20th century, globalisation switched to a new form called neo-, or hyper-globalisation. It is characterized by the predominance of transnational companies (TNCs), which endeavour to geographically optimise their value chains: in order to reduce costs, different elements of their value chains are outsourced to places and to countries which provide important benefits. For example, assembling activities require unskilled workers, thus these activities are outsourced to underdeveloped countries, where labour is cheap, however, more sophisticated activities are kept in the rich countries, having more abundant supply of trained labour. Not surprisingly, countries having low value-added activities are often trapped in poverty, or at least at a medium income level. For such a middle-income trap see for example Árvai (2018) or Csath (2019).

But the COVID-19 pandemic is changing the picture: geographically too long value chains jeopardize TNC operation, as – due to the health hazards – it is not easy to buy component parts. If, for example, parts of a company's activities are outsourced from Western Europe or from the USA to China, Vietnam or other remote parts of the world, visiting these subsidiaries is unavoidable, and the risk of COVID infection increases with each travel.

It is highly probable that already in the near future TNCs may geographically shorten their value chains or bring back some activities to Western Europe or to the USA.

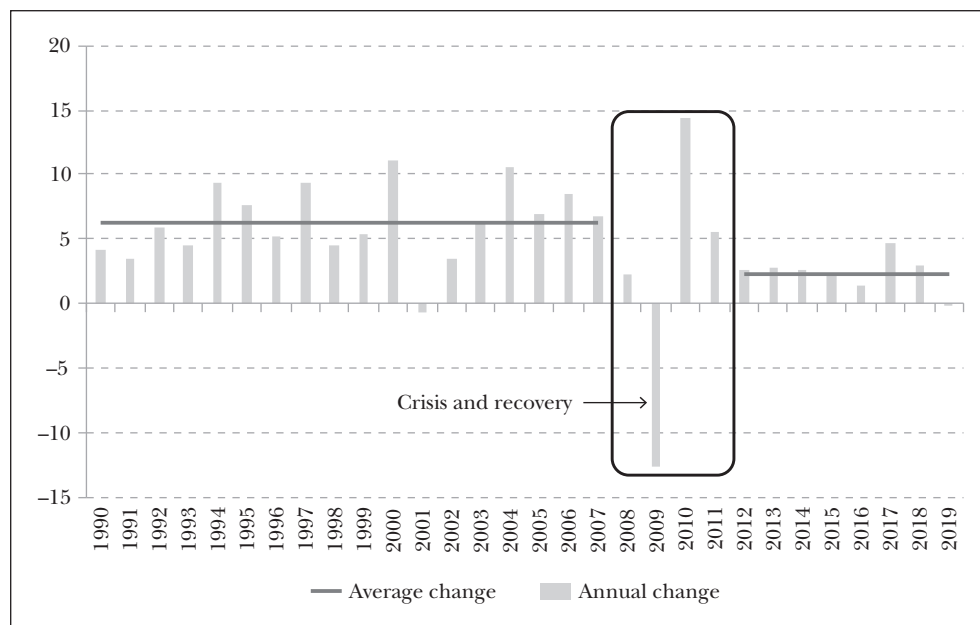
CEPAL, the regional economic committee of the UN for Latin America, has made a very interesting analysis on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on international trade and logistics (UN ECLAC, 2020): “The COVID-19 outbreak occurred in a context of sluggish global trade that has been dragging on since the 2008-2009 financial crisis. While the volume of trade in goods grew at an average rate of 6.2% per year between 1990 and 2007, it expanded by only 2.3% per year between 2012 and 2019. Likewise, the share of exports of goods and services in global GDP, which reached a historic height of 31% in 2008, has been around 28% since 2015.”

“In this situation, the volume of global trade in goods fell by 17.7% in May 2020 compared with the same month in 2019. The drop in the first five months of the year was widespread, although it particularly affected exports from the United States, Japan, and the European Union. The economic contraction in China was smaller than the global average, as that country controlled the outbreak and reopened its economy relatively quickly. Latin America and the Caribbean is the most affected developing region.”

