

5 | Development possibilities of Central-European tourism industry

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While the most important tourist sites in the US, e.g. the Time Square in NY, the Mall in Washington, the Disney World in Florida, or the main “destinations” of Western Europe, like Paris, London, etc. attract huge crowds of people, several other European areas are dissatisfied with the number of their visitors. Hereinafter, we are attempting to review the catching up possibilities of the Central-European tourism industry, since it extremely lags behind that of the Western-European countries. And finally, based on our statements, we are proposing a most intensive co-operation among the states concerned.

Key words: tourism statistics, touristic attractiveness, top travel destinations

INTRODUCTION

It is well known, that nowadays tourism is quite a significant economic factor with growing importance. Thus, a large number of different organizations, economies, e.g. the EU and most of the Central European countries urge the exploitation of the economic possibilities arising from tourist attractions, beautiful sights, well-known historical monuments, or destinations found indifferent areas, and promising great adventures, pleasant recreation or recovery. For example the Treaty of Lisbon stipulates that Member States should promote the competitiveness of their tourism sector, they also have to intensify their co-operation and create a favourable framework for economic development in that area (XXI. Title: Tourism, article 176/b).

Thus on the following pages we are trying to analyse in detail the specific possibilities and tasks of the Central European tourism. Our work was inspired by certain results of the Eger Eszterházy Károly College's (EKF) research entitled 'Educational innovation in the field of hotel-manager qualification' and built on the analysis of several interviews conducted with tourism managers. The research showed that on numerous topics (e.g. on the Central-European attractions) the knowledge of graduates does not meet the requirements of the employers. In order to ease this difficulty the College has collected information on the “must-to visit” destinations of the region and based on the results of our applied research it has elaborated a new curriculum (see: 2011 issue of Periodica Oeconomica published by EKF).

In the 2nd paragraph of our article we go through the different interpretations of the notion of tourism; in the 3rd we study the statistical problems in the measurement of tourist trade. In the 4th paragraph we examine the main Central European must-to-visit tourist sites

(supply elements), based on statistics and published estimations. Then, in the 5th paragraph, in an unusual way in the professional literature, we also point out the problems to be solved in the tourism development²² (which are in general untold by other authors). Some of these problems will be presented by the help of professional articles, interviews, others based on the experiences of the authors themselves. It is our firm belief that the concealment of the problems is not a good advertising gimmick, but a kind of guest-deterrent misdirection which turns out to be public in no time (and we find it an unnecessary ostrich policy obstructing the real solution). At the same time our approach makes possible to survey not only the current tasks of Central Europe but also the solutions to the practical problems in the area.

1. DEFINITION OF TOURISM

While presenting our research results we have to draw attention first of all to the fact, that although the phenomenon of what we call nowadays 'tourism' was already frequent²³ in ancient times, the definition of this term is not uniform even up to now.²⁴ Of course, in our analysis we try to follow the worldwide accepted and broadly-defined description of the United Nations' World Tourism Organization of the United Nations (UNWTO), which states that tourism '*is the activity of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes*' (e.g. UNWTO, 1995, p.14). However, the traditional notion is narrower than the quoted one,²⁵ e.g. only the nature-lovers with boots and backpacks are commonly called tourists, and visiting a theatre, realizing study-tours, shopping- or conference trips, or using medical services in a spa, or a pilgrimage is rarely considered to be referred to as tourism.

The statistical practice uses other interpretations since it had to accept compromises in order to facilitate the measurement of the tourist flows. The traditional²⁶ methods and main problems of this measurement are summed up in the table below (Table I). The main conclusion of the table is that none of the present-day statistical indexes can give full-scale information on the real extent of the UNWTO's tourist-flow reading.

²² The reason behind our analysis is the statement of Argyris (1976), since he argued that the analysis of a problem is the first step to its correction.

²³ It is often referred that the first trade routes had been created in prehistoric times and the Greeks literally organised visitors for the Olympic Games in 776 BC (Lengyel, 1992). Perrottet (2002) provides a persuading review of Roman tourism aiming at visiting the well-known sights.

²⁴ In detail see e.g. UN (2010).

²⁵ The wide scope of the activities observed by the UNWTO's statistics is characterised well e.g. that in accordance with their data in 2011 the purpose was leisure, pleasure, recreation, and holiday in 51% of the "inbound tourism" visits, visiting friends and relatives, healing, exercise of religion and other in 27%, business or professional travel in 15%, and not specified in 7% (UNWTO 2012).

