



**SZÉCHENYI ISTVÁN UNIVERSITY
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**TRAVEL FOR WATER – TOURISM-ORIENTED BRANDING OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
AT THE LAKE BALATON**

PhD Dissertation
THESIS

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**Győr
2014**

Content

Main Goals and Concept of the Research 3
Hypothesis 5
Methodology 8
Main results, thesis 11
Theoretical implications 11
Role of the natural environment in waterside destinations, especially at the Lake Balaton 12
Thesis 16
The Lake Balaton’s potential brand values 18
Literature 21
Academic publications and performances 24

Main Goals and Concept of the Research

Waterside areas are one of the most dynamic developing destinations (Hall 2001), playing a leading role in world tourism (UNWTO 2011). This means not only the escape from the daily routine, but the arrival into a new world at the same time. Although the water has always been fundamental in human history, its recreational dimension dates back to a few centuries. Waterside areas lived their glam during the mass tourism era. From the 1980's on, the demand for waterside destinations has undergone important changes (Yeoman 2007) that resulted for these areas to step into the consolidation/stagnation phase of the tourism area life cycle (TALC) model (Agarwal 1997, Jennings 2004, Oreja et al. 2008, Garay – Canoves 2011). The 1990's were characterized by the 'over-production' of water(sea)side destinations that resulted not only the decrease of the 3(4)S segment, but new challenges emerged like overdependence from one market, image problems, environmental changes, lack of investment or high unemployment (Agarwal 1999). To reflect these changes, the so called 'second generation' (Chapman – Speake 2011) waterside destinations tried to re-position themselves by a numerous effort, including tourism development often independent from the water itself. Today, these areas fulfil not only the motivations of the travellers looking for relaxation, but at the same time, new segments discover the scenic beauty of the waterside destinations. This goes with the development of the waterside destination definition itself: 50 years ago, waterside tourism focused to the shore areas (beaches), today it refers to a holistic view of the area, including water and non-water activities (Hall 2001).

In Hungary's tourism, the transition has been the milestone that induced destinations to re-positioning. Although the homogenous 'troops' of mass tourists disappeared long ago, important external factors (e.g. social tourism cheque, global economic downturn) influenced the Hungarian destinations that needed on-going 'fine-tuning' of the tourist receiving areas.

Waterside destinations are typical examples of the increasing competition among tourist receiving areas. They are dominantly characterized by water/sea and sun that results that destinations can be easily confused (Michalkó 2007). To remain competitive, it can be helped by developing and communicating unique attractions, that actually means 'branding'. Besides countries and cities, researchers today focus rather on the 'place' branding (ETC – UNWTO 2009, Lorenzini et al. 2011) that means a holistic definition including non-tourism parties (ETC – UNWTO 2009). In the case of waterside areas, it is especially important that the brand would harmonize with the destination's natural, cultural and social bases (Lorenzini et al. 2011).

The history of the regional sciences goes back to a long time (Illés 2008), also in Hungary it receives more and more attention (Rechnitzer 1995, Nemes Nagy 2009). This means that besides the national level, regional and local levels, furthermore social and ecological concerns come into focus (Rechnitzer 1996) influencing also waterside areas. Because not being administrative area, waterside destinations can be an interesting focus of mapping connections between tourism and regional/spatial sciences. Another important relevance of the research topic is the – beginning in 2005, still forming and continuous developing – tourism destination management system (local and regional level) in Hungary.

Tourism is a popular 'hotpoint' of strategic documents (at the time of the writing, the next EU timeframe 2014–2020 is relevant). But, according to my experiences, the natural resources and their conservation often remains on the strategic level, without being incorporated into the operational level. Therefore, my dissertation had the aim to understand the natural environment's role using an innovative and holistic primary research.

From the wide range of waterside destinations in Hungary, I have chosen the Lake Balaton. The region is one of the most popular tourist receiving area (KSH 2011/b), also popular among tourism researchers and stakeholders. Even being comprehensively researched, the Lake Balaton's tourism always has interesting questions to answer, more of the 'problems' defined e.g. in the 1980's are still on the desk. The Lake's tourism goes back to more centuries (Rátz 2007), its authentic and original culture 'melted' during the mass tourism era (Schleicher 2011). Although the Lake and its surroundings is more than just a destination for the Hungarian population, the important dimensions and challenges of a waterside area can be observed and analysed comprehensively (e.g. seasonality, territorial concentration, tourism supply's structure).

The dissertation's main goal is the tourism-oriented analysis of the Lake Balaton. The natural environment/scenic beauty is in the focus of my work. Besides the five hypothesis, my dissertation seeks to identify:

- The main characteristics of the tourism system at waterside destinations.
- The Lake Balaton's potential brand values.

