

HARMONY OF NATURE PROTECTION AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE AREA OF THE HORTOBÁGY NATIONAL PARK

István Süli-ZAKAR¹

Abstract: *Harmony of nature protection and regional development in the area of the Hortobágy National Park.* The Hortobágy, the westernmost steppe landscape of Eurasia was designated to be the first national park of Hungary for its special natural values and thanks to its unique cultural values it received designation as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Shepherd's life in the Hortobágy occupies a special place in the ethnography of Hungary as well as cattle grazed in the plain bear a special genetic significance. Outstanding sights attract many tourists to the Hortobágy from both the country and abroad, however, it has to be noted that the vulnerable landscape cannot receive much more visitors than today. Modern economic development here has strong limits. Fortunately there are no significant industrial establishments in the region while strong regulations give strict limits for agriculture. The area of the Hortobágy National Park is practically uninhabited; however, almost four hundred-thousand people live in the surroundings of Hortobágy in more-and-more difficult conditions. The fundamental questions are: how is it possible to provide modern living conditions for the people living in the surroundings of the Hortobágy with preserving its irreplaceable natural and cultural values? Can these aims correlated at all? What means realizable sustainability in the vicinity of a strictly protected national park?

Keywords: sustainability, regional development planning, nature protection, Hortobágy National Park

1. Nature protection facing with regional development in the Hortobágy region

UNESCO surveyed natural and cultural values of world significance in the 1960s and based on this it recommended the strict protection of the Hortobágy as a region important for mankind and worth conservation and protection. The Hortobágy National Park was founded first in Hungary on 1st January 1973 for the protection of the steppe natural, cultural and economic values characteristic for the Great Hungarian Plain. Strict nature protection regulations and the designation as UNESCO World Heritage Site present serious limits for economics, infrastructure and urbanisation.

The region of the Hortobágy as a special “inner periphery” – surrounded by areas providing moderate and developed living conditions – represents serious backwardness in the space structure of Hungary. It is located in a void area between active social-economic “corridors” or lines of force giving the framework of the national macro-structure. The Hortobágy is enclosed by the Budapest-Hatvan-Miskolc-Nyíregyháza and Budapest-Szolnok-Debrecen traffic-space structural corridors (Figure 1).

The Hortobágy still regarded as a rural area – regarding employment – is in a more advantageous position compared to other crisis zones of the Great Plain – due to considerable commute into the surrounding industrial centres (Debrecen, Miskolc,

¹ Debreceni Egyetem Főépület 410/b, Telefon: (52) 512-900/2112, sulizi@tigris.klte.hu

Tiszaújváros, Tiszafüred, Szolnok) – however, unemployment still presents a serious challenge to the settlements of the region. Several experts think that the Hortobágy is a specific industrial centre of Europe providing significant income due to its special conditions. Others emphasized that the optimal state of being a strictly protected nature reserve and a tourist centre providing significant income at the same time can be reached hardly. The main task is to harmonize nature protection and the goals and interests of tourism perspective on the basis of local conditions.

2. Possibilities of sustainable regional development in the Hortobágy

In the region of the Hortobágy future acceptable socially can be drawn on the basis of the “natural” landscape and wildlife **valuable internationally** (natural values here are regarded to be unique even in European context), agriculture, balneological conditions of thermal waters and ecotourism.

