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The Role of the Greenways in the Harmonization of Urban-Rural Relation in Hungary

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Introduction

The decrease in the population of villages and the growth of cities is a global phenomenon, also present in Hungary. In inner peripheries, regions that most often lack cities, the ageing of the population and the emptying of the villages has begun. These regions are uniquely affected by regional development and rural development in terms of both economics and demographics. A significant step in creating cohesion between the advanced urban areas and the declining rural areas is the improvement of infrastructure (Csatári). We believe that greenways, as parts of the networks of infrastructure and green infrastructure, may play a significant role in the connection of urban and rural areas, and so in the revitalization of the villages.

The explicit aim of the regional greenways created in Hungary is to become the engine of local economic and community development through encouraging the locals. This engine is fed by both local resources and the visitors to the greenways. If these visitors are from more developed urban areas, a connection can be realized between the urban and rural population, making the greenways a tool for the improvement of these relations. In our research, we attempted to appraise the truth in this assumption.

Background/Literature Review

Around 1980, several siginifant groups in the US recognized that the motorized lifestyle leads to reduced exercise and therefore health issues. Following this realization, the President't Commission on American Outdoors was created, which put forward a proposal on creating a network of greenways suited for non-motorized travel (Fabos, 1995, 2004).

Greenways are technically 'green' networks, which combine the preservation and presentation of a region's natural and cultural values, thereby promoting the sustainable economic development of the region. At the same time, they may create new educational, sporting, or economic opportnities in the settlements they connect. The typology of American greenways (Little, 1990) can be used in Hungary, though the greenways most relevant to our topic usually have multiple uses, making typology mostly relevant in their marketing.

The European Greenways Association (EGWA) was founded in 1998 in order to realize the creation of infrastructure for new ways of non-motorized travel. Their aims were the following:

— The greenways have to be separated from roads for motorized travel, but still benefit from preexisting infrastructure.
— The greenways should be open to all people including those with limited mobility, be easily accessible, and secure.
— Their users should respect the natural, cultural, historical, and human values, and the surroundings of the greenways.
— Informing and educating the communities about greenways, prioritizing the youth.

The EGWA also took the responsibility of lobbying for the creation of long-term sustainability and regional balance at European bodies.

The Greenways Methodology Association (ZÖME) plays a significant role in the creation of the greenways in Hungary. The work of the Association is done within the framework defined by guidelines of the EGWA and the Central and Eastern European Greenways (CEG). ZÖME places an emphasis on the development of local communities and local economy in the realization of greenways. The greenways are created using own resources and grants. The realization depends on the possibilities. Thus, greenways are typically carried out entirely only in their established popular segments (Zöldútmutató, 2009).

14 greenways have been established in Hungary with the help of ZÖME, with few further ones in progress. Of these three are long greenways which connect to international ways past the border (Vasfüggöny greenway, Borostyánkő greenway, Dunamenti greenway). The rest are sub-regional greenways, each created in relation to certain landmarks in less populated areas in the country. One of these, the Cserhát greenway in the Cserhát Nature Park serves as a sample region in our studies.

Cooperation between the city and the countryside is vital for achieving regional cohesion (Magócs, 2013). In Hungary, following the establishment of local goverments (after the political change in 1989), there were several examples of such cooperation mostly regarding the waste and wastewater management, but also regarding tourism. However, partnerships for handling projects embedded into a common strategy are rare (Magócs, 2013). With the help of the ZÖME, greenways with complex goal for regional development are being created bottom-up, so several projects are carried out as parts in a publicly developed strategy on a small regional level. These greenways aims to fulfill the success criteria of the urban-rural relationship (Figure 1.).

The functions of greenways according to the CEG (www.greenways.by)	The success criteria of the urban-rural relationship (Partnership, 2013)
▪ They promote sustainable development and help the local economy. ▪ The improve the quality of life with minimal burdern on the environment. ▪ They provide a framework for local initiatives. ▪ They assisst conservation, the protection of the cultural heritage, sustainable tourism, and mobilty. ▪ They serve the demands of both the locals and the visitors.	▪ the existance of a regional identity ▪ the involved have common goals ▪ use of a good regional administration model ▪ experience with partnership ▪ a high level of social capital ▪ several small projects providing a sense of accomplishment ▪ „bottom-up" approach within the framework of national and common law ▪ multifaceted cooperation between the involved parties ▪ motivated parties