Hypothesis

Primary research had been conducted between 2009 and 2012, including a wide range of stakeholders that enabled a comprehensive analysis of the result. (*Figure 1*)

Hypothesis 1

During the branding process of spatial tourism destinations (city, rural, waterside, and mountain areas), the natural environment's unique attributes dominate that can be a starting point for mapping potential brand values.

Originating from the tourism demand, the fundamental role of the motivation (Michalkó 2007) can be concluded. The 'waterside' attribute can be identified in a lot of way: as a motivation (e.g. surveys of the Eurobarometer, IPK International, Hungarian Central Statistical Office, and Hungarian Tourism Plc.). On the supply side, we find destinations forming a geographical unit (Buhalis 2000) or a spatial tourism product (Michalkó 2007). The landscape is part of the travel experience for all of the visitors, independently from motivation. Therefore it can be fundamental among the image elements, values relevant for every tourism season (Moilanen – Rainisto 2009).

Hypothesis 2

The image of the Hungarian waterside tourism destinations is fundamentally influenced and defined by the image of the Lake Balaton.

During the branding process, often a stereotyp or an icon comes into the focus (ETC – UNWTO 2009). In the case of Hungarian waterside destinations, the dominance of the Lake Balaton is showed in the tourism data (Hungarian Central Statistical Office) and in the travel surveys (Hungarian Tourism Plc.). Because of its positive or negative impacts, mapping the role of the biggest waterside destination can provide valuable insights for other destinations, as well.

Hypothesis 3

Tourism products and activities – e.g. active tourism, cultural tourism, health tourism, wine and gastronomy – can be developed and managed independently from the waterside attributes that results the weakening of both potential brand values (waterside and other attractions), lacking the potential synergy effect.

The tourism destination is perceived as a unit in the mind of potential travellers (Buhalis 2000, Bordas 2001), including a wide range of stakeholders (Moilanen – Rainisto 2009). The synergy originating from the cooperation between stakeholders can result a valuable competitive advantage (Bordas 2001, Presenza – Cipollina 2010, Haugland et al. 2011). Travellers becoming more active (Yeoman 2007) seeks a wide range of activities at waterside areas. The supply side puts great emphasis on the tourism attractions independent form bathing that is supported also by the seasonality. The waterside areas are not separate administrative regions, and the conflicts of interest between stakeholders results that the tourism services are often not harmonized with the destination and its main attributes.

Hypothesis 4

Waterside destinations can be defined as a network brand where the brand's added value influences cooperations, and thereby the competitive advantages, the brand values in a positive way.

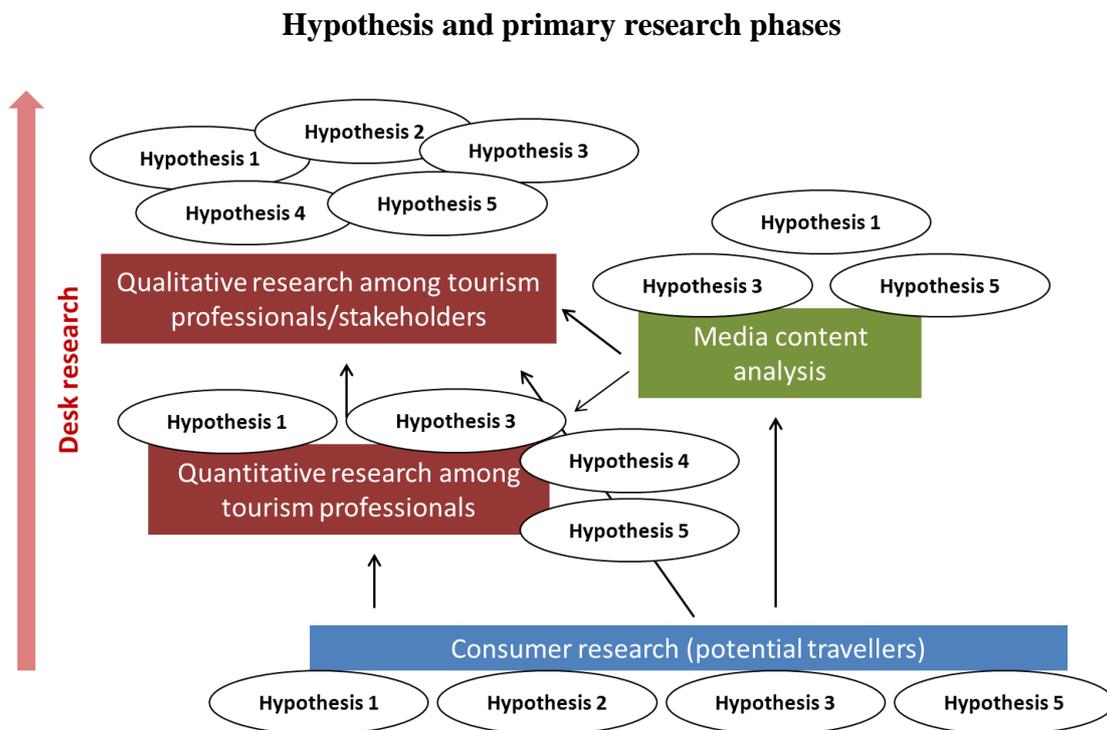
The travel experience is 'made-by' a numerous service providers and stakeholders. Waterside destinations can be regarded as 'network' brand (Moilanen – Rainisto 2009), and not as a 'resort' (like e.g. a ski paradise). The synergy originated in the cooperation between stakeholders and be a competitive advantage (Bordas 2001, Presenza – Cipollina 2010, Haugland et al. 2011), where besides the administrative boundaries (e.g. settlement, county), the waterside destination also can be motivating for cooperation.

