

Landscape transformation at tourist resorts around Lake Balaton

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Introduction

While a hundred years ago the villages disposed mainly the same functions (working and living functions) for the inhabitants, by now the villages transformed and can offer different functions for the inhabitants and tourists as well. Some of them offer work possibilities or have excellent location for being a living place. Some of them have values that are attractive enough for people for a while, they became a holiday resort. In this essay we examine the landscape transformation of this kind of villages.

Objectives

With this work we had three objectives. First of all we wanted to examine the impact of the two main types of tourism (sleeping at a commercial accommodation or at an own weekend house) to the landscape. On the other hand we wanted to examine the rate of the landscape transformation at the settlements of the Balaton Recreational Area, which can be a basement for further studies. Last, but not least we wanted to make a very short review on the impact of the economical crisis of 2009 to the number of guest nights at commercial accommodations.

Material and method

The Balaton (often called the “Hungarian sea”) is the largest lake in Central-Europe. It is situated in the middle of Transdanubia, bordered in the north by Balaton Highlands, on the west and by Zalai- and Somogyi-Hills and in the east by Mezőföld. The Zala River is the largest inflow to the lake, and the canalized Sió is the only outflow of it.

The lake and the Balaton Region is one of the most popular tourist destinations of Hungary beside Budapest and the Central Region of Hungary. The most visited settlements of Hungary (Hévíz 2nd place, Siófok 4th place, Balatonfüred 5th place) and 25,7% of Hungarian commercial accommodation rooms can be found in this region (*MT. Zrt* 2008/b). The 16,8% of guests spends the 22,7% of the guest nights at the Hungarian Sea.

The intensive tourist season extends from June until the end of August. The average water temperature during the summer is 25°C, which makes bathing and swimming possible. Other tourist attractions include sailing, fishing and other water sports, as well as visiting the countryside and hills; vineyards on the north coast and night life

on the south shore. The climate around Lake Balaton has also made the region ideal for viniculture. The Mediterranean climate combined with the soil (containing volcanic rock) has made the region notable for its production of wines since the Roman period two thousand years ago. (*MT. Zrt 2008/b*)

The major resorts around the lake are Siófok, Keszthely, Balatonfüred, Tihany, Badacsony and Hévíz. Siófok is one of the centres of the region, it is known as the “Summer Party Capital of Hungary”, which attracts many young people in summer due to its numerous large clubs. Keszthely is the site of the famous Festetics Palace and Balatonfüred is a historical bathing town home to the annual Anna Ball. The

Table 1. The number of the settlements according to the ratio of the weekend houses and the number of guest nights

			Guest nights (per year)		
			> 10 000	1000 - 10000	1000 >
Ratio of weekend houses	> 50%	26 (IA)	10 (IB)	8 (IC)	
	10 – 50%	7 (IIA)	10 (IIB)	26 (IIC)	
	10% >	5 (IIIA)	11 (IIIB)	76 (IIIC)	

