

A szamár potenciális szerepe az egészségturizmusban

The potential role of donkeys in health tourism



ÖSSZEFOGLALÁS:

A kutatás egy Magyarországon honos haszonállat, a szamár turisztikai hasznosíthatóságára hívja fel a figyelmet elsősorban az egészségturizmusra fókuszálva. A tanulmány tudományokon átívelő módon mutatja be az elméleti háttérrel és egy külföldi gyakorlatot is bemutató esettanulmány formájában. Egy félig strukturált mélyinterjú tárja fel a magyar helyzetet, a már létező turisztikai termékeket és a turisztikai potenciált. Az interjú során kiderült, hogy a szamárnak Magyarországon haszonállatként nincs gazdasági jelentősége. Hobbizállatként turisztikai szerepük elenyésző,

bár vannak ez irányban kezdeményezések. Az irodalomlemezés és a primer kutatás is arra mutatott rá, hogy nincs olyan korlátozó tényező, mely a szamár bevonását a turizmusba meggátolná. Az interjúban az is megfogalmazódott, hogy a kézenfekvő megoldás a lovas-turizmussal foglalkozó turisztikai vállalkozások pályára lépése lenne. A kutatás egyértelmű következtetése, hogy a szamár az egészségturizmuson belül számos területen szerepet kaphatna Magyarországon, így a gyógyászatban, a wellness turizmusban, valamint a gasztronómiában is.

Kulcsszavak: egészségturizmus, fenntartható turizmus, állat terápiás turizmus, biofilia



ABSTRACT:

This study draws attention to the potential use of the autochthonous animal, the donkey in tourism with special regard to health tourism. The paper explores the theoretical background from a multidisciplinary perspective and showcases foreign good practices in a case study as well. An interview is also conducted to discuss the Hungarian current state, existing tourism products and tourism potential. The interview revealed that donkeys do not have a role in a farm economy, usually kept as hobby animals, and their role in terms of tourism is also negli-

ble despite some initiatives. Although both the literature analysis and the primary research found that there would be no barrier to the involvement of donkeys into tourism. The interview also confirmed that the handy solution would be to encourage entrepreneurs dealing with horse tourism to involve donkeys as well. The research concludes that donkeys could play a role in several areas within health tourism, including medical and wellness tourism as well as in gastronomy in Hungary.

Keywords: health tourism, sustainable tourism, animal-assisted therapy tourism, biofilia

1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research is to rethink health tourism in Hungary and to introduce donkey products including donkey – assisted therapies to health tourism. Donkeys are famed for their longevity (Burden, 2015) and they are autochthonous in the country, so the study tries to prove that there would be a myriad of beneficial experiences obtained with the involvement of donkeys in tourism. Apart from onotherapy, the milk of the animal can be used in gastronomy along with the wellness and beauty industry, while its meat also offers a healthy option in gastronomy.

The research regards health tourism in a wider sense, including all activities, experiences and products that might potentially improve the well-being of tourists.

There is a research gap related to studies associated with the involvement of donkeys in tourism. The existing literature has two main strands: farm/rural tourism including interaction with

donkeys (Lanfranchi et al., 2015) and research dealing with the well-being of donkeys in tourism (Tully – Carr, 2020; Williams et al., 2017; Hadjiannou, 2018).

Only a handful of recent studies explore the potential role of onotherapy in health tourism and those therapies mostly consist of riding the animal or interacting with donkeys called grooming (Cancrini, 2009; Marras, 2017; Portaro et al., 2020; Delloye, 2013; Giovagnoli, 2009).

The gastronomic value of donkeys has never been linked to tourism, neither the possibility of using donkey milk in the wellness industry.

The apropos of this research are manifold. First, coming out of Covid-19 the whole overhaul of tourism is needed with more focus on sustainability, using our own resources. Furthermore, many tourists have changed their travel habits, looking for more meaningful experiences. So, both phenomena are a signal that the time is ripe to offer better options in tourism benefiting both the tourists and the environment.



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Tudományos tevékenysége során kiemelten foglalkozik az egészségfejlesztés, egészség-, gyógyturizmus területeivel, valamint az egészségi állapotot befolyásoló tényezőkkel, mind egyéni, mind társadalmi megközelítésben. a Recreation folyóirat egészségturisztikai rovatának vezetője.

2 LITERATURE

2.1 The concept of biophilia

The interdependence of humans and animals was conceptualised in the theory of biophilia by Edward O. Wilson (1984) who insists that there is a strong link between humans and other living systems. Consequently, the disconnection with nature might lead to several diseases.

Especially children can develop different disorders like attention deficit or learning difficulties. Animal-assisted therapy is based on the idea that close contact with animals can have health benefits (Wilson, 1984). Kahn (1997) also stated that biophilia is a fundamental human need to affiliate with other living organisms.