Hypothesis 5

In the case of waterside destinations, the regional identity of the host community has a regional level (besides the local/settlement), thereby the branding of waterside areas can be more successful.

As the hard factors (e.g. accessibility, infrastructure, technology) can be accessed almost everywhere, the soft factors (quality of life, emotions, ‘good place’) comes more and more into focus. Ideally the local community is proud of their home and talk to visitors with pleasure. The host community is an important part of tourism system (Lengyel 1994, Akis et al. 1996, Michalkó 2007, Vargas – Sanchez et al. 2011). This means not only the supply side role (as accommodation, catering providers etc.), but they can be in the focus of service providers, as well (Puczko – Rátz 2000). This is supported also by the fact that in Hungary, studies points to the presence of the regional identity (Somlyódyné Pfeil 2007), and so in the Lake Balaton region (Balaton Fejlesztési Tanács 2001-2002). My dissertation maps the role of host community in the waterside destinations’ image, futhermor its tourism demand potential.

Figure 1



Source: own illustration

Methodology

Primary research – based on desk research and my personal experience – was conducted between 2009 and 2012. A survey of the potential domestic travellers (year 2009) was followed by the media content analysis (year 2010-2011), the online survey among tourism professionals (year 2011), and in-depth interviews with leading stakeholders (year 2012). Meanwhile the travellers' survey focused on the Hungarian waterside destinations, media content analysis and stakeholders' phases targeted the Lake Balaton. The qualitative phase following the quantitative survey provided more in-depth understanding, e.g. tourism products or activities arising from the travellers' survey were focused on at the media analysis and at the stakeholders' phase. The innovation of this work lies in the combination of stakeholders (travellers, media and tourism professionals). The integration of the stakeholders' wide range enables the comprehensive, complex investigation of the studied topic. The dissertation resulted some important conclusions not covered by the hypothesis, like the role and potential of tourism destination management organizations or the tourism potential of second home owners, furthermore the perceived rational and emotional benefits of domestic travel.

The secondary and primary research included:

- Review of international sources (e.g. studies of Baloglu, Buhalis, Cooper, Ritchie), international tourism journals (e.g. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Tourism Management*, *Tourism Review*, *Tourism Geographies*, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*).
- Review of important Hungarian sources (e.g. studies of Lengyel, Michalkó, Puczko, Rátz), Hungarian journals (e.g. *Turizmus Bulletin*, *Tér és Társadalom*, *Földrajzi Közlemények*, *Területi Statisztika*).
- Data and report of main international tourism organizations (World Tourism Organization/UNWTO and European Travel Commission/ETC).
- Data on international tourism demand (UNWTO and Eurostat).
- Data on Hungary's tourism performance (Hungarian Central Statistical Office).
- Review of the research report of the Balaton Development Council and of the Hungarian Tourism Plc., furthermore the relevant OTKA research reports.
- Comprehensive review of the information about the Lake Balaton.
- Primary research detailed below.

Consumer research among potential travellers was conducted in the cooperation of the Academy of Hungarian Sciences and the Kodolányi János College, with the support of OTKA

fund. The survey focused on Hungarian waterside destinations. Data of 668 prospective domestic travellers was collected Summer 2009. The sample follows the aggregated demographics of Hungarian population regarding gender and age. The results highlight the attitudes of urban residents with waterside holiday experience. The results were analysed in SPSS 18.0 statistical software. The survey included¹:

- Spontaneous associations about waterside trip;
- Characteristics of the Hungarian waterside destinations and their importance in the decision-making;
- Unique attributes of Hungarian waterside destinations;
- Visits to Hungarian waterside destinations, and
- Image of the Lake Balaton and the Lake Tisza.

