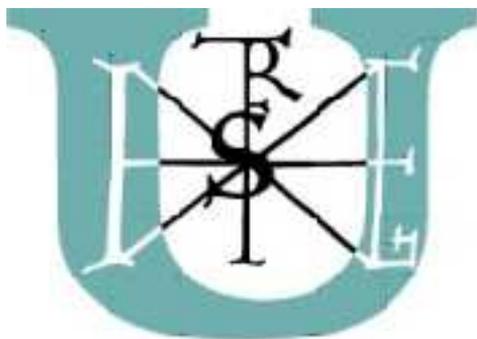


THESES OF PHD DISSERTATION

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SZENT ISTVÁN UNIVERSITY

**THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF ECO-
TOURISM:
FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH FROM THE
DEFINITION TO PLANNING METHODOLOGY**

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I. Objective, research questions

The goal of the research was to summarize the theoretical background of eco-tourism through exploration of a wide range of Hungarian and international literature on the subject, to create an analytical paper synthesizing the results of the research into eco-tourism. The sub-objectives of the research are interrelated: I go from defining the term to the product of eco-tourism. I summarized the sub-objectives and the questions and tasks related to them in five points:

1. The analysis and interpretation of the term eco-tourism

There is no definition for eco-tourism that is accepted nationally or internationally. However, there are numerous design/development documentations and tenders that mention it as a goal. As there is no unified definition, each person can assign different meaning to eco-tourism, making inspections and quality assurance impossible.

Questions: What definitions exist for eco-tourism? How did Hungarian and international definition change since the first one was created? How much did the general opinion towards and the role and importance of eco-tourism change? What aspects are unique to or have a greater importance in Hungarian definitions compared to international ones? Are regional development and landscape preservation key elements in the definitions?

2. Collecting and organizing the possible indicators of eco-tourism

As the term eco-tourism is not unambiguous, it is very difficult to decide whether a tourism target fits the requirements of eco-tourism. Therefore, it is necessary to create indicators which make eco-tourism identifiable. Such standardization could facilitate the processes of design, management, and decision-making related to eco-tourism.

Questions: What uses are there for indicators in the field of eco-tourism? What systems and methods of qualification exist in the field of eco-tourism? What

sources of data could help a set of indicators functions in the field of (eco-)tourism on a national level?

3. Defining the place and role of the landscape in tourism

Eco-tourism is built primarily around attractions the landscape offers. However, from my experience, most authors only view the landscape as a component of natural resources (usually next to climate, water, terrain elevation, geology, flora, and fauna).

Questions: Is the landscape in fact a dominant factor in attracting tourism? What is the landscape's position among factors of attraction in tourism? How can the role of the landscape in tourism be summarized? To what degree does the 'expected' landscape affect the decision to travel? Is there such a thing as a tourist landscape?

4. Defining the design principles and methods for eco-tourism

Neither for tourism, nor for eco-tourism are there any generally accepted design principles. At the same time, almost all development plans on the national and regional level requires the development of tourism and, if the conditions are suitable, eco-tourism. Therefore, I believe it is necessary to explore and analyse design methodology.

Questions: What principles and methods related to designing tourism in Hungary? What are the similarities and differences between these descriptions? To what degree are the recommendation for methodology realized in plans and concepts for tourism? Is there a set of guidelines for designing eco-tourism in Hungary or internationally?

5. Interpretation of the term eco-touristic product

To navigate through the offers of tourism, it is necessary to explore the term touristic product and, taking into consideration the defining characteristics of eco-tourism, interpreting the touristic product in eco-tourism.

Questions: What are the characteristic features of touristic products in the case of eco-tourism? Are there special characteristics of eco-touristic products? What are the necessary steps for developing an eco-touristic product?

II. Material and method

Due to the complexity of the topic, I used several methods, among which there were both primary and secondary methods. My research strategy was deductive and based on the study of relevant literature and plans. Accordingly, I started with **secondary research**, as part of which I conducted the **critical comparative analysis** of Hungarian and international literature about the characteristics and conceptual components of eco-tourism. For this, I used Hungarian and international theoretical works in the field of tourism, using which I explored the basic concepts and the connection between concepts. In my secondary research I made it a priority to use the most recent and most important publications possible in the field, as well as to include results not yet published in Hungarian. As the range of literature on theoretical research in the field of eco-tourism is quite narrow in Hungarian, I found it exceptionally important to explore the English language literature, which has a long history and is experiencing rapid growth. In this, the BGE Tourism Library was a great help with its wide range of foreign literature. Based on the literature I analysed, I concluded that Hungarian sources put little focus on specifying the content of the definition of eco-tourism, which is one of the most popular areas of research in international literature. In addition to my analysis of literature, I conducted **primary research** and created a comparison of definition for eco-tourism using **content analysis**. In conducting fundamental research into the indicators of eco-tourism, I used the **Criteria&Indicators (C&I)** method.

