

Evolution and Cyclicity in Rural Tourism

Experience of Tourism Development in the Inner-Őrség in the Light of Statistical Data

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world, and any settlement that can harness and promote its potential can benefit from it. It is not only the prerogative of cities but can also make a significant contribution to the survival and development of smaller settlements.

The development of tourism in a given area is not a sudden, rapid process, but usually takes place over several decades, through cyclical phases. Our research is based on the different hypothetical models of the stages of tourism developed by Noronha (1977) and Butler (1980), the applicability of which was examined in rural areas through the example of the Inner-Őrség. Nowadays Őrség (Guard's Country) is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Hungary, where the small settlements of the area have built on their natural, architectural and cultural assets and they have been able to exploit their potential by using the right marketing techniques. The villages of the Inner-Őrség have developed at different rates since their discovery as tourist destinations, and depending on their role in the settlement network, their accessibility and tourist values, the different phases of tourism development took place at different speeds in their territory. Therefore, the intensity and impact of tourism varies in each village despite the strong interaction between them.

In the present study, we seek to identify the trends and characteristics of the development of tourism in the examined area by using the results of the available statistical data, in order to obtain a more accurate picture of the role of tourism in the settlements concerned.

KEYWORDS

tourism cycle, development history, rural tourism, Inner-Őrség, small settlements, economic geography

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest growing ‘industries’ in the world and one of the top three largest sectors of the global economy (Kardos 2011), whose rural tourism segment is particularly important in Hungary, due to the lack of coastline and high mountains. There are a number of internationally different definitions of this gentler form of tourism (Kovács 2003), however, in Hungary the term ‘village tourism’ is often used as a synonym for the complex field of rural tourism,¹ which means a tourism product that aims to promote rural lifestyle and traditions by exploiting local conditions and opportunities, providing a variety of services for visitors who are actively involved in tourism (Pakurár–Oláh 2008; Kulcsár 2009).

The present research, using the concepts of rural and village tourism in a unified manner, reveals the detectable phases of tourism development and its characteristics through the territory of Inner-Őrség (Inner Guard’s Country), a small village area that locates in the western border of Hungary. The topic is particularly relevant as 35.6% of Hungary’s settlement network is made up of small villages (KSH 2015), whose future fate and viability largely depend on whether there is a national or local vision of the future (intention to maintain or develop them) for these areas, and to what extent the content of the relevant plans is idealised or actually reflects realistic longer-term opportunities.

The research seeks to answer the question of what factors promoted or hindered the competitiveness of the Inner-Őrség area, and which elements have contributed to its current prominence and role as a tourist destination over time since its ‘discovery’ as a target of tourism. The above are most relevant for the future development of the region, as the fundamental question is whether tourism in the Inner-Őrség is still booming, whether further possible development directions need to be identified, or whether it has already reached the limits of its capacity? In the latter case, the direction of the future development of the settlements must be formulated or re-defined bearing this in mind.

The methodology of the research is based on the adaptation of two different tourism cycle models by Noronha (1977) and Butler (1980). In addition to the literature review, the sources of the research are statistical data (Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH), regional statistical yearbooks, National Spatial Development and Spatial Planning Information System (TeIR) database), and relevant development strategies and concepts (ÓKTKP, VMTEK, VMTK, HFS, ÖNPI). The study builds on the compilation, analysis and interpretation of statistical data available from the 1970’s to the present day, based on a number of indicators. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that some data proved to be incomplete or inaccurate and, in recent years, actions (closures, restrictions) taken in response to the COVID epidemic have distorted tourism trends. Nevertheless, the processes in the examined area can be well understood.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW – TOURISM AND DEVELOPMENT CYCLES

Tourism, one of the most important drivers of socio-economic development in the world, is an increasingly researched topic. Two types of tourism can be distinguished according to the nature of the destination, the level of the infrastructure development, the use of natural resources, the

¹ According to Kardos (2011), the main types of rural tourism are: recreational, agro-, gastronomic, wine, equestrian, hunting, water-, castle, eco- and village tourism.



experience and the role of the local population: urban and rural tourism² (Ayazlar–Ayazlar 2015), that are operating together and in competition with each other according to the emerging and changing needs of tourists. Yet, tourism can also serve to alleviate the often unequal economic competition between regions, (metropolitan) cities and rural areas (Kőszeghy 2001). In today's urbanising and globalising world, more and more people are seeking to escape from the extreme stimulus and 'pollution' of urban environment by taking advantage of the opportunities offered by rural tourism.³ This shift in approach provides new opportunities and growth paths for economically (decline of agriculture, lack of jobs) and socially (population decline, emigration of youths) disadvantaged rural regions (Dashper 2014; Long–Lane 2000).

Bernard Lane (1994) attempted to define rural tourism and clarify its specific characteristics, which led to extensive research on the issue of rural tourism. According to Lane (2009. 355–356) 'rural tourism is a tourism that takes place in the countryside', a complex, multi-faceted activity that is constantly diversifying.⁴ It is very difficult to define, as what is considered 'countryside' can vary considerably between countries and even within countries (Dashper 2014). Identifying the strengths and attractions of rural areas may be an easier task. Long and Lane (2000) emphasise personal contact, authenticity, heritage and individualism, while Sharley & Roberts (2004) mention the restorative and healing effects – both mental and physical – of the natural environment.

The development of tourism in a given area, however, is not a sudden, rapid process, but usually takes place over several decades, through cyclical phases. Noronha (1977), developing a general model of tourism development, distinguished three phases:

- I) *discovery*: where the spontaneous development of tourism and the emergence of local initiatives are typical;
- II) *local response and initiatives*: characterised by the welcome and support of tourism, the use of local resources, craft tourism from which predominantly local people benefit, and the important role of local people;
- III) *institutionalisation*: whereby local facilities cannot meet the demands of the growing tourism and locals are losing their role and share, international standards of facilities and political and economic interventions emerge, and craft tourism changes to 'industrial tourism' (Cohen 1984).

During the various phases the spontaneous development of tourism, which significantly involves local people, gradually turns into an international 'industry', driving out the input and participation of the local population (Cohen 1984). Butler, on the other hand, in his hypothetical model presented in 1980, distinguished six successive phases based on the volume of tourists, the level of tourism development and its effects, which envisage the development or decline of a destination.

- I) *discovery*: low number of tourists; attraction of local culture and nature; no special tourist facilities; strong links with local people; no physical environmental, economic or social impact of tourism

² Kardos (2011) distinguishes 3 types of tourism in terms of land use: i) resort, ii) urban and iii) rural.

³ The excellent marketing of rural tourism as an embodiment of idealism, myth and antiquity has also strongly contributed to this (Dashper 2014).

⁴ For example: ecotourism, nature tourism, farm holidays/agritourism, activity tourism, adventure tourism (Lane 2009).



- II) *involvement*: increasing number of tourists – seasonality; provision and development of tourist facilities; continuous strong links with locals; emergence of area marketing (advertising); the beginning of organisation
- III) *development*: tourism market – strong marketing; increase in the number of visitors; declining participation of locals; expansion of facilities by outside organisations; development of attractions; emergence of ‘import’ facilities; tourism has a visible impact on the physical environment
- IV) *consolidation*: declining growth rate; tourism is a key element of economic development; marketing – search for new markets; emergence of franchises; growing dissatisfaction among the local people
- V) *stagnation*: the area is reaching its carrying capacity; the emergence of environmental, social and economic problems – outdated destination; underutilised facilities; tourism relies on return visitors; the emergence of mass tourists
- VI) (a) either *decline*: declining tourism (spatial, numerical); shorter stays; deterioration of tourist facilities; high property turnover
(b) or *rejuvenation*: changing the tourist attractions (man-made elements or unused natural features); creating new forms of recreation (Butler 1980; Palanca 2007).

In a sense, these different models correspond to each other (*Table 1*), but while Noronha tends to take the aspects of the local society into account in order to stagger the development of tourism, Butler focuses on the pace and impact of tourism development.