²⁶ OECD worked out a new system, based on financial indexes (Tourism Satellite Accounts), See: OECD (2012).

Table 1: Most well-known tourism statistics and their characteristics

Indexes	Registered flows	Non-registered flows
Number of border crossings	Foreign tourists coming for more than 1 day ^x	Domestic tourists ^{xx} Guests arriving for 1 day ^{xxx}
Turnover data of accommodations	Visitors arriving for more than 1 day	Visitors arriving for 1 day ^{xxx}
Number of sold admission cards	Paying guests (including local inhabitants)	Guests entering free of charge ^{xx}

^x In the EU the number of internal border crossings is estimated.

^{xx} Lack of data is often compensated by estimations.

^{xxx} The frequency of one-day trips is examined by targeted surveys.

Source: own edition

The notion of “Central Europe” needs to be defined as well, since during most of the second half of the 20th century, when Europe was divided into West and East, this area was considered (by the public opinion and also by many authors) to be part of “Eastern Europe”. Since the fall of the Berlin wall, distinction between the old and the new EU member states is widely thought reasonable. Basically due to our limited information base hereinafter we also concentrate to the latter mentioned group of countries that are attempting to catch-up.

2. ATTRACTIVENESS OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS

In order to work out developmental decisions on tourist trade, it is an important question, whether how many tourists came to a specific area in a defined period and why (i.e. **how attractive was the given area and by what factors could it be explained**). However in spite of the several decade-long efforts of statisticians, answering this question is very difficult even nowadays. Notwithstanding the under mentioned data and the researches on this issue (e.g.: KPMG, 2002) it is still not clear enough which destinations²⁷ attract tourists to Central Europe.

The most common²⁸ data used to describe tourist trade, referring to the *international* (the cross-border) *tourist flow*; reflect the nearly continuous growth of the number of tourists. According to the worldwide accepted estimation of the UNWTO's International Tourism Barometer, in 2011 the number of border-crossing tourists in the world reached approximately 1 billion. The tourism trade income was over 1.000 billion USD (740 billion Euros). It is good news for Europe that nearly half of the travellers were tourists visiting this continent.

However, **neither this information, nor the distribution of the flow by countries does say much about the reasons**. Although it is useful to know that according to the UNWTO data in 2010 *most foreign tourists* entered France (77 million) and the list goes on

²⁷ According to the Forbes magazine destinations can be historical and cultural places of interest, natural sights, places of amusement and recreation. The first travel list in history was the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It was first mentioned by Antipater of Sidon in his epigram written in the 2nd century BC. At that time the seven wonders consisted of the followings: the pyramids of Giza, the Semiramis' hanging garden, the Artemis church of Ephesus, the Zeus statue of Olympia, the mausoleum of Halicarnassus, the colossus of Rhodes, the pharos of Alexandria. The list has changed a lot by the thousands of years, today of the seven original wonders only the Great Pyramid of Giza remains.

²⁸ It is well-known that concerning the tourism issue the number of information published only in manuscripts, even confidential documents is too high (Wöber 1997). Similarly to the practice of most other branches, publishing the most important sectorial data (e.g. the number of visitors at the principal destinations) by the official statistics (free of charge) would be the fundamental interest of the branch.

with the following nine countries: the USA (60 million), China (56 million), Spain (53 million), Italy (44 million), the United Kingdom (28 million), Turkey and Germany (27-27 million), Malaysia (25 million), and finally Mexico (23 million), but these numbers do not inform us about the factors influencing the tourist flows. Similarly, even if we cite that the Central European ranking is as follows: Poland (13,4 million tourists), Hungary (10,3 million), Czech Republic (8,8 million), Bulgaria (6,3 million), Slovenia (2 million), Romania and Slovakia (1,5 million) and Croatia (9,9 million), still we do not know, why we cannot find any Central-European country among the European top ten.²⁹

