

The role of Guest-cards in developing “Slow Tourism” in Austria and Hungary¹

Márta Bakucz – Ádám Horváth – András Bozóti
Pécsi Tudományegyetem

AIM

The aim of our study is to evaluate new types of discount card which support the purchase of goods or services in tourist destinations.

METHODOLOGY

We focus primarily on the spa sector and this is for several reasons. The importance of the sector in Hungary is such that it affords us a broader background and at least some choice of examples to assist our study. We also consider that the close relationship between spa- and slow tourism will show results and effects more clearly. We approach this by examining two Regions in Hungary (West and South Transdanubia) and the types of guest-card used there. Then we look more closely at specific tourist destinations - in Austria and in Hungary.

MAIN FINDINGS

Our study highlights an Austrian example (Bad Kleinkirchheim in Carinthia) of a high-quality guest-card, whose introduction is notable due to its bold approach to the concept. A somewhat similar card has now appeared in Hungary— perhaps not surprisingly, in the Balaton Holiday Region – and we have also had the opportunity to look at a further product introduced in Harkány, in South Transdanubia. We describe the principal features of the various products.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We then draw conclusions based on direct contact (largely by telephone) with senior responsible officials in the destinations.

Keywords: guest-card, sustainable tourism, slow tourism, tourism destination

¹The study was written with the support of OTKA 106283 project funds.

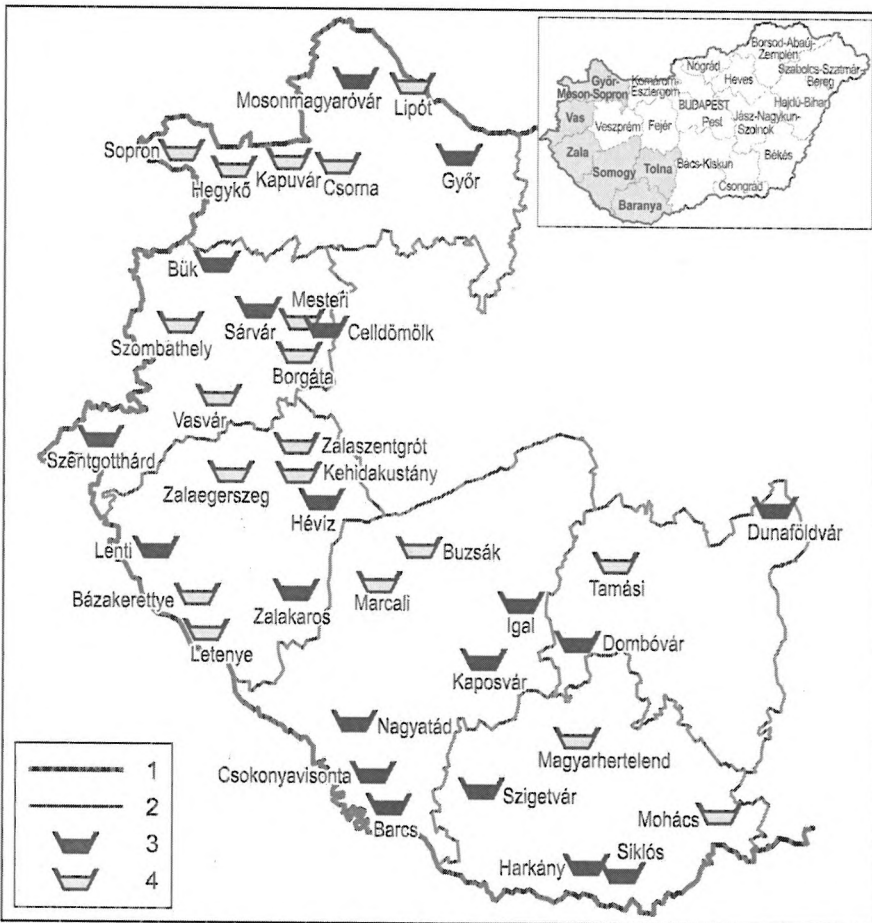
INTRODUCTION

Innovation and sustainability are important key-terms in both contemporary economics and in tourism. Well-known – and already widely used abroad – marketing tools in tourism are tourist- or guest-cards. These are the focus of our research, although we examine their use in a specific segment, spa-tourism, and in the related settlements. Our survey covers the Austrian spa-town of Bad Kleinkirchheim and its region in Carinthia, together with West Transdanubia (centrally located in terms of tourist flow and with some 23 spa-settlements) as well as South Transdanubia (peripherally located, and with 15 similar settlements) (Figure 1).

