

DIFFICULTIES OF THE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE TISZA (TISA) REGION, HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT. – Difficulties of the Tourism Development in the Middle Tisza (Tisa) Region, Hungary. In this paper the water-based tourism characteristics of Eastern Hungary are studied, mainly concerning the tourism development problems (deriving mainly from the administrative borders) of Lake Tisza in the Middle Tisza (Tisa) region. The fragmentation into planning-statistical and tourism regions, counties, townships, and the recovery of the geographical area demanding special development are not smooth. The development potential of the tourism characteristics of Lake Tisza is now unexploited; the low price-quality ratio makes the region attractive in terms of tourism. The area is an internal periphery on the map of Hungary. Its peripheral location was also disadvantageous concerning the EU tender allocation since it could not make the best of those possibilities the borderline settlements could (e. g. HURO tenders). The tourism statistics of the region were improved due to the available developments supported by the European Union between 2007 and 2013. However, it remains the last region among the tourism regions of Hungary.

In this paper suggestions for eliminating the difficulties are offered to facilitate the catching-up of the Lake Tisza region, but this is detained by social problems such as the high percentage of Romany people or migration.

Keywords: *tourism, development, appraisal problem, EU support, Lake Tisza (Tisa), Hungary*

1. INTRODUCTION

There are two factors that seem essential in the economic stimulation for the states of the European Union (especially for those waiting for economic adjustment). The first one is the increased presence, the independent production, and the multiplier effects of the tourism in the national economy categories of the countries, these factors increase the value of GDP. Based on the estimations, 10% of the GDP derive from the tourism. Concerning the production and the income generation, the tourism multipliers are higher than the social multipliers; therefore tourism should be highlighted in every national economic strategy where the main purpose is the production and the increase of income. The production and income effects of tourism are significantly high comparing to other export industrial activities (Economic Research Co. -Internet 1). The other factor

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is ensured by the European Union since there is a development and support system for its member states that significantly facilitates the catching-up of the different regions. This mainly depends on the decision-maker organisations and development policy of the countries.

It is typical that the countries are divided into smaller geographical regions in the inner areas (counties, regions, divisions). Several researchers have studied territorial demarcation. Examining the economic spaces Dicken (2003) created three levels: regional/local, national and supranational. Based on social activities, Nemes Nagy (1998) created four levels: micro, local, regional and macro. The typical organisation characteristics of the territorial units were highlighted previously by Korompai (1995). He described local, regional, national and international levels. The organisation is either economic, competitive or other, the processes in it and the effects of the society represent the territorial units. Studies show that each territorial unit derives from three main social characteristics (independently of the number of levels): ideological (cultural, linguistic identity); political-legal; economic.

In order to reach the EU support, countries should create territorial units that are suitable for the harmonization of the different divisions. The territorial units in the European Union i. e. NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) levels were created based on political-legal characteristics. The harmonization of the former territorial units with the NUTS levels depended on the approach of the countries. In Hungary the levels are: NUTS I. - country, NUTS II. - region, NUTS III. - county, NUTS IV. - subregion (townships from 2013), NUTS V. - settlement. The borders of regions are set to the borders of the former counties. They exist from the middle of the 1990s since Hungary endeavoured to prepare for the accession to the EU. In Hungary, after the creation of the planning-statistical units, the tourism regions were also created based on these units.

In this paper development problems deriving from the planning-statistical and tourism demarcation are presented studying a chosen tourism destination, Lake Tisza (Tisa), as an example. It is important to highlight how the decision-making mechanism can detain the development of a region. Examining the actual problems solutions are offered how the existing economic-social development processes can be modified favourably.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The most significant tourist attractions of Hungary are water-based due to the rich surface and underground water resources. In Eastern Hungary surface water resources consist of the River Tisza (Tisa), its subsidiaries and the related irrigation canals and lakes. Concerning underground water resources Hungary is the richest country in Europe. Thermal waters with temperatures above 30°C can be found in 80% of the country (Alföldi, 2011). The thermal water resources provide the basis for medical and health tourism supply. Besides the Great Hungarian Plain (Debrecen, Hajdúszoboszló, Gyopárosfürdő, Berekfürdő, Gyula) there are spas in the Buda Mountains and the Transdanubian Hills e. g. Hévíz, Zalakaros, Bükfürdő. Many settlements have spas; for example Thermal-Health Industrial Cluster Association has 33 registered spa members in the Northern Great Hungarian Plain.