Media content analysis is based on the Hungarian (in Hungarian language, and published in Hungary) written non-paid news. Articles were collected from the daily media observation of the Hungarian National Tourist Office. Altogether the content of 1,483 articles (published during 2009 and 2010) was analysed using the content analysis technique. The analysis included:

- Positive, negative or neutral (trade news were grouped neutral);
- Whole article (focusing only on the Lake Balaton) or part of an article;
- Image of the Lake Balaton (wording of the articles);
- Settlements mentioned in the news;
- Main topic (water(side), tourism products, tourism infrastructure, trade news).

Survey of the tourism stakeholders had two phases. The online questionnaire – sent to appr. 600 service providers registered in the gyereabalatonra.hu database between November 2011 and February 2012 – was filled out by 47 professionals (12 destination management organizations and 35 tourism service providers). The low number of the respondents had not allowed mathematical analysis, and the respondents are not representative for the region. Therefore, the result of the online survey has been integrated into the results of the qualitative trade survey (in-depth interviews).

The online study included:

¹ The survey included also the awareness of Hungarian destinations with spa and wellness hotels. These results are not explained in my dissertation.

- Information about the respondents (e.g. location, number of employees, guests' structure);
- Cooperation with partners;
- Partners geographical location;
- Goal and content of cooperation;
- Unique attributes of the Lake Balaton on domestic and on international level;
- Important stakeholders of the Lake Balaton, furthermore
- Future trends.

The in-depth interviews conducted during 2012 (between April and September) included 20 important, determining stakeholders of the Lake Balaton's tourism (both public and private, located on the north and on the south shore, covering a wide range of tourism services). The semi-structured in-depth interviews lasted between 90–120 minutes each.

The survey included:

- Role of the Lake Balaton in Hungary's tourism, main characteristics of the lake's tourism;
- Main attractions and unique attributes of the Lake Balaton;
- Role of the natural environment and the water, shore areas;
- Non-waterbased tourism products' awareness, image and potential;
- Important stakeholders in the Lake Balaton region;
- Lake Balaton's tourism marketing;
- Future, developments needed.

Main results, thesis

Besides the hypothesis, the research resulted important theoretical and practical implications for waterside destinations. The dissertation's conclusions are structured into four parts: theoretical implications are followed by the results referring to the natural environment's role (including tourism system at waterside areas), by the thesis, and by the Lake Balaton's potential brand values.

The complex methodology enables a comprehensive analysis. The results – originating from the primary research and the statistical data – also mirror my personal views and experiences as a tourism professional.

Theoretical implications

My study echoes that *waterside areas play an outstanding role in tourism*. In accordance with the statistical data, *tourism can play a leading role in waterside areas economy* that means mainly its employment role. Until today, watersides' tourism mainly means *summer vacation, bath and nice weather* – they are fundamental elements of the travel experience. My primary research proved that *media has an intermediating role between demand and supply side*. Media news about tourism are predominantly positive. Furthermore, my dissertation points out that *travel experience is 'made by' numerous stakeholders with different role and power*. Also it can be concluded that responsibilities and tasks not fulfilled by tourism service providers are best *dedicated to an independent, local tourism destination management organisation (DMO)*. DMOs can meet the need for interpreting strategic directions to service providers, thereby being a *bridge between national/regional and local level*. At the same time, I found that Hungarian waterside destinations have to face similar challenges like their international competitors.

Based on my research and experience, I think that the gap between academic research and marketing-oriented studies about waterside areas should be much more integrated in the future, in order to provide real solutions and to help to realize the strategic directions, policies.

Role of the natural environment in waterside destinations, especially at the Lake Balaton

The natural environment of the waterside destinations is a fundamental part of the hypothesis, of the tourism system, and of the Lake Balaton's brand values.

In the perceptions of potential travellers, waterside areas form a unit, independently from travel season or motivation. Natural resources are directly (e.g. water, scenery, flora and fauna, air, sunshine) or indirectly (e.g. walking, cycling, panorama) connected to the water. The scenic beauty of the Hungarian waterside destinations is widely acknowledged, and at the same time it plays an important role in the decision-making and among the unique attributes. In the case of the two leading waterside destinations (Lake Balaton, Lake Tisza), the landscape is also a positive and fundamental image element.

As a conclusion can be stated that at waterside areas, the natural resources have fundamental image building role.

The local community, the destination's social and cultural environment at waterside areas do not dominate either in the image, neither in the decision-making process. In the case of domestic travellers, the natural landscape dominates over the local community among the perceptions and attitudes. Regarding the destination's personality, the time spent with family and friends travelling with can be attractive/motivating for travel. Here, it should be also highlighted that some settlements (e.g. Tihany, Szigliget) have very attractive and unique cultural heritage.

Parallel with this, the local community of waterside destinations is not in the focus of tourism service providers. Although there is no accurate information about the locals' consumer preference whether is it influenced by the tourism destination itself, inhabitants can not be regarded as 'guests'. Among the unique attributes, hospitality can get awareness on the international level.