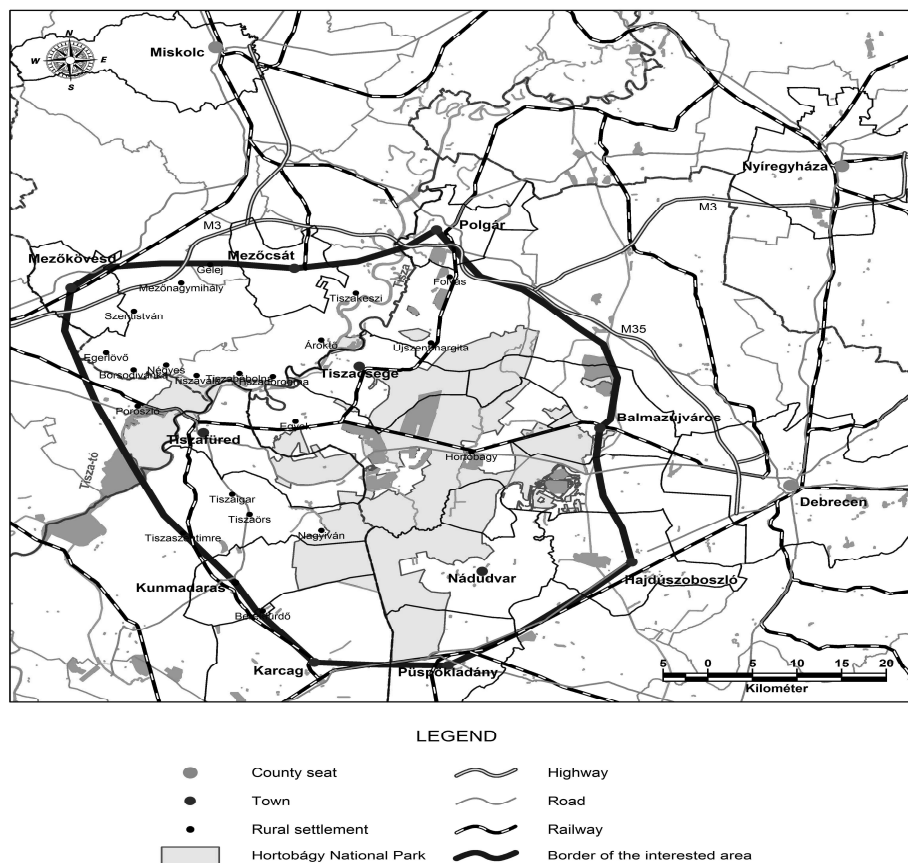


Figure 1. Geographical location of the Hortobágy National Park

Sustainable development and load ability of the Hortobágy region requires the statement and implementation of the following **aims**:

1. Establishing economy and residential environment harmonizing to the **natural, landscape and traditional shepherd culture**, helping the spread of sustainable “leisure tourism”, improving the development opportunities of backward rural areas.

2. Establishing **biologically healthy** and **aesthetically pleasant** environment considering environmental-medical aspects.
3. Sustaining the productivity of soils in areas of intense cultivation with modifying land-use according to long-term interests and strict landscape protection.
4. Establishing **economic and secure flood prevention system** adjusted to the extreme weather of the wider environment, the resultant hydro geographical dependence and the intense flooding of rivers (primarily the Tisza).

Implementing the different development programmes **cannot result in** the elimination or irreversible alteration of close-to-natural habitats. Defining **Environmentally Sensitive Areas** (ESA) could be associated to all these that is already a practice in the EU. These may contribute to the preservation of the **unique image** of the Hortobágy landscape and to the long-term increase of the attraction of the region. Thus the Hortobágy region could become the most important Hungarian destination of the developing **European ecotourism**.

High standard presentation of the natural values has to be established in the presentation sites of the **Hortobágy National Park** and the **Tisza lake** and in the protected areas with constructing/developing infrastructure in several languages (information tables, observation towers, paths, etc.) founding the conditions of rural and ecotourism based on natural values.

Sustainable regional development programmes – in vulnerable areas such as the Hortobágy – have to be based on stable measures and alternatives regarding environmental protection. Therefore the degree of load ability in the direct environment of the settlements was investigated regarding agricultural and industrial production, network infrastructure and expected development of tourism.

What **future** can be drawn for the Hortobágy region? The majority of the region will become the **agricultural region** of small and middle towns **suffering from structural problems** (Hajdúhát, Hortobágy, Nagykunság) that, of course after successful transition may become developed and dynamic areas of the Great Plain. At the same time significant areas of the Hortobágy region, especially in the **Middle Tisza Region** and in the southern edge in the margin of the **Sárrét** areas may become rapidly depopulating territories used extensively. In these areas decreasing and marginalisation rural population can earn living by extensive land-use (pastoral lands and forests) and ecotourism. Vast areas are expected to become wetlands.

Regarding the differentiated conditions, development opportunities and limits of the Hortobágy region, the regional development concept of the territory should be many sided, however, - on the level of principles – aggregated and synthesised. Regarding uncertain changes that cannot be assessed as strong and permanent process yet, strategic trends and priorities can state those development ideas regarding the most important spheres, that may help regional development based on the natural environment, economy, technical and human infrastructure, society and settlement structure into advantageous and harmonic trends expected according to today's knowledge.

3. Priorities of regional development in the Hortobágy

Considering sustainable development five development priorities can be recommended for the Hortobágy region:

First priority: Establishment and application in practice of the conditions (nature protectional, environmental, economic, settlement and social) of sustainable development

Regarding the Hortobágy this base priority includes the following:

- strict protection of the very valuable national park areas, application of landscape friendly agriculture (“rideg” – open air cattle raising) and tourism in the national park area;
- in connection to the “Living Tisza” Programme ecology and ecotourism based development of the riverside zone along the Tisza valuable from landscape protection aspect;
- improving activities in the areas suitable for complex regional development towards landscape friendly cultivation and bio-agriculture;
- with the changed economic conditions of the settlements, increased protection of the rural lands, reconstruction of the landscape parts of the Great Plain, establishment of the green-corridor network adjusted to the Tisza and the Hortobágy rivers for biodiversity maintenance, in conclusion enforce landscape aspects in the course of regional development planning connecting all these measures with development of steppe eco-, rural-, forest- and water tourism, further extending meadows, forests and wetlands together with the exigent development of and sewage network construction in the built-in area of the settlements.

