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# **ECOTOURISM CLUSTERS IN THE BORONKA NATURE RESERVE AND IN THE SLOVENIAN TRIGLAV NATIONAL PARK**

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## **1. THE PROBLEM**

In the South-Transdanubian ecotourism destinations, typically pointwise operating tourism suppliers with different efficacy are competing for the tourists. Harmonising the nature conservation and tourism is the basic question of the sustainability of the destination. While the number of visitors is increasing at the coastal areas and Lake Balaton in Hungary, attractions situated far from the mass tourism destinations are unexploited.

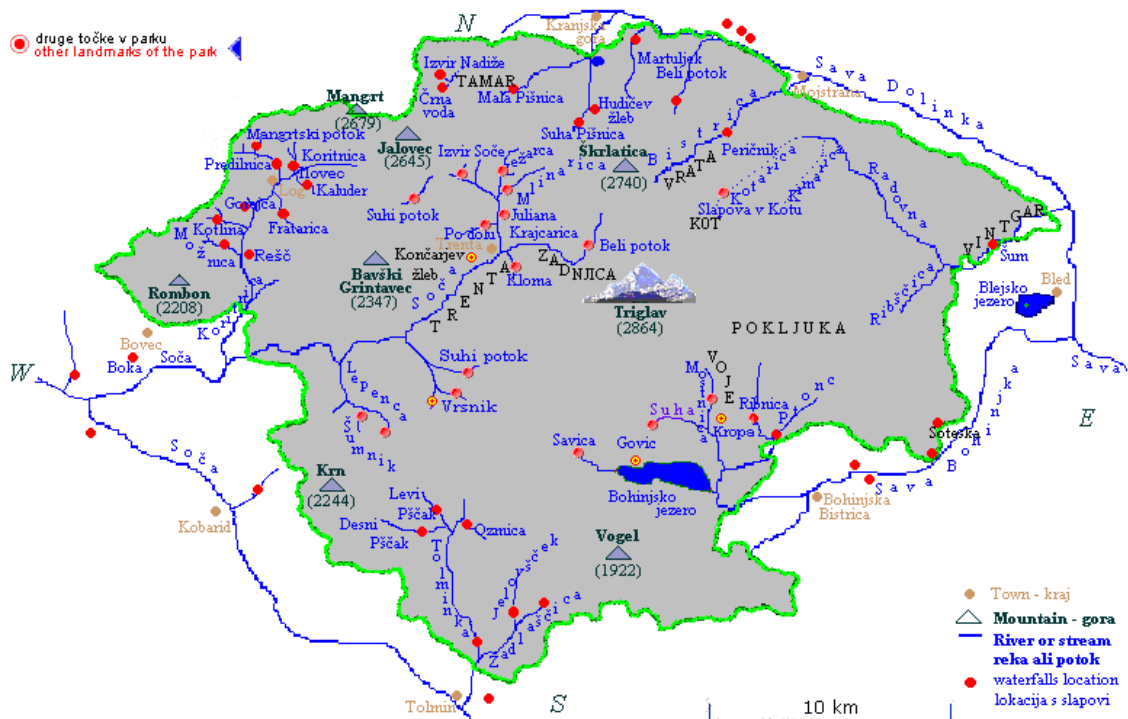
## **2. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH**

The main objective of this research is to develop a model of ecotourism clusters, which is suitable for the Boronka Nature Reserve Area and the Hungarian National Parks.

Map 1:

The research area:





2. figure: The map of the Triglav National Park

Source: Triglav National Park homepage 2006 ([www.tnp.si](http://www.tnp.si))

## 2.1. The earlier researches concerning the theme of this research

Publications concerning ecotourism clusters have not been published yet. Ecotourism and clusters separately are notions appearing in great number of publications of famous experts. The notion of ecotourism was firstly defined in the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, but a uniformly accepted definition is still lacking. Due to the negative environmental impact of mass tourism, tourism experts have started to define ecotourism.