Regarding the relationship between humans and donkeys, donkeys were domesticated around 7000 years ago, and over the centuries they took part in trades delivering goods, they also did jobs around the house, like carrying water and they were involved in different agricultural activities. Donkeys had many important roles in history, they carried Christ into Jerusalem, in Greek myth donkeys transported Hephaistos up to Mount Olympus and Dionysus into battle against the Giants (Mitchell, 2018). Donkeys participated in wars as well, carrying heavy stocks and injured soldiers.

Summarising the European situation Camillo et. al., (2018) stated, the number of donkeys reared was reduced by 50% in the last 20 years and more than 80% since the middle of the last century due to the lack of breeding selection and biodiversity conservation.

As a result, most European breeds are on the verge of extinction. In the continent the animals are mainly used for niche purposes such as mule production or maintenance of the soil and landscape in Europe

2.2 Donkeys as social animals

People who own donkeys and work with them are fully aware that although there is shared heritage between donkeys and horses, donkeys are remarkably different in their physical traits and behaviour. For example, they have long-term memories and a logical, flexible approach to problem-solving. Contrary to common belief, donkeys are also highly intelligent animals, with the capacity to experience a wide range of emotions (Burden – Thiemann, 2015; González et al., 2019). Furthermore, they are docile and predictable creatures, they not only like humans but actively seek their company (Cancrini, 2009). On the other hand, they usually respect the human's personal space, which is important for those who are afraid of animals of bigger size (Delloye, 2013).

2.3 Donkeys in tourism

Animal tourism has always been a controversial issue and before 2019 the focus was more on animal welfare. Tully – Carr (2020) discuss the animal welfare associated with donkey rides on beaches, in a case study carried out in the UK resort of Blackpool. Santorini used to be another textbook case for animal exploitation (Williams, et. al., 2017; Prabowo, 2022; Hadjoannou, 2018), where donkeys were used to carry often overweight tourists. Fortunately, the Greek government took strict measures a couple of years ago, limiting the passengers' weight allowed to carry, stipulating compulsory provisions and enough rest time.



Photo 1: Santorini with tourists

Source: <https://greekcitytimes.com/2019/11/15/animal-activist-groups-say-donkeys-are-still-being-abused-in-santoirni/>

There has been vocal activism to ban animals in tourism altogether. However, during any crisis, banning animals in tourism is counterproductive and even harms the well-being of both animals and humans claimed by the Society for the Protection of Animals Abroad (SPANNA), highlighting the interdependence between people and animals. The association found that hundreds of Morocco's carriage-horses and donkeys were threatened during the collapse of the tourism industry because people working in tourism did not have enough income to take care of their animals. According to the organisation, around 200 million horses, donkeys, camels and elephants worldwide provide various livelihoods for over 500 million people (SPANNA, 2022). Acknowledging the complexity of the issue and avoiding drawing oversimplified black-and-white conclusions, this study limits itself to find sustainable solutions in tourism for the benefit of both humans and animals and does not venture into the area of animal rights.

When it comes to tourism products, rural holidays are the most common type of travel to meet donkeys. They are usually multi-motivational trips because regardless of their preliminary reason for travel, when staying on a farm, tourists can gain multiple experiences. Rural life includes animal breeding and care that tourists can experience even if their main motivation was simply to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city. To meet the growing demand, more and more farmhouses and accommodation facilities are established offering the opportunity to live a few days together with donkeys and to discover the slow pace of being in their company. Italy, France, Belgium, and Switzerland are the main countries where these types of services are abundant (Lanfranchi et. al., 2015).

While in the past many donkey rides were offered in tourism, nowadays looking at organised donkey trips offered online, there is a shift from donkey rides towards walking with donkeys or trips where the animals only carry light luggage for tourists. This experience is enjoyable for both animals and humans because they can harmonise their walking speed and interact with gentle touches during the trip.

It has become common just to enjoy the proximity of the animal without any physical interaction. One of the best places for donkey watching is the Schoss Hof, Austria, where the extremely rare Austrian-Hungarian white Baroque donkey is the faunal highlight. (<http://www.schlosshof.at/> website). Only a few hundred of the "light-bringers" still exist in the whole of Europe.



Photo 2: The rare white donkey at Schlosshof
 Source: https://www.schlosshof.at/fileadmin/_processed_/0/0/csm_BarockeselstutemitFohlen_c_Tschann__1__9e079dde7b.jpg

Another location to see white donkey is the island of Asinara, Italy where the Asinara breed of feral donkeys live and breed. The 120 individuals are an integral part of the cultural and environmental heritage of the place, which is a national park. (Christina, 2021).