The different phases described above may take different amounts of time to achieve, and may be significantly affected by diverse external factors (earthquake, virus, weather events). In recent years (2020–2021), the development of both urban and rural tourism has been determined by the COVID epidemic. The pandemic and restrictive measures (closure of hospitality establishments, border closures, curfews) associated with it have put tourism in a difficult situation globally. The choice of destination for travellers has been reduced, and tourism habits have changed, which the service providers in the large cities really felt the impact on. In rural areas, the negative effect of the epidemic was less noticeable, as smaller rural accommodation capacities, lower local populations, ample opportunities for active tourism (hiking, cycling, fishing, etc.) and a healthier environment became attractive during the epidemic. Rural tourism, which is less exposed to the effects of globalisation, has thus been able to build on its own resources and assets to reduce the significant vulnerability of the tourism sector (Szántó 2020; Végi et al. 2020; MTU 2022). The next chapters investigate the characteristics of the tourism of the Inner-Őrség, and its connection with the different hypothetical model stages presented above.

3. CASE STUDY: INNER-ŐRSÉG

3.1 A brief history of Őrség

Őrség is a hilly region that typically consists of small villages in Vas County, on the western border of Hungary, which has undergone a number of trials and tribulations over time, mainly due to its geopolitical and geographical position. The present research focuses on those settlements of the ‘historical’ Őrség mentioned in the first written source (1280), which are still located in Hungary, and on the villages of the Inner-Őrség, which are considered historical by the locals (*Fig. 1*) (Balogh 1898; Beluszky 2005).



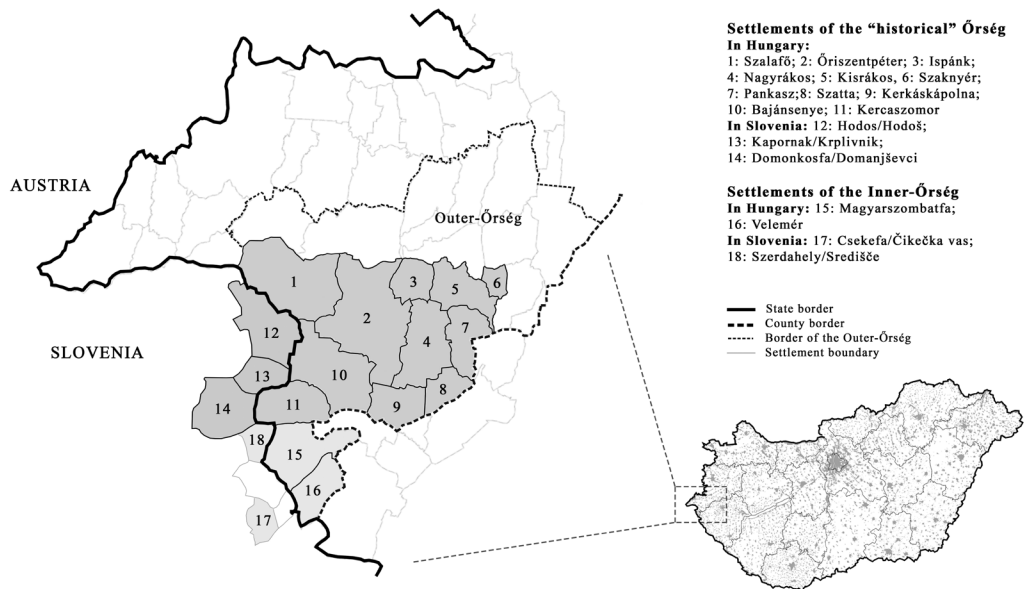


Figure 1. The settlements of the ‘historical’ and Inner-Őrség (Source: own editing)

Őrség has served as Hungary’s western frontier since the 11th century where the inhabitants⁵ settled in the area, adapting to the varied topography, creating a unique settlement structure, the so-called ‘szer’⁶ form, which is now a ‘highlighted national relic’ (Fig. 2). From the very beginning, Őrség has been an agricultural landscape, where, in addition to grain production, the presence of cattle kept and bred extensively on the rich pastures was a dominant feature, whose most significant market was the neighbouring Austria. Until the First World War, this trade link was one of the most important elements in the economic life of the area. However, the border demarcation of the Trianon Peace Treaty (1920) after the First World War left its mark on the area. The territory of Őrség became fragmented and lost its external markets (Csiszár 1983; Beluszky 2011).

After the Second World War Őrség was also affected by the ideological considerations, settlement and economic policy ideas of the state socialism, and the hermetic closure of the border in 1949, which determined the development potential of the area for decades. Őrség became a closed buffer zone on the western border, whither access was possible by special permit only and thus – the area with already deficient urban development energies and infrastructure network – it could not count on public development. The dictatorial agricultural policy of the era – collectivisation and land reform – did not alleviate the situation of the population living predominantly

⁵ In the 11th century, the conquering Hungarians settled guards in the area, who were granted noble privileges for their border protection duties (Csiszár 1983).

⁶ ‘Szers’ are made up of small, cohesive groups of houses that are structurally disperse, separated by fields, meadows and streams. The distance between each ‘szer’ can be only a plot or even more kilometres, yet they are related. Presumably each ‘szer’ was originally a family house, which expanded as the family grew (Csiszár 1983; Tóth 1971).



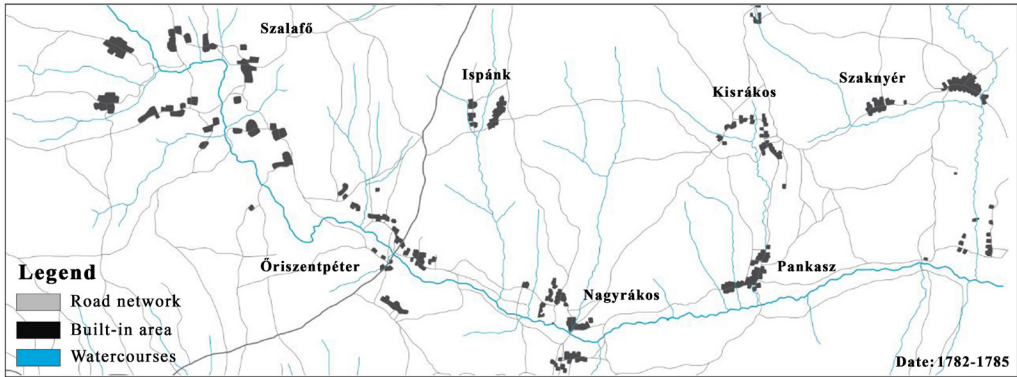


Figure 2. Part of the Inner-Őrség area in the 18th century (Source: Bertyák 2021)

on agricultural production and animal husbandry,⁷ thus, the local population, fleeing from the pressures of fulfilment obligation that often proved impossible, began to work in other economic sectors and cities. People left their villages behind, which has led to a continuous decline in the region's population (Beluszky 2011). The permanent population (3,427 people in 2020) has declined by almost 57% since 1949, when the area reached its peak population (7,936 people) (KSH 2001; KSH 2022a). The isolated situation along the border, however, has contributed to the preservation of the natural, landscape, structural, cultural and architectural traditions of the villages of Őrség, which represented a value in the territory of Hungary that initially attracted the interest of domestic and later of foreign tourists as well, initiating the development of the region's tourism.

3.2 Tourism as a new direction

The typical small village area of Őrség is one of the youngest tourist destinations in Hungary, which started to be discovered indeed in the 1960's, mainly due to the change of attitudes of the state socialist party leadership towards tourism after the Revolution of 1956. At that time, in addition to the political content of 'Opening to the West', improving the living conditions of the population, such as providing and expanding recreational opportunities and developing (rural) tourism became an important element (Slachta 2014; Palanca 2007).

The focus on the development of recreation and tourism in the Őrség region actually became conscious with the opening of the Őrség Landscape Protection Area in 1978 when protected parks, which represented a change in the socialist environmental approach, became significant elements in the growth of tourism through the obligation to preserve natural (flora and fauna, land and water values, land use, etc.), built (typical settlement structure, buildings), cultural (folk customs, traditions, etc.) (Budai 2004) and landscape values ensuring the long-term attractiveness of the area (Palanca 2007; Ispán 2019a).

⁷ In 1930, 85% of the population of villages worked in the agricultural sector, which was still very high in 1960, around 76% (Beluszky 2011; KSH 2013).