Surface and underground waters can also indirectly affect tourism. Thus, not only the fishing and sport tourism or the waterside recreation, and the medical and health tourism related to the thermal water resources are offered.

River Tisza (Tisa) is the largest river in Eastern Hungary; it is formed by the junction of headwaters White Tisza (Tisa) and Black Tisza (Tisa). The length of the river is 1260 km (Alföldi, 2011). The river has 3 main reaches: from the source to the estuary of the River Szamos (Someş) it is called Upper Tisza (Tisa), from this to the estuary of the River Maros (Mureş) it is the Middle Tisza (Tisa), and the last one is the Lower Tisza (Tisa) that ends at the junction with the River Danube. The whole reach of the Middle Tisza (Tisa) is in Hungary and it can also be divided into 3 different reaches (the naming is the same as mentioned above). The Upper Tisza (Tisa) is situated between the northern Hungarian border and Tokaj, the Middle Tisza (Tisa) is between Tokaj and Tiszaug, and the Lower Tisza (Tisa) reach can be found between Tiszaug and the southern border of the country. The Middle Tisza (Tisa) region includes the middle part of the Hungarian reach of the River Tisza (Tisa). According to the Hungarian landscape classification, it is a meso-region. It belongs to the macroregion of the Great Hungarian Plain, includes 8 microregions within 3 microregion groups (Middle Tisza floodplain, Nagykunság and Hortobágy, see Fig. 2). In this paper the Lake Tisza tourism region situated in the Middle Tisza (Tisa) region is studied, focusing on the tourism of the lakeside settlements (Fig. 3).



Fig. 1. The Hungarian reach of the Middle Tisza (Tisa) region.

Source: Own editing

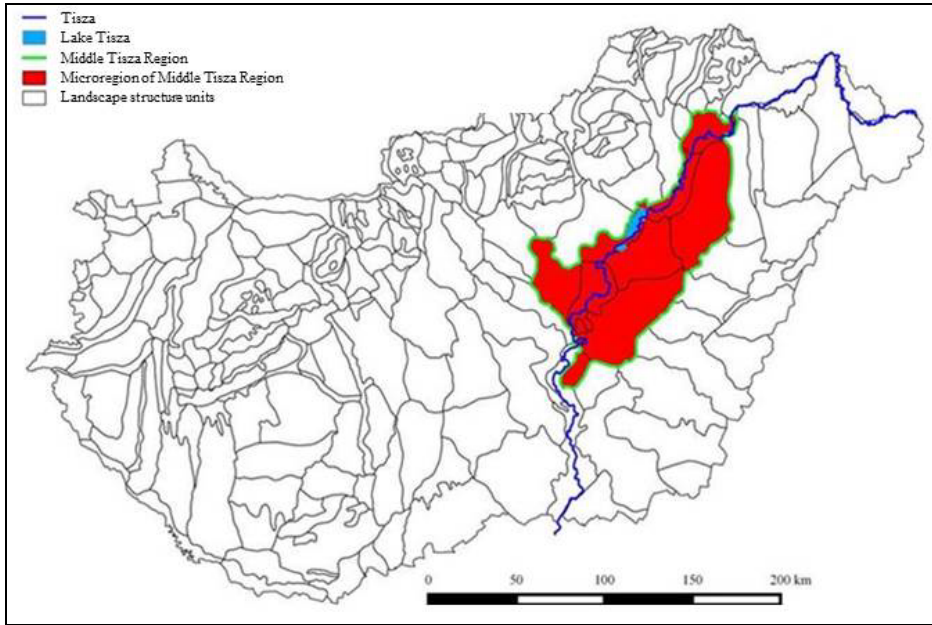


Fig. 2. The landscape geographic representation of the Middle Tisza (Tisa) region.
Source: Own editing