Together with the natural environment's image forming role, the local community and the destinations cultural, historical heritage at waterside areas is not dominant element either of the image, neither of the decision-making. Hospitality can be a brand value only on the international level.

Primary research pointed out that domestic travellers (who generate a significant share of guests and guest nights in waterside destinations) perceives the rational and emotional benefits of domestic travel that are independent from the water(side). The attributes associated to the domestic trip fundamentally influence waterside areas' brand values and competitive advantages. But, it should be highlighted that domestic trip can raise also negative associations. Even then I guess that these benefits can form an umbrella brand value of Hungarian tourism destinations.

As a conclusion can be stated that for destinations with a significant share of domestic tourism, the perceived benefits of domestic travel can fundamentally form the image, influence the decision-making and be part of the potential brand values.

'Water-independent' activities have been in the focus of last years/decade developments at waterside areas. These tourism products are attractive for a wide range of travellers, mainly being an activity during the trip. According to my research, active tourism and sports can be a motivation for travel themselves. As the same time, culture (that is familiar for domestic guests) is rather attractive during the trip, like wine and gastronomy is also relevant for less travellers/some segments. Today, health tourism facilities are not integrated into waterside travel experience, meaning that it is either a main motivation, neither a popular activity during the trip.

'Water-independent' attractions – echoing the stakeholders' product-oriented thinking – can have a significant role among unique attributes when compared with other international destinations. It should also be highlighted that every tourism product and destination has its special character to count with. Reflecting the reviewed literature, I also guess that a holistic (also non-tourism) and conceptualised tourism product can develop to a potential brand value (I found that there is a significant gap between tourism product and destination).

As a conclusion can be stated that active tourism can be regarded as a potential motivation for waterside destination. Cultural tourism, wine and gastronomy are rather attractions during the trip. Meanwhile health tourism is not an integrated part of waterside travel experience, therefore it can not be a dominant brand value, either.

From the spatial point of view, it can be concluded that potential travellers perceive Hungarian (domestic) destinations as a smaller unit (e.g. lake, settlement). At the same time,

when thinking about a foreign destination, the country level comes into focus. In the Lake Balaton tourist region (consisting of 179 settlements) not only hinterland areas have the peripheral position, but there are big differences at the shore area, as well. So, being located at the 'waterfront' is not a guarantee for successful tourism. Among the cooperation partners, the local level – together with the destination management organisation – has fundamental role. Here we should highlight that the Lake Balaton's image has been formed for centuries, and the main attributes of today will also define the future in short-mid term.

My research underpinned that the closer the destination, the smaller the spatial dimension in the mind of potential travellers. In the case of Hungarian waterside areas, the local level decision-making should have the leading role.

The waterside area's specific attributes influence all of the tourism system's element. The results are showed in Figure 2 that symbolizes all elements being connected – directly or indirectly – to each other.

The landscape (*highlighted in green*) itself is an environment of the tourism system. At the same time, it influences other environments (e.g. high number of second homes, economy's structure, low level of political power). The nature has a much more comprehensive meaning for travellers than for the tourism service providers. But, the unique attributes of the landscape are acknowledged by both the demand and the supply side.