The most alarming picture in 2020 is related to the year-on-year changes of the international trade (see Figure 2).

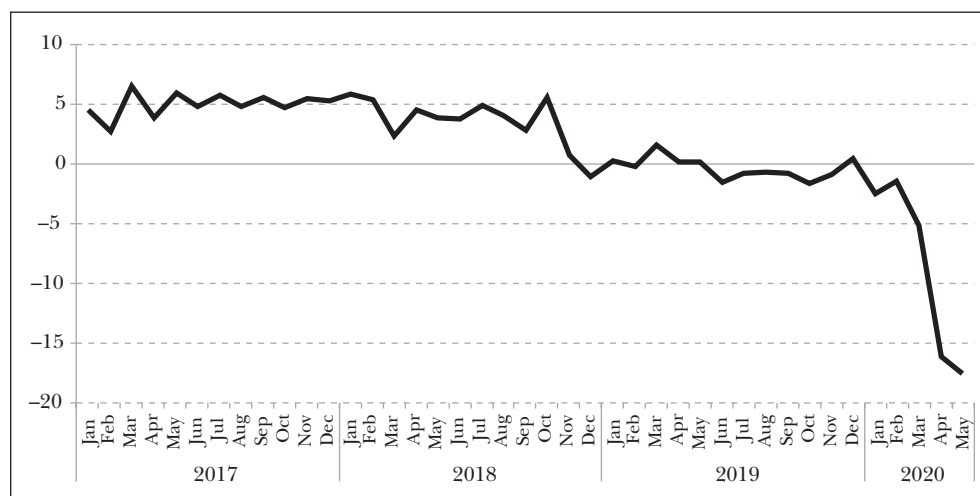
“Global value chains were the main channel for transmitting the effects of COVID-19 to global trade. The measures adopted by China in January (the temporary closure of Hubei Province and national borders) meant that exports of inputs for industries such as the automotive, electronics, pharmaceutical and medical supplies

Figure 1: Change in the volume of the global trade in goods, 1990–2019. (Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of information from the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Figure 2: Year-on-year change in the volume of global trade in goods, January 2017–May 2020 (Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Netherlands Bureau of Economic Policy Analysis (CPB), World Trade Monitor [online database] <https://www.cpb.nl/en/worldtrademonitor>.

industries, were suspended. This forced factories in North America, Europe and the rest of Asia to shut down for several weeks because they had no alternative suppliers, as China is the world's leading exporter of parts and components, accounting for 15% of global shipments by 2018. The volume of global goods trade shrank by around 18.5% in the second quarter of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019 (UN WTO, 2020a). Thus, the drop during the first six months is expected to be around 11%. This suggests that the contraction in global trade in 2020 will be closer to the "optimistic" end of the projections that range from -13% (similar to the annual fall in 2009) to -32% forecast in April. These projections clearly depend on how the pandemic evolves during the second half of the year, particularly in the United States, where infection rates continue to rise. Trade in services has also been severely affected. The value of exports from a group of 37 countries, which in 2019 accounted for around two thirds of global exports of services, shrank by 10.4% in the first quarter of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. Tourism, which accounted for 24% of global exports of services in 2019, has been hit particularly hard. Between January and April 2020, international tourist arrivals declined by 44% worldwide, compared to the same period in 2019. For 2020 as a whole, arrivals are expected to drop by between 58% and 78%, depending on how the pandemic evolves and how quickly travel restrictions are relaxed" (UN ECLAC, 2020).

EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON TOURISM

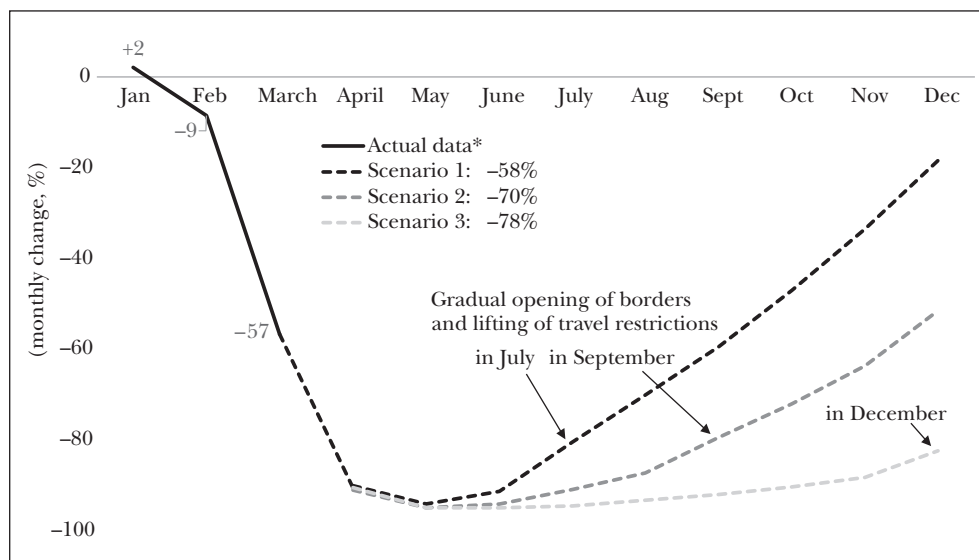
This pandemic has already had serious consequences, as economic activities have dropped by 10-30 per cent all over the world. The badly affected activities are those which necessitate close contacts between people. Tourism is one of those, as the risk of infection does not only arise at the destination, but also during travel, when a lot of people are locked up in narrow spaces (airplanes, trains etc.) with hundreds of other, potentially infected, persons.

In addition to postponing large events (festivals and other programmes), travels have also been reduced or completely stopped. Lots of tourism companies have been obliged to temporarily reduce their operation or have gone bankrupt.

At the same time new types of tourism might emerge soon: travelling by camp cars, caravan cars or by other means to efficiently separate visitors. If those solutions become more popular, tourism can be completely refashioned. While airlines and cruise ship operators might suffer further decline, camping and caravan car renting companies and especially, healthy camping facilities might flourish.

Currently, tourism highly relies on air transport, as the most popular destinations can mainly be reached by air. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, air transport increased twice as rapidly as the world population (Iacus et al., 2020a, p. 3). However, when the pandemic broke out in 2020, air transport collapsed. As a result of the 2020 crisis, the volume of air transport has fallen to 15-20 per cent of the previous data. Using the experiences of the former pandemic, recovery in the air industry has been predicted as follows.

Figure 3: International tourist arrivals in 2020: three scenarios (YoY monthly change, %)



Note: * Actual data through March includes estimates for countries which have not yet reported data.

Source: UN WTO, 2020b (International tourist arrivals in 2020: three scenarios (YoY monthly change, %))

Note: The scenarios presented in this graph are not forecasts. They represent alternative monthly change in arrivals based on the gradual opening of national borders and lifting of travel restrictions on different dates, still subject to high uncertainty.

Note that the fears generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the nearly complete shutdown in air traffic might be a good opportunity to change transport-related habits. It is a well-known fact that air traffic is one of the most polluting means of reaching a destination, and as a result, tourism is responsible for approximately 25-40 per cent of all the pollution caused by economic activities.

Tourism-related pollution is caused by various sources, including:

- air traffic,
- cars and other land vehicles,
- cruise ships,
- other polluting activities related to accommodation (food shopping, staff travels to their working places, etc.).

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As tourism had become one of the most important economic activities by the end of the 20th century, involving a large part of the population, it is essential to reduce tourism-related pollution and to make it sustainable. In addition to the traditional pollution due to emissions caused by travels, note the above-mentioned “overtourism”. The COVID-19 crisis can help reduce traditional tourism with a more sustainable, less polluting one.

REPLACING POLLUTING TOURISM BY A SOFTER AND MORE SUSTAINABLE FORM OF TOURISM

It is well-known that not all types of tourism are equally polluting, and there are forms of tourism which are more sustainable than the others. The most polluting tourism activity is cheap mass tourism, which does not usually generate sufficient revenues for the service providers at the destinations. A typical example includes trips by ocean cruises, with food and accommodation provided on board. For the destinations the only “benefit” is that the travellers embark on and visit some places, but they do not spend much.