### **3. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

#### **3.1 Delphi research**

In the course of my research I applied a four-round questionnaire. The establishment of the initial panel and selecting the expert group members asked for participation required intense foresight. It is indispensable that the summarising report of the research is on the basis of the answers of the panel members representing the different areas of specialties. According to the opinion of tourism experts, the initial panel of 30 persons was set up. In the selection process of the panel members, it was important that both tourism and ecotourism experts were represented in high rate; but -regarding the complexity of the theme- it was also necessary to represent both the fields of nature conservation and cluster by their experts, in an appropriate ratio.

#### **3.2 Perception researches**

The perception researches aim two target areas. The first area reaches the organisations and tourism service suppliers along the Belső-Somogy Ecological Network. I focused on this territory, because it is an ecologically uniform area, where tourism enterprises are present; further more, nature conservation is led by a very active NGO, which owns most of the territories. The Hungarian perception study was based on a questionnaire with 20 questions, in which I was interested in the cooperation network and the future expectations of the organisations.

Regarding to the international experiences, the other focus area aims at the Triglav National Park in Slovenia. I chose this area because it is one of the most attractive ecotourism resorts near Hungary. It has similar size to the Belső-Somogy Ecological Network, both governmental and non-governmental organisations are present are open for ecotourism network, with different types of tourism attractions offering distinct tourism services. In Slovenia, the questionnaire contained 7 questions aiming the local tourism and nature conservation organisations, basically. It focused on the present network cooperation and the strength of the cooperation between the enterprises.

### 3.3 Desk research

I studied and summarised the background documents. For the study I needed to collect, organise and analyse statistics of the target areas.

## 4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH

The target areas of this study are the Belső-Somogy Ecologic Network situated to the South from Lake Balaton and the Triglav National Park situated in the West of Slovenia in the Julian Alps. The target areas can be found in the South of East-Centre-Europe.

The most visitors of this area come to see the capitals, Lake Balaton, the Julian Alps and the Adriatic Sea. There is a great number of unique attractions in this area, which attracts tourists from all around the World. Tourism attractions are improving where the availability of the attraction is ensured. It means, there is nearby a traffic way (railway, highway, waterway). Nowadays, Lake Balaton can be reached on good quality roads. Slovenia spent significant amount of money on quality reparation of the roads leading to tourism attractions in the past 5 years. This resulted that tourism destinations are available easier, more accessible. These are used firstly by the seasonal visited sites, which are the target destinations of mass tourism.

There are more special attractions located in the tourism supply of the research areas, which are open most of the year or all year around, waiting for the visitors.

In Hungary, the topmost attractions are apart from Budapest and Lake Balaton the spas and thermal baths and the cultural towns. In the South-Transdanubian Region the medicinal/health tourism is one of the most significant tourism sectors. The most significant architectural site is the excavated old-Christian cemetery, which gained the World Heritage Site title. The church in Mária-gyűd is visited by thousands of pilgrims. The wine roads of the region e.g. Villány-Siklós (1999) have become known widely.

The riverside of the Drava represents a unique natural value in Europe. One of the special attractions of the 50 thousand acre large Danube-Drava National Park along the Danube and the Drava is the narrow-gauge railway in the forests.

The visitor centres and thematic exhibitions of the Danube-Drava National Park present the natural values. A unique attraction is the Otter Park located in Somogy County in Petesmalom. The cognition of the natural values is served by the study trails and the guided tours organised from 2006 for the public at large at fixed dates.

Slovenia has all the attractions, which can be found in Europe, although in small. There are cultural heritage sites, coastal zones for relaxation, high mountains for the active tourists, different kinds of water and hardly encroached forests, and last but not least medicinal bathes served by high quality service for those, who desire to heal.

In the pinewood, the scenic land of the Julian- Alps, in the valleys formed by the glaciers, the most famous holiday resorts, winter-sport centres (Bled, Bohinj, Kranska Gora, Planica, Bovec, etc.) can be found. The memories of the glacial glacier-world are conserved by the tarns. Beside of two dozens of regional parks, there is only one national park in Slovenia, the Triglav National Park. Although, it is planned to assign new national parks in the Kamnik-Savinj-Alps, in the Pohorje, in the Karst and along the Croatian border nearby the Krka and the Kolpa rivers.

#### 4.1 Tourism demand in the area

The tourism sites of the South-Central-European area attract great number of visitors from all the continents. The two tables below indicate the tourist arrivals of the two relating countries.