The reason for the choice of the Regions is that Austria is the best example among our neighbours in terms of tourism competitiveness, and several forms of tourist or guest card are already offered there, among them highly innovative forms targeting longer stays by guests in particular places. It seems likely that the adoption of such cards, offering complex touristic services including free-of-charge elements, would contribute to the success of our domestic stakeholders in the tourism industry. A further base for selection was our ongoing research project (OTKA 106283) in which the two above Hungarian Regions are examined from different points of view of competitiveness in the field of spa-tourism.

In this paper the following research questions are

Figure 1 Spa settlements of the two Transdanubian Regions



Note: 1 - State border; 2 - County border; 3 - Medicinal spa; 4 - Thermal spa

Source: Fonyódi V. 2016

considered most important:

1) Which type of card is more effective and generates most profit - one which can be used only during a longer stay or one which can be used even on a day-trip?

2) From the point of view of spa- and thermal tourism, which tourist cards are more beneficial: those connected to a particular settlement or those covering a wider area?

The results are mostly based on scanning the websites of settlements with spas and analysing the related specialised literature.

THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO THE ANALYSIS

Tourism as an industry is characterised by a strong dependence on the environment, and so the issue of sustainability is highly important. Intensively developing tourist traffic might have a damaging influence due to the pollution caused by heavy traffic (Saarinen 2006), and, obviously, tourist- and guest-cards do not help to resolve such problems, although they might provide better organised access to destinations and can make them more easily available in terms of the price/value ratio. Hence the balance between tourism and ecology is more sustainable.

Tourist/guest cards related to particular settlements are relatively new in Hungary and can be effective tools to open up certain market gaps. It is, therefore, practical to examine them in terms of niche marketing. Initially targeting a narrow circle of customers (in our case tourists) with a short life-time tourism product, the narrow demand segment widens with time and the actual product loses its niche character (Michalkó 2011).

Tourist cards can be characterised by the 7P model (Kotler 2002). The traditional product, price, place and promotion factors are supplemented by the human factor (packaging, positioning and people), objective and enjoyment (entertainment) elements or processes (Veres 2005). The tourist/guest card cannot be considered as a product in itself, but it can be an effective tool to combine separate touristic products making them available to a wider circle of interested visitors. In this case, therefore, the product is a complex package available for consumers at a beneficial price - highly advantageous in terms of a customers' price sensitivity. Cards can be either acquired (bought) on-line (tourist cards) or given to the guest at the place of accommodation (guest cards), and so their method of promotion is also different, highlighting the strength and efficiency of the on-line promotional tools. As a result, tourists are attracted by more complex experiences and may buy relatively

rarely used services, which otherwise they would not. Guests like to be given something extra, and the tourist card can provide this satisfaction.

THE AUSTRIAN EXAMPLE

Between the Bodensee and the Neusiedlersee there are many different tourist cards available offering a wide range of discounts for travellers as well as for locals. With a target group of (for the most part) tourists, such cards are typically named "Summer Card", "Active Card", "Erlebnis Card" or named after the province where they are valid. Such cards are mainly intended for tourists who like to explore a region, use cultural services, visit museums or make trips to other specific destinations, rather than stay in one location.

In general, tourist cards entitle the holder to use several services - either free or at reduced cost - such as the fare for a cable-car, entrance to an open-air pool or the cost of a guided tour.

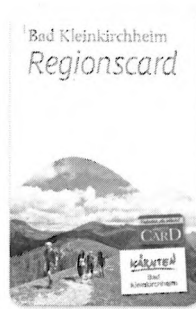
Guest Cards (Gästekarten) are the ones for tourists who stay overnight in a specific region. This type of card is usually issued *gratis*. They include a wide range of services free or at a reduced price. They cannot be bought, but are given by the hotel or the owner of the accommodation.