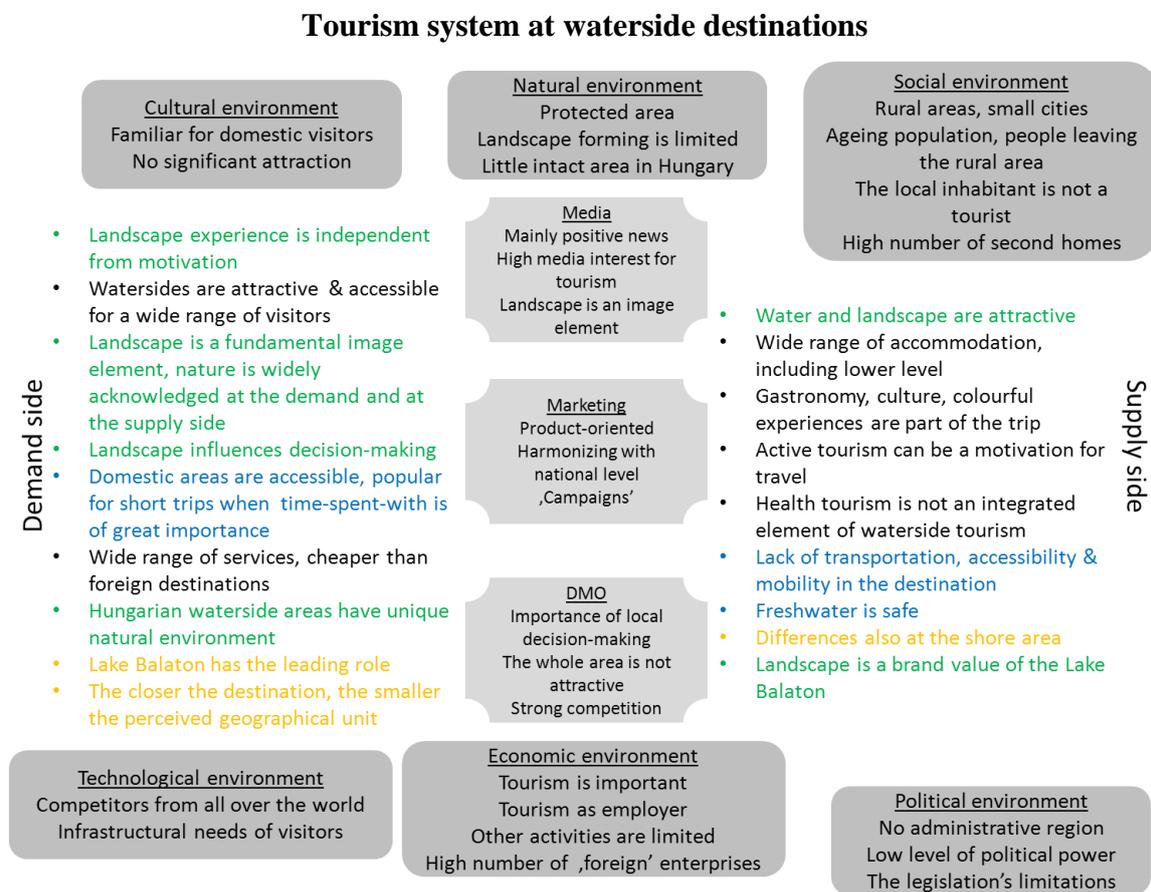
Tourism products, activities and infrastructure (*highlighted in yellow*) shows the strongly product-oriented thinking of stakeholders. Travellers perceive different activities as important part of the travel experience, meanwhile stakeholders put much more emphasize on the tourism products and infrastructure (namely lack of infrastructure). But, the most popular activities, products are the same at the demand and at the supply side (active tourism, cultural tourism, health tourism, wine and gastronomy). In the case of health tourism, my experience – not covered by my primary research – is that the appearance of health tourism services in the mind of potential travellers is a result of not only the tourism demand trends (more health conscious people), but also of the stakeholders' strong image forming and marketing communication.

The benefits of a domestic trip (*highlighted in blue*) can be seen at the demand and at the ofsupplyfer side, as well. Its three main dimensions – each independent from the water itself! – are security/safety, accessibility and the time spent with family and friends.

The spatial dimension (*highlighted in orange*) resulted that the closer the destination, the smaller geographical unit travellers think about. In the case of Hungarian waterside areas, it means the local level (settlements) that can have responsibilities and power. At the same time, my research highlighted the difference not only with reference to the hinterland areas, but also at the shore areas.

The intermediary sector (*not highlighted by any colour*) the marketing is connected primarily to the supply side. The media has a real ‘intermediary’ role, it is closer to the potential travellers. The – until today forming – destination management organisations reported a lot of best practise, plans based on real experience and knowledge.

Figure 2



Source: own research (2009–2012)

Thesis

The complex methodology of the primary research enabled a comprehensive analysis of the hypothesis. (Table 1)

Thesis 1

Consumer research, media content analysis, and survey among tourism professionals proved that: *During the branding process of spatial tourism destinations (city, rural, waterside, and mountain areas), the natural environment's unique attributes dominate that can be a starting point for mapping potential brand values. (Hypothesis 1)* The waterside areas' natural environment and its elements (e.g. water, flora & fauna, topography, panorama) form an important image element, influence decision-making, furthermore can be a unique attribute/potential brand value of Hungarian destinations. The water and its surroundings can be directly (e.g. bath) or indirectly (e.g. panorama) connected to the tourism supply. The landscape is a fundamental element of travel experience, independently from the visitors' motivation.

Thesis 2

The image of the Hungarian waterside tourism destinations is fundamentally influenced and defined by the image of the Lake Balaton. (Hypothesis 2) This provides valuable insights for other waterside destinations, because the travel experience at the Lake Balaton influences potential travellers' in a positive and in a negative way. Because of the dominance of relaxation, other areas (where possible) also need to develop good quality bath facilities. The increasing awareness of bath-independent activities has important potential, as well. Here we should highlight that the Lake Balaton has an emotional meaning for the Hungarian people, so its awareness can influence also the decision-making regarding other (non-waterside) destinations.