Second priority: applying complex economic development with special regard to integrated (modernised) agriculture and food industry and planting new, competitive, knowledge based production and servicing sectors

The framework of complex development of the Hortobágy region – in case of openness for domestic and foreign capital – can be given by supporting small and middle sized towns. The content of this priority could be the following:

- diversifying the economy of the region. Based on the conditions of the area complex sectoral development programmes might be viable as well (integrated agriculture, food industry, development of the so called supplier–sub-contractor industry in for example electronic industry, etc.);
- regarding agriculture apart from extensive and intensive profit orientated sectors social type, sustainable, partly self supplying, landscape friendly cattle grazing and vegetation growing can be successful as well if life standard is improved by supplementary activities (craftsmanship, services, rural tourism);
- long-term opportunities of complex economic development are extended by the better use of human resources (re-training and new training programmes) and developing service sectors improving production;
- in backward regions employment increasing investments of social based economic development is recommended to be provided by co-ordinating several sectors.

Third priority: Developing the towns of the Hortobágy region, eliminating periphery position

It is an essential condition of developing spatial economic-social relationships to extend co-operation possibilities of the economy and society of the region with more developed Hungarian and European economic areas. Accessibility of the region and its settlements shall be improved. This priority includes the following in relation to the study area:

- tourism based on quality thermal water can be an important sector of economic development (e.g. Hajdúszoboszló, Hajdúnánás, Püspökladány, Nádudvar, Balmazújváros, Berekfürdő, etc.);
- urgent development of every transit route in the region together with the establishment of bypasses of the towns;
- development of the airport and logistic centre in Debrecen regarding its attraction zone and economic development effects;

- deliberate development of combined transport forms (road, railway, air) serving the demands of the hopefully strengthening eastern (Ukrainian, Romanian) economic forces;

- establishment of the major and sub centres of communication-information networks modern in long-terms that may become motors of economic-financial life, foreign-domestic trade and development of relatively backward areas together with modern regional marketing and tourism.

Fourth priority: Applying small region programmes based on specific historical and landscape traditions

Different spatial, landscape and social conditions of the Hortobágy, the Hajdú towns and the Tisza region can be correlated in a common regional concept if the different demands of the regions can be visualized. This priority involves the following:

- improvement of town-village, town-town relationships, improvement of accessibility, establishment of joint regional development-manager offices, establishment and connection of their information systems;

- improvement of base supply to the national level with special regard to the establishment of the institution network and solidarity towards dropping settlements and regions.

Fifth priority: Improving regional, local identity, establishing professional regional development, co-operation and institution network, strengthening special economic-social cohesion

Regional development of the Hortobágy region can be successful if participants are also successful in their own field. Sectors, planning-researching-developing professionals and prominent persons of the local politics can define **common regional aims** and co-operations both in short- and long-term if they can understand each other. If they **discuss** their development ideas adjusting to social demands and if they know exactly how they are partners and competitors to each other in the sharp market competition. Therefore strengthening identity and cohesion is a fundamental requirement in the European practice of modern regional development. This priority involves the following:

- strengthening the social-political cohesion of the region, establishing partnership between local governments and small regions and also between the regional and local participants of regional development, enforcing complex regional development principles that can be connected on regional and smaller levels;

- development of new local communication strengthening identity, widening the range of training and re-training with special regard to the developed town secondary school network of the margin of the district;

- preserving and extending folklore and cultural values, extending resultant co-operation possibilities;

- developing tourism associated to both natural and cultural values.

REFERENCES

- Fehér A., Kurucz Gy, Süli-Zakar I. (1994), *Ember-táj-mezőgazdaság a Tisza-tó környékén*, (Szerk.: Fehér A.), Kompolt, 282 p.
- Kiss É. (1989/a), *A Közép-Tiszavidék megyehatármenti településeinek gazdasági fejlődése és közigazgatási területbeosztása Alföldi Tanulmányok XIII.sz.* MTA Alföldi Kutatócsoport, Békéscsaba. pp. 185-209.
- Kiss É. (1991/b), *A Közép-Tiszavidék elmaradott térségének népesség és társadalomföldrajza. (Kandidátusi értekezés)*, Budapest, 205 p.

- Süli-Zakar I., Baranyi B. (1997), *A mezőgazdaság jövője, avagy a fenntartható fejlődés esélye az Alföldön.* – Tér és Társadalom 4/1996 (Szerk.: Rechnitzer J.), pp. 125-138.
- Süli-Zakar I., Kozma G., Radics Zs. (2006), *Hajdú-Bihar megye területfejlesztési lehetőségei, kilátásai.* – Hajdú-Bihar Megyei Területfejlesztési Ügynökség Kht. Debrecen. 56 p.
- Süli-Zakar I. (1998), *A fenntarthatóság és a társadalmi-gazdasági fejlődés esélye az alföldi falusi térségekben,* In: Alföldi tanulmányok 1997 (Főszerk.: Csatári B.). Nagyalföld Alapítvány, Békéscsaba, pp. 77-92.
- Süli-Zakar I. (2007), *The Living Tisza., In: Role and Impact of the FLAPP Project in the cross-border water management of the Upper Tisza valley.* Debreceni Egyetem Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadója, Debrecen. pp. 39-46.