Tourist-cards (Touristenkarten), on the other hand, can be bought. They are valid for a specific season or for a specific region. One exceptional example connected to a settlement with many year-round attractions, but specifically attracting visitors in the summer season is devised and offered by Bad Kleinkirchheim in Carinthia:

"One card – many pleasures: everything the region has to offer in one card, surfing, sailing, kayaking, a guided hike through the Nockberg Biosphere Park, delightful thermal spas, pony trekking, mountain biking and stand-up paddling – everything for an even more enjoyable summer in Bad Kleinkirchheim is now included in the Bad Kleinkirchheim Regional Card" (Figure 2).

This Card also includes attractive bonus offers from selected partners. The Bad Kleinkirchheim Regional Card is free for all visitors staying in the Bad Kleinkirchheim region and can be used from the first night of the visitors' stay.

Figure 2 Bad Kleinkirchheim Regional Card



Can be used from the first night of your stay!

Source: <http://www.badkleinkirchheim.at/en/bad-kleinkirchheim-card-summer/>, 2014

The Bad Kleinkirchheim Regional Card is, in fact, two cards in one: the Bad Kleinkirchheim Regional Card and the Kärnten Card – issued by the accommodation providers, most of whom automatically include the Kärnten Card Package for the duration of the stay. For example, with the Kärnten Card, tourists can use the (normally quite expensive) cable-cars, use ferries and visit 5 zoos and 16 adventure pools at no cost.

The financial background to the guest-card (as of summer 2014) was that part of the funding is a proportion of the local tourist tax and the other comprises a contribution from hotels and other tourist accommodation. The tourist tax is obligatory for all types of accommodation, but the contribution is voluntary - a form of cooperation. (The actual rate depends on the number of beds in each place of accommodation).

Those owners who pay this voluntary contribution have a premium version of the guest card (in the attachment, the Bad Kleinkirchheim Card and Familien Euro together), and the local tourism organisations pay the negotiated additional supply costs of the premium card version from these contributions. The benefits covered by the card are quite significant and, in act, are useful for local residents also. This small town takes the form of a long, straggling ribbon along a valley which is at various points relatively narrow. This means that the built area leaves little room for car-parking and so the provision of a user-friendly and free bus service along the whole length of the settlement is particularly useful for everyone. Other benefits include reduced cost entry to the baths, totally free access to the cable-cars outside the winter skiing season (an expensive feature of the Austrian tourist scene), a discounted bus-fare to the most attractive Millstättersee – some kilometres distant – and free use of the ferries across and around this lake. To most visitors these are “must do” excursions and represent a significant saving.

Bad Kleinkirchheim's motivation for introducing its generous card is clear. This long-established Winter Sports destination also had the benefit of a still longer established medicinal spa which gave the town some year-round tourist traffic. However, the differences between the seasons were considerable and the local authority devised a particularly attractive package of offers and discounts in an attempt to boost visitor numbers in the May-September period.

SLOW TOURISM AND GUEST CARDS

It is the accepted view that our pace of life has increased hugely in all respects - which has had a negative impact even on holiday activities. The time devoted to relaxation can be spent more effectively if the tourists accept the *slow tourism philosophy*. “Slow tourism corresponds to the needs of a new tourist segment to give up fast, stressful tourism in favour of an interlude of quiet serenity to recollect energies and genuinely enjoy the holiday. The theoretic concept of slow tourism subsumes the original idea of “wellness” based on four pillars: a healthy diet, movement, relaxation, and cultural and spiritual renewal” (Matos 2004, 96).