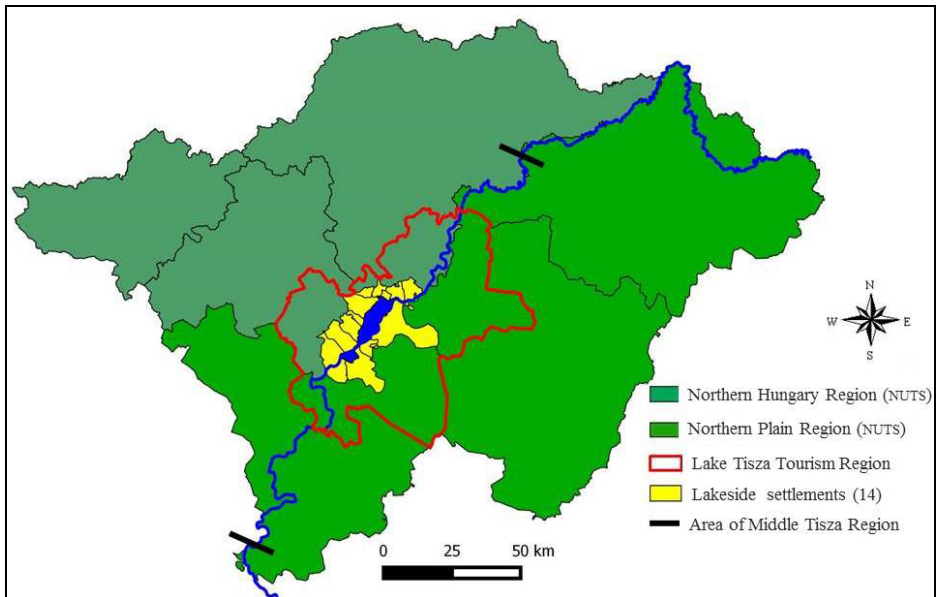


Fig. 3. The studied area.
Source: Own editing

During the secondary study, international and national special literature was examined specifically of the topic. Libraries, journal collections and internet databases were studied such as the data of Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH), National Region Development and Spatial Planning Information System (TeIR), National Development Agency (NFÜ), European Travel Commission (TourMIS). 3 databases were prepared using the collected data. The first one comprises of statistical data (KSH, TeIR), the second is about the parameters of the development tenders that are available through the National Development Agency, and the last database includes the primer data deriving from the independent study.

A field study of the settlements and the geographic characteristics of the Middle Tisza (Tisa) region was performed in order to self-experience the characteristics of the area.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The physical geography of the Middle Tisza (Tisa) region

In the Pleistocene the surface of the region was formed by the rivers of the North Hungarian Mountains then the River Tisza (Tisa). Among the natural and artificial oxbow lakes (Szartos oxbow lake, Dead Tisza (Tisa) near Csapó, Dead Tisza (Tisa) near Füred) there were soft-wood parks, gallery forests, but orchards and ploughlands could also be found. The floods of the River Tisza (Tisa) always prevented the intense economic usage of the active floodplain, thus the area was considerably rich of species, which makes it outstanding among the similar habitats of the Middle Tisza (Tisa) region. Here the unique, water-affected ecological systems of the Tisza (Tisa) valley remained in the largest diversity.

From the 19th century flood control and river regulations started in the landscape formed by the rivers (in favour of agricultural usage). There were oxbow lakes, abandoned river beds and brooks in the alternating width of the active floodplain between the dams, and between the Little Tisza (Tisa) and the River Tisza (Tisa) in the first half of the 20th century. A recent significant change was the construction of the barrage near Kisköre started in 1967, but finished only in 1973 since the damming of the water occurred in different times due to the dam built as part of the works. Regarding the construction of the dam, several determinant aspects were considered such as ensuring the sufficient water quantity for the watering of the drought areas in the Middle Tisza (Tisa) region, the flood regulations, the improvement of the navigability of the River Tisza (Tisa) as well as the development of energy production and tourism.