Data showing the number of the visitors of certain cities give somewhat more information about the reasons/purposes of tourism than national data. It is apparent though that the common statistics analyze only *the foreign tourist trade* in the case of the cities as well. E.g. Euromonitor International (2012), at the basis of national statistics, airports' and hotels' data 30 ranks Hong Kong, Singapore and London the most visited cities in 2010 (with approx. 20, 18, 15 million inbound tourists respectively). The followings are Macao, Bangkok, Antalya, Kuala Lumpur, New York, Paris and Istanbul (the former ones with approx. 10 million visitors each, and the last two cities with approximately 9, and 8 million, respectively). This shows clearly that according to Euromonitor International's statistics none of Central Europe's towns is among the first ten most visited cities of the world. According to the publication **the most visited city of the latter area is Prague with its 23rd place** (and with almost 4 million visitors), **the followings are Budapest and Warsaw at the 42nd and 47th places** (with 2,6 and 2,5 million visitors respectively). Finally it mentions Bucharest and Varna from the area (with 2,1 and 1,5 million visitors). Other estimations also give similar results. Wikipedia's 2011 year list (raising as well the problem of comparability) of the most visited countries starts with Paris and London (with approximately 15 million foreign tourists), and follows with Antalya and New York (with around 10 million visitors). The next places on the list were taken by Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Dubai, Hong Kong (with 9 million visitors, in the latter case excluding Chinese tourists!), and finally by Istanbul and Bangkok (with 8 and 7 million visitors). Though rankings taking into account the number of domestic tourists as well are rare, but they show that this correction modifies significantly the quoted rankings. For example according to Law's (2002, p. 10) estimations at the turn of the millennium the most visited cities were London, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Orlando, Tokyo, (great) Paris, New York, Chicago (the first with 30 million tourists, the following with 20 million tourists each). Half of the visitors of the European cities were foreigners, while the majority (in the case of Las Vegas the vast majority) of the US cities' visitors were domestic tourists. On Law's list containing 37 cities, at the 34th place Prague was the first and sole Central European town (with about 3 million visitors).

Based on some available data we might draw careful conclusions on the possible motivations of those tourist visits as well. E.g. on the internet one can find (Gallup poll based, but undoubtedly subjective) information on the factors explaining the attractiveness of some cities. According to the *ucityguides* (2012) for example, on the world's top 10 most *beautiful* cities' list Prague is at the 3d place and Budapest at the 9th and among the 10 most *romantic* cities it mentions Prague at the 4th place. At the same time no Central-European city is mentioned neither on the 10 must-to-see cities for the cosmopolitan travellers nor on the 10 ugliest ones and the authors of the *ucityguides* think that the world's

²⁹ Of course the limited reliability of these rankings cannot be neglected while evaluating the above mentioned statistics. E.g. the fact that the ranking does not take into consideration domestic tourism at all can be a significant distorting effect. This problem is even more important taking into consideration that the different countries have different size: the inhabitants of a small country have to go abroad to visit several types of attraction at once, while residents of a large country can find almost anything in their home country. Furthermore we cannot forget that statistics concerning tourist flow within the EU are simple estimations since the elimination of border controls among European countries. However, the moderate Central European performance cannot be explained even with these methodological commentaries.

³⁰ The reliability of this ranking is diminished by the fact that the method of calculation was not unified.

10 best shopping streets are also outside Central-Europe.³¹ There's no doubt that these rankings are to be considered as explicative references on the volume of the tourist turnover.

The estimations on the tourist destinations' attractiveness can give complementary information on the reasons of the tourist visits' spatial distribution. So, we have to take notice of the fact that **at present there is no Central European attraction among the most visited ones.** For example the Forbes list of the "50 most visited tourist attractions of the World" of 2009 ranked a square in New York City, the Times Square at the first place with 35 million visitors. The second place was occupied by a park in Washington DC, the National Mall with 25 million visitors, and at the third place stood Disney World Florida, with almost 17 million visitors. There were only 3 European attractions among the first 10 most visited places of the list: the Trafalgar Square of London, the Notre Dame of Paris and the Disneyland near Paris (with 15, 12 and 10,6 million visitors per year respectively). Apart from the above mentioned ones, only 3 other European (all 3 French from Paris!) sights are found among the 11th-20th top destinations: the Sacre Coeur, the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower of Paris (with 8 – 7,5 – 6,7 million visitors). The 21st place is occupied by the Pleasure Beach of Blackpool, UK; the 25-27ths are occupied by the Pompidou Centre of Paris, the Tate Gallery and the British Museum of London, while the 29th of the ranking is the National Gallery of London. Looking at the group of the first 50 sights of the Forbes list – apart from the above mentioned European sights found between the first 30 – we can find the following European spots: the Tivoli Gardens of Copenhagen, the Vatican and the Coliseum of Rome, the Natural History Museum of London and the London Eye, the Palace of Versailles, Pompeii, and the Hermitage Museum of Saint Petersburg (the latest with 2.5 million visitors). The poll opinion based thematic grouping of ucityguides (2012), which can be debated as well, is favouring a bit more for Central Europe. However it does not rank any Central-European museum among the 10 most well-known places of the world, but it ranks Warsaw's old town the 21th on its list of the most wonderful urban sites of the world, it qualified the New York Café of Budapest as the world's most beautiful Café, and it lists 7th Andrassy street of Budapest among the top 10 greatest boulevards.³²