**Table 1. Tourist arrivals to Hungary according to source countries 2002-2004 (thousand person)**

Countries	Number of tourist arrivals	Number of guest nights	Number of tourist arrivals	Number of guest nights	Number of tourist arrivals	Number of guest nights
	2002		2003		2004	
<b>Total in commercial accommodations</b>	<b>5 971</b>	<b>17 840</b>	<b>6 315</b>	<b>17 981</b>	<b>6 616</b>	<b>18 429</b>
Foreigners total in commercial accommodations	2 949	10 114	2 948	9 778	3 270	10 343
Hungarians total in commercial accommodations	3 022	7 726	3 367	8 203	3 347	8 086
<b>Other European countries total</b>	<b>31 739</b>	<b>9 036</b>	<b>31 412</b>	<b>8 675</b>	<b>36 635</b>	<b>9 040</b>
Other European countries	---	250	---	222	---	259
European Union countries	9 089	7 155	9 461	6 861	10 743	7 264
Asian countries total	274	527	275	530	380	646
African countries total	15	19	17	20	28	34
American countries total	428	503	385	521	515	579
Australia and Pacific Ocean islands	29	30	22	32	43	44

Source: KSH Budapest, 2006.

**Table 2. Tourism arrivals to Slovenia according to source countries 2002-2004 (thousand person)**

Countries	Number of tourist arrivals	Number of guest nights	Number of tourist arrivals	Number of guest nights	Number of tourist arrivals	Number of guest nights
	2002		2003		2004	
Total	2 162.0	7 321.1	2 246.1	7 502.6	2 341.3	7 588.8
Slovenians total	859.9	3 300.3	872.9	3 327.2	842.4	3 226.0
Foreigners total	1 302.1	4 020.8	1 373.2	4 175.4	1 498.9	4 362.8
Europe total	1 174.1	3 756.6	1 241.5	3 908.7	1 349.6	4 041.6
Other European countries	4.7	12.9	6.1	15.5	7.0	18.8
Israel	32.0	64.1	39.9	83.3	35.4	88.3
Japan	6.2	13.8	6.5	12.6	9.0	16.0
U.S.A.	30.1	69.8	29.6	68.0	38.5	90.1
Canada	6.1	16.0	6.3	16.7	7.4	19.4
Australia	8.5	21.8	8.4	20.1	12.5	26.7
New-Zealand	2.0	4.2	2.2	4.3	2.7	4.8
Other, not European countries	12.5	47.3	12.3	34.3	18.1	42.6

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2006.

Regarding both studied areas, the interest of the tourists increased between 2002 and 2004. The largest sending countries of the two regions are the European countries.

In Hungary there is a significant difference between the figures of the visitors (spend less than 24 hours in the country) and the tourists (spend more than 24 hours in the country) because of the specific geographic facilities. Hungary has a central geographic position; therefore the number of the through-passengers is significant. Only 15 percent of these people spend at least one guest night in commercial accommodation. In the country, the share of the Asian and American tourists is 5 percent. To Hungary, tourists come from more sending countries than to Slovenia. To Slovenia, around 40 percent of the guest nights are spent by tourists coming from the neighbouring Italy.

Tourists coming from America, Japan, Asia, Australia and Western, Northern European countries have resort to airways (in case of Hungary 4 percent), therefore passengers arrive very close to the tourism destinations. Great number of the tourists come to the target destination on

public roads (in case of Hungary 90 percent) and by train (in case of Hungary 5 percent). The guests coming from Eastern-Europe, South-Eastern-Europe, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Austria are through-passengers in the studied regions.

Passengers coming from the Northern countries to the tourism resorts in the Southern countries do not stop before the target destination, but tend to reach the destination as fast as it is possible. The data of tourism demand has led to the conclusion that making stop the through-passengers in these regions can be realised with new and attractive tourism products, such as – as it is also emphasised by the WTO forecasts – tourism products built on *ecotourism attractions*.