“Party tourism” is similar in its effects. In the past few years it has become trendy to fly (by low-cost airlines) to popular party destinations in the Mediterranean or to large cities.

Another similarly adverse form of tourism includes “autonomous” tourist villages (generally run by Club Mediterranean and similar organisations), where tourists are completely closed off from the local areas, and consequently they do not create jobs for locals as the staff is often recruited, and even food and drinks are transported from distant places.

Unfortunately, tourism service providers are lobbying for the quick reopening of the borders in order to be able to return to the former practices and earn revenues. But this approach is no useful solution to the crisis. Even if the borders open quickly,

– after a quick opening, the pandemic might soon return, and consequently the borders will have to be closed again, as it happened after World War I during the Spanish flu, which started in 1918, and had new waves in 1919, 1920, and even in 1922,

– additionally, due to global warming and to increasing population, after the COVID-19 pandemic new infectious diseases are likely to appear; and

– the destinations are unable to cope with the floods of tourists, and overtourism might force out new activities.

Taking all these factors into account, it is advisable for tour operators and destination managers to move towards less polluting and more environment friendly types of tourism.

THE LEAST POLLUTING TOURISM AND TRAVELLING INLAND

After the COVID pandemic, long-distance transport and travels should drop significantly – at least in the foreseeable future –, as people are not ready to spend days and weeks in quarantine, or to suffer from a disease instead of enjoying a pleasant holiday. Cruise hotel ship industry might be hit badly, as people have died in high numbers due to COVID-19 infection got on hotel ships.

All these discomforts may be avoided if tourists do not travel abroad, however, at the moment it is not clear if this shift in destinations will be a short- or long-term trend. In order to save the planet and tourism, it is essential that governments, tour

operators, destination managers and everyone with any influence on tourism should make efforts in order to maintain this trend over the long term. Currently, in Hungary the government makes considerable efforts at encouraging domestic tourism, but it is also important to maintain them over the longer term.

Development should be speeded up in some regions: lots of efforts are made to develop the most popular Hungarian tourism destinations by soft government credits and non-refundable grants.

Naturally, the efforts of the central government are not enough in themselves: the case of the town Eger shows that in order to increase the popularity of a destination, it is important to find a good name. The name of the town Eger, the centre of this destination, is much more known than the present name (Mátra-Bükk Destination), and the latter fails to represent the specificities of the destination, which are concentrated around Eger, including wellness facilities, gastronomical and wine tourism establishments. Perhaps, the “Eger Valley of Wellness Spas” would be a happy name for this destination, comprising the highly popular areas of Eger, Egerszalók, Demjén etc. (Várhelyi and Árva, 2020).

The importance of new developments in the Lake Tisza region should be highlighted, as the Hungarians who used to visit sea resorts might now target this destination, which is worth developing, as contrary to Lake Balaton, the use of motor boats is permitted there. Unfortunately, the right bank of the River Tisza does not have proper infrastructure yet.

Some of the government sources have already been allocated for programme and service development, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, there might be important demand for those programmes and services. For domestic tourism important impetus might be given by the Erzsébet Coupon, which can be used for paying Hungarian tourism attractions and accommodation.

OPPORTUNITIES IN DEVELOPING TOURISM IN BUDAPEST

During the past few years the (environmental or social) unsustainability of tourism has already caused lots of problems all over the world. Some destination managements are trying to limit the number of tourists. This is a strong trend in Venice of Italy, Barcelona of Spain, or in some parts of India and Latin America. Similar efforts are made in Budapest due to the discontent of the inhabitants.