THE HUNGARIAN 'BEST PRACTICE' EXAMPLE

This concept is now supported by the card system devised by seven Balaton settlements (Balatonalmádi, Alsóörs, Felsőörs, Lovas, Csopak, Balatonfüred and Tihany). The Balaton Best Card is available to guests from their accommodation providers free of charge. With this card they can travel free on the Balaton Volán regular buses between Balatonfüzö and Tihany and

also on the local buses in Balatonfüred itself. A good discount is given in respect of entry to the baths, and those staying more than 4 nights at the Lake can do so free of charge. The nearest similar and successfully functioning card system we can find in Austria, at the Neusiedlersee, which seems to have been the inspiration for the Balaton venture. The owners of the Hungarian version can save even 20-30 thousand forints from their expenses as, with the card, not only can bath visits and the bus travel be free, but from 10 to 25% discounts can be given in several museums, Leisure (Erlebnis) Parks and restaurants.

The Balaton Best Card creates a matrix, which provides the management for the innovative product and marketing networking for the involved organisations and service providers.

The card was launched in April 2013 is a regional beneficial card together with a bundle of connected products and services. By now, more than 50 accommodation providers have joined the system, and the range of benefits is continuously widening. The concept is that the visitors can get the premium beneficial card *free* at the accommodation places involved in the system (but exclusively there), and afterwards they have access to these premium services at almost 80 locations.

We strongly believe that in the current tourism industry-related competition, this specific regional tourism product and the total service package managed by the destination is able to create real value and experience for the interested customers, and so generate provide long-term demand and turnover.

Table 1: BBC Benefits

Customers	service providers	accommodation providers
- free of charge (price built in the accommodation price)	multiplied opportunities (surfaces)	marketing satisfied returning customer
- concentrated experience, focused supply	positive effects of the networking system	- passing responsibility to experts to organise programmes
- premium benefits (between 15-100%)	opportunity to be built in a thematic supply system	building loyalty
- free regional bus lines		- extension of average stay (5-7 days bath free of charge)
- exclusive services (e.g. e-bike seasonal ticket)		

Source: Constructed by Bakucz M. 2016

The aim of the local tourism leaders with the Balaton Best Card (www.balatonbest.hu) is to “slow down” people at the Lake, encourage them to leave their cars at home and use buses, or walk to the various attractions whilst enjoying the landscape and nature. Rather than hurry along the shore, visitors should sit in cafés, talk to people and pay more attention to their own “selves”.

The seven settlements involved devised this card system not on an *ad hoc* basis, but in the light of earlier related research. The concept of slow tourism is also not new to Hungary as Hungarian Tourism Ltd. has published on this issue and their experience has been built into this Balaton Best Card.

Table 2: Balaton Best Cards statistics

Period	2013.04.01-12.31	2014.04.01-12.31	2015.04.01-12.31
Number of cards issued	1248	1288	1742
Registered guest nights	15904	12311	19699
Persons registered to the cards	3347	3271	4571

Source: Constructed by Bakucz, M. based on data Balaton Best TDM, 2016

The Balaton Best Card was introduced in 2013, at the same time as the analysed best practice example in Austria. Both primarily target the summer season, but for different reasons: Bad Kleinkirchheim aims at balancing the main winter season locally; the North Balaton micro-region focuses on supporting and extending the main summer tourism season (which had shrunk noticeably in recent years). In the table above (*Table 2*) we can see that, despite the fact that in the North Balaton micro-region (of 7 lakeside settlements) the number of guest-nights dropped in 2014, the number of cards issued increased slightly compared to the year prior to its issue. This very promising figure is related to 2015, when a relatively high rise in the number of guest-nights resulted in a major increase in the number of cards and, consequently, in the number of persons registered with the Balaton Best Cards (hereafter, BBC). It is, of course, too early to conclude that the increase is due to the introduction of a card providing benefits for tourists locally, as there are several other reasons behind the annual change of tourism performance (e.g. increasing interest in domestic holiday options for external reasons). What is, however, unarguable is that the introduction of such a new promotional product should be undertaken carefully and that time is needed for clear results to be generated.

The financing background of the BBC

- contributions from accommodation providers paid to the BBC Fund,
- income from self-purchases (from advertisements in the BBC magazine and from advertising space on Best E-bikes, from E-bike rental fees and income from guaranteed programme packages),
- local authorities (contributions by the local authorities of related owners),
- project application funds (KDOP, LEADER, GINOP).