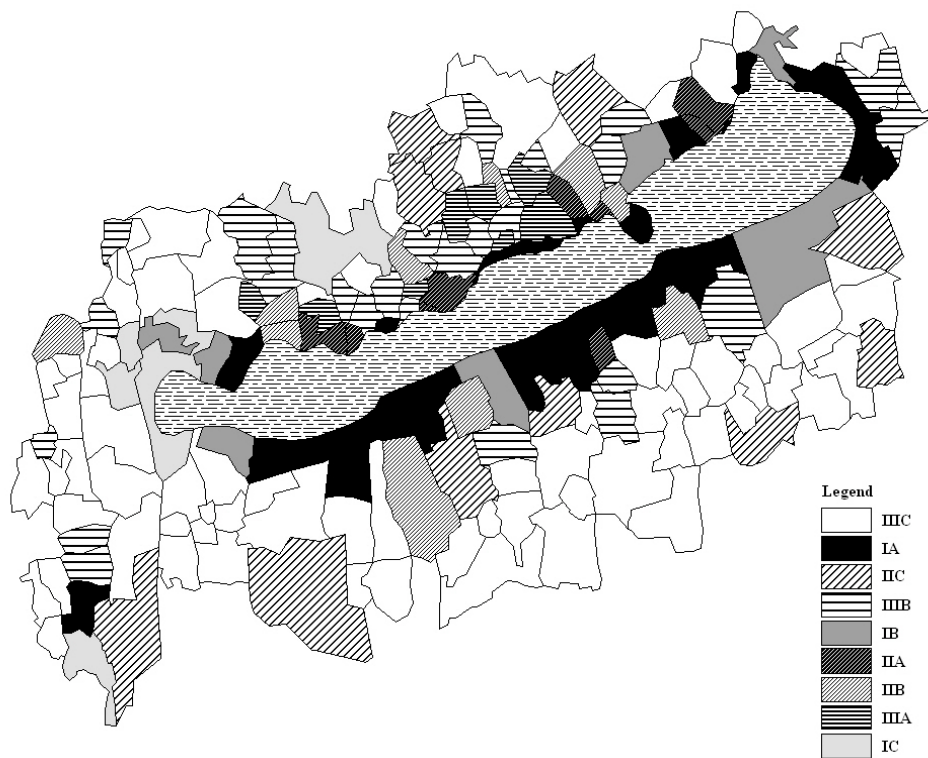


Figure 1. The location of the settlements according to the ratio of the weekend houses and the number of guest nights

Tihany Peninsula is a historical district, the Benedictine Abbey founded in Tihany in 1055. Badacsony is a famous volcanic mountain and wine growing region as well as a lakeside resort. Hévíz is situated about six kilometres from Lake Balaton and the Hévíz medicinal lake is the world's largest biologically active natural thermal lake.

The Balaton Highlands National Park is famous for its biodiversity, especially of birds. The total area of the park is about 56,000 hectares. Professional tour guides are available to visitors by previous arrangement, and hikers may become acquainted with botanical and geological distinctions of the region with the help of study trails and display areas. One of the most valuable sections of the park is the Little Balaton. More than 230 bird species have been observed here. (*Méhes 2007, Feketéné 2005*)

According to the strength of the resort function of the villages we sorted the settlements into different groups by statistical data. We took into account the ratio of the weekend houses (*KSH 2003*) and the number of the guest nights (*www.mth.hu*).

We examined the landscape transformation of the settlements with the help of several databases. At first we strained off the major changes of the land use by statistical data. Using military maps (*nfo.arcanum.hu 2010*) and aerial views we focused on the settlements where the most significant changes happened in the last centuries, and explored the type of those changes. Finally in the case of the assorted settlements we used some sources about the history of the settlements to understand the background of the changes. The photos from the past and nowadays helped to show the effect of the mentioned changes on the character of the assorted settlements. (*Molnár 2007*) Because of this kind of approach we didn't make a summary of the related publications.

Results

As the figure above shows it, the major pressure is located at the lakeside. Generally the holiday resorts on the south attract more visitors, but there is hardly any settlement at the lakeside where the ratio of the weekend houses not reaches the 50% of all the houses in the given settlement. (IA) These exceptions are some little villages at the Balaton Highland. Their administrative borders reach the lake, but the villages themselves are located further from the lakeside.

One of the most interesting villages in this group is Balatonmárfürdő, which is a very special and a very typical example at the same time. It is typical in the point of the involvement of a resort place at the south lakeside, but it is special, because the luridity of the landuse. Balatonmárfürdő actually is dominated by water: the 90% of its territory is occupied by the lake, and the rest is filled with houses.

If we have a look at the first military map, we can't see any settlements on the east part of the southern lakeside between Balatonkeresztúr and Balatonboglár. Fonyód and the starts of Balatonfenyves can be seen at the second military map, but these

simple, mainly one-street villages are bordered by groves from all directions. On the third military map at the place of the lately Balatonmáriafürdő we can see some information about that this area was used as extensive grassland in the middle of the 19. century, which was a typical form of land use in this area at that time.