In the past few years party tourism has increased in the city. Some parts of the town have become “party quarters”, and their visitors, being primarily not well-off young Hungarians and foreigners, behave accordingly. This type of party tourism generates important revenues only for a limited number of pub owners, but the external costs (pollution) are shifted to and very often covered by the municipalities, i.e. the inhabitants of the area. In certain parts of Budapest Airbnb services have become important and in spite of the large number of foreign party tourists, hotels working at only half capacity. On the other hand, as lots of flats were bought in Budapest for investment as Airbnb accommodation, property prices have increased to levels the local Hungar-

ians can hardly afford. Due to the inconveniences caused by parties, a high number of the locals, who had lived at such places for generations, decided to sell their flats and to move away to calmer parts. Fortunately, the municipalities and the central government have just decided to regulate Airbnb services to help mitigate the problems.

Durable, longer lasting solutions could only be reached if polluting party tourism is replaced by higher-quality, less polluting forms of tourism, but it is not easy to do so, as the image of the area should completely be transformed, and this is a major marketing task.

How can the party district of Budapest be re-positioned?

– First of all, cultural tourism should be increased by supplying proper programmes supported by adequate marketing;

– Health tourism should also be increased. As Budapest is rich in hot spas and wellness hotels, the number of health tourists can be increased, and consequently, capacity developments are needed (new wellness hotels should be built, the services of the existing ones should be increased and developed);

– Business tourism should also be increased after the COVID-19 pandemic;

– Educational tourism (i.e. foreign students at Hungarian higher educational institutions) can also be an interesting possibility in changing tourism in Budapest; and

– At last but not least, the regulation of Airbnb accommodation can also help change tourism in Budapest: short-term Airbnb facilities should be transformed into longer-term accommodations like students' dormitories or hotels.

“Soft” tourism is important not only because it is less polluting, but it also because it depends less on the economic conjunctures than “party tourism”. Tourists arriving to make business, study or participate in cultural events tend to spend more than party tourists..

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EDUCATIONAL TOURISM IN HUNGARY

Although not widely known, educational tourism used to be an important segment of Hungarian tourism. At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, due to the demographic trends and to the increase in the opportunities of studying abroad, the number of young Hungarians applying for admission to the Hungarian higher education started to decline.

Decline in the number of university students is due to three causes:

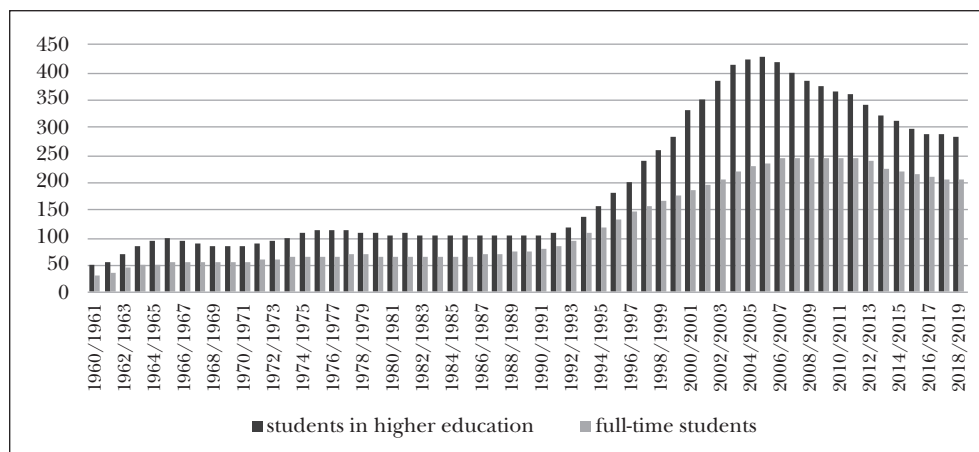
– Demographic causes: the number of young Hungarians has been declining in the past few decades;

– An increasing number of Hungarians opt for studies abroad. According to the “mirror statistics” of the Engage Institute, the number of the Hungarians studying abroad was 13,000 in 2018.²

– Admission to Hungarian higher educational institutions is increasingly difficult.