Lake Tiszais the second largest and also the youngest lake in Hungary. The first step of the formation of the planned open water surface was the exploitation of the forests. However, this work could not have been finished in time; therefore the transportation of the fallen trunks was not handled (Gál et al., 2006). The single remained hardwood park is the Tiszaád forest. The damming of the reservoir was originally planned at 850 cm water level, but only the second damming schedule was realized, thus the maximum of 725+5 cm water level (Fejes, 2011) was determined to satisfy the water demand and the maintaining of the water basis and water reserve since 1978. Due to the cancellation of the third damming schedule most of the higher areas (23 km², mostly point bars) remained dry and appear as islands and peninsulas.

Lake Tisza actually would not have inner flow in the area between the River Tisza (Tisa) and Little Tisza (Tisa); this can result in sedimentation. To avoid this, 12 flushing channels were constructed by cutting the point bars to ensure the water exchange between the rivers and the basins, and also between the oxbow lakes. The water depth is various in the different areas. In the nearly flat areas, formerly used as ploughlands and orchards, the water depth is only 0.8 m, but the depth of natural rivers, oxbow lakes and flushing channels are between 2.0 m and 5.0 m. The deepest point can be 20 m in the main bed of the River Tisza (Tisa) (Fejes, 2011).

As the result of the temporal and spatial diversity there are different living-spaces and landscapes. Mosaicity increases the attraction of the landscape, and the various living-spaces facilitate different tourism utilization: the edge effect at the boundary of ecological patches and mosaicity represent landscape attraction; recreation demands such as bathing, water sports (canoe, jet-ski); due to the different water bodies the possibilities of fishing activities are also various. Besides, the significance of Lake Tisza in ecotourism is considerable as the paradise of the ornithologists. The bird reserve area can be found in the Tisza (Tisa)valk bay, in the northern part of Lake Tisza (Tisa). It is protected from 1979 due to the Ramsar Convention. In 1993 it became a national park area since it was attached to the Hortobágy National Park.

3.2. The tourism of the Middle Tisza (Tisa) region

There was an intense economic development in the life of the settlements near the Middle Tisza in the second half of the 19th century when the productive agriculture was started in the floodplains after the river regulations. However, it did not mean quick catching-up after all. The main roads and railway lines avoided the Middle Tisza region and the area of Lake Tisza inside. Its development was also impeded by the county arrangements of the 1950s since its area was situated within the borders of 4 counties. The industrialization wave of the 1960s also avoided the area; the available raw material, the energy sources and the infrastructure necessary for the transportation were lacking. Thus, the studied area remained an underprivileged and disadvantaged so-called inner periphery of the Great Hungarian Plain. The situation became worse after the regime change when the settlements were in recession due to the reduced market of the productive agriculture (Radics, 2008). The emigration tendency of the inhabitants was more and more increasing in terms of both the national and international migration. The primary reason of the emigrations was the social and economic differences in the country, and this is also typical of nowadays i. e. there is higher unemployment in the eastern and the north-eastern part of Hungary than in the capital and the western regions. (Süli-Zakar and Csüllög, 2000; Baranyi, 2004; Internet 2). The emigration intensity was also increased by the high percentage of Romany people. The simultaneous occurrence of the existing problems made the increased exploitation of the tourism potential of Lake Tisza necessary, thus the settlements can slightly decrease the economic lag.

The recreation possibilities of the area were very inconsiderable before the formation of the Lake Tisza. Recreation infrastructure was available mostly in Tiszafüred (KIB, 1979). Some suitable places were used for bathing (Dead Tisza near Tiszafüred), others were used for fishing. They are frequented places in terms of passive recreation, and also the most popular recreational tourism areas in the catchment area of the River

Tisza (Tisa), nowadays (Michalkó, 2003). At the end of the 1970s, the newly flooded area (127 km²) and the considerable fish production attracted both native and foreign guests. In 1976 the number of the sold fishing tickets hardly reached 1000 pieces, but exceeded to 30000 by 1984 (VÁTI, 1985). According to the estimations, nowadays 40% of the guests in the region (i. e. 40000 people) visit Lake Tisza for fishing.