2.3.1. Ootherapy in tourism

The biophilia hypothesis provides a powerful rationale for including animals in a therapeutic context. Among the animal-assisted therapies, hippotherapy is well-researched and documented (Silkwood-Sherer et al. 2007; Champagne - Dugas, 2010) concluding that horses can improve the social, emotional, and physical well-being of people with several diseases. Studies in ootherapy are few and far between, even though donkeys have many behavioural qualities that would make them appropriate for certain patients (Portaro et al., 2020).

The exception is the Mediterranean region where the use of donkeys in therapy or learning programs has become increasingly common, involving native breeds. Some authors even state that donkeys can be a good alternative for horses in assisted therapies, due to their unique features, such as size, type of hair, and calm and behavioural characteristics such as gentle attitude towards people (Borioni et al., 2012; Delloye, 2013). Scholars also state that donkeys have the ability to facilitate their engagement with people, helping both children and adults with a wide range of emotional, psychological, and cognitive needs (De Rose et al., 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2018).

The most common type of ootherapy is petting an animal, which causes relaxation for the patients due to the donkey’s breathing and sharing its body warmth. This kind of interaction is called “total grooming” (Giovagnoli, 2009).

3 METHODOLOGY

The interdisciplinary examination of the literature clearly set the direction this research should go into and the methodology proper. In this research, the exploratory approach was suitable because the use of donkeys in tourism has been mainly discussed from the perspective of animal well-being,

and the potential use of donkeys in health tourism is an uncharted research territory. Therefore, even setting a hypothesis would have been too early at this stage.

First, a case study is briefly summarised related to ootherapy tourism. Then, the findings of an expert interview carried out help understand the Hungarian situation and explore some options. The half-structured interview with the Hungarian Association of Donkey Keepers took place on the telephone on June 20, 2022, it was recorded and transcribed.

4 THE CASE STUDY: THE DONKEY SANCTUARY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

One of the international examples worth investigating is the Donkey Sanctuary established in the United Kingdom six decades ago. The centre offers a myriad of services, including carrying out research projects, organising workshops and also publishing books. The Donkey Academy is its Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), offering high-quality education and training resources. They are heavily involved in animal welfare, providing help for donkey owners. They occupy over 1,200 acres of farmland, so a visit to the centre offers much more than seeing the donkeys. The centre has been running a successful animal-assisted therapy program in the UK, Ireland, Spain and Italy. They take clients through referrals and offer them different programs:

1. Donkey Facilitated Learning (DFL) aims to help people learn about their own capabilities and develop well-being and life skills while interacting with the donkeys.
2. Donkey Management Programme (DMP) is about learning the day-to-day care of animals and nurturing the relationship between humans and animals.
3. Wellbeing with Donkeys (WWD) focuses on developing skills around self-awareness, self-care, and work-life balance in natural surroundings. It involves interactions with donkeys, participation in mindfulness activities, or specific coaching support to develop an awareness of emotional and physical well-being.

These days it is easy to collect up-to-date and unbiased data from online review sources that can be conveniently used both in quantitative and qualitative analysis. Tripadvisor travel platform can help finding the satisfaction rate of tourism destinations, products and services and the site

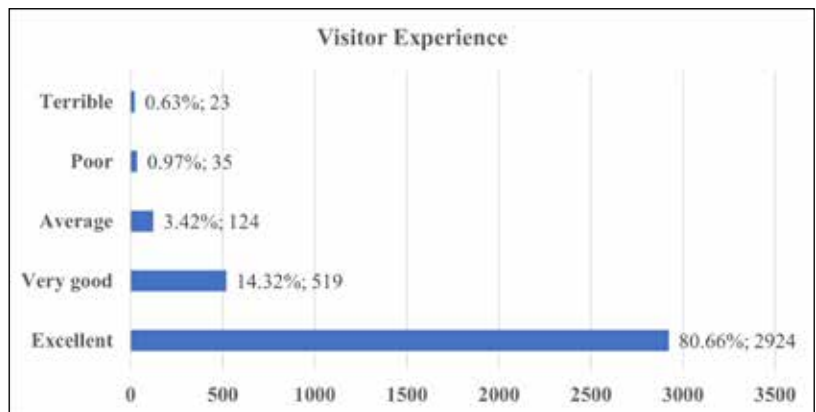


Diagram 1: Analysing the content of the reviews, the following table (1) details the most common expressions found in the reviews. Source: own, collection, 2023 jpg

can aggregate reviews and opinions from its community of travelers. Based on the platform on February 20, 2023 the Donkey Sanctuary generated 3625 reviews that were overwhelmingly positive: on a scale of 1 to five, the satisfaction rate averaged 4.5.

World	Frequency (proportion of mentions/all mentions in %)
Lovely place	828 (23%)
Gift shop	578 (16%)
Free entry	533 (15%)
Walk around	442 (12%)
Nice café	237 (6%)

Table 1: Expressions in reviews

Source: own collection, 2023.jpg

So, it seems that visitors do not consider the sanctuary as a therapy centre, since the word “therapy” only features in 33 comments. The most common textual context around the word “therapy” was disabled children (9 times). It can also be concluded that most visitors enjoyed the whole experience of being out, walking around, eating, and drinking in a nice environment while interacting with donkeys.