Thesis 3

Tourism products and activities – e.g. active tourism, cultural tourism, health tourism, wine and gastronomy – can be developed and managed independently from the waterside attributes that results the weakening of both potential brand values (waterside and other attractions), lacking the potential synergy effect. (Hypothesis 3) According to my research, it can be concluded that active tourism, wine & gastronomy can be a motivation for travel, and thereby

a potential brand value in Hungarian waterside destinations. At the same time, cultural tourism and health tourism are not integrated part of a waterside trip. This is an important snapshot of related tourism products that needs further research. The analysis valued tourism products very comprehensive, in order to accept/reject the hypothesis we should mention that according to my experience the product development lacks of the common points/reference to the destination itself. This should guide strategic plans and developments in the future, as this can provide an added value for these activities.

Thesis 4

My research rejected that: *Waterside destinations can be defined as a network brand where the brand's added value influences cooperations, and thereby the competitive advantages, the brand values in a positive way. (Hypothesis 4)* Among the tourism professionals and stakeholders, the regional level does have some meaning and significance, but their operation is dominated by economic concerns (e.g. profit). This has important potential for the future in order to develop a regional strategy where every stakeholder perceives some real benefits. Although there are results referring to regional identity (also at the Lake Balaton), according to my experience, these have a very low impact on stakeholders' behaviour. I think that higher (national and regional) level should guide stakeholders and fill strategic plans with 'real content'.

Thesis 5

My research rejected that: *In the case of waterside destinations, the regional identity of the host community has a regional level (besides the local/settlement), thereby the branding of waterside areas can be more successful. (Hypothesis 5)* Although the Lake Balaton has a rich tourism supply, the host community is not different from other areas of the country. Probably that also results that the local community's tourism consum is not fundamental, they are not in the focus of service providers. This – with reference to the regional identity – has a great potential in the future, because the local demand contributes not only to the sustainability of service providers, but at the same time is strengthens the regional identity and the quality of life.

Table 1

Hypothesis vs primary research results

Hipotesis	Consumer survey	Media	Stakeholders research	Thesis
Hypothesis 1: During the branding process of spatial tourism destinations (city, rural, waterside, and mountain areas), the natural environment's unique attributes dominate that can be a starting point for mapping potential brand values.	yes	yes	yes	accepted
Hypothesis 2: The image of the Hungarian waterside tourism destinations is fundamentally influenced and defined by the image of the Lake Balaton.	yes	-	-	accepted
Hypothesis 3: Tourism products and activities – e.g. active tourism, cultural tourism, health tourism, wine and gastronomy – can be developed and managed independently from the waterside attributes that results the weakening of both potential brand values (waterside and other attractions), lacking the potential synergy effect.	partly accepted	partly accepted	partly accepted	partly accepted
<i>Hypothesis 3/a: Cultural tourism</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>partly accepted</i>	<i>partly accepted</i>
<i>Hypothesis 3/b: Active tourism</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>rejected</i>
<i>Hypothesis 3/c: Wine and gastronomy</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>rejected</i>
<i>Hypothesis 3/d: Health tourism</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>accepted</i>
Hypothesis 4: Waterside destinations can be defined as a network brand where the brand's added value influences cooperations, and thereby the competitive advantages, the brand values in a positive way.	-	-	no	rejected
Hypothesis 5: In the case of waterside destinations, the regional identity of the host community has a regional level (besides the local/settlement), thereby the branding of waterside areas can be more successful.	no	no	no	rejected

Source: own research (2009–2012)

The Lake Balaton's potential brand values

Summarizing the potential brand values highlighted by the different stakeholders, we used the five stage brand pyramid model (*Figure 3*). The model adapted for the Lake Balaton as a lacustrine destination demonstrates the strong dominance of landscape. The natural environment can be found in all of the stages of the pyramid, supported by the perceived advantages of domestic travel. Among the potential brand values we can find an important 'lacustrine' specific, namely the freshwater's advantage against sea water.

Taking into account the gaps between the prospective travellers, media and the tourism stakeholders regarding tourism products, these activities mainly belong to the rational attributes of the destinations potential brand. Meanwhile travellers' put great emphasis on emotional values, this is not supported by the professionals/supply side (nostalgia was the common issue).

An interesting point is that potential travellers perceive local destination level (settlements – influenced by personal experience), meanwhile tourism professionals define the Lake Balaton region as a whole or in 4 to 6 smaller regions. Here, the limitations of my study (namely that the consumer part focused on the Hungarian waterside areas, the media analysis and the stakeholders' study focused on the Lake Balaton) should be taken into account.

At the bottom of the pyramid, among the rational attributes we find good quality beaches, accessibility, nice weather, and non-waterbased tourism products. This points out that tourism products (active tourism, cultural tourism, health tourism, wine and gastronomy) should not be dedicated outstanding role in the marketing and tourism developments, because these activities can motivate smaller segments. Ideally, these services should be harmonized with the landscape (e.g. wine terrace). Tourism promotion should provide up-to-date, reliable and comprehensive information about rational attributes in order to help travellers' decision-making.