The tourism importance of Lake Tisza and the restructuring of the settlements into the tourism sector have already occurred in the 1980s. However, the implementation of the tourism infra- and suprastructure of the lakeside settlements started very slowly since the area was waiting for the third flooding (according to the former plans). In 1987 only Tiszafüred had the status of town (Radics, 2008), and the Touring Hotel was also built in this year. In Abádszalók, the mill became a hotel, and the Erzsébet-garden became a park. The construction of the recreation zone of Tiszanána (Dinnyéshát) was also among the tourism developments of the 1980s. Free beach and juvenile camping were created in Kisköre. Poroszló functioned as a fishing basis at that time. Kayak-canoe, boat, paddle boat rental stores and ports were established one after the other in Kisköre, Tiszafüred and Abádszalók. Due to the rough ground (wood trunks) most of the lakeside beaches were dangerous and life threatening (Füreder and Remenyik, 2008). Beaches were created in the 1990s in Tiszafüred, Kisköre, Poroszló, Sarud, Tiszaderzs and Tiszanána.

After the regime change, the abandoned local governments saw the flooded reservoir as the only chance that included the possibility of the tourism development.

3.3. Regional demarcations in Hungary

The demarcation of the regional administrative units in Hungary can be found in the act XXI of 1996. Its purpose was a comprehensive regional development innovation that emphasizes the regional policy of the European Union to prepare Hungary for the accession to the EU. The preparation of a development document, the strategic purposes of that are included in the operational programmes, was one of the basic conditions of the accession to the EU (Pénzes and Molnár, 2007). The content of the prepared document (National Development Plan) must have been harmonized with the formerly created NUTS levels (Kozma, 2003). In Hungary, seven statistical regions comprise the NUTS II level, their development purposes are summarized in seven operational programmes. The former county borders were preserved by the creation of seven planning statistical regions (Fig. 4).

Then 28/1998. (V.13.) IKIM-decree, and the 1007/1998. (I. 23.) government regulation ensured the legal background for the establishment of 8 and then 9 tourism regions, due to the modification of 4/2000. (II.2) decree of the Ministry of Economy. The demarcation of the jurisdiction area of the tourism regions seems to adapt to the significant recreation zones and considers the county borders as well. They are similar to the planning-statistical regions in their structure (Tóth, 2005), their nominations practically conform to the names of the planning-statistical regions (Northern Hungary, Northern Great Plain, Southern Great Plain, Central Transdanubia, Western Transdanubia, Southern Transdanubia). The significant recreation zones are the exceptions: Lake Balaton, Lake Tisza and Budapest-Central Hungary.