In addition we have to recognise that the destinations mentioned in the above presented world-rankings are mainly historical and cultural attractions and places of amusement. There aren't any natural landscapes, resting places, educational or healing spots among them. The reasons behind this are not known, they might root in the difficulties of the calculation of visitors, or in marketing aspects. (E.g. we found in the Croatian tourism statistics of 2010 that the number of tourists arriving to the different regions of the Adriatic coast were as follows: Istria 2,6 million, Primorje-gorski 2 million, Zadar 1 million, Split-Dalmatia 1,6 million, Dubrovnik 1 million, and we think that the majority of those visitors show up at the seacoast as well. So, we can state, that this 'natural landscape and resting place' is an important Central European tourism place as well.

³¹ It is also worth mentioning that according to the list of ucityguides (2012) the world's most beautiful cities are Venice, Paris, Prague, Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro, Amsterdam, Florence, Rome, Budapest and Bruges. At the same time the top 10 must-to-see cities for the cosmopolitan travellers are New York, Paris, London, Rome, Barcelona, Madrid, Amsterdam, Berlin, Lisbon and Istanbul.

³² Of course, the compilation methods of the quoted lists are often criticised as well. Although in some cases they are more or less precise (for example those compiled on the base of the number of the issued admission cards) but at the same time they take into account resident persons as well (i.e. one condition of the UNWTO's definition of the tourism trips, namely "the staying outside their places of residence", is not fulfilled). At other times, e.g. in the case of the above mentioned Forbes list determining the number of visitors at a given "corner" (the Time square) or public park (Mall), they are prepared by using quite uncertain methods. The ironic remarks of Larriva - Weisert (2007) regarding the possible distortions of such lists have provoked significant echo world-wide (they challenged for example that Forbes' lists qualified all visitors of Rome as tourists, but they did not take into account Mecca's visitors because of the supposed religious purposes of their travel). Similar example can be the polish city of Czestochowa (known for its famous Pauline monastery of Jasna Gora), which is a famous pilgrimage destination and according to different information sources is visited by more than 5 million people per year. Thus in reality Czestochowa is one of the most visited Central European towns.

We presume that on the basis of our modest analysis (and the statistics of the appendix) two findings can be formulated in spite of the quoted methodological problems. On one hand we can state that in Central Europe there are only two or three cities having comparable attractiveness to that of the most visited European cities. These are Prague, Budapest – and maybe Warsaw. On the other hand, we have to conclude that neither these capitals, nor the whole Central-European region have any tourist attraction, whose data of attendance could be compared to that of the world's top destinations.

3. TENTATIVE INVENTORY OF THE MAIN CENTRAL EUROPEAN ATTRACTIONS

Although there are a great number of documents on the tourist attractions of Central Europe, it is still a very difficult task to give a reliable review about the subject, because we have only little information on their attractiveness (see the appendix). Thus we try to create hereinafter a (perhaps subjective) list of the most important destinations of the region, based on the information basis of the Internet³³, ³⁴ – and our own experiences.³⁵

Bulgaria – From among the more than 4 million hits reviewing the country's tourist attractions we've selected the informative official tourist portal of Bulgaria (<http://bulgariatravel.org/>). It displays more than 60 different destinations, half of them are cities qualified as worth to visit (e.g. VelikoTarnovo and Tryavna). The other bigger group of destinations presented on the webpage is "holiday resorts", among these we can find Albena and Nesebar, pearls of the Black Sea's beaches, the Town of Velingrad in the Rhodope mountain, which is said to be one of the leading "balneological" resorts in the Balkans, as well as Bansko and Borovets winter resorts in ski regions of Bulgaria. We also need to mention the Rila Monastery, which is one of Bulgaria's symbols, and has always been the spiritual, cultural, and educational centre of the country.