Concerning the Hungarian areas, going on holiday to Lake Balaton is of high importance. Among the efforts taken to manage mass tourism at Lake Balaton, there have already been attempts to involve the background regions of Lake Balaton and to make tourists spend more time in the region. In this manner, the developing ecotourism sites are exquisitely suitable in the nature reservation area between Lake Balaton and the River Drava.

The experiences indicate that attracting further tourists to this region without convenient efficient marketing is hardly possible. There are facilities in both countries to attract tourists to the coastal zones that are the destinations of mass tourism as well. The key factors of reaching these tourists are the high quality tourism services and the distribution of the information to the target groups.

The objective of my research was to develop a model of an ecotourism cluster, which is a possible method for enhancing tourism attendance of the background regions.

## **4.2 The results of the research**

### **4.2.1 The results of the Delphi research**

After having consulted with the tourism research experts, I set up an initial panel of 30 persons. In the panel, experts from different research areas relating to my research theme took part, who have been in relation with ecotourism, nature conservation, clusters or the area of the Belső-Somogy Ecologic Network.

In the first two rounds of the research, regarding the answers of the questionnaires, my observations were, that the approach of the nature conservation, tourism and cluster experts were *basically different to the subject*. While most of the tourism experts agreed with my statements, the nature conservation expert was wedded to his opinion and could hardly agree with the softer approach of



tourism or did not agree at all. The cluster expert who has been the main supporter of my research theme drew up his opinion in some questions, which made me rethink the definition of the ecotourism cluster.

I experienced the third round of the Delphi research successful, despite of the small number of the returned answers. The generality of the experts agreed with my statements and the defined sequence of the characteristics. The former criticism and the proposals of the cluster expert were integrated into the present definitions and statements. I realised that the main elements of the success were that we managed to develop a unique front with the experts and to sustain their interest during 9 months.

The final definition of **Ecotourism cluster**: System based on the uniform utilisation and nature conservation principles and the facilities of the land, in which the **nature conservation and tourism** enterprises and organisations take part simultaneously competing and cooperating with each other, for reaching more economic and social benefits. They accept as a common aim the development and the preservation of the harmony between the nature conservation and the presentation of the natural values. In this organisation tourism does not exceed the environmental capacity of the destination together with the other local economic activities.

The degree of clusterisation:

- Partnership based, **regional development aimed, collective organisation** having its own management, which aims to realise common developments.
- Cluster, as a **network cooperation**, contribute to the enforcement of the commonwealth and the social cohesion and it serves as a quality assurance system, regarding the natural conservation and the tourism services, and operates as a trademark system.
- The cluster as an **economic cooperation based on the ecological values**, beyond the network cooperation is a concentration of the organisations not membership based, but it is a cooperation of infrastructure, organisation and services regarding the service elements of an area.

#### 4.2.2 The results of the perception research in the area of Belső-Somogy Ecological Network

I intended to reach and interview the tourism service suppliers related to the Belső-Somogy Ecological Network, the NGOs, the Tourinform Offices and the National Park with my questionnaires. Unfortunately they were not disposed to answer my questions by e-mail. Only 9 valuable responses were returned to me, but fortunately the responses were returned by different type of organisations. In this manner, this study can be evaluated as first sampling. The respondents were

three Tourinform Offices working in the area, The South-Transdanubian Marketing Directorate, the Somogy Nature Conservation Organisation, one craft worker, one municipality and an NGO working in the field of ecotourism (bicycle tour organiser).

Relating to the cooperation with other organisations functioning in their environment, surprisingly many of the respondents marked different organisations. Most of them cooperate with accommodations, tourist offices, craft workers, catering trade organisations, tour operators, municipalities and regional managers. They further mentioned sport organisations, traffic companies, marketing organisations, NGOs. The respondents know about nature conservation organisations of the region (Somogy Nature Conservation Organisation, Zöldfolyosó Public Endowment and the Danube-Drava National Park). The questioned organisations are familiar with the tourism organisations of the area, but generally the ecotourism organisations are not known by them.

The interviewees sometimes meet excursionists, guided tours groups, bird watchers, horse riders, and more often bicyclists, out of the tourist groups.