Experience to date certainly shows that the accommodation providers have reacted to this system with mixed feelings. Those who understand the mechanism of the operation, are willing to build its cost into their prices, and the related registration and administrative commitments do not cause difficulties as they understand the advantage gained by their guests' extra experience. Mixed feelings also accompany the 100 forints per registered guest night per person paid into the card fund. Supposedly, there are cases when the card is not automatically given, but

it is difficult to prove this directly. However, it is hoped that future financing from project funds, putting more emphasis on marketing this specific tourism product will achieve further progress in the coming years.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HEALTH AND MEDICINAL TOURISM

The development of the establishments and services in spa (medicinal- and thermal) tourism should be harmonised with modern health tourism trends and so help to create up-to-date forms of service. In the complex medicinal establishments of spa settlements, the needs of healthy people searching for relaxation should be met as well as of those suffering from different ailments – and all at the highest possible level.

Longer stays by visitors and higher levels of spending are characteristic of the spa segment as well as reduced seasonality. The overall more balanced demand for health tourism services, however, also reinforces the need for spa tourism to progress and develop.

Slow tourism refers to a special type of holiday during which travellers spend time in the surrounding areas of their targeted destination, often on foot, by bicycle or by public transport. People participating in slow tourism are much more involved in a mutual relationship with the people, places, culture, food, cultural/local heritage and the environment surrounding them than are other tourists. They are happy to use any means of transport to reach a destination since this will often increase the pleasure of visiting a new location and contribute to their holiday.

²Közép-dunántúli Operatív Program (Central Transdanubian Operational Programme)

³"Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale", meaning Links between the rural economy and development actions

⁴Gazdaságfejlesztési és Innovációs Operatív Program (Economic Development and Innovation Operation Programme)

BENEFICIAL CARDS CONNECTED TO SPA SETTLEMENTS

Mapping the different medicinal- and thermal tourism benefits, we found several settlements (Zalaegerszeg, Kaposvár, Sopron, Marcali, Szigetvár, Siklós, Tamási) offering cards with benefits related to the use of the

particular local bath, but also offered to local residents, hence strengthening the feeling of local identity.

Our research dealt with visitors arriving in spa settlements, and the results appear in *Table 3* (below). They show the most important Hungarian settlements in West and South Transdanubia where guest-cards have been successfully introduced

Table 3 Characteristics of Tourist / guest cards available in Hungarian spa-settlements (2014)

	Availability	Free of	Length of time	Usable only in a
	on-line	charge	entitling use	particular settlement
Hévíz	X	@	min. 2 nights	@
Harkány	X	@	min. 1 night	X
Sárvár	@	@	Any short stay	@
Bük	@	X	Any short stay	X
Lipót	@	X	Any short stay	@
Mosonmagyaróvár	X	@	Any short stay	@
Zalakaros	@	X	min. 2 nights	@

Source: Constructed by Bozóti, A. 2015

Looking at the list in the above table (*Table 3*) the quantitative and qualitative differences between the card offers of the two regions are quite obvious. Only two cards were found in South Transdanubia, but one has nothing to do with any spa as it is connected to the unique tourist event of Mohács, the Busó Festival. As such, it provides no benefits for the local bath and so is not listed in our table.

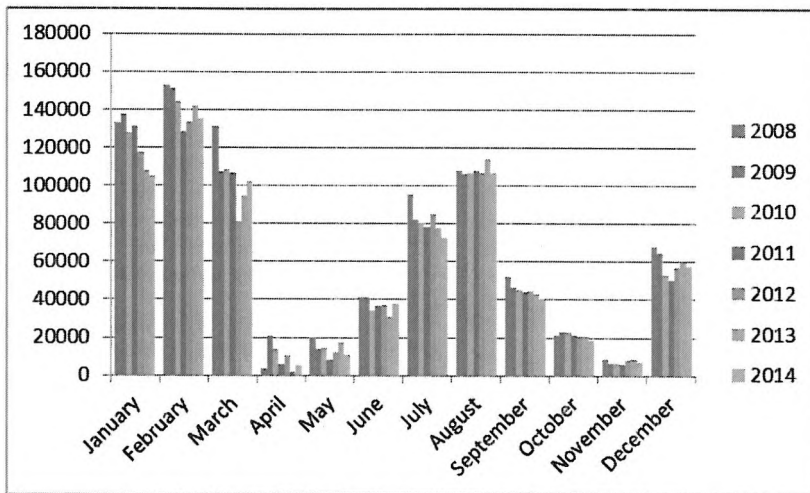
The only spa-related guest-card currently found in South Transdanubia is the Harkány Card (<http://www.harkanyturizmus.hu/en/harkany-kartya>) which can be used for medicinal and thermal services. It can be considered as a combination of different types of card which cannot be ordered on-line, but its great advantage is that it is free of charge and provides many local and regional benefits.