Croatia – Looking at the 18,5 million references found, it quickly becomes obvious that the top attraction of the country is the Adriatic coast. Beyond the beautiful landscapes and the beaches, recommendations also draw attention to the basilica of Porec; the city of Split, centred around the ancient Roman Palace of the Emperor Diocletian; the mediaeval, now pedestrian-only Old Town of the city of Dubrovnik, nicknamed as "Pearl of the Adriatic" and listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site; as well as to the islets such as Hvar, Korcula, and Mljet. The user friendly webpage of the Croatian National Tourist Board (<http://croatia.hr/en-GB/Discover-Croatia>) has a list of almost 400 destinations, displays all the Croatian sites listed among as UNESCO World Heritages, potential tourists can find anything from cities, through holiday resorts, to nature parks on the website. Zagreb's sightseeing, the Plitvica

³³ The above referred documents were downloaded early September 2012 for the presented review. We intend to refer to official homepages which display destinations that are considered widely as worth seeing. But of course there are a great number of other homepages about this issue (e.g. Google web search engine finds 76 million results on Central Europe tourist attractions to the key phrase "tourist place Central Europe").

³⁴ We can find webpages (that of travel agencies, travel magazines, travellers' blogs) which give the advice of visiting not the best known but other, less travelled regions/cities of Europe and Central and Eastern Europe. This fact shows that in the opinion of some professionals (and enthusiastic travellers) several places in Central Europe possess similar level of attractiveness to that of the traditional destinations. Just to quote some: Boots n All travel guide for example suggests to explore 'Six alternative destinations' of Central Europe instead of the most popular ones (namely Wrocław, Český Krumlov, Esztergom and Bled instead of Warsaw, Kutna Hora, Bratislava and Ljubljana) (<http://www.bootsnall.com/articles/12-03/off-the-beaten-path-destinations-central-europe.html>). Los Angeles Times Travel section has also created a list of the less common European destinations which are alternatives worth visiting ("In Europe, 76 destinations of the beaten path" <http://www.latimes.com/travel/la-tr-europe-pg.o.1402546.photogallery>), while Brilliant Travel has 10 suggestions (<http://blog.brillianttrips.com/2009/07/ten-off-the-beaten-path-places-to-visit-in-europe/>).

³⁵ Authors know nearly all hereunder mentioned destinations.

Lakes, furthermore at the seashore the antique churches of Zadar, Sibenik's renaissance cathedral and the mediaeval town of Trogir are perhaps the most quoted sites beside the attractions of the Adriatic resorts.

Czech Republic – About 8 million hits refer to tourism possibilities in the Czech Republic. The official homepage of the Czech Tourism Office is of high standard (<http://www.czechtourism.com/home>), displaying the capital Prague, and listing the Czech cultural heritages, health and spa centres and recommending places for active holiday spending during the winter as well as in the summer. Beyond Prague, the most recommended cities are Brno, Ceski Krumlov, Olomuc, Plzen, Ceske Budejovice, Telc, Hradec Kralove, Litomysl, and Terezin. From among the UNESCO World Heritages Sites¹² are found in the Czech Republic, these are the historic town-centers of Ceski Krumlov, Kutna Hora, Prague, and Telc; the Jewish quarter of Trebic, the pilgrimage church of Zelena Hora, the village of Holasovice, as well as the castles/villas of Kromeliz, Litomysl, Brno, Lednice-Valtice; and the Holy trinity column of Olomouc. Talking about castles, we would like to draw the attention to that of Prague, Karlstein, Ceski Krumlov, and Hluboka. In the Czech Republic one can choose from among a wide range of possibilities, apart from the above mentioned cities and cultural heritages, many other religious sights, villages, some spas (e.g. on Karlovy Vary), natural beauties (parks and caves like the Bohemian Paradise or caves in the Moravian karts), and open air museums awaits the visitors, according to the Czech Tourism website. And last but not least Czech bier is also to be mentioned even in our brief list of attractions.

Hungary – From among the more than 6 million hits the two official websites of the Hungarian Tourism Plc. governmental agency (<http://gotohungary.com/>; and <http://visit-hungary.com/>) give a comprehensive picture on the country's tourism destinations and attractions. First of all both draw the attention to the capital city of Budapest, where they recommend to visit the Castle Hill and the Buda Royal Palace, as well as the Fisherman's bastion; the Gellért Hill, the Chain Bridge, the Margaret Island, the St. Stephen's basilica, the Andrassy avenue, the Parliament, the Great Synagogue, the Heroes' Square and the Castle of Vajdahunyad, as well as the Opera house. Visitors can find trip suggestions to other regions of the country as well, such as the Danube Bend, Lake Balaton, the Palace of Gödöllő, the Great Plain, the cities of Szentendre and Eger; the folk art village of Hollókő (one of the 8 Hungarian UNESCO World Heritage sites), and the Aggtelek National Park, not to mention the Tokaj wine region, the world renowned spas of Hungary and many other destinations. Visitors can explore the country's wide range of attractions by the 7 different NUTS II regions of the country.