To cope with the ‘village-demolishing’ settlement development and agricultural policies of the state socialist period and the agricultural crisis after the change of regime, many small villages sought a way out in rural tourism, which started with the village private hospitality, namely rooms rented out by local families. So, in addition to state-promoted holiday opportunities spontaneous, grassroots rural holidays of small scale have also emerged (Molnár–Reményik 2017; Kardos 2011; Kovács 2015). Villages hoped for positive changes (population retention, new jobs) by taking the advantages of the opportunities given by tourism, however, this was not realized everywhere. The Inner-Őrség, however, can be classified as one of the more fortunate areas where the population which used to live on agriculture and livestock farming, is mainly trying to make a living in the field of catering and rural tourism, which is becoming a major source of income (Beluszky 2011).

4. THE PHASES OF THE TOURIST CYCLE IN THE INNER-ŐRSÉG

The following chapters are intended to analyse the tourism characteristics, opportunities and development concepts of the area of Inner-Őrség, following the phasing system presented by Noronha (1977) and Butler (1980) (*Table 1*). The stages affecting tourism in the territory of Őrség are not sharply separated from each other, but they are mostly present in synergy with each other, which is a local specificity. On the one hand, it is because of the different – delayed – time and nature of the development of tourism in each village, and on the other hand, due to the relatively late ‘discovery’ of the area. As a result, the events presented in the different phases often took place in parallel and overlapped in time.

Table 1. Models of tourism phases and their presence in Inner-Őrség
(Source: based on Cohen 1984; Butler 1980 – own editing)

Noronha's general model	Butler's hypothetical model	Phases in Inner-Őrség
<i>I) Discovery</i>	<i>I) Discovery</i>	From the 1960's
<i>II) Local response and initiatives</i>	<i>II) Involvement</i>	From the change of regime: 1989–1990
	<i>III) Development</i>	From the change of regime (1989–1990) Strong increase since the second half of the 2000's Partly appears
<i>III) Institutionalisation</i>	<i>IV) Consolidation</i>	From the 2010's Partly appears
	<i>V) Stagnation</i>	From the 2010's Appears to a small extent
<i>VI) Decline or VI) Rejuvenation</i>		Do not appear



4.1. The beginnings – A time of discovery (1960–1989)

According to the stories of the local people, tourism in the area of Őrség already appeared as early as the 1930's in a special form, where the guests could get an insight into the village life and the ancient peasant farming, while they also could contribute to daily work (Jankó et al. 2013). However, the Second World War and the state socialist period that followed it, put a brake on the development of tourism. From the 1960's onwards, the special, secluded area of Őrség, its inviting natural environment, its tranquillity and silence once again attracted the intellectuals and artists of Hungarian cities, and especially of the capital, who bought nearly 45% of local uninhabited properties by the mid-1980's. The presence of foreign tourists was not a feature of this period yet, nor was the development of human, technical and recreational infrastructure for tourism. However, the existing elements of hospitality required for tourism have been able to follow the growing interest relatively acceptably. The retail network was of optimal size for the population. In 1970 there were 27 shops serving locals and visitors, while in 1985, 26. In 1970, the number of catering establishments was 16 (including 12 buffets, pubs and 2 restaurants), rising to 19 in 1980 and then to 20 in 1985 (including 11 buffets, pubs and 3 restaurants). At the same time, it can be said that the quality and range of store network elements could not fully satisfy the more sophisticated needs of tourists (Imre 1984; Palanca 2007; TeIR 2022).

During the discovery phase a significant part of the services and accommodation capacity was concentrated in the centre of Őrség, Őriszentpéter, where in 1985 the available accommodation capacity was 115, provided by the 'Inn of Őrség' with 15 places and a camping with 100 places. In addition, Szalafő had 15 other accommodation places, part of which was a four-bed cottage. In the region there were also private accommodations with available rooms, mostly in Őriszentpéter (102 rooms), but also on request in Nagyrákos, Pankasz, Bajánsenye and Ispánk (Csiszár 1983; TeIR 2022). However, renting rooms was hampered by several factors. On the one hand, tourists demanded rooms with higher comfort and bathing facilities, although even in 1970, on average only 4.3% of dwellings in Inner-Őrség had a bathroom at all.⁸ On the other hand, the main source of income for the local population at that time was still agriculture and animal husbandry, and renting rooms only appeared as a supplement to the income of backyard farms, which in fact hindered the efficient performance of farming tasks. Over the years, however, a steady rise of the tertiary sector among workers can be seen: while in 1960, 76% of the active labour force worked in the primary sector and only 11.3% in the service industry, by 1980 the share of the former fell to 51% and the latter grew to 21.4% (Imre 1984; Slachta 2014; TeIR 2022).

Due to the limited services and accommodation capacity, the difficulties of accessibility and transport obstacles resulting from the peripheral location of Őrség, the number of tourists was restricted not only in terms of quantity but also in spatial terms. The fragmented, 'szer' type of settlement structure made it difficult to approach certain villages in the area and increased the cost of infrastructure investments, so the improvements of transport were mostly neglected (Ispán 2019b; Imre 1984). Following the closure of the Körmen–Bajánsenye railway line in 1980, the villages were reached by bus services, however, this did not meet the needs of the tourists arriving to the area, neither in terms of frequency nor in journey times. Thus, it is no wonder that visitors preferred staying in Őriszentpéter, which offered the most opportunities,

⁸ By 1980, the average proportion of dwellings with a bathroom rose to 31.9% (TeIR 2022), which is a significant improvement.



pushing the smaller villages into the background. Resulting from the border situation travel between villages and on hiking trails⁹ was made more difficult by the border guards' identity checks, which – although the border zone was abolished in 1965 – were completely terminated only by the change of regime and the opening of the border (Imre 1984; Palanca 2007).

At the time of discovery, the number of tourists and urban relocators arriving in the Inner-Őrség was not yet at a level that could cause a significant physical environmental, socio-cultural and economic impact on the area, however, the need to develop the rural tourism – as a new demographic and job-creating sector alongside agriculture – has been brought to the fore by the growing interest in tourism. As early as the 1960's, several party and state bodies were discussing the development opportunities¹⁰ for Őrség, but at that time the main goal was to keep the declining population in place¹¹ by boosting large-scale production and cooperatives, giving animal husbandry and soil improvement a prominent role (Ispán 2019a; Pósfai 1974).

In the 1970's, the Tourist Office of Vas County (Savaria Tourist) tried to promote Őrség for tourists by publishing various publications and brochures, based on the slogans: 'silence', 'tranquillity', 'subalpine climate', 'marked tourist routes' and 'rich ethnographic monuments' (Csiszár 1977). It is no wonder that the area of Őrség, although its accessibility was unfavourable, was mentioned in geography books by the 1980's as a landscape that 'deserves more attention from the point of view of tourism' (Bernát et al. 1986. 253).

As the popularity of the area has steadily increased, problems such as the availability of public utilities¹² and the lack of transport infrastructure, including the shortcomings of the possibilities of different ways of transport,¹³ have come to the fore. This were needed to be solved not only to improve the quality of life for local people, but also for environmental considerations and tourism needs (Imre 1984).

In the mid-1980's, the basis for the growth of tourism was seen in the provision of larger and more comfortable housing that could meet the needs of more and even higher demanding tourists. In 1980 there were 126 empty houses in the Inner-Őrség, which were being considered for sale as guest houses, holiday homes or possibly even art studios. New functions (for example village house, local history collection, library) were also intended to be added to the monuments – that have been protected by the National Monument Inspectorate since the 1950's – and buildings that had ceased to have functions¹⁴ (Imre 1984; Tóth 1971; TeIR 2022). The establishment of the Ethnographic Museum of Pityerszer in Szalafő, which is still a tourist attraction demonstrating the characteristics of the local settlement form and architecture, began in the 1970's by the Directorate of Museums of Vas County.

⁹ In the 1980's, there were about 10 recommended hiking trails in and around Őrség, covering only Hungary (Csiszár 1983).

¹⁰ 1963: County Council: Vend and Őrség Programme; 1969: County Council: Situation of border settlements; 1971: Development ideas for Őrség, Vend region and Hegyhát (Ispán 2019a).

¹¹ Only between 1949 and 1970 the population decreased by 25% (1988 people) (TeIR 2022)

¹² Even in 1990, only a public water supply network was built in the Inner-Őrség (except for Ispánk, Magyarszombatfa, Szatta and Velemér), sewerage and gas pipeline networks were not available yet (TeIR 2022).