However, there is little else to be said in favour of the Harkány Card and its performance. Whilst the Bad Kleinkirchheim card represents serious Best Practice and the Balaton Best card offers genuine promise due to its professional and particularly active management, the Harkány product has been a total failure. In a 3-year period of life only 1400 cards were issued and so no useful data exists. It is admitted that preparation was totally inadequate in the sense that the advantages of the card were not well explained to the service providers. A few hotels and a small number of catering establishments joined the scheme whilst the great majority of owners of the self-catering

accommodation which is a dominant feature of Harkány rejected the proposal due to a fear of exposing themselves to the tax authorities. This example demonstrates the fact that there is a basic need for minds open and able to understand the simple advantages of cooperation if such schemes are to be successful.

The Austrian Guest Card example (*Figure 2*) shows the same benefits as it promotes the *more intensive year-round tourist flow* - a great advantage for local businesses. At the same time it offers several *free-of charge* transport facilities for tourists, which encourage them to join the new slow tourism trend in order to see and enjoy more of the local attractions. All these benefits can be seen in the case of Bad Kleinkirchheim where the complex guest card was introduced three years ago, in 2012. Since then, the typical winter holiday resort has managed to increase average visitor-nights, especially in the intermediate periods between the busy winter and summer seasons - an encouraging development for any tourism settlement (*Figure 3*):.

Figure 3: Changes in guest nights in Bad Kleinkirchheim, (2008-2014)



Source: Based on data from Bad Kleinkirchheimer Tourismus Marketing GmbH, Horváth Á. 2015

The decline in the tourist flow after the global economic crisis of 2008 is obvious, seen first of all in the winter season, the period of “high quality” tourism, which draws tourists with high personal disposable income to a ski-resort of high prestige and with additional attractions. The economic crisis, together with the traditional seasonality problem (mainly the spring and autumn months), appear to have been balanced by this highly advantageous card offered to visitors.

In respect of the settlements with spas in the two Hungarian regions, several innovative ideas were noted, although all need continuous development. The greatest value is represented by those cards which give benefits to a larger tourism destination area (Bükfürdő- and Szigetköz Cards), related to the particular settlement and its surrounding region, as in our view a card relying only on the primary attractions of one settlement is not enough for the revitalisation and development of the local and regional economy. The price to be paid for the different cards in the two regions also varies: the most expensive is the Zalakaros Card which, obviously, targets customers with higher disposable incomes, but tourists have to pay for the Szigetköz and Bükfürdő Cards, which have a certain validity for the given settlements including their region. From the point of view of the place where the cards are purchased, the situation also varies: three cards can be bought via the Internet (one, the Sárvarfürdő Card can be widely used), but the other three cannot. Internet availability we do not consider an important competitive factor, but rather more decisive is the range of benefits offered by the cards. In

Zalakaros and Hévíz a minimum of two guest nights is required to be able to use the benefits provided by the cards, and so these two settlements are focusing on increasing the average length of stay. However, there is an important difference in that, whilst a relatively high price is paid for the benefits, in Hévíz they are available free.