Poland – The webpage of the Polish National Tourism Office (<http://www.poland.travel/en-us/>) ranks the tourist attractions into four major categories: Historic sites, Regions, Cities/towns and Nature. The webpage recommends visiting 18 cities, including mediaeval centre of Krakow, the Hanza town of Gdansk, the old cities of Warsaw and Wroclaw; it displays the 13 UNESCO World Heritages of Poland, such as the gothic castle of Malbork, the Wieliczka salt mine, and the Bialowieza Forest. It enumerates sanctuaries, among others the Jasna Gora monastery of Czestochowa; and fortresses and castles, like that of Czocha. Visitors can find information on the 23 Polish National Parks, Wigierski NP with its pine and spruce forests, marshy forest lakes and meadows, and its wolf and beaver population as well as Magurski National Park in Mount Magura, and the Drava National Park, not to mention the Tatrzanski National Park's beauty.

Romania – The Official travel and tourist information (<http://www.romaniatourism.com/main-attractions.html>) which was found among more than 14 million hits presents the most interesting Romanian destinations in 9 different groups (Black Sea Resorts, Castles & Fortresses, Danube Delta biosphere, Medieval Towns, Carpathian Mountains, Painted Monasteries, Spas, Traditional Villages and World Heritage Sites). It suggests for example the visit of the mediaeval towns of Brasov, Sibiu, Sighiora, Cluj, Bistrita, Medias, Sebes, the castles of

Bran, Hunedoara, the residence of Peles and Bethlen, the painted monastery of Voronet, and many Saxon fortified churches (e.g. Biertan, Cisanadie, Harman, Prejmer, and Viscri).

Slovakia – One of the more than 20 million hits is the official travel webpage of Slovakia (<http://www.slovakia.travel/intropage.aspx?l=2>). In the “best of” section the webpage displays those places which they say are unique within the world. These are the highest gothic wooden altar of the world in the Levoca’s St. James church; the historical Kremnica mint, which is the oldest enterprise in the world which operates without any break since 1328; the so called Bratislava tapestries; the world highest sinter column in the Krásnohorská jaskyňa cave, the first Mining Academy of the world in Banská Štavnica and the Tatra Chamois. Among the towns the capital Bratislava, Banská Bistrica and Košice are mentioned as the 3 most important ones.

Slovenia – The www.slovenia.info/ website of the Official Travel Guide by the Slovenian Tourism Board was found among more than 24 million hits. It allows searching the different tourist attractions by 6 major groups (Don’t miss, Towns, Regions, Countryside, Tourist Destinations, and Triglav National Park). The webpage enumerates 588 towns, 17 of which are mentioned as “top results”, among them Ljubljana and Maribor, the lake-shore village of Bled, Piran and its old harbour, Bohinj of the Lower Bohinj Mountains; and Postojna in the country’s karsts region. Among the “countryside” destinations one can choose from organic tourism farms, wine roads and wine cellars, traditional houses, culinary experiences and tourist farms with accommodation.

According to the authors, the above displayed rough review proves that as a matter of fact **Central Europe have numerous attractions worth visiting**. However we have to underline that this wealth of destinations is only a necessary, but not a sufficient condition of the high (and increasing) number of tourists’ visits.

4. PROBLEMS TO BE RESOLVED IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

In the past decades, many Central European Governments have reckoned insufficient the tourist attendance of their countries, and have planned to develop this branch. Most countries have created tourism development concepts and detailed strategies for the first years of the 21st century.³⁶ Various publications, newspaper articles also discuss this issue. However, **no clear picture has been formed nor on the touristic possibilities of the whole Central-European region till today**, and neither on the tasks which would contribute to the exploitation of those possibilities. So, on the following pages we try to analyse, how the declared objectives can be realised.

In order to be able to conclude the realistic tourism development possibilities many information would be helpful if not indispensable. Such as how many tourists are attracted by the different sites, and by how much this number could be increased. This information would be important on one hand, if a tourism strategy aims at increasing the tourist trade of a relatively high number of sites. On the other hand it could help to identify those (few) destinations which appear to have the greatest attractiveness, and might be converted into tourist sites/events serving as so called “brands”. But these lists are not sufficient; it is also important to know the different features influencing the attractiveness of these destinations and their infrastructure.