My second step was to explore the travel habits, attitude towards eco-tourism, and the landscape's role in the decisionmaking of the Hungarian people using statistical data and the results of survey-based research. Processing sources in the literature, I presented the system of tourist attractions, primarily focused on the role of the landscape in the system. In addition to the secondary data, I also used data from surveys I conducted in 2009/2010 and 2014/2015, having asked 82 and 74 people.

As my third step, I conducted secondary research on the subjects of the touristic product and planning methods, then, after critical comparative analysis, I determined the principles and methods that could be used to create an eco-touristic product and what planning principles would have to be used in the planning of eco-tourism. In this case, I emphasized Hungarian sources in my research, as my goal was to explore the Hungarian practices. I only used international literature when I could not find relevant Hungarian sources.

The organization and processing of the data was done using Microsoft Word and Excel. To create charts and graphs, I used SmartDraw and PhotoShop.

III. Theses (new and novel scientific results)

1. The definition and introduction of the terms 'tourist landscape' and 'landscape preservation'

1. A)

The tourist landscape is the symbolic and material transformation of an original physical and/or socio-economical landscape with the goal of satisfying the interests / needs of tourists, and the industry of tourism. Its emergence is greatly influenced by the differences between the recounted experiences of others, the experienced expected by travel agencies, and our own experiences.

International literature already uses the term 'tourist landscape'. Though it has no precise definition, a landscape that appeals to tourists and encourages them to visit it is meant by the term. It is a broader term concept than recreational landscape used in the field of landscape architecture. Recreational landscape emphasizes physical characteristics and uses those to define areas. In addition to physical characteristics, the spiritual value added by humans as well as their experiences contribute greatly to the emergence of the tourist landscape.

1. B)

The aim and task of landscape preservation is to protect the primary / characteristic structure of the landscape, to maintain, through inspiring an inner desire in the locals, the interested, and the affected parties, an order capable of renewing itself.

Héctor Ceballos-Lascuráin, the creator of the term eco-tourism emphasized that eco-tourism might become an important tool of preservation. I introduced and defined the term of landscape preservation. Eco-tourism can contribute to the preservation of the landscape and its values through:

- making the local population and tourism companies interested in helping the appealing landscape and its values remain open and

presentable to tourists in the long term, regardless of their protection status,

— encourage compliance with (mostly protective) regulation that help preserve the appealing landscape.

2. Defining the position of eco-tourism among types of tourism using the content analysis of sources in literature and definitions of eco-tourism; finding the defining characteristics of eco-tourism and using them to define eco-tourism, as well as defining the relationship between landscape preservation, regional development, and eco-tourism.

2. A)

Within the system of tourism, eco-tourism represents an alternative to mass tourism. Eco-tourism is both a principle that encourages the ecological design and realization of tourism, as well as the product itself that is created utilizing these principles.

The typology of tourism is subjective and factors include the knowledge, experiences, and attitude of the authors and researchers. Based on my analysis of sources, I concluded that most authors consider eco-tourism to be the counterpart of mass tourism, an alternative to it. At the same time, its characteristics as a touristic product are emphasized.

2. B)

Taking into consideration the Hungarian particularities, there are seven criteria we can use to identify eco-tourism. These are: education, type of conservation, effect, which area, benefits to locals and the community, the realization of nature conservation, economic benefits and development aspects.

Based on Hungarian and international literature, as well as the results of my content analysis, I specified the range of criteria to be used for the design and realization of eco-tourism and the eco-touristic product, as well as for the evaluation of realized projects and products.

2. C)

I defined eco-tourism taking into account its identifying characteristics:

Eco-tourism emphasizes the balanced relationship between tourism and landscape, and the development of this relationship. It focuses on the natural environment of a specific landscape and its conservation, as well as the people and communities living there. It does not necessarily target distant lands or untouched areas. Rather, it offers activities and recreation to a wide range of people, including those with more modest resources. Due to this, it can/should only be developed in places, where the locals need tourism and the region and population share the benefits.

Similarly to many other terms, we encounter terminological difficulties in the case of eco-tourism due to the lack of an unified definition. Using content analysis, I identified the factors included in the majority of (Hungarian and international) definitions, and supplemented them with Hungarian specifics. I used the seven primary characteristics I found in my content analysis as the basis of my definition for eco-tourism. The necessary criteria for eco-tourism are included in the new interpretation.

2. D)

In my content analysis of definitions for eco-tourism, I proved that landscape preservation and regional development have key roles in eco-tourism.

Based on the literature I reviewed, I concluded that there is a strong mutual relationship between regional development, landscape preservation, and eco-tourism. I presumed that this connection could be found in the definitions as well. The content analysis showed, that over half (54.5%) of the defitions included characteristics related to regional development and 83.3% of them ones related to landscape preservations. There were 33 definitions that included both of regional development and landscape preservation, 50% of the sample.