CONCLUSION

The answers to the research questions posed earlier seem clear: the most productive cards are those which encourage a longer stay and those which apply to the region surrounding a spa destination rather than to the spa alone. The Austrian practice shown above highlights the clear advantages and benefits to be gained from a marketing approach such as this. The predisposition to cooperate and take the broader view may typify - to some extent at least - the business philosophy of our neighbours, and it is encouraging to see that this lead is now being followed by certain, more aware Hungarian settlements. Inevitably, perhaps, these are the relatively sophisticated spas close to the Austrian border in West Transdanubia and the relatively prosperous locations of the North Shore of Lake Balaton. However, in South Transdanubia only Harkány has progressed to the point where some scheme with a similar background has appeared. Further, even though the need for effective action is great, the limitations of this particular card are clear. What would be most effective would be a free card which could be used more widely – regionally - as is the case in Bad Kleinkirchheim. Sadly, this may not be

easy to introduce in Harkány, due to the high proportion of visitors accommodated in private rooms and apartments where only a modest amount of Tourist Tax is collected. (This problem applies, of course, to Hungarian spa settlements in general). At the same time, the potential region could embrace the neighbouring spa settlement of Siklós (locked for yeas in an unproductive war with Harkány over thermal water) and the famous Wine Road from Harkány to Villány. The railway line was closed some years ago (unlikely to have happened in Austria), but there is no sign of any attempt to organise tourist-related transport which could link the two settlements profitably.

The Hévíz and Balaton Cards are Hungary's best practice examples, and we would certainly urge their wider adoption, whilst we would also argue that the range and coverage of the Harkány product be seriously improved.

To motivate all stake-holders – the local authority, local business people, local tourism organisations - in the tourism industry must be the common goal to achieve the highest possible results for the local economy and local residents.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER LITERATURE

- Balaton Best Card**, www.balatonbest.hu
Balaton Kártya, <http://www.balatoncard.hu/public/home.php>
 Bükfürdő Turisztikai Kártya, <http://www.visitbuk.hu/hu/info/hirarchivum/ke-dvezmenykartya-bukfurdon--bukfurdo-card-akar-elore-is-megrendelhető.html>
 Data from Bad Kleinkirchheimer Tourismus Marketing GmbH (2015), <http://www.badkleinkirchheim.at/en/bad-kleinkirchheim-card-summer/>
 Harkány Turisztikai Kártya, <http://www.harkanyturizmus.hu/en/harkany-kartya>
 Hévíz Turisztikai Kártya, <http://www.kolping.hotel.hu/Egy-kartya--dupla-elony>
 Kotler, P. (2002), *Marketingmenedzsment*. KJK-KERSZÖV Jogi és Üzleti Kiadó, Budapest.
 Kreativitás és innováció a turizmusban (2013), http://www.turizmusonline.hu/aktualis/cikk/kreativitas_es_innovacio_a_turizmusban
 Magyar Turizmus Kártya, <http://www.hungarycard.hu/index.php?p=ismerteto>
 Matos R. (2004), Can Slow Tourism Bring New Life to Alpine Regions? In: Weiermair K. - Mathies C. (Eds.): *The Tourism and Leisure Industry: Shaping the Future*. Chapter 6, 96 THHP, NY, London, Oxford
 Michalkó G. (2011), *Turisztikai terméktervezés és*

- fejlesztés*, Pécsi Tudományegyetem, Pécs <http://www.eturizmus.pte.hu/szakmai-anyagok/Turisztikai%20term%20tervez%C3%A9s%20%C3%A9s%20fejleszt%C3%A9s/book.html#d6e65>
 Saarinen J. (2006), Traditions of sustainability in Tourism Studies, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33. Issue 4, 1121-1140
 Sárvarfürdő Kártya, http://www.sarvarfurdo.hu/sarvarfurdo_card
 Szigetköz Kártya, <http://www.szigetkozport.hu/hu/egyesuletunk/szigetkoz-kartya/>
 Veres Z. (2005), *Szolgáltatásmarketing*, KJK-KERSZÖV, Budapest
 Zalakaros Turisztikai Kártya, <http://www.clubkaros.hu/>

Márta Bakucz, PhD, Associate Professor
 bakucz@tk.pte.hu

Ádám Horváth, Assistant Lecturer
 horvatha@tk.pte.hu

András Bozóti, PhD student
 andras.bozoti@gmail.com

University of Pécs
 Faculty of Business and Economics