¹³ Meeting the needs of those travelling by car, on foot, by bicycle, or even by horse has become necessary through the construction of networks and facilities (e.g., car rest, gas station, separated roads, etc.). The development of the public transport system was seen in the launch of a new bus service that would have served at appropriate intervals to suit the needs of locals and tourists (Imre 1984).

¹⁴ Due to the population decline and the centralisation efforts of the state socialist settlement policy, between 1970 and 1985, six settlements lost educational institutions or classrooms (TeIR 2022).



The Őrség Fair, as a series of cultural events, was launched in 1981 with the aim of creating a tradition, and it is still an emblematic event in the area, bringing local gastronomy and traditional crafts (pottery, basketry, pumpkin seed processing) closer to those who are interested in them. At the same time, they also saw an additional potential for attracting visitors – building on examples from abroad – in the presentation of the methods and traditions of farming, animal husbandry, mushroom picking and hunting. In the mid-1980's, as an example of the increasing opening to the West of the era, international events were proposed, mainly involving the Austrian Burgenland and neighbouring areas of the then Yugoslavia (Imre 1984). The growth of tourism was – of course – to be achieved through proper marketing¹⁵ and promotion of the area.

4.2 Progress (from 1989)

4.2.1 The phase of involvement

The involvement phase of the tourism of the Inner-Őrség started due to the transformations related to the change of regime when, with the opening of the border, the area regained its network of domestic and foreign connections, and the external factors that had previously hindered visitors disappeared. It was helped by the continuous marketing of the area. By 1994 the Phare ICC (Naturally Őrség) programme had already identified tourism as one of the main potential development strengths of the area (ÓKTKP 2002), whose economic benefits were beginning to be recognised by the local population.

Through the publications of Vas County Tourist Office about Őrség (travel guides, maps, postcards), oral tradition, trips organized by Savaria Turist and the commercial accommodation provided by the company, the number of tourists visiting Őrség has been steadily increasing, and more and more guest rooms have become available to accommodate them. The first private accommodation establishments in the paid catering sector appeared outside Óriszentpéter in Szalafő, then in Magyarszombatfa, Velemér and Bajánsenye. This is not surprising considering the natural, built and cultural characteristics of each village. In Szalafő the Ethnographic Museum of Pityerszer, in Magyarszombatfa the potters and their products, while in Velemér the famous medieval church attracted visitors and generated tourist traffic. According to the statistical data, the rural private accommodation last appeared in Kerkáskápolna (2009) (TeIR 2022), thus the last settlement integrated into the complex system of rural tourism too.

Commercial accommodation, usually with a larger capacity, first appeared in Óriszentpéter and Szalafő. The number of such facilities continued to increase steadily with the growing demand also in Bajánsenye, Magyarszombatfa and Ispánk. Commercial accommodation mainly consisted of boarding houses, holiday homes and tourist resorts, while the appearance of various hotels is still not common (TeIR 2022). During the involvement phase, Őrség was open to youth tourism, so camps for larger groups of students were established (for example Youth Camp in Ispánk) and several municipal and church-owned buildings were used – temporarily – as sum-

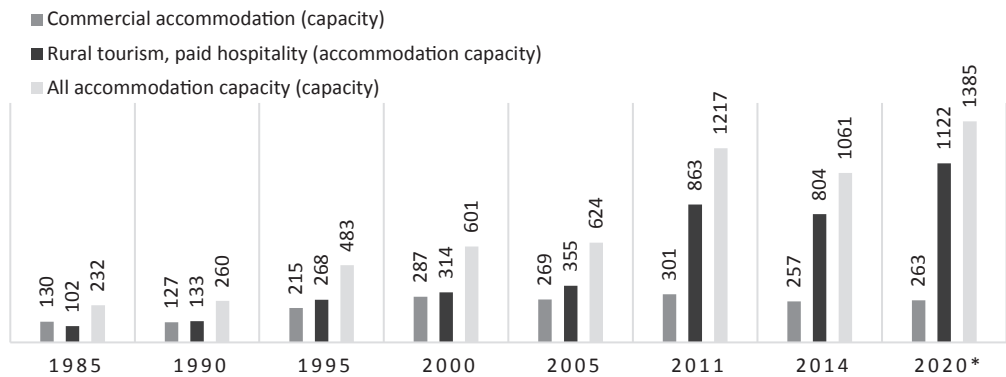
¹⁵ Highlighting ethnographic curiosities; publishing picture albums of local monuments; producing calendars, leaflets and postcards; producing colour slides, TV films; publishing newspaper advertisements and producing memorabilia (Imre 1984).



mer camp accommodation (Szalafő). The strong seasonality in the area therefore has also been adapted to school cyclicity.¹⁶

The steady growth of tourism in the region is well-illustrated by the fact that the number of beds in commercial accommodation doubled between the change of regime and the 2000's, since then it has remained roughly stagnant, while the number of beds in private and rural accommodation more than doubled until the mid-2000's and then increased by almost 6.5 times until the 2010's, representing the success of rural accommodation type (Table 2). However, there are significant spatial and temporal differences in the formation and distribution of accommodation capacity. According to the statistical data, from the change of regime to 2011 the expansion of rural accommodation supply was particularly high in the areas of Ispánk (four times), Kercaszomor (seven times) and Nagyrákos (eight times).

Table 2. Changes of accommodation capacity in the territory of the Inner-Őrség (Source: TeIR 2022; KSH 2022b – own editing)



*Incomplete date source

Although several settlements had already had private accommodation at the time of the regime change, it was only from the mid-1990s that guests really started to use them, 'venturing out' from Óriszentpéter. It can be said that, until the early 2000's, visitors spent more guest nights in commercial accommodation than in rural tourism, and Óriszentpéter, the centre of the Őrség region, remained important in the area, both in terms of the number of accommodation facilities and the number of visitors. A significant change in the evolution of overnight stays took place between 2005 and 2010 (Table 3), when the number of nights spent in rural accommodation tripled, while the number of nights spent in commercial accommodation increased by only 20%, and the central role of Óriszentpéter gradually declined.

¹⁶ April–May served as the pre-season, building on school camps, June–August as the high season, took advantage of the summer school holidays, while September–October as the off-season, served for the enthusiasts of hunting tourism in addition to class trips (ÖKTKP 2002).



Foreign guest flows also appeared in the involvement phase, but they were insignificant and volatile compared to domestic ones. Until 2010 they were mainly concentrated in commercial accommodation (Table 3). Most of the foreign visitors were Austrian, German and Dutch, but due to the border situation, the Slovenian shopping tourism as well as the Austrian hunting tourism were also typical (ÓKTKP 2002).

Table 3. Changes in the number of guests and the number of guest nights in the Inner-Őrség (Source: TeIR 2022; KSH 2022b – own editing)

NUMBER OF GUEST NIGHTS IN INNER-ŐRSÉG (PIECE)											
Year	In all	Commercial accommodation				Rural tourism				Rate of Őriszentpéter in tourism	
		Guest nights	Guest nights	Pro-portion (%)	For- eign	Pro- portion (%)	Guest nights	Pro- portion (%)	For- eign	Pro- portion (%)	Guest nights
1990	2 550	1 513	59	6	0.4	1 037	41	-	-	2 470	97
1995	9 722	5 446	56	262	4.8	4 276	44	72	1.7	5 316	55
2000	8 893	4 818	54	440	9.1	4 075	46	52	1.3	4 962	56
2005	12 599	6 012	48	737	12.3	6 587	52	249	3.8	5 730	45
2010	26 936	7 185	27	586	8.2	19 751	73	226	1.1	11 735	44
2015*	31 629	9 300	29	369	3.9	22 329	71	1157	5.2	9 953	31
2020*	44 873	15 284	34	86	0.6	29 589	66	0	0	9 040	20
NUMBER OF GUESTS IN INNER-ŐRSÉG (PIECE)											
Year	In all	Commercial accommodation				Rural tourism				Rate of Őriszentpéter in tourism	
		Guests	Guests	Pro- portion (%)	For- eign	Pro- portion (%)	Guests	Pro- portion (%)	For- eign	Pro- portion (%)	Guests
1990	1 075	669	62	4	0.6	406	38	-	-	1 056	98
1995	2 488	1 514	61	167	11.0	974	39	72	7.3	1 732	70
2000	2 753	1 851	67	195	10.5	902	33	21	2.3	1 398	51
2005	4 351	2 344	54	225	9.6	2 007	46	48	2.4	2 262	52
2010	8 222	2 859	35	223	7.8	5 363	65	55	1.0	4 051	49
2015*	11 135	3 534	32	123	3.5	7 601	68	256	3.4	3 510	32
2020*	16 083	5 802	36	28	0.5	10 281	64	0	0	4 260	26

* Incomplete data source





Figure 3. Renovated typical house in Ispánk (Source: own photo)

Although mostly intellectual, urban population had already bought vacant properties in the Őrség area at the time of the discovery, this form of village recreation really started to spread during the phase of involvement. At this stage, private property purchases were common, less often for permanent settlement and more often for a second home in the countryside. At the beginning of the 2000's, the majority of acquisitions were made in the most secluded settlements and 'szers' (Beluszky 2005; Palanca 2007).