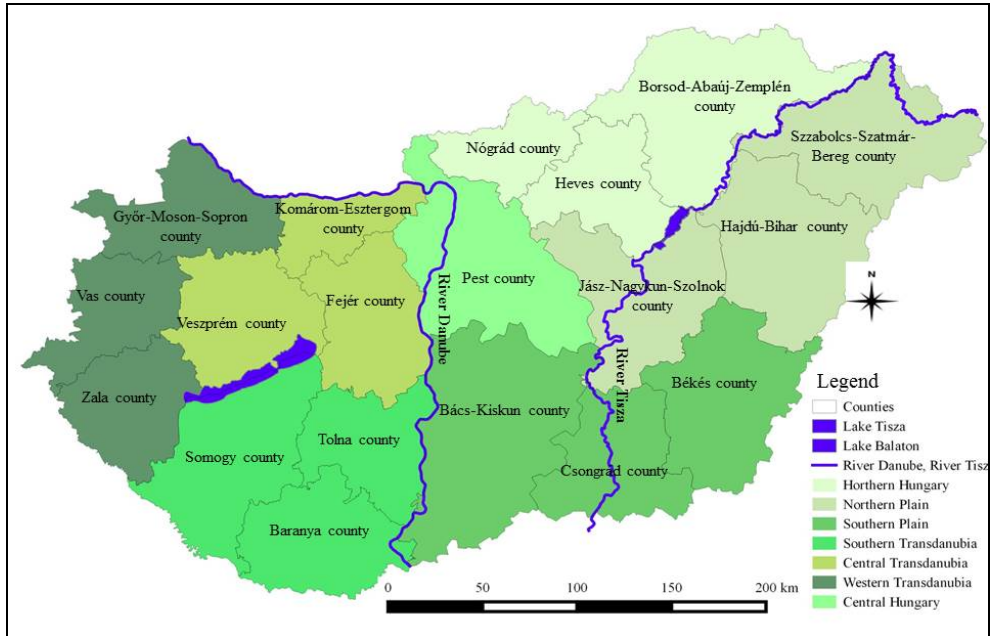


Fig. 4. Planning-statistical regions in Hungary.
Source: Own editing

According to Behringer and Kiss (2001) the tourism regions can be identified by their tourism supply. In our opinion a foreign tourist can not distinguish between the Northern and the Southern Great Hungarian Plain. According to other experts a tourism region can be more successful regarding marketing communication if their geographic name is also known internationally (Michalkó, 2002; Tóth, 2005). For example among the tourism regions described on the website of France Tourism Development Agency (Atout France) we can find regions such as Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur or the French Riviera; they are clearly harmonized with the physical geographic characteristics in their names (Internet 3). There are examples for the adaptation of the geographic names in marketing-communication in the Hungarian tourism as well. Instead of 9 there are five regions (due to their integration) that seem to be adapted to the physical geographic characteristics. The created "marketing regions" are the following: Transdanubia, Lake Balaton, Budapest-Central Transdanubia, Northern Hungary, and Great Hungarian Plain. "Great Hungarian Plain and Lake Tisza" naming can also be found (Aubert, 2011). In our opinion such integration of the tourism regions is not beneficial. The geographical characteristics of the "Great Hungarian Plain" (or the "Great Hungarian Plain and the Lake Tisza ") cover the macroregion of the plain, but the dune field of Bugac significantly differs from the aquatic attractions of Lake Tisza. In the international marketing communication of the Hungarian National Tourist Office the above-mentioned five regions are applied, but the used nominations are different and more informative regarding the tourism supply: Budapest and its surroundings, Lake Balaton, Pannonia, the Pusta and Lake Tisza, Eger-Tokaj Wine Region.

The area is also divided by landscape geographical divisions therefore the area can be characterized by newer structures.

3.3.1. Problems with the regional demarcations

The problems of the demarcations of the planning-statistical and the tourism regions appear in several ways:

- The concerns of the regional demarcation have already arisen with the dividing of the country into counties. These borders were the basis of determining the planning-statistical regions. During the designation of the borders neither the landscape geographical characteristics nor the nature conservation areas determined by the law were taken into consideration. Thus, the tourism regions are mostly adapted to the administrative borders. Sometimes the tasks for completion, the purposes and the necessary developments affect more counties, planning-statistical and tourism regions. The bird reserve in Tiszavalk basin (the area of Tiszafüred Biosphere Reserve) belonging to the Hortobágy National Park is an excellent example. As a Ramsar protected area the criteria of the international regulation are valid for it. In the northern part of the Tiszavalk basin there are the borderlines of Heves County and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County. In the eastern part there are the borderlines of Heves County and Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County. Accordingly it is situated at the junction of two planning-statistical regions, but regarding tourism the whole area of the reserve belongs to the Lake Tisza Tourism Region, and its managing is the competence of the Hortobágy National Park. The newest administrative restructuring that resulted in the re-formation of the townships, can be found on the 218/2012. (VIII.13.) decree. The lakeside settlements of Lake Tisza belong to eight townships. In my opinion, claiming the will of the decision-makers is quite complicated in such an administratively divided area.

- Demarcation problems are also significant regarding the formation of the development-support system. Territorial plans are necessary to reach the EU support. During the foundation of the National Development Plan (2004-2006) the physical geographical characteristics of the regions were not really concerned, the decision-makers adopted a general development guideline that can be applied both on the plains and the upland areas. The tender system was created more specifically in the New Hungary Development Plan (2007-2013) emphasizing the territorial differences.

- The cooperation of the national territorial and tourism development organisations is only partially ensured. That also causes difficulties during the determination of the development purposes. This is also confirmed by the documents of the National Tourism Development Strategy and the Tourism Development Strategy prepared in 2004, then in 2011 (NTS 2004, TS 2011, TÓTH 2005).

