

HORTOBÁGY TOURIST SIGHTS BASED ON HUNGARIAN GRAY CATTLE AND SHEPHERD TRADITIONS-BRIEF OVERVIEW

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Abstract: In their work, the authors focused on one of the outstanding tourist attractions of the oldest Hungarian national park, the Hortobágy National Park, on the tourist attraction built on the stock of Hungarian gray cattle and the breed. The compiled material was based on literature sources. The role of gray cattle covers several areas, such as the preservation of genetic value, the use of Hortobágy pastures, the production of organic meat and meat products, a scenic attraction, the basis of seasonal programs and the continuation of pastoral traditions.

Key words: Hungarian grey cattle, Hortobágy National Park, tourist destination, shepherd's events, organic products

INTRODUCTION

Hortobágy, the flattest islet of the Central Tisza region, with an area of 2,300 km², is bordered by the Tisza in the northwest, the Nagykunság in the south, the once swampy Sárre, and the Hajdúsági-lőszha in the east. The bare surface of the plain, which was formed in the Quaternary period, was formed by the construction work of the rivers. Until the middle of the last century, it was the floodplain of the Tisza [7]. Today, it is one of the largest small landscapes in Hungary, characterized by quite a lot of "most", 1,600 km² of which fall on the territory of Hajdú-Bihar county. Here are the most pastures, the largest expanse of alkaline soil (not only in Hungary, but in the whole of Europe), the most remnants of marshes, the sparsest population and the sparsest road network, etc (Figure 1).

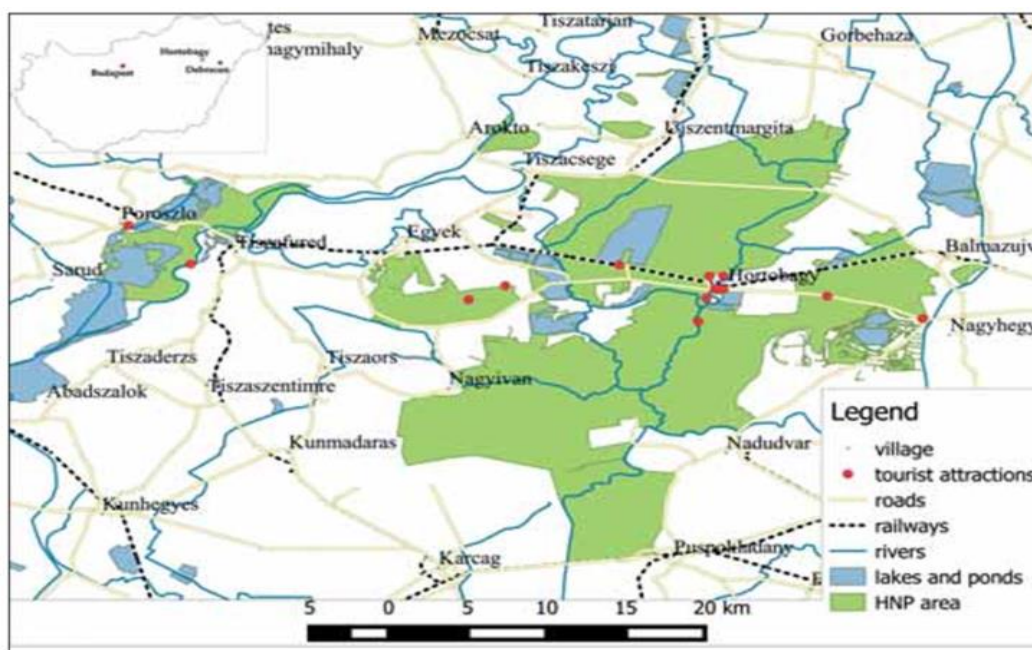


Figure 1. Map of Hortobágy [4] (Legend: HNP: Hortobágy National Park)

Hortobágy (as a geographical unit) is located in Eastern Hungary, forming a subregion of the Northern Great Plain. A large part of the area (approx. 80,000 ha) contains

various nature conservation-related areas with significant overlapping boundaries: Hortobágy National Park (1973), Biosphere Reserve (1979), Ramsar Area (1979), World Heritage (1999), NATURA 2000 Site (2007), Starry Dark Sky Park (2011) [14]. (In parentheses is the year the title was awarded.)

Thanks to the ecotourism developments that are being implemented at an increasing pace after the turn of the millennium and are concentrated in national park areas, positive changes can already be seen in our country. The expanding tourist offer is clearly reflected in the growing tourist demand. Between 2000 and 2009, the visitor traffic registered by the directorates of the national parks showed a 153.9% increase. At the same time, the number of visitors in 2009 (1,386,589 people) is still orders of magnitude lower compared to the countries leading in ecotourism [1].

In the framework of this article, we present the oldest and most well-known Hortobágy National Park and the settlement of Hortobágy, focusing on the development of the tourism offer and visitor traffic related to the Hungarian gray cattle and shepherding traditions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The significance of the Hungarian gray cattle in the life of the Northern Great Plain and Hortobágy National Park (HNP) was summarized based on data from the literature. The short review aims to present the contemporary significance of the traditional breed through its impact on rural tourism.