It has become almost fashionable to own a house in Őrség, which is reflected in the statistics. In 1980, 7% of local dwellings were holiday homes, 18% in 2001 and almost 26% in 2011. Wealthier city-dwellers bought up the architecturally more valuable – but often dilapidated – buildings (Fig. 3), so between 1990 and 2010 only 39 dwellings in the settlements of Inner-Őrség were demolished (TeIR 2022). The advantage of buying empty homes is that the buyers have ensured the preservation of the old buildings, renovating them to create a tidy, aesthetic environment; the disadvantage is that they have abandoned the rural residence-workplace land-use pattern and its elements (for example farm buildings) and have created a suburban milieu on their sites, transforming the original streetscape of their micro-environment (Lányi 2010; Baranyai 2012).

The continuous growth of tourism has also generated the need for infrastructural development, which was helped by the new settlement development policy that came with the change of regime, through the self-determination of the local governments and state support, which started the development of smaller villages, such as the peripheral settlements of the Őrség. However, the dispersed, 'szer' type of settlement structure of Őrség, coupled with its border location, has hampered the development of costly infrastructure networks, but urbanisation, technical

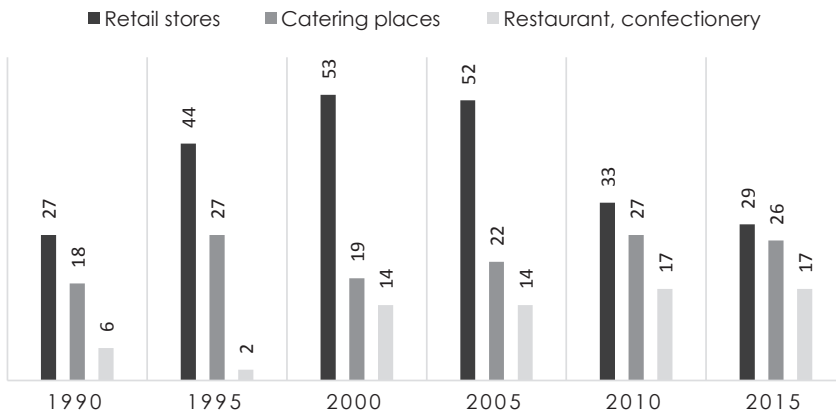


infrastructure and the provision of a more modern, liveable environment,¹⁷ have reached, albeit more slowly, an increasing number of settlements (Kőszegfalvi 2009; Beluszky 2005).

Due to its small village and fragmented structure, access to the Őrség area is still difficult, its road network is dense but at the same time in poor condition, and its public transport system is incomplete and unable to cope with the increasing demand for tourism-generated traffic. Since 2001, the main connection to the region has been provided by the Pan-European Railway No. V (No. 25),¹⁸ which connects Hungary with Slovenia. However, rail and intercity bus timetables, overlay connections and frequencies are not necessarily adapted to the needs of locals and visitors. At the same time, the global increase of car usage seems to be reducing this problem.

The retail network expanded during the period of involvement until the late 2000's, however, from 2008, the number of them started to decline, presumably as a result of the global economic crisis. In contrast, the number of catering establishments has increased steadily since the change of regime and has stagnated since the early 2010's (Table 4). The restaurants and confectioneries were mainly concentrated in Őriszentpéter and Bajánsénye, whose offer was based only to a smaller extent on the gastronomic characteristics of the area and almost all of them adjusted their opening hours to the seasonality, pushing aside the possible needs of the local population.

Table 4. Changes in the number of stores and catering places in the Inner-Őrség
(Source: TeIR 2022 – own editing)



One of the essential elements of the involvement phase was to raise the profile of Őrség further by using appropriate marketing strategies, which launched the external communication of the area. One of the most effective ways to do it was to organise events based on different cultural and folk traditions (for example log-pulling since the 1930's), gastronomy and rural lifestyle. The first event attracting large crowds – the Őrség Fair – was followed in 1996 by the Őrség Pumpkin Festival, which gradually became the 'trademark' of the area, saturating accommoda-

¹⁷ The development of the sewerage network and gas supply in the Inner-Őrség only started in the early 2000's firstly in the areas of Őriszentpéter and Nagyrákos, and their construction is still incomplete (TeIR 2022).

¹⁸ It has stations in Bajánsénye, Őriszentpéter, Nagyrákos and Pankasz.



tion within a 30–40 km radius (Tama 2010). The number and scope of events have been steadily increasing and more famous events¹⁹ involving the foreign neighbouring settlements have been organised (Őrség Infó 2022).

4.2.2 The phase of development

In the area of the Inner-Őrség – as already mentioned –, the phase of involvement and development of tourism is characterised by a ‘shift’ in time and territory, where some of the micro-centres in the region acted as core development areas, going further from which the next stage of progress emerged later and later (Fig. 4). Micro-centres of the area are, of course, Óriszentpéter – which was upgraded to urban status in 2005 – and its surroundings (Szalafő), Magyarszombatfa and Velemér, which were previously the geographically most isolated settlements with strong craft traditions and architectural values. The Lake Vadása (Hegyhátszentjakab) and its surroundings, located in the Outer-Őrség, also play a micro-central role in tourism as a major recreational and fishing area, whose attraction has also benefited the nearby villages (Szaknyér, Kistrákos) of the Inner-Őrség (ÖKTKP 2002; Palanca 2007).

While in 2001 some peripheral settlements (Kerkáskápolna, Szaknyér) were just entering the involvement phase, according to their study, Kóródi and Dudás (2004) classified the Óriszentpéter sub-region as one of the highly rural sub-regions with above-average tourism capacity and development indicators, which well-treated tourism as a break-out opportunity and made considerable efforts to do so. The establishment of the Órség National Park in 2002, which includes 44 settlements of the area and its surroundings (Vend-region, Upper Rába Valley), also contributed significantly to the further strong growth of tourism in the Inner-Őrség, which, in addition to its role in nature conservation, had been involved in the creation of eco-tourism and experiential tourism from the very beginning. The success of the region’s progress in tourism was significant²⁰ and the area has become known nationally and internationally.

Based on the statistical data, it can be stated that there had been a surge in the development of the Inner-Őrség in the second half of the 2000’s, which is reflected in the increase in the number of accommodation capacity (2x), the number of guests (1.9x) and the length of guest nights and therefore the length of their stay (2.1x). Since the mid-2000’s, the number of visitors to the area has exceeded the number of the local population, whose lives have thus been strongly influenced by the need to adapt to – typically seasonal – tourists. However, experience has shown that the relationship between locals and tourists is still positive (Jankó et al. 2013).

The development of tourism has also had a significant impact on housing conditions, as the more demanding tourists visiting the area have set the more backward settlements of Órség on the path of comfort and modernisation, which also became common among the local population over time, starting from the change of regime. However, the development did not necessarily mean the construction of new dwellings and holiday homes, but the renovation and extension of existing buildings, which had an advantageous size and characteristics due to the former large family way of life and could be easily converted into rural accommodation. In 2011 only

¹⁹ Such as the Valley Bridge Fair and the Equestrian Days, the International Pottery Meeting, the Seven-Fields Festival, or the Órség–Goricsko hiking tour (Őrség Infó 2022).

²⁰ Órség won the title of ‘Hungary’s most developing rural destination’ in the ‘European Destinations of Excellence’ 2007 competition on rural tourism with its entry ‘Naturally Órség’ (Ligeti 2007).