After the filoxera destroyed the vineyards of Zala Hills, the landlord family of this area, the Széchenyis established new vineyards on the sandy soil. The first buildings had been built according to this successful project. Some families let their villas to visitors in the summer, this was the first step for Balatonmáriafürdő towards evolving into a holiday resort. The area became an independent administrative unit in 1926. The first hotel was established in the middle of the 1930's, but there were cheaper accommodations as well. The viticulture dominated till the 1970's. (www.balatonmariafurdo.hu, 2008) Today 88% of the buildings are weekend houses, the settlement has a long, rectangular form along the lakeside, with connection to the houses of Balatonkeresztúr and Balatonfenyves as well. (If we



Figure 2. The west side of the southern lakeside between Balatonkeresztúr and Fonyód on the third military map and on the Google Map

have a look at an arial photo from nowadays, we can see that the settlements at this part of the lakeside basically create one residential-recreational zone from Balatonkeresztúr till Balatonkenese.)

The second group of the villages still dominated by the weekend houses, but they have less visitors per year. These are the villages that fill the gaps mainly on the northern lakeside of the zone created by the above mentioned settlements with the domination of weekend houses and visitors. (IB) The structure of these villages usually didn't suffer from major changes, only grew a bit. (But half of these settlements have less than 500 inhabitants.)

One settlement of this group is Örvényes. It is located in the middle of the northern coast, near Tihany. Örvényes could't compete with Tihany, which is one of the most attractive settlements of the entire zone. In contrast to Balatonmáriafürdő Örvényes looks back on a history of more than a thousand years. In the 11th century it belonged to the Abbey of Tihany. In the era of the Turkish occupation the village depopulated. It was repopulated by the order of the Abbey of Tihany with Germans at the beginning of the 18th century. The character of the village started to form in that time. (www.orvenyes.hu 2010) The viniculture dominated here as well as at the other settlements at the Balaton Highland, though the filoxera appeared here as well at the end of the 19th century.

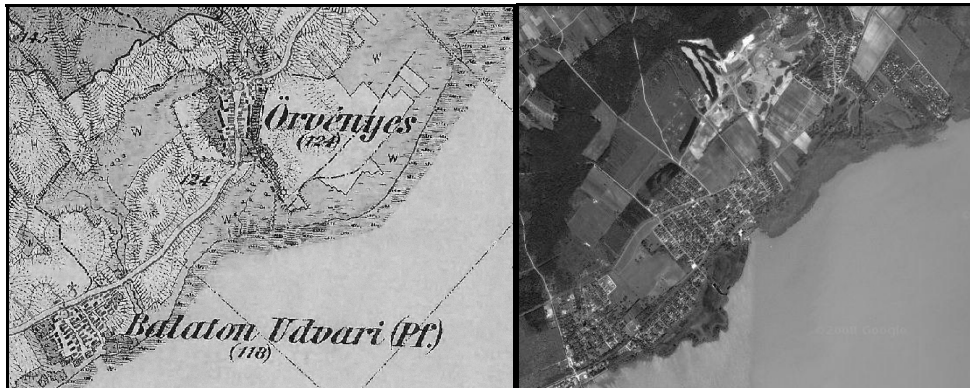


Figure 3. The middle of the northern lakeside at Balatonudvari and Örvényes on the third military map and on the Google Map

Lately the settlement grew in the direction of the lake, but the structure of the village didn't change much, it is still separated from the neighbouring settlements and there is no threat of joining. The newer streets created a new section of the village with a new character. The old part of the settlement is at the foot of the hill, its streets formed themselves taking into account the given relief. The newer streets had the aim to reach the shore as soon as possible, here was evaluated a rectangular structure. The structures of the building sites are different in the two section of the village. In the old part the traditional, pectinated form remained, while at the younger part the chequered form is dominant. The settlement tries to strengthen its

touristical potential with building on its history, first of all on its viniculture and the memories of the middle age, when it has its heydays.

The villages, where the ratio of the weekend houses is also above 50%, but the number of tourists, who accommodate themselves at the given village is under 1000 visitor per year are usually located at the valleys of the Balaton Highland. (IC) In this villages the structure basically remained the same and the character of the settlements stayed still as well. The reason of this is the fact, that these villages suffered more or less depopulation in the last decades, and the houses of the former inhabitants were bought by people who use these buildings as weekend houses.

The next big section of the settlements is the one where we still can find blocks of weekend houses, but they haven't got a dominant role in the given area. The first group is made up by little towns or villages with some major role in the surrounding. (IIA) All these settlements went through major transformation during the 20th century because of several reasons: on one hand because of the leader position in the area, on the other hand because of the tourism that grew decade by decade.