RESULTS

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the system of shepherding in Hortobágy as we know it today was developed, which left many native breeds (gray cattle, rack sheep, Mangalica pigs, etc.) as well as a cultural-historical memory for posterity. The tasks of the HNP also include the restoration and preservation of decaying pastoral buildings. Among them, the "vasaló" (roofless, reed-walled cooking place), the wing (the reed wall that protects the livestock from the wind) and the burial pit (a pit dug to the ground water level, with a drain carved into the ground for the livestock) have disappeared today. The condition of the boom wells and ditches is also inadequate. The Hortobágy Kilenclükü bridge (bridge with nine arches) is located on the edge of Hortobágy settlement. It was built in 1826 based on the plans of Ferenc Pavolny. This is Hungary's longest road stone bridge. The Hortobágyi Nagycsárda at the foot of the bridge has been welcoming travelers for nearly 300 years. Opposite it, on the other side of highway no. 33, is the former coach house, which today houses the Shepherd Museum. Kadarcsi Csárda is located at the 86th kilometer marker of highway no. 33 and was built in 1761. The Meggyes Csárda is the only building operating as an inn museum in the Hortobágy National Park; it may have been built around 1760. The Zádor Bridge is a monument located outside the HNP, but in a protected area [3].

Visitor traffic shows a strong seasonality, and visitor peaks are linked to long-standing events - Bridge Fair, Horse Days. The spectacular trampling damage, air pollution and littering at the venues of these events that attract large crowds, as well as the damage caused by people walking in the park area (picking flowers, picking mushrooms, disturbing animals) is one of the reasons why the HNP's relationship with tourism so far is rather one of fear and detachment is characterized by an attitude that strongly advocates improvements rather than increasing guest traffic.

Tourism and, within that, eco-tourism, is the utilization of Hortobágy offers new opportunities for the people living here. The development of ecotourism and the presentation of the world heritage site are closely related to the preservation of natural and landscape values, the maintenance and presentation of traditional forms of land use.

Without the presentation of pastoral traditions, pastoral buildings, ancient and current fishing, and the preservation of cultural-historical values, the plain would lose its appeal. The basic condition of the development was the construction of a high-quality visitor center in order to provide information, expand the offer and present it in a high-quality manner [2]. The attractions are presented to the guests by building nature trails and controlling the view, so that they are not deprived of the joy of discovery. The tourism and ecotourism development of the wilderness cannot be imagined without the development of the settlements around the national park.

The professionals of the Hortobágy National Park Administration (hereinafter HNPI) updated their development ideas from time to time as the application opportunities expanded. Thanks to the well-defined ideas and effective tendering activities, HNP and other service providers interested in tourism received large amounts of support from various sources [8]. The most significant facility of the HNPI was the Visitor Center and Handicraft Yard, realized with a multi-stage investment, which began operating at full capacity in 2008. The multi-functional building also houses an information office, a multimedia exhibition space, rooms for professional meetings, conferences and education, a craft yard and a gift shop. The exhibitions at the HNP's presentation locations have also been renewed from time to time, and its presentation tools have been modernized. The new exhibition of the Pásztor múzeum, Pásztorvilág in Hortobágy, has been waiting for visitors since 2006. The Hortobágyi Körszín also served with novelties almost every year. The Nyugati Fogadó Gallery was given a new face in 2002, the Szálkahalmi exhibition hall in 2002 and 2007. The National Shepherd Meeting and Shepherd Competition started in 2000, and the Délibáb "Mirage" Run for those who like performance tours started in 2004. The St. George's Day Herding Festival and National Organic Fair, which revives the events of animal husbandry in the steppe, Pásztoradvent, i.e. the Autumn Herding Festival, and the Hungarian Gray Bull Fair have become recurring events since the middle of the decade.

It is characteristic of the visitors that Hortobágy, as a destination, was visited more for the purpose of a one-day trip, knowledge, or experience. It is rare for tourists who come here to spend several days in Hortobágy. It is much more typical that tourists arriving in the region spend several days in the area, during which they also get to know Hortobágy[11]. In terms of attraction area, Hortobágy's visitors mainly live east of the Danube, especially in the area of the landscape unit, in its immediate surroundings in the surrounding counties.

The life of shepherds followed the rhythm of nature [15]. There were few holidays in their simple life, but they were celebrated with dignity. Such significant days were during the drive-out, the drive-in, and the period of the animal fairs. The Hortobágy Bridge Fair and Horse Days have been organized for decades and are nationally renowned events that welcome tens of thousands of visitors each time. A new program was added to the calendar: the Harvest Festival organized at the end of April, and the accompanying National Organic Fair, which has grown into a serious event in a few years. The Hortobágy Horse Days, organized during Pentecost, became a true celebration of shepherds. As a new highlight, the National Hermen's Competition and the Shepherds' Meeting were added to the event, which gives an insight into the daily life of the goulash farmers and presents the masterstrokes of Silaj animal husbandry. The festive atmosphere is ensured by the newly organized Shepherd's Dance Competition. Shepherd's Advent, which is also a harvest holiday, also marks the end of the grazing and tourism season. Safari – 20 minute off-road ride in Puszta. The target area consists of big animal pasturelands (e.g. Hungarian grey cattle).