³⁶ E.g.: ‘National strategy for the sustainable development of tourism in Bulgaria for 2009-13’, the Croatian Strategic plan for 2011-13’, ‘The state tourism policy concept in the Czech Republic for 2007-13’, the Polish ‘Directions for Tourism Development until 2015’, ‘National tourist development master plan for Romania for 2007-26’, ‘New strategy for development of tourism in the Slovak Republic until 2013’, the Slovenian ‘Tourism strategy for 2007-11’.

It is well known that professional literature distinguish four important characteristics influencing the attractiveness of a tourism “product”. They can be described by the “4 A”: attraction, access, accommodation, and attitude.³⁷ **In Central Europe the factors limiting the number of tourists are often not the lack of attractive destinations, but certain other problems³⁸: sometimes the neglectedness of a potential attraction, and most of the time the inadequateness in the remaining 3 “A”-s, that is, in the access of the sites, the availability and quality of nearby accommodations and the attitude of the local service providers. So, in our region an analysis of tourism-related problems is necessary. Thus, on the following pages we can make an attempt to outline a general picture.**

The number of documents reviewing unreservedly these mentioned Central-European problems is few according to the authors’ information; and because of the language barriers they could not undertake to process the publications of different CEE countries on the issue. However our efforts can be helped by the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index of the World Economic Forum (Blanke – Chiesa 2011). According to this publication the touristic competitiveness of the Central European countries is moderate (among the 139 examined countries the Czech Republic ranked at the 31st place, Slovenia at the 33rd, Croatia at the 34th, Hungary at the 38th, Bulgaria at the 48th, Poland at the 49th, Slovakia at the 54th and Romania at the 63rd). The mentioned publication stated that a great number of obstacles on the national level continue to hinder the development of tourism. The area’s regulatory frameworks are a somewhat more favourable than the average; but concerning this issue Bulgaria received expressly unfavourable ranking querying the environmental sustainability and public safety, whereas in Poland and in Slovakia the lack of priorities in tourism industry was objected. The business environment and the infrastructure of the region also received negative comments (and worse than average rankings); Slovakia because of its air transport, Romania because of its ground transport infrastructure, and Slovenia, Croatia and Slovakia because of high prices in tourism. With respect to human, natural and cultural resources Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Poland were criticised on the grounds of their weak tourism affinity, while Romania (not quite understandably) and Hungary were estimated having only few natural resources.

As we presented above, in Central Europe there are a great number of tourist **attractions** in perfect condition, but not all of them: certain destinations have endangered (or are closed for tourists³⁹) natural and cultural values, there are number of once beautiful, now weathering (rural) castles, country-houses and churches. In case of some other tourist sites (having otherwise important potential of attractiveness) their inadequate direct infrastructure (incomplete information⁴⁰, cleanness of the surroundings,⁴¹ number of nearby restaurants, toilets,⁴² medical service providers, etc.) is also a problem.

Accessing some Central European destinations can also be difficult. In most countries this problem is also related to the step-by-step closing of the lateral railway’s network. In

³⁷ See the presentation of A. Godsave in the 1997 at the general assembly of the Hungarian Tourism Society. (Michalkó, 2012, pp. 177).

³⁸ This finding corresponds with the above mentioned statement of Argyris (1976). So, we hope that our analysis can be the first step to the correction of the problem enumerated.

³⁹ E.g. in Hungary the famous fortresses in Siklós. The whole building complex was closed for many years because of renovation.

⁴⁰ E.g. the sign-posts on the road to the above mentioned Siklós did not inform tourists that the fortress was closed.

⁴¹ On the maritime pollution problems in Bulgaria see: Sanders, D. (2014): Maritime Power in the Black Sea. Ashgate. Burlington, UK. p. 174.

⁴² On the busy roads to the wine mountain Somlyó (Hungary) many sign-posts recommend hotels and restaurants at the Mountain, but arriving to Somlyó during off-peak months, after climbing the steep slopes, tourists have to face that all facilities are closed in the surrounding area.

other cases it is rather the inadequacy of the road network⁴³ which is limiting the number of tourists. It is a common view that the problems resulting from the lack of highways and from the low quality of the side-roads increase as one goes from West to East in Europe. However, as we can find bad examples of deteriorated roads almost anywhere in the whole area, a more detailed analysis about the road-conditions (with respect to nearby tourist attractions) could always be useful.