Figure 1. Greenways fulfill the success criteria of the urban-rural relationship

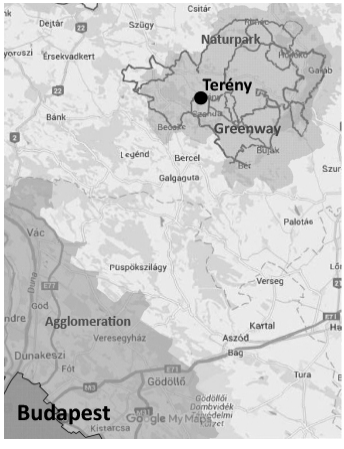

Figure 2. Cserhát greenway

(on the basis of map from http://zoldut.cserhatnaturpark.hu/terkep.php)

The data from the chosen region show clearly the processes of urbanization and agglomeration. The Budapest agglomeration includes 81 settlements, which are included in the Landuse Framework Plan for the Budapest agglomeration first approved in 2005 then modified in 2011 (terport.hu).

Between 2001 and 2011, the population of the Budapest agglomeration grew by 83106 (Figure 3.). The natural decline was 70782, so the 3.3% growth (KSH, 2013) was only possible due to significant immigration to the area.

Goals and objectives

Our research was focused on the Hungarian greenways outside cities, as these are the ones connecting the cities with the countryside. Our goal was to find out how a selected geenway affects the relations between urban and rural areas. We selected the Cserhát greenway for our studies and explored its phsyical attributes, attractions and the visitors' place of residence.

We expected greenways to have a siginificant role in the improvement of urban-rural relations, but our research had aims beyond proving this.

We were curious about
— which aspects of greenways have a stronger or weaker effect on the urban-rural relations, and
— what should be given particular attention in the process of designing and establishing the greenways if we wish to serve the necessary regional cohesion.

Method

Following research done in the international literature regarding greenways, we narrowed down the circle of Hungarian greenways which, out of the types present in Central and Eastern Europe (greenway.by), have a potential to restore the urban-rural relations. We selected a model regional greenway, the Cserhát greenway and explored it.

We compared the selected greenway's state to the international standards, and the guidelines of the CEG. Visiting the greenway, we gained valuable information from the locals, owners of lodging, and leaders in the local governments. The general information related to other greenways is from our conversations with the leader of the Greenways Methodology Association, and from our own experiences teaching about greenways. The data on the visitors to the Cserhát greenway were gained from the guest book from a guesthouse that has been operating for two years in Terény, a village in a central location of the greenway (see Figure 2.).

We drew conclusions based on our results and wrote recommendations about the design of greenways, knowing that to ensure the validity of these first results the research would have to be extended to further greenways.

Results

The population of the settlements on the Cserhát greenway (five with a population between 1000 and 2000, four between 500 and 1000, five between 100 and 500, and three under 100), roughly 80-100 km away from the agglomeration of Budapest, the population shrunk by over 9% within the reference period of ten years. This loss of population is due to the natural decline in demographics in Hungary, and migration. Natural decline is present in each settlement in the area, and the net migration is also negative in all but six of them. Even in the ones with a positive net migration value, it is under 5, therefore the population is decreasing in every village.

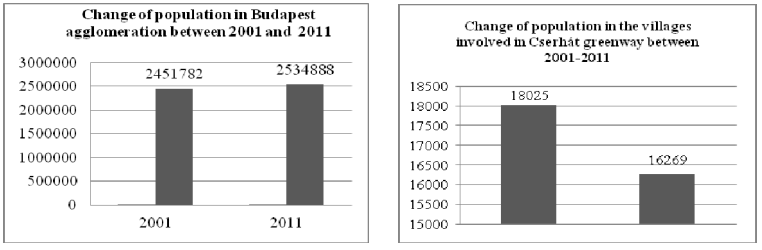

Figure 3. Population in Budapest Agglomeration and in the settlements of the Cserhát Greenway
(Source: http://www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/tablak_teruleti_12)

The Cserhát plays a defining role in the image of the entire Nógrád county. Despite their similar situations, there is little to no cooperation between the small villages of the region, further hindered by administrative difficulties. By joining the Greenway project, the initiating organizations intended to reduce this isolation (zoldutak.hu). The Cserhát greenway in the reference area was established as part of the Cserhát Naturpark. There are 24 settlements within the Naturpark, 17 of which are directly connected to the greenway, among these is our reference settlement, Terény.

In the chapter concerning methodology we explored the guidelines of the CEG regarding greenways. Looking at the Cserhát greenway we can see that the majority of the criteria are met (Figure 1). The main deficiency is perhaps the lacking develpment of the roads, limiting local mobility. Having a separate lane is not a requirement of a greenway, but pavement ensuring accessability under all weather conditions is. The Cserhát greenway, however, has several segments, including near Terény that are dirt roads, practically unusable in rainy conditions.