5 THE INTERVIEW: DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The semi-structured interview

5.1 The current situation of donkeys in Hungary

The Hungarian Association of Donkey Breeders was established by some donkey keepers and breeders in 2002 with the aim to improve the situation of this autochthonous breed. The interviewee pointed out that due to their calm behaviour, adaptive nature and intelligence, the Hungarian donkeys are perfectly fit as hobby animals, or for carrying out little jobs on farms.

Currently, about 1000 adults including 900 females and about 400-500 foals are registered, in addition, about 1000 more are scattered around the country unregistered. Donkeys do not have economic benefits in Hungary; however, they are important as a traditional Hungarian animal, part of the Hungarian landscape, so it is worth keeping and protecting them.

The interview also revealed that the role of donkeys in tourism is negligible, they are usually kept in pet zoos. The animal breeders and keepers are not tourism professionals, so venturing into this area without any professional assistance would be an additional burden for them and not an opportunity. Realistically, tourism businesses focusing on horse tourism could expand their business venture in a relatively easy way as it is done in Rádpusztá.

5.2 Recommendations for involving donkeys in tourism

During the interview, it became clear that with professional assistance it would be worth exploring opportunities in tourism. Based on the discussions with the expert, and complementing it with some aspects of the case study and literature, the following recommendations are worth considering:

Donkey grooming releasing work tensions: The case studies show that donkeys are a no-risk approach even for exhausted healthcare workers. Due to our overstressed and fast lifestyle, this area of tourism has great potential and can be attractive to several segments of society. Some programs can also be marketed within the context of digital detox for teenagers during school holidays.

Onotherapy for people afraid of horses: This area is an uncharted territory, and way beyond the scope of this study. However, it is common knowledge that some adults and children are afraid of horses and for those people, horse therapy is out of the question. The use of the smaller and calmer donkey can be a better option in that case as well.

Revival of extinct jobs and trades: Due to the growing need for onotherapy some more traditional professions such as harness makers, have reappeared (Rodrigues et al., 2017). So, a whole new industry could evolve around onotherapy.

Donkey trips for senior tourists: Donkeys can play a part in encouraging activities among senior tourists. They can walk with the animal, even if they have some physical disabilities. As long as the fragile seniors can engage in short, organised trips, donkeys can carry small medical devices for them such as glucose and blood pressure monitors, walking sticks, light food and drinks.

Gastronomic use of donkey milk and meat: Many studies in this topic originate from Indian scholars, probably because they do not eat beef, therefore, they have been looking for a similarly versatile animal to cater for the needs of those who consume dairy and red meat. For those who opt for a healthy and balanced diet, donkey meat and milk can be a good option (Singh, 2022). Donkey milk is claimed to be closest to human breast milk with great health benefits (Prasad, 2020), for instance, it is less allergic than cow milk (Swar, 2011).

Donkey milk is also rich in vitamins, strengthens the immune system and it is beneficial for tuberculosis, bronchitis, pneumonia, and asthma. It is also useful for those suffering from osteoporosis and other bone illnesses (Prasad, 2020) and inflammatory illnesses (Jirillo et al., 2010).

The interview also established that donkey meat is tasty and healthy, but there is a great reservation in Hungary to eating an animal with whom people encounter in a pet zoo. So, the emotional barrier is too high to put donkey meat on the menu.

Developing beauty and wellness products: Nowadays the beauty industry thrives on using products containing natural ingredients. Various scientific studies have proven that products with donkey milk such as soaps and creams show multiple benefits for the skin (Cosentino et al., 2013). In fact, their use as an anti-ageing agent has been well-known since the Antiquities (Camillio et al., 2018). Therefore, a much wider range of wellness and beauty products and services can be developed such as massage oils or bath rituals based on donkey milk, similarly to goat milk which has a renaissance in the beauty industry.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the synthesis of the literature analysis, the case study and the interview, the following conclusions can be drawn.

Donkeys can have a much more important role in tourism, particularly developing and marketing products and services within the context of health and wellness tourism.

These products can range from the interaction with the animals in the forms of petting, grooming and walking together to the wellness and beauty industry.

Furthermore, the potential use of donkey milk and meat should also be considered since evidence-based studies confirm their health benefit.

Overall, it can be established that the involvement of donkeys in tourism can be beneficial for both breeders and tourists.

It would give donkey breeders additional motivation for dealing with donkeys in the long run, thus keeping this autochthonous breed alive, while Hungarian tourism would be more diversified in terms of offering healthy and unique options in a wide range of areas.

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