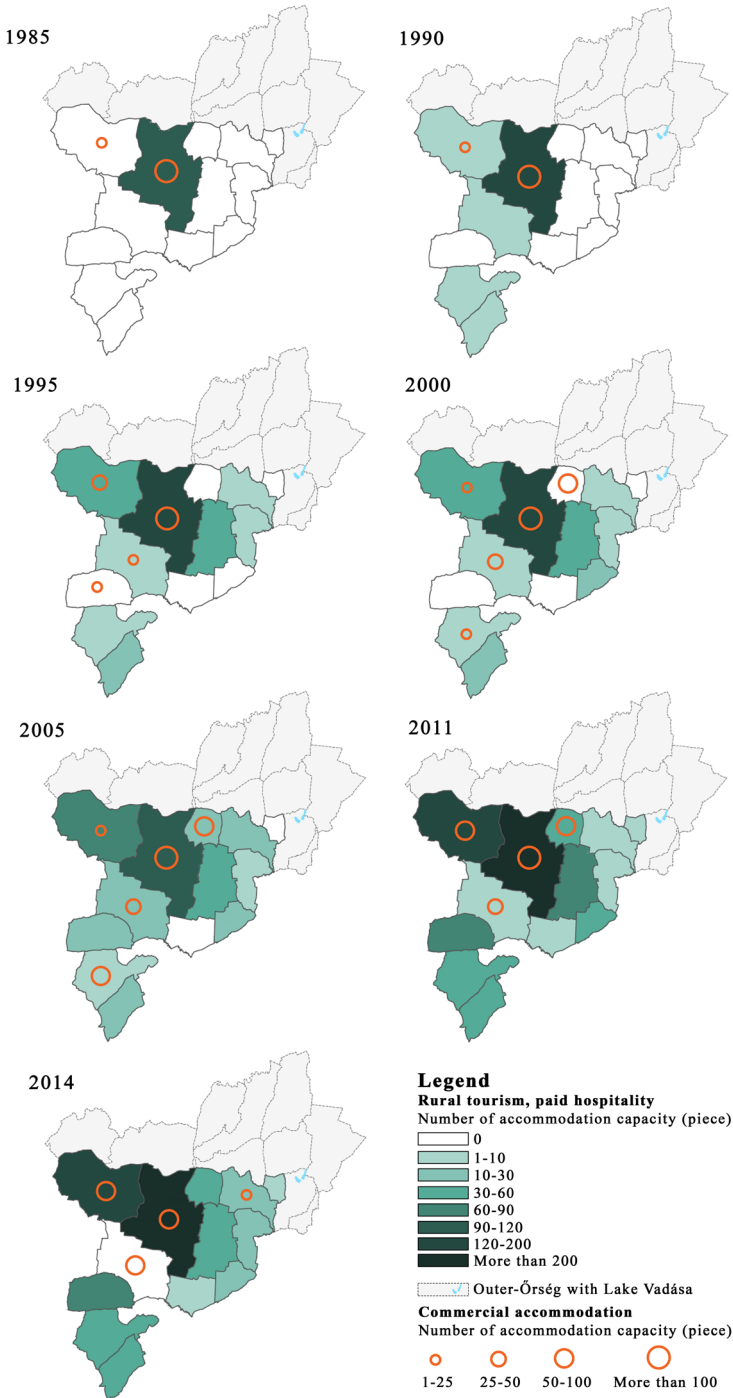


Figure 4. Development of accommodation capacity in the Inner-Őrség (Source: TeIR 2022 – own editing)



12.7% of the housing stock in the Inner-Őrség was built after the change of regime, and by 2020 only 36 new dwellings (1.9%) were built and none of them was demolished (TeIR 2022). Since the 1990's, nearly 57% of the housing and holiday construction has been concentrated in Őrszentpéter, Szalafő and Ispánk, thus mainly in these settlements some foreign architectural elements have appeared that deny the traditional architecture of the area. For this reason, the protection of the townscape and the utilization of the empty buildings without function have become important. While a single building does not drastically change the character of an area, their mass appearance leads to the destruction of aesthetic quality and local identity (Dúll 2017; Tamáska 2009), therefore, the protection of the townscape of the villages of Őrség is today supported by strict local building codes, Townscape Design Manuals, townscape regulations and restrictions of the Őrség National Park.

In the Inner-Őrség, the growing tourism sector – as well as a more modern and liveable living environment for locals – was to be served by the slowly developing technical infrastructure networks, however, they have focused only to a small extent on the development of technical elements (utilities, roads) and the shop network, and to a larger extent on the expansion of certain services (restaurants, attractions, accommodation, etc.). Mainly in the micro-centres particular new retail stores have appeared that were not typical of the area (souvenir shops, bicycle shops, chocolate factories, etc.). An increasing number of NGOs and businesses in the service sector (1.4 times more between 2005 and 2010) have been registered, which have built their full-time activity on tourism (restaurants, potters, farmers, accommodation providers, etc.), thus tourism was no longer seen by locals as just a secondary activity and a source of additional income (Palanca 2007; TeIR 2022).

4.3 Strengthening (from 2010)

4.3.1 The phase of consolidation

Rural tourism is still a developing, yet increasingly sought-after sector in Hungary, which, building on local agricultural, natural, built and cultural values and free local capacities, supports the principles of nature conservation and heritage preservation and fits well with the principles of sustainability (Kovács 2015; Molnár–Reményik 2017). One of the best developing areas of the Western Transdanubian region going towards quality rural tourism is Őrség (Kóródi–Dudás 2004), where the growing role of tourism is reflected in the steady decline in the share of employment in the agricultural and industrial sectors, while the economic volume of the service sector has increased. In 2001, the proportion of people working in the tertiary sector was already 47.6% – exceeding the average value of the villages in Vas County (41.3%) – and increased to 53.2% by 2011, so the recreation and tourism function has become one of the area's major employers (TeIR 2022).

In the consolidation phase of tourism development, the already established tourist micro-centres and hence their 'agglomeration' have been put on the mental map of domestic – and to a smaller extent, foreign – tourists in terms of tourist destinations, however, contrary to the theoretical phase, mass tourism and the emergence of (foreign) investor capital were not typical. Large investments and hotel constructions have avoided the Inner-Őrség, leaving it to the lovers of nature-based recreation and relaxation, instead of the complete exploitation of tourism as an 'industry' (Palanca 2007). The winds of mass tourism have rather hit some of the catering establishments – which, for example, in order to satisfy the ever-changing needs of visitors prefer



the more expensive offer of fine dining to local gastronomic specialties, pushing the needs of the locals into the background – and they are reflected among visitors to local events and festivals. Some of the traditional village festivals are now just tourist attractions – where ‘bulk trade fair products’ and souvenirs also appear – which the local population often does not even attend (Lányi 2010; Kalas 2022).

By the time of consolidation, the rural accommodation sector had undergone a major transformation, partly due to the changing demands of tourism. While initially guests were typically accommodated under the same roof or on the same plot but in different buildings with the landlords, nowadays it is no longer common for owners to live in the same settlement where they rent out their accommodation. As a result, the close relationship between visitors and locals loosens and the distance between them increases, which also favours speculative land purchases by real estate investors, who are interested in ‘soft²¹ tourism (Kovács 2015; Palanca 2007).

Őrség, although attractive to tourists, still lacks tourist attractions and leisure infrastructure that could keep visitors here for a longer period of time, which is reflected in the number of guest nights, which, although increased sharply by 2010, lags far behind the county (–25%) and national (–60%) averages, but above the average of the small village areas (+14%) (TeIR 2022). The leisure infrastructure is based on 8 nature trails built by the National Park in the Inner-Őrség and 8 more in the surrounding area; interesting guided tours about seasonal natural values; complex nature school programmes for students and programmes in the visitor centre and museums. Furthermore, there are several round trips and hiking trails (11 recommended, signposted routes) through Őrség and its surroundings and in addition to these walking tours, cycling tourism has lately become popular. Recently, cycling routes of Őrség (named 1–6) have been designated, mostly along existing paved roads, connecting the villages of Őrség with the settlements along the River Rába, Slovenia and the neighbouring Zala County, supplemented by 6 other recommended routes (Őrség Infó 2022).