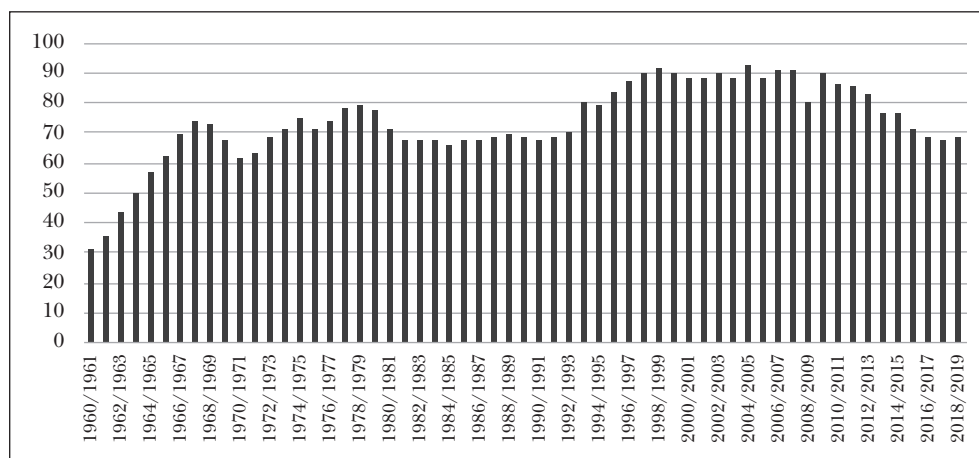
As a result, since 2000 an increasing number of more and more Hungarian higher educational institutions had to give up their independence, and they either closed down, reduced their capacities or merged with similar institutions, unless they managed to attract foreign students. The current tuition fee paid by foreign students is

Figure 4: Full-time students in Hungarian higher education (1000 persons)



Source: KSH

Figure 5: Persons with secondary qualifications (1000 persons)



Source: KSH, www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_hosszu/h_wdsi001a.html

around EUR 2,000 per term, 10 per cent of which is paid to student recruitment companies, and the rest is used by the university.

EDUCATIONAL TOURISM AND DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER QUALITY TOURISM

While in Hungary the importance of cultural, wellness, health and business tourism has already been accepted, this is not the case with educational tourism, although foreign students do not only pay their studies, but also spend a lot of money in the cities



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where they live. According to the latest surveys educational tourists spend more per capita and per year than business (MICE), wellness or health tourists.

According to research studies conducted among foreign students studying in Hungary³

- foreign students spend much more money than other tourists in Budapest;
- these students are considerably more likely to return to Hungary as tourists;
- spending by foreign students is more even than by other tourists;
- foreign students staying in Hungary for a longer time cause less pollution than party tourists, who stay here for a short term;
- educational tourism does not fluctuate as rapidly with economic cycles as the other forms of tourism.⁴

A steady increase in the number of foreign students in Budapest would be beneficial, but it is not an easy task, as it requires

- increase in higher educational capacities, and
- increase in the number of foreign students applying to higher educational institutes in Budapest.

Foreign students in Budapest might bring further benefits: they can help transform the currently rather expensive Airbnb accommodation places into student dormitories, and consequently reduce conflicts with the local residents. At the same time the proposed regulations on Airbnb can also be more easily implemented by longer-term renting of homes to foreign students, who are generally ready to pay higher rents. Also, the number of visitors at museums and exhibitions, and thus “cultural tourism” might also increase.

HIGH QUALITY ACCOMMODATION FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS IN HUNGARY

It is very important to encourage activities that might increase the arrival of foreign students to Hungary. At the moment in Hungary there are insufficient student dormitories acceptable for foreign students: note that the Hungarian higher educational system competes with the American, British, French, Austrian or German systems. Although there are a few good private dormitories for foreign students in Hungary, their capacities are insufficient. The Hungarian government and the municipalities should support the building of high-quality student dormitories, perhaps by providing preferential credit, or preferential mortgage schemes (Kovács and Pásztor, 2018).

IMPROVEMENT IN THE SUPPLY OF CULTURAL TOURISM FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS

Although a wide range of important cultural events were offered in Budapest and in other major cities (Debrecen, Szeged, Pécs and Győr), they were generally concentrated in time and there were huge gaps. Unfortunately, foreign students in Hungary generally do not have enough information about such programmes, only a few organ-



isations have special websites that provide relevant information to foreign students studying in Hungary.