Some parts of the greenway use the preexisting bicycle road. Its traffic is at times also directed to roads with light traffic that are used simultaneously by pedestrians, cyclists, and cars. The Kutasó-Terény mounted touring route uses roads separate from other parts of the greenway so that they do not disrupt each other. The greenway's traffic can not be separated from the use due to other factors in the region, such as the Naturpark, the Kéktúra path, the Way of Mary, and the Palóc Route. It is likely thier cumulative effect that makes the greenway viable. The section of the greenway near Terény is richly populated by buildings of cultural significance. The churches, the bell, the statues, the memorial sites, and the 114 renovated buildings of folk architectural heritage which would be remarkable on their own, are supplemented by programmes from the local café, craftmen, and museums. Activies such as cheese-making, trying out local recipes, meeting animals, and perhaps milking them provide a uniquely natural experience to the urban visitor. There are cultural attractions such as the open-reel tape recorder museum, the Hunnia house of lacework, and the café give tourists from cities a feeling of familiarity. The castles, palaces, the natural and built heritage sites (such as Hollókő) attract tourists to both the greenway and the other routes in the area.

CEG Criteria	Is it met?	Evaluation, further notes
Does it contribute to sustainable development?	yes	Through activites related to the greenway.
Does it contribute to the development of the local economy?	yes	Local enterprises (lodging establishments, restaurant, local
Does it improve the standards of living?	partly	Improvements are necessary, buti t has the potential.
Does it provide a framework for local initiatives?	yes	Support of enterprises and civil movements.
Does it help conservation?	yes	Natura 2000 region, soft tourism, protection of indigenous species, presentation.
Does it help protect the cultural heritage?	yes	The greenway highlights cultural values.
Does it help sustainable tourism?	yes	Small local enterprises, eco-fiendly solutions.
Does it improve mobility:	partly	The greenway passes through designated, but often insufficiently develped roads.

Figure 4. Cserhát greenway and the CEG criteria

According to our research, the majority of visitors come from Budapest, which is less than 100 km away. Figure 4., showing the statistics on the tourists, demonstrates the opportunities the greenway offers for city dwellers to connect with the countryside.

In addition to the greenway and the heritage sites, the enthusiasm of the local people to organize various activites that represent the characteristics of the landscape for the visitors plays a significant role.

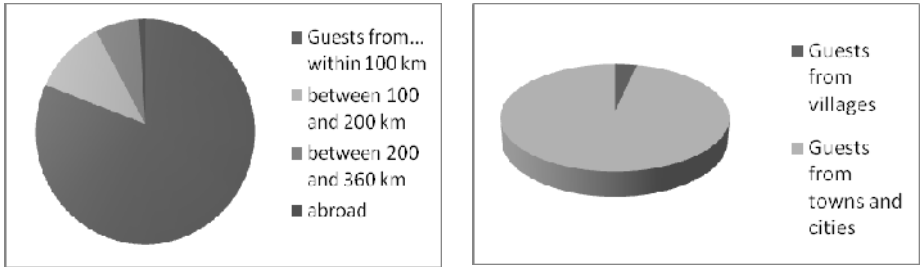

Figure 5. The distribution of the guests of the Terény palócház

Discussion and Conclusion

Due to their technical parameters, the Cserhát greenway (and several other Hungarian ones) can not be classified as greenways in their present state. On the other hand, we believe that the community-based design and upkeep methodology is exemplary. Furthermore, it is apparent that greenways, particularly with other thematic routes can revitalize the development of local economies, which is especially important for regions with small villages. The greenways fulfill the urban-rural success criteria, as shown by the example presented.

The experiences that can be had through tourism might have an effect that can spread across city dwellers, causing:
— an appreciation of the regions and settlements of the countryside,
— increased respect for agriculture,
— higher demand for local products.

Through tourism, with the majority of the visitors being from cities, personal relationships between the urban and rural population emerge, leading to a revitalization of an almost broken partnership. Greenways are therefore a promising initiative for rebulding the urban-rural relations. We believe it is important to consider the following aspects when desiging greenways, due to the lack of funding:

— the design of more modest technical content
— the creation of a programme for the long-term implementation
— taking into account the various attractions, including the local products and activities, the possible connections to local thematic routs, as well as elements of the built heritage.

Figure 6. Pictures from Cserhát greenway

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