Regarding to the tourism cooperation, most of the information offices mentioned the flow of the information. The regional organisation alluded the marketing (primarily the promotion) and the product development, the quarter-master pointed out the room rents, the open-air schools, the conference tourism organisations, the craft work exhibition, the master education, the tour guiding and the teaching in open-air schools. The bicycle tour organisers mentioned the development and ingress of ecotourism tour-trails, publishing of tour guides and tour maps, organising bicycle tours, the exploration of the opportunities of bicycle tourism, the discovery, planning and propagation of bicycle tour roads.

The respondents urged to build closer relations with the quarter-masters, the catering trade organisations, the nature conservations NGOs, the organisations belonging to the national park, the forestry, the tour operators, the municipalities and the regional management organisations, in order to attract more ecotourists.

Most of the respondents do their marketing activities on their own and through mediator organisations with brochures, prospects, Internet and exhibitions in tourism fairs. Only the Regional Marketing Directorate deals with attracting and organising eco-tourists; the other respondents try to give services to the tourists visiting the region.

In the field of the international relations generally the organisations have no contacts. Only the nature conservation organisations are in communication with horse riding tourism organisations. In the Belső-Somogy region, the respondents emphasised the importance of organised programme offers, and the cooperation in the assigning of thematic roads, the accommodation service, running camps and marketing. According to them, the cooperation is important between the nature conservation organisations, the national park, the expert organisations, the NGOs and the municipalities.

90 percent of the respondents would take part in a new ecotourism cluster. They primarily expect the environmental friendly and conscious tourism services from this organisation, and secondly more even tourist arriving all year around, less environmental pollution and last but not least higher incomes. According to the opinion of the respondents, the management of the cluster is expected to manage and represent the interest of the cluster on the basis of the unified approach and cooperation. It should have good marketing policy, both in the field of business and nature conservation; it has to promote ecotourism effectively, by helping to obtain additional financial sources for the realisation of the ideas and projects of the region. It must be altruistic and enthusiastic, and should help in the implementation of the municipal and small region development ideas and the emergence of these in the national development plans.

#### **4.2.3 The results of the perception research in the area of Triglav National Park, Slovenia**

The questionnaire asks about the present practice, the social, economic and environmental conditions, furthermore the expected social, economic and environmental benefits and conditions of the close cooperation. The study involved 88 tourism and nature conservation organisations.

In consideration of being a foreigner in Slovenia I did not expected many responses. Only 10 organisations answered my questions, five quarter-master, two restaurants, the Directorate of the Triglav National Park and two sport organisations.

Most of the respondents cooperate with tourinform offices, sport organisations, tour operators and municipalities. Some of the respondents mentioned the nature conservation organisations and NGOs working in the field of tourism, the craft workers, and the regional management organisations.

60 percent of the respondents indicated that they know about nature conservation organisations, and mentioned namely the CIPRA Slovenija, The SAZU, the Freelancers – the Wildlife and the Triglav National Park. 60 percent of the respondents knew about tourism organisations, most of them gave the names of tourism information offices working in the area. Ecotourism organisations within the national park are known by 60 percent of the respondents, but 20 percent of them answered with “no”. One of the organisations named Plajerjeva domačija Trenta and Ecofarming.

The respondents more often meet climbers, ski riders, oarsmen and para gliders, some of them mentioned horse riders, organised ecotourism groups, while the sport organisation emphasised the canoes, the paddlers, the fishermen and ski riders.

The last question asked about the tourism cooperation forms. Most of the organisations cooperate with others in the field of marketing. Within these, the common advertisements, brochures were marked. The most interesting among the answers was that the quarter-masters cooperate with their close environment, while one of the sport organisations reported about cluster cooperation, and the Triglav National Park Directorate wrote about signed cooperation agreement.

In this phase of the research I intend to deepen the given information by via e-mail and next year I visit the most active respondents of the region.

## 5. SUMMARY

The *successful* closing of the *Delphi research* and the present phase of the perception research done in the Belső-Somogy Ecological Network and the Triglav National Park enable to realise my main objective: to develop the possible form of a pilot ecotourism cluster. In order to reach it, the next step in my research is to deepen the relation with the stakeholders, the settlements in Somogy County and the Somogy Nature Conservation Organisation; and I will prepare further case studies relating to the Hungarian Nature Parks.

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