Among the emotional benefits (the pyramid's next level) there are the benefits of domestic trip, the personal experiences, furthermore the time spent with family & friends. This brand dimension can be of relevance for the marketing communication messages.

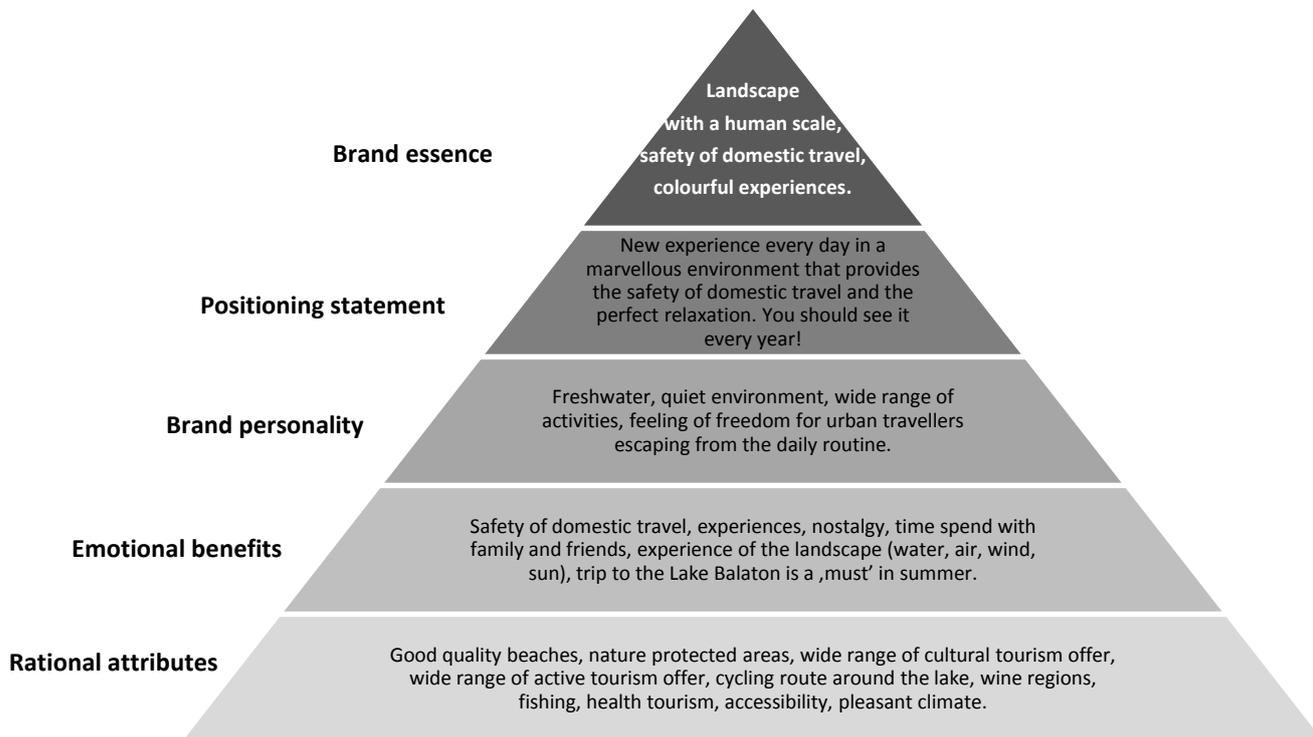
The Lake Balaton's brand personality is built on bathing in freshwater, quiet environment, a wide range of activities, and freedom. These attributes can differentiate the lake from its perceived – domestic or foreign – competitors.

On the fourth level of the pyramid, we find a positioning statement (not a slogan!) representing the most dominant attributes. Besides the benefits of domestic travel, we should here highlight that the Lake Balaton and its surroundings is not a 'one-in-a-life' destination, a lot of the visitors return to the area from time to time. Among the potential brand values, no iconic attraction (settlement or sight) emerged.

Finally, the Lake Balaton' potential brand values (on domestic level) can be the following unique attributes: human-scale landscape, domestic environment (safety), and a wide range of colourful experiences.

Figure 3

The Lake Balaton's potential brand values in the brand pyramid model



Source: own research (2009–2012) based on ETC – UNWTO (2007)

The comprehensive work indicates some important implications for the future. Some issues raised during my research (e.g. seasonality or second homes' tourism potential) need further analysis. Furthermore, complex academic studies can validate my conclusions, and thereby help Hungarian tourism development. These include:

- Research using similar methodology in other destinations (rural, city, mountain),
- Explaining tourism system in other spatial destinations,
- Mapping potential brand values of other waterside areas,
- Tracking research about the role & potential of non-waterbased tourism products,
- Completing my work with research among international travellers.

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