Due to its extensive nature, gray cattle require a large area of pasture, which, depending on the place of production, can be up to 5-10 hectares per animal [9]. 70% of the gray cattle herd can be found in the Hortobágy, Kiskunsági, Fertő-Hansági, Balaton-Felvidéki and Körös-Maros Menti National Parks. We cannot talk about the processing and sales system developed in the case of gray beef products, the reasons for which are the extremely low number of herds, the decreasing consumption of beef and the unfavorable economic conditions. The breeders themselves are interested in getting the gray beef to the market, the gray cattle ready for slaughter is taken to the small slaughterhouses and then made suitable for consumption in contract processors. The sales channels are limited for the time being, and the consumer can only occasionally encounter products made from gray cattle beef. Only 20% of sales are made as raw materials (live animals), the other products leave meat plants in semi-finished form (fillets, after freezing) or as finished products.

The role of the Nature and Gene Conservation Public Company (Hortobágy Co.) in the food supply is relevant. The farm is well-known in Hungary, as a producer of organic food. The Hortobágy Co, does farming on more than 2000 hectares of arable land. Their main products are wheat, oil repps, oil pumpkin, mustard, barley and they own more than 15000 hectares of meadows and grasslands, where their livestock consist of Hungarian grey cattle (Figure 2), Racka sheep and horses [6]. Similarly to conventional farmers, they sell their products to wholesale companies abroad, as well as in Hungary. Although the market of their products is relatively small, but their market relations are much more stable.



Figure 2. Group of young grey cattle

The possibilities of the supply side based on the example of the Northern Great Plain Based on a previous study by the author [10], let us see some of the various local, traditional and landscape-specific agricultural and food products on offer in the Northern Great Plain: gray beef, Hortobágy racka sheep, Debrecen sausage, etc.

The economic analysis of the short- and long-term economic conditions of beef production and the gray cattle sector and the evaluation of the gray cattle husbandry technology of Hortobágy Nature Conservation and Gene Preserver Nonprofit Kft. Due to the management technology of the company, it is in a secure income position under the given economic and social conditions, and thus its operation results in a secure survival for the future as well [13]. The costs of producing fodder for winter feeding and the subsidy

amounts that can be applied for are the factors that most determine the profitability of the given farm.

The consumption of gray beef is extremely low, only 12% of those surveyed have this specialty on their tables with some regularity (but certainly not more often than every 2-3 months). Thus, it must be taken into account that due to the low number of items, possible conclusions can only be drawn cautiously [12]. Education and place of residence influence consumption. 36.7% of those with a diploma, while the max. only 5.0% of primary school graduates choose this meat, 23.2% of the respondents in the capital are among the consumers, while in the countryside this value is a maximum of 10.4%.

The residents interviewed in the region expressed a positive opinion in connection with traditional and regional foods, according to a survey, they mostly buy and consume these products regularly. In the case of the presence of the products on the market, however, from the point of view of rationality, it would be worthwhile to emphasize economy, possibly a more favorable price compared to competitors, and excellent quality, which factors increase customer satisfaction and the feeling of the usefulness of the purchase [5]. There was no correlation between the income situation of the families and the purchase of traditional foods in the Northern Great Plains region. From an emotional point of view, it can also be justified that the knowledge of the place of origin, the reliable origin, the traceability of the product, and the information of the customer could be put in the center.

CONCLUSIONS

The main findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

- All indigenous animals: the herds of silver-grey Hungarian cattle with crested horns, herds of Racka sheep with spiral horns, herds of Mangalitzas, stallions of Nonius, and the life of their caretakers the shepherds as well as their helpers: the achievements of the Puli, Pumi, Mudi, Kuvás and Komondor dog breeds, - are all very attractive to strangers.
- Tourist movement in HNP is strictly connected with seasons of year. The extreme period is in July and August, which is connected with the holiday time. Most of the attractions are not available outside of the holiday period.
- Special events (shows) based on gray cattle:
 - April 24. St. George's Day is the time when the animals are driven to pasture.
 - October 21-26. St. Dömötör's Day is the time when the animals are driven in from the pasture.
 - October: breeding evaluation of three-year-old bulls. The bulls that perform well in the judging are sent to the producers of the Carpathian Basin.
- The consumption of gray cattle meat and meat products is increasing despite rising prices.
 - The biggest problem is that the complex tourist products that make people want to stay for several days are quite absent from Hortobágy's range. We can hope for a change from the establishment of the local TDM organization - created to strengthen the tourism competitiveness of Debrecen and Hortobágy - whose financial basis can be created by an awarded subsidy. In the future, this organization can ensure the cooperation of the parties interested in tourism, the assessment of market needs, take part - taking into account the interests of nature conservation - in the development of tourist products, provide their marketing, sales and communication with tourists.

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