Additional programmes that could be offered to foreign students staying in Hungary include, among others:

- guided walks to present Hungarian city and town architecture;
- presentation of Hungarian gastronomical traditions;
- Hungarian fashion designers, etc.

Obviously, such programmes in addition to foreign students, such programmes should also attract other foreigners, but foreign visitors who do not spend as long time in Hungary as foreign students have less free time to visit all these attractions. MOTE, the Hungarian Association of Educational Tourism, might help service providers to elaborate such programmes.

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS IN DEVELOPING COMPLEX AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM OFFERS: EXAMPLES OF META DESTINATIONS

In order to develop sustainable tourism, it is important to find solutions which might help destinations offer more complex attractions to visitors. A single attraction is insufficient to engage visitors in additional activities after a medical treatment or a wellness programme, while cultural events or gastronomy might help. However, as it may be difficult to find extra attractions at a single destination, “meta destinations” need to be developed. In essence they bring different destinations together in order to be able to provide common, complementary marketing management activities.

Health tourism in the town Gyula is a good example. In the vicinity, Békéscsaba has significant cultural and gastronomical tourism and two towns on the other side of the border, in Romania, have active sports life. Jointly they may be regarded as a “meta destination” with different elements supported by a common marketing management. Consequently, tourists are offered more complex supplies within a few kilometres.

In the case of “meta destinations”, common brand building is an important element in tourism marketing management, especially in health and wellness tourism (Várhelyi and Soós, 2018). Also note that such common marketing activities should be used in relatively small destinations, as according to the latest experience, if a destination is too extended, it is unable to help tourists, who are generally unwilling to visit places situated farther than 10-15 km from each other. Also, meta destinations should attract visitors by different, supplementary activities.

A similar development has already taken place around Eger. In this destination some spa resorts (as in Egerszalók or Demjén) can be found, and additionally, Eger is famous for its cultural, gastronomical and wine tourism. Unfortunately, the rigid administrative borders between the destinations block efficient, common tourism marketing management.

The idea of cooperation was used in the feasibility study for the development of Egerszalók. Tourism managers realized that this project can only be successful if a



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complex tourism development is implemented together with other villages in the micro-region. The concept was described as the “Egerszalók Model” (Várhelyi, 2019). In addition to Egerszalók another spa in Demjén was also developed to make this region one of the strongest meta-destinations in the country.

Currently, spa-based, traditional wellness attractions predominate tourism in Eger and are presented in its official tourism communication. Not surprisingly, the spa and wellness facilities of the town are crowded. Other attractions in the vicinity should also be advertised and reflected in the destination name to relieve the town (Várhelyi, 2011).

By broadening the offer, tourism could include meta destinations comprising various complementary attractions in order to reduce the number of visitors at a time in overcrowded parts and to increase it at places where formerly tourism was scarcely present or not at all. Reducing the density of tourists is very important in stopping the COVID-19 pandemic, to fight overtourism and to make tourism more sustainable.

Interesting cooperation is about to be established between the towns Békéscsaba, Gyula and some cross-border places in Romania under the name “Körös Valley Cooperation”.

UP-TO-DATE, POST-MODERN MARKETING TOOLS IN DEVELOPING HIGH-QUALITY, SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

By the end of the 20th century, post-modern marketing had emerged and successfully used all over the world. Some elements of post-modern marketing are very popular in Asia, in China and in Japan. Post-modern marketing, which is a part of the post-industrial society, has been deliberately defined against Kotler’s modern marketing of the industrial society. Post-modern marketing has given more place to fantasy, to tales and to a “look-alike” or a “retro” feeling. Good examples of these post-modern marketing are some retro-products or some retro attractions in the tourism. By the beginning of the 21st century post-modern marketing (together with the use of internet and other up-to-date methods) have become one of the very useful tools of the marketing of our time (Árva and Sipos, 2012).