The region is not characterized by overcrowding and a uniform negative attitude of the population towards tourism, but tourism in the area is still highly seasonal, the reduction of which could be one of the tools of sustainable development, which would also benefit local residents through a better distribution of visitors (Palanca 2007; Jankó 2013). Seasonality, in addition, entails restrictions, with many of the services and restaurants that are no longer available to tourists – and locals – arriving after the high season has ended (Józsig 2021).

4.3.2 The phase of stagnation

The start of the phase of stagnation in tourism development in the Inner-Őrség can be linked to the abolition of tax relief for rural tourism in 2009 and the effects of the global economic crisis, which have disrupted the two-decade rise in national rural tourism and led to its decline (Kovács 2015). *Table 5* shows that the number of accommodation providers and capacity decreased nationally until 2014 and then started to increase again, although the share of rural accommodation within other accommodation has been decreasing steadily since then. In the Inner-Őrség, this national trend is only partially reflected – to a varying extent in individual settlements – and

²¹ Soft tourism means a tourism that is environmentally and socially compatible with the needs of tourism, without any harmful impact on the natural, cultural and built environment of the destination, and based on an understanding between the visitor and the local population. (Kardos 2011).



it has stabilised since 2012, ahead of the national indicators, reflecting the popularity and attractiveness of the area. However, there are fluctuations in the number of accommodation capacity, which are also influenced by the tendering opportunities that have emerged in recent years. At present, several national and European Union tenders serve the development of rural tourism, but these are mainly aimed at the renovation, construction and expansion of accommodation facilities – often only in a designated development area –, but other tourism-related infrastructure elements and activities are less affected by them (Molnár–Reményik 2017; GS 2022).

Table 5. The development of ‘other accommodation’ establishments in Hungary and in the Inner-Őrség (Source: KSH 2022b; TeIR 2022 – own editing)

Year	Hungary					Inner-Őrség			
	Accommodation capacity (a. c.)	Rural a. c.	Number of hosts	Guest number	Guest nights	Accommodation capacity	Number of hosts	Guest number	Guest nights
2008	When the previous year is 100%					When the previous year is 100%			
2009	99.1%	-	97.5%	99.0%	96.6%	122.2%	94.1%	136.6%	126.6%
2010	100.3%	-	99.9%	90.4%	86.4%	102.2%	84.3%	80.7%	99.8%
2011	98.6%	97.3%	96.9%	100.9%	100.4%	109.0%	109.3%	98.5%	78.0%
2012	98.9%	84.3%	97.6%	108.7%	103.2%	99.5%	100.8%	118.4%	127.8%
2013	97.8%	94.0%	98.3%	111.2%	108.5%	105.8%	103.4%	106.4%	95.9%
2014	100.2%	97.8%	98.7%	128.6%	122.5%	86.6%	85.4%	105.2%	113.9%
2015*	106.3%	98.2%	105.9%	120.5%	118.7%	104.8%	104.8%	111.6%	106.7%
2016*	103.8%	99.7%	102.8%	116.9%	121.2%	112.9%	99.1%	128.6%	129.7%
2017*	104.2%	91.9%	107.1%	127.9%	128.2%	88.9%	100.0%	90.8%	85.5%
2018*	104.7%	97.4%	107.9%	120.4%	113.6%	106.2%	109.2%	115.5%	112.9%
2019*	106.1%	-	100.3%	109.4%	107.0%	122.0%	110.1%	105.9%	98.8%
2020*	101.7%	-	97.4%	58.2%	61.5%	109.3%	112.2%	94.7%	107.1%

* Incomplete data source

Furthermore, it can be stated that after the 2010's, although the overall number of rural accommodation establishments increased in the Inner-Őrség, the share of nights spent in them decreased steadily compared to the number of nights spent in commercial housing (by 7% between 2010 and 2020 – Table 3), which shows a slight change in the structure of tourism. However, the area still has limited capacity to accommodate large groups (40–50 people) simultaneously in time and space, and its technical and leisure infrastructure raise some questions, which means that, in contrast to the characteristics of the stagnation phase, mass tourism is not expected in the area.



4.4 Future – The phases of decline and rejuvenation

The positive social and economic effects, which were hoped for by the development of tourism and the growing awareness of the Inner-Őrség since the change of regime, have only been partially realized. The decline in population since 1949 has not been reversed, between 1990 and 2010 the area lost an average of 17.9% of its population and 23.3% by 2020, but there were also settlements where the population fell by more than 40% (Kerkáskápolna: –51.2%; Kistrákos: –41.6%; Szatta: –45.7%). At the same time, by making good use of the geopolitical characteristics of the area, its connections and the opportunities offered by the tertiary sector, the economic situation of the local population is exceptionally good compared to the Hungarian small village areas²² (Bertyák 2021).

In order to maintain the population and strengthen the economic competitiveness of Őrség, several development concepts and strategic objectives were set after the change of regime, which were also considered to be important to ensure the further development of tourism, as: *‘Tourism partly provides employment and sources of income for the population, and partly can contribute to the “maintenance” of agriculture as a complementary activity. But it can also ensure the physical survival of rural settlements that are completely depopulating’* (Beluszky 2005. 154). The objectives of each document were very broad, but so far, they have only been partially met, so their content is very similar (Table 6).

The general features of the declining phase in the area of the Inner-Őrség are not yet noticeable (Palanca 2007). However, just as the country’s – and the world’s – tourism trends have been affected by the COVID epidemic, so too has the Inner-Őrség. Usually tourist destinations, where the temporal distribution of tourism is more homogeneous, are better able to cope with the reduction in demand caused by emergency situations (Duro et al. 2021), but the Inner-Őrség, despite its typically strong seasonality, has proved resistant to pandemics. As a result of the restrictions caused by the epidemic, nationally the number of nights spent in commercial accommodation fell by 57% and only 4% in the Inner-Őrség, whereas the number of nights spent in rural accommodation nationally fell by 39%, while in the Inner-Őrség it increased by 7%.²³ In addition, some of the urban population with holiday homes may have temporarily moved to these epidemiologically safer villages. Due to the COVID restrictions introduced, there has been a concentration and a slight shift in the peak season for tourism in the area. While in 2019 the number of guest nights spent in commercial accommodation from May to August was 64% of the annual value in Őrség, in 2020 it was already 72% (KSH 2022b). There are also changes in consumer habits and preferences in the area, to which local tourism must adapt (rejuvenation phase). Nowadays more and more accommodations providing ‘something extra’ are also appearing in the Inner-Őrség region, offering new creative recreational experiences.²⁴

²² In 2011, the unemployment rate was only around 4% (compared to an average of 16.9% in small village areas). By 2021 it became around 5.8%, partly due to the economic and territorial impact of the COVID pandemic (KSH 2013, 2015).

²³ The data refer to the ratio of the number of overnight stays between 2019 and 2020.

²⁴ Alpaca farm, canopies, jacuzzi, Trabant rental, equestrian tourism and equestrian therapy, etc.



Table 6. Development ideas and objectives that also affect Őrség
(Source: ÖKTKP 2002; VMTEK 2014; VMTK 2014; HFS 2017; VMTEK 2021; ÖNPI 2021 – own editing)

CONCEPT AND PROGRAMME FOR THE SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUB-REGION OF ŐRISZENTPÉTER (ÖKTKP 2002)	Realized	Not realized	Partly realized
• Tourism as a way out: 'soft' tourism based on natural assets; strengthening tourism as an economic sector	•		
• Development of tourism infrastructure: qualitative and quantitative improvements (hiking paths, cycling and walking tours, information boards, improvement of accommodation facilities, development of service infrastructure)			•
• Development of tourist centres: complex service development; creation of leisure centres	•		
• Expanding the range of tourism programmes: development of cultural programmes; opportunities to take advantage of the thermal springs near the area			•
• Tourism valorisation of Őrség: tourism marketing	•		
• Ecotourism: handicrafts, cycling and hiking, equestrian tourism opportunities			•
• Development of specific local products and handicraft programmes in the region and business development based on them; promotion of market access for products			•
• Development of an information network (tendering opportunities, development of a marketing and tourism database)	•		
• Preservation and renewal of cultural heritage; related research and development			•
• Improving transport infrastructure			•
• Village rehabilitation programme; heritage maintenance			•
• Fostering specific traditions, supporting civil society organisations and creating the conditions for organising cultural events	•		
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTION OF VAS COUNTY (VMTEK 2014) and REGIONAL TOURISM CONCEPTION OF VAS COUNTY (VMTK 2014)			
• Expanding cross-border links: labour market, natural assets, tourism			•
• Experience-oriented development: organised attractions and services – health tourism; cultural and sports tourism; soft tourism		•	
• General infrastructure development: accessibility, sustainable mobility			•