- The differences between the planning-statistical and tourism region borders also cause problems in the creation and the use of the databases. Hungary's best-known database supplier is the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. Regarding some development index (GDP) they collect data only at the level of counties and planning-statistical regions. Many experts were concerned by the solution i. e. the dividing of the GDP value based on the data related to the development (for example taxable income). However, only estimated GDP is resulted by the procedure (Kiss 2003; Lócsei and Nemes Nagy, 2003; Tóth, 2005).

- The presentation of the regional statistical data used in the statements must be taken into consideration. It is important that the ranging of the studied region (for example by the tourist tax) must be clearly identifiable in the document to be presented. Tourist tax

is significant since, as a local tax, it increases the direct income of the local governments. The assessment and the rate of the tax are determined by the local governments: for example in Szolnok 200 Ft, but in Hajdúszoboszló 410-450 Ft were paid per nights in 2012 (Internet 4.). Comparing planning-statistical regions, for example the two most frequented settlements of Lake Tisza: the tourist tax of Tiszafüred appears in the database of Northern Great Hungarian Plain, but that of Poroszló appears in the database of Northern Hungary. However, studying tourism regions both settlements belong to the Lake Tisza Tourism Region. In our opinion the significance of tourist tax is more considerable if the settlement returns it into the tourism developments (it is also described in the bill related to tourism). The settlement of the Lake Tisza Region, Berekfüdő will strengthen the best-known supply of the Northern Great Hungarian Plain: medical and health tourism. It will not appear with its new developments in the marketing of the lake.

Regional demarcation and the related administration system are less advantageous for the tourism sector. The local population and the economic actors firstly detect the deficiencies since in the everyday life they use the tourism infra- and suprastructure of the settlement, or they are strongly related to them (tourism enterprises).

3.3.2. Some options for the solution of the regional demarcation

In the long run the above-mentioned problems can not result in the linear improvement of the territorial and tourism development. In our opinion the EU support should be only one part of the developments. Moreover, initiatives and options that can generate development from a different approach are essential, such as:

- Tourism Destination Management aims to evaluate and represent the local demands to the decision-makers. Their formation is related to the geographical, social and historical roots, contrary to the borders of the regions. The tourism supply of the settlements and areas associated in the destination managements are very similar, thus their purposes and tasks are common. Destination managements can be an alternate solution for the problems related to the regional demarcation.

- Non-governmental organizations, that represent the area in an informal way, are necessary. The significance of the non-governmental organizations is minimal in the Lake Tisza region yet (Lake Tisza Development Ltd., 2014). The Balaton Tourism Region also has similar demarcation problems. However, the foundation of non-governmental organisations is in progress. For example Balaton Non-governmental Organisations Association was founded in 2001, or Balaton Wine Region was founded in 2003 and is physical geographically originated and does not adopt the administrative structure (Internet 5).

- The use of the new region development policies can also offer a solution. They aim at the development directions based on the inner synergy of the areas. They adapt to the principle of location-based approach and subsidiarity described in the European Union Territorial Agenda 2020 document (Lake Tisza Development Ltd., 2014). There are two basic directions for the creation of developments:

- Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI): it covers sub-regional areas and the selection is performed by the upper management. This can be carried out with the union of several operative programmes and the preparation of an integrated strategy. The area can get a source of billions.

- Community-Led Local Development (CLLD): communities organized in the society, the community managing is performed by the Local Action Group (LAG). During the implementation the decision-making is communal involving the business and the civilian sector. Its disadvantage is that less support source is available comparing to the ITI.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing the study we would like to repeatedly emphasize the national economic significance of the tourism nowadays. Tourism in Hungary represents an opportunity to develop especially such areas like Lake Tisza that are economically lagging inner periphery areas with excellent tourism potential.

The physical geographical characteristics and the tourism development of the destination were studied, while the demarcation problems of the area were also discussed. Territorial fragmentation affects the maximum availability of the development-tender system, the cooperation within the territorial and tourism development institution system; the precise preparation of the statistical databases comparing the areas.

In this paper we tried to list development-oriented organizations (without being exhaustive) that are organized in the society and can be suitable for solving the tourism development related problems of the Lake Tisza Region.

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