The village Felsőtárkány near Eger is a good example of the application of post-modern marketing elements. It houses “Bambara Hotel and Mali Beach”, a complex excellently using fantasy and vintage elements in an attempt to offer a replica of an African sea resort, including a beach, made predominantly of items from Africa. While Mali does not have beaches at all, as it is a landlocked country, this “look alike” attraction relies on business success on the feeling of African beaches, which is rather popular in Europe. To attract visitors, meerkats are kept in the resort, although these cute animals only live in the southern part of Africa, not in Mali. The African hot climate is imitated with the help of the local thermal springs, abundant all over Hungary.

Similar post-modern “look-alike” attractions might have an important role in improving local tourism. They may help making tourism sustainable, as traveling to the north-east Hungary is less polluting than to fly to Africa or to the Indian Ocean.



Naturally, with the aim to increase sustainability in tourism, service providers should also use post-modern marketing methods elsewhere. Unfortunately, at the moment Hungary does not have enough similar post-modern resorts.

HISTORY OF HUNGARIAN THERMAL SPAS AND THEIR USE IN TURNING TOURISM SUSTAINABLE

The region is rich in hot spas: examples include Sovata and Băile Tuşnad (Romania), at *Starý Smokovec* and Piešťany (Slovakia), Palić and Kanjiža (Serbia), Hévíz, Harkány, Tarcsafürdő or the spas around Eger (Hungary).

As the Carpathian Basin is rich in thermal spas with proven medical properties, before World War I, Hungary was well-known for its spas and today it is working hard to re-establish itself on the world map of spas. While in the past rich people spent longer periods in spas, mainly to drink the waters, today these places offer shorter wellness programmes. With increase in health awareness and prevention, Hungarian spas should be developed in this direction.

Unfortunately, a large part of the population does not know that in Hungary everyone is eligible for a 15-day-long treatment in spas twice a year (prescribed by a general practitioner) for rheumatic or orthopaedic problems, or to prevent diseases for those who do desk-bound jobs.

Although some of the famous, old spas have disappeared from the Carpathian Basin, a lot of new spas were built after 1998 at thermal springs discovered mainly in the 1960's and 1970's, during extensive search for natural gas and oil. At that time the springs discovered were generally closed down and they were only utilized after the change of regime.

Today this natural asset can be used for medical and tourism purposes. Thermal spas are suitable for implementing sustainable and non-polluting tourism, as water does not need to be heated, and can also be used for heating and cooling rooms. Since imitation tropical beaches can also be built on thermal spas, Hungarian tourists can save the costs of travelling far and spare the environment.

SUMMARY AND PROPOSALS

After the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism was the hardest hit by the travel restrictions and by people's fears. After a careful re-consideration of the opportunities, solutions can be found and strategies developed to the more general and chronic problems of tourism, accumulated during the past decades. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism was not only one of the most rapidly developing economic factors, but also one of the most polluting activities. Perhaps, this pandemic arrived at the right moment, as tourism had reached its limits of complete non-sustainability.

Solutions should be found to replace the former methods by less polluting and more sustainable ones, including:

- Increasing the importance of local tourism with focus on shorter distances than before the pandemic;
 - Engaging in less polluting and more sustainable tourism activities, as health, educational or cultural tourism);
 - Improving the distribution of tourists at a given destination, and creating larger “meta-destinations”;
 - Replacing long-distance air travels by shorter trips by camp and caravan cars and by train;
 - Using post-modern marketing to create “exotic” places in the vicinity.
- These new methods might hopefully provide solutions not only during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also for reducing pollution and increasing sustainability in tourism.

NOTES

- ¹ www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/.
- ² www.engame.hu/eass/blog/kulfoldi-tovabbtanulas/943-magyar-diakok-kulfoldon-2017.
- ³ See Árva, L., Könyves, E., Deli Zs., Császár, Zs. and Alpek L. Here we would like to refer to research studies conducted by Árva László, Könyves Erika, Deli Zsuzsa, Császár Zsuzsa and Alpek Levente
- ⁴ See research by KSH (the Hungarian National Office of Statistics) and estimations by Árva, L. and Könyves, E.

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