Balatonfüred is in this group, which is the centre of the micro-region located the east side of the northern coast. Similar to Örvényes Balatonfüred was mentioned as an estate of the Abbey of Tihany at the beginning of the 13th century. According to the first military map Füred was outstanding taking into account the neighbouring villages. (Some of them joined to Balatonfüred during the centuries.) The spring of the settlement, which was acknowledged as medicinal water, is also mentioned at that military map with some houses around it. Balatonfüred was very popular since the reform era, so the cultural life became very various. (*www.balatonfured.hu* 2010) The town exploited the strength of the traditions and its popularity and it remained one of the most frequented places of the zone. Because of the fact, that the town annexed three other villages, the structure of the settlement is quite various. Instead of one big recreational zone there are older and newer parts of the town towards every direction. Subsequent upon the popularity of the town many hotel and other building was opened in the last decades which offer various services for the visitors and the inhabitants as well. Those developments have a great mark on the character of the town, though the leaders of town try to save the traditional character of the old centre, since this is a part of the image that attract the tourists.

The following groups of the villages are formed by settlements located further from the lakeside. At first there are villages not too far from the lakeside which have some speciality: for example the Stone Sea at the Kal Basin or a fishpond nearby. Similar to the group with higher ratio of weekend houses but the same number of visitors. (IIB) These villages didn't change basically. The function changed, because the places left by inhabitant were filled by regular visitors and entrepreneurs who offer accommodation or some service for tourists.

The next case is when a settlement has a decent ratio of weekend houses but have no speciality to compete the popular resort places. (IIC) This is a rather big group of the

villages located variously in the recreational zone, some of them are rather far from the lake itself. These places can have visitors for a few hours, especially when the weather is not so good for spending the time at the Lake and people search some alternative programme.

The last big section of the settlements are the ones where haven't evaluated zones of weekend houses. Surprisingly one of them is Hévíz. The character of this town was absolutely changed by the large number of modern hotels that was established because of the patients and tourists came to visit the largest natural lake refilled by thermal water of Europe. (IIIA) However weekend houses are not dominant at all, which have two reasons: the attitude of the visitors who spend there a few weeks, and the enormous economical potential of the thermal lake. The town need so much human resource that gives work even the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages. According to the type of this lake, a season here is much longer than at the villages at the shore of Balaton.

The next group contains little towns or big villages as well, which are not very popular among tourists. (III B) However they have some decent number of visitors every year, but it's rather due to the central role in the given micro-region than the speciality of the town itself. These settlements changed rather lot during the centuries, but it is also in connection with the leader role in the surrounding, not with their touristical potential. That can be told about the villages of last group as well, which are located inside the administrative border of the Resort Zone of Lake Balaton, but didn't take part in the tourism of the region. (IIIC)

Conclusions

Summerized the facts mentioned above we can declare that according to the given conditions the southern and the northern side of the lake developed in very different way. Instead of the extensive grasslands and groves nowadays the southern side is dominated by huge, borderless recreational zones all along the lakeside. On the other hand the settlements on the northern side didn't change that radical. They can look back a thousand years of history, and they try to capitalize their traditions, first of all their viniculture. Usually these settlements have more or less economical potential, but they have several lean months every year. The villages located further from the lake can only take a part role in the regional tourism. Nowadays commuting is typical, but there are some villages that suffer from depopulation, these ones need to renew themselves.

From the point of view of depopulation that villages are in the worst situation, which founded themselves on the owners of the weekend houses and they can't follow the changing recreational demands of nowadays. These are generally located on the north coast at the lakeside in the shadow of a successful settlement without any first class attraction. Maybe due to the cheaper accommodations some of this villages scored much more guest nights in the harder economical situation of 2009 as before (Ábrahámhegy sextupled its guest nights compared to 2008). It is possible that they

can exploit this fortune, and they can find a new regular basis of visitors. (On the other hand other settlements were vanished from the touristical map of the last, extraordinary year.) We have to wait for a few years to find out if there is a settlement that could strengthen itself with the help of the changes due to the economical crisis and if this crisis had a long term effect on the settlements which are traditionally popular, but had a lean year in 2009 or not.

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