3. Defining the role of the landscape in (eco-)tourism

In tourism, the landscape is not just one of the components of the natural resources, but the regional integration of attractions. The landscape is a fundamental component in tourism and, as such, plays a key role in making travel decisions.

Research results make it clear that the landscape represents a summary of a region's natural and cultural qualities relevant to tourism. I compared and analysed the results of eight studies, and concluded that the landscape and associated values play a primary role in making travel decisions and choosing a destination. My primary research through surveys supports this, showing that the landscape plays a central role in the travel decisions of Hungarians.

4. The exploration of the lacking aspects of tourism planning practices.

I concluded that there are several anomalies in current tourism planning practices:

- **plans are born more or less randomly, independently of each other; there is a lack of systematic connections between them,**
- **though planning guidelines exist, they have no real affect on the plans,**
- **terms are used very differently in plans, and there are inconsistencies within and between plans,**
- **the identification of attractions is often superficial,**
- **natural resources are often entirely omitted.**

I reviewed ten methodological guides and 31 development concepts. I concluded that the guidelines are rarely reflected in the finished plans. My analysis proves that an unified set of requirements is necessary for tourism planning. Based on my results, my recommendation is that all tourtic development concepts should be required to contain an inventory of attraction, in which landscape values must be included as well. It is necessary to create a patent or guide to make sure that attractions and touristic features are recorded with a consistent methodology.

5. The creation a survey data sheet for tourist attractions.

To improve the practice of tourism planning, I created (and successfully utilized in 28 settlements) a set of criteria for surveying the register of attractions, the tourism infrastructure and superstructure, and the settlement image. For this, I created a SWOT analysis sample as well. In the creation of the data sheets, I implemented the landscape architectural aspects to the maximal degree.

Using the guides and recommendations I explored and analysed as a basis, I devised the observation criteria for the register of attractions, the tourism infrastructure and suprastructure, and the settlement image. I made modifications taking into consideration the factors of landscape observation, the methodology of recording landscape values, the categories used in the TÉKA project, and the German methodology for cultivated landscape cadastres. During my ten years of research, I tested the new set of criteria in 28 settlements and continued to refine it based on my experiences. The new set of criteria allows for the creation of plans that incorporate natural features to a significantly higher degree.

6. The elaboration of the practical elements of eco-tourism planning.

If a settlement's tourism development concept includes the development of eco-tourism as a recommendation, then an eco-tourism development plan must be created. I divided the process of planning eco-tourism into four steps:

- 1. The role of eco-tourism must be determined, then research must be conducted and its results must be evaluated accordingly.**
- 2. Completing the planning concept and marketing plans.**
- 3. Realization.**
- 4. The measurement of the results.**

In planning eco-tourism we assume that a tourism development concept has already been created for the area/settlement which made a recommendation to

improve eco-tourism. The eco-tourism development plan is different from the tourism development concept in that it contains recommendations for the specific eco-touristic product. I devised the four steps of eco-tourism planning based on Hungarian and international planning practices and methodological guides. I selected the following as unique elements of examination in eco-tourism planning: examination of the landscape character, examination of the effects of load on the area and each attraction, spatial examination, and eco-tourism resource register data sheet. I defined the establishment of land use and zones, the creation of a visitor management plan, and the establishment of a monitoring system to be unique elements in the eco-tourism plan. I recommend the use of the aforementioned eco-tourism indicators in the form of a check list.

7. The development of the characteristics of the eco-touristic product, and the methodology for eco-touristic product design.

Based on my research, I summarized the characteristic of the eco-touristic product in the following points:

- The basis of the eco-touristic product is formed by the landscape and the natural and cultural values of an area.**
- The success of an eco-touristic product lies in being based primarily on local resources and services provided by the local population.**
- It is unique, not to be found elsewhere, not to be confused with anything else, characteristic of that specific region.**

Taking into account the characteristics of eco-tourism, I described the main steps in the design of an eco-touristic product in the following points:

- 1. Surveying the features, organizing the data.**
- 2. Defining the target audience, determining their needs.**
- 3. Qualifying the data with the needs of the target audience in mind.**
- 4. Turning the features into a product based on the needs of the target audience.**
- 5. Creating a business and promotional plan.**

I determined that eco-touristic products have significantly different characteristics between continents, countries, and regions due to the different (cultural and natural) features. The creation of the eco-touristic product requires supply-based development built on local features. It's an important aspect in the creation of an eco-touristic product to provide appropriate recreation for people with different interests and of different age-groups (or to choose the appropriate target audience for the attractions). When creating an eco-touristic product, it is important to make sure that each element of the offerings is in accord with the goals of eco-tourism, namely environmental awareness and having a minimal impact on resources.

4. A szerző publikációi Publications of the author

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