• The networking of existing local destinations with a strong local image and a mostly good product offer			•
• Development of regional tourism institutions: R&D, information, marketing, sales			•
• Brand development: branding and competitiveness; improving the conditions for tourism based on new target groups, local values and products			•
• Promoting and strengthening low-impact tourism: in harmony with the environment and nature conservation	•		
• Support for research, training, education, awareness-raising	•		
• Developing a network of cycling routes, service networks and infrastructure; producing publications			•
• Creation of service developments, publications in line with the themes of the different hiking paths			•
• Developing gastronomic services: local food; local ingredients; local supply chain; gastronomic training and marketing			•
• Promotion, development and networking of agrotourism (horse riding, fishing, hunting) and rural hospitality			•
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTION OF VAS COUNTY (VMTFK 2021), LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2014–2020 (HFS 2017), and REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ÓRSÉG NATIONAL PARK ACTIVITY FOR THE YEAR 2020 (ÖNPI 2021)			
• Making regional (sub)centres more dynamic and accessible: infrastructure improvements – improving secondary road networks and public transport; increasing the number of businesses; strengthening small-scale farming			
• Strengthening tourism conditions: development of nature and active tourism attractions, leisure infrastructure (cultural, gastronomic tourism, adventure beaches, etc.); capacity and quality development of accommodation; improving the competitiveness of services; development of service activities; continuous renewal of cultural programmes; development of health and active tourism; preservation of attractions – building regulations, nature and landscape protection; brand building and marketing; development of information systems			
• Preventing the marginalisation of peripheral areas: rural development interventions; improving transport infrastructure; improving the liveability of small villages; creating jobs; increasing the productivity of arable crops; producing and selling local products; shortening the distribution chain – using local raw materials; supporting young farmers; exploiting the potential for self-sufficiency			
• Promoting the networking of tourism operators			
• Use of COVID and epidemic-resistant solutions			
• Cultivating and presenting traditions based on gastronomy, handicrafts and folk crafts: development of background infrastructure			
• Plans for the complex development of the environment of the Ethnographic Museum of Pityerszer			
• Further renovation of educational hiking trails, creation of new trails			
• Development of regional and cross-border tourism links			



4.5 Evaluation

The villages of the Inner-Őrség, as tourist destinations, have developed at different rates since the discovery phase, and depending on their role in the settlement network and their accessibility and tourist values, the different stages of development took place at different speeds in their territory. Therefore, the current share of tourism in each village is different (Table 7) – although more evenly balanced, compared to the situation before the change of regime –, whose reduction, and the approximation of the role of villages in tourism, is a key element of the future tourism development opportunities.

Although Őrség has performed excellently in terms of tourism during the COVID epidemic, the question remains whether it will continue to be attractive despite its shortcomings, and whether it will be able to compete on price and service, while retaining its local identity, once the pandemic is over and travel restrictions have been lifted (Józsig 2021). It is expected that the actual impact of the epidemic and the future development trends of the study area will be determined on the basis of the data from the census to be held in autumn 2022.

Table 7. Summary table of the tourism development of the settlements of the Inner-Őrség (Source: KSH 2022b; TeIR 2022 – own editing)

Settlement name	Bajánsenye	Ipánk	Kercaszomor	Kerkáskápolna	Kisrákos	Magyarszombatfa	Nagyrákos	Óriszentpéter	Pankasz	Szaknyér	Szalatfő	Szatta	Velemér
Average value of the development of tourism – according to: number of hosts; accommodation capacity; number of guests; number of guest nights both in commercial and other accommodation (when the previous year was 100%)													
2008–2014 (%)	129	95	121	101	116	108	97	105	197	95	116	94	118
2014–2020 (%)	107	122	114	n.d.	112	186	116	106	n.d.	129	105	95	108
Average: 2008–2020 (%)	118	109	118	101	125	147	106	106	197	107	111	94	113
The tourism development phase of the settlement – based on the author’s opinion													
Exploration													
Involvement				○									
Development		○				○	○		○	○			
Consolidation	○		○		○						○		○
Stagnation								○					
Decline/Rejuvenation												○	
The tourism development trend of the settlement	-	↓	-	-	-	↑	↑	-	↑	↑	-	↓	-



5. CONCLUSION

Thanks to its unique natural, cultural and architectural values, as well as its strong marketing since 1970, the Inner-Őrség, one of the youngest tourist destinations in Hungary, is now on the mental map of domestic – and foreign – tourists. The visitor numbers to the area have increased steadily over the years and remained high even during the COVID epidemic, proving that rural tourist destinations have a better resistance to the pandemic due to their more natural and healthier environment.

The hypothetical models of tourism development cycle in the Inner-Őrség are largely well traceable, however, due to the peripheral geographical situation of the area and the rise of rural hospitality, some development phases are still only partially interpretable. The Regional Development Concept of Vas County (2021) still classifies the territory of Őrség as one of the areas with the most unfavourable progress and transport indicators that needs to be developed. This is both beneficial in terms of promoting soft tourism and discouraging the institutionalisation of the sector and the mass tourism in the area, on the other hand, it is disadvantageous, as the accessibility of some villages, and thus their development potential, remain limited.

The settlements in the Inner-Őrség are at different phases of tourism development, typically in the development and consolidation stage, which shows that the area has not yet reached the limit of its capacity. Due to their different situations, the settlements benefit differently from the economic and demographic impacts generated by tourism, so tourism development remains an important economic stimulus for the region. The key element of the development is network building and thus the equalization of the role of individual settlements in tourism, which cannot be achieved without the development of insufficient leisure and transport infrastructure.

This research can help to identify the situation of tourism in the different settlements of the Inner-Őrség and thus to elaborate settlement-specific development concepts for each municipality, depending on what stage of tourism development the given settlement is at, and which directions may be needed to ensure progress, taking into account the ever-changing needs of tourism stakeholders.

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Fejlődés és ciklikusság a vidéki turizmusban

A Belső-Őrség turizmusfejlődésének tapasztalatai a statisztikai adatok tükrében

ÖSSZEFOGLALÓ

A turizmus a világ egyik leggyorsabban fejlődő gazdasági ágazata, melyből bármelyik az adottságait megfelelően kihasználni és népszerűsíteni képes település kiveheti részét. Nem kizárólag csak a városok kiváltsága, hanem a kisebb települések fennmaradásához és fejlődéséhez is jelentős mértékben hozzájárulhat.

A turizmus fejlődése azonban egy adott területen nem egy hirtelen, gyors folyamatként megy végbe, hanem általában több évtizedet felölelve, ciklikus szakaszokon keresztül. Kutatásunk a Noronha (1977) és a Butler (1980) által kidolgozott különböző turizmusfejlődési szakaszok hipotetikus modelljeire épül, amelyek alkalmazhatóságát a vidéki térségekben a Belső-Őrség példáján keresztül vizsgáltuk. Napjainkban az Őrség (Guard's Country) Magyarország egyik legnépszerűbb turisztikai célpontja, ahol a térség kisteleplései természeti, épített és kulturális értékeikre, valamint megfelelő marketingtechnikára építve képesek voltak kihasználni adottságaikat. A Belső-Őrség falvai turisztikai célpontként való felfedezésük óta különböző ütemben fejlődtek, és a településhálózatban betöltött szerepüktől, megközelíthetőségüktől és turisztikai értékeiktől függően a turizmusfejlődés egyes fázisai különböző sebességgel zajlottak le területükön. Ezért a turizmus intenzitása és hatásai az egyes falvakban a köztük lévő erős kölcsönhatás ellenére is eltérők.

Jelen tanulmányban arra törekszünk, hogy a rendelkezésre álló statisztikai adatok eredményeinek felhasználásával feltárjuk a turizmus fejlődésének tendenciáit és jellemzőit a vizsgált területen, annak érdekében, hogy pontosabb képet kaphassunk az érintett települések turisztikai szerepéről.

KULCSSZAVAK

idegenforgalmi körforgás, fejlődéstörténet, vidéki turizmus, Belső-Őrség, kisteleplések, gazdaságföldrajz

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