Finding **accommodation** in bigger cities' of Central Europe should not be a problem. But the supply of accommodations is poor in the neighbourhood of many other (rural) attractions in the region, and in peak season's lack of capacity can occur. Even reservation techniques are not competitive in case of many host institutions (they do not have websites or the existing ones are hardly available, registration is too complex and unreliable). In several cheaper lodgings the questionable cleanliness of table-covers, bed-linens – or that of the restrooms – can be repulsive. Sometimes to all this adds poor supply or bad quality of foods and drinks.

In general tourists are received in a friendly way. Unfortunately in some cases hosts are unprepared: their command of languages is inadequate; they neglect the internationally common standards of politeness, and are not well prepared about the programs / attractions which could and should be recommended for their guests. All this can leave unpleasant memories in the visitors. But the general **attitude** of the local tourism service providers (as almost in every other field of life in CEE), that is, the unsatisfactory recognition and respect of guests, creates more serious problems. Disrespectful behaviour, in some cases even illegal, guest-detering examples happen, e.g. the extreme event of shameful overbillings⁴⁴. The number of visitors to neighbouring countries is sometimes moderated by nationalist conflicts as well.

It is obvious that, **when developing Central-Eastern-European tourist destinations, the above mentioned "infrastructural" deficiencies should be equally tackled.**

5. CONCLUSIONS

The comparison of the attendance of the international top tourist destinations and the Central-European attractions shows that lots of destinations of the world and of Europe are more popular than that of Central Europe's. Therefore all governments of the region have aimed to increase the attractiveness of their countries from touristic point of view. The majority of the measures and tools which they intend to use are similar to each other: they seek to increase the level of education, to develop the tourism "products", to create environmental sustainability, to strengthen marketing and branding activities, and to dismantle the barriers impeding the development, etc.⁴⁵

Based on our modest analysis we could gain experiences related only to some elements of the above mentioned list of tools and tasks. These are the followings:

- Development of the tourism products and their infrastructure. Based on the earlier presented statements we can assume that this type of development would be necessary in case of a large number of destinations, thus fully implementation of this measure would need significant financial resources. As most countries financial resources are considerably limited, probably the development of all major attractions will not be covered. Yet, it can hardly be disputed that realising certain tasks is very often not only a question of financial means, but rather that of the quality of human

⁴³ E.g. the road from Budapest to Galyatető (in the Mátra Mountain) from Pásztó.

⁴⁴ For example: Half a million for three beers. Magyar Nemzet, 3 November, 2011, p. 17.

⁴⁵ A more detailed summary can be found e.g. in OECD (2012).

resources. Besides, concentrating our efforts on the development of the most visited spots or those which could be transformed into places with significant attractiveness, the necessary financial sources (and human factors) could be gathered.

- Development of an information base on tourist attractions. A data-collecting and processing system should be developed, in order to be able to receive reliable information on the level of attractiveness of the main tourist destinations of the area, and on the destinations whose development would result in the greatest increase of the number of visitors. This information is sorely needed to be able to make well established, concentrated, product-development decisions.
- Establishment of regional cooperation. The presented analysis did not reveal any Central-European tourism development possibility, the development of which could promise dynamism permitting to achieve visitor numbers similar to the most visited Western-European destinations. The authors of this article believe however that the joint efforts of the CEE countries (already outlined by the Visegrád group) could create the opportunity to achieve such results. Just to mention some examples:
- Thematic castle tours in Central Europe. The – rather flexible – itinerary could include e.g. the Bohemian Ceski Krumlov, the Slovak Trencin and Oravski Hrad, the Subcarpathien Mukaceve, then Bran and Hunedoara of Romania; or alternatively one could visit the Polish Malbork, the Czech Karlstein, the Austrian Forchtenstein, the Slovenian Predjama, and perhaps the Croatian Dubrovnik as well.
- Better exploitation of recreational and outdoor sport opportunities. Improvement of the conditions of bicycle roads, hiking opportunities, mountaineering and skiing activities, water sports and recreations would increase significantly both the domestic tourism as well as the cross-country tourism, the number of visitors from the neighbouring countries (having different tourism possibilities).
- Reanimation of the rich gastronomic traditions of the area. Development of the catering sector could improve the competitiveness of the whole Central and Eastern Europe as the food and beverage supply influence considerably the satisfaction of most tourists. E.g. Prague attracts masses from all over Europe not only with its beautiful historical centre but also with its famous Bohemian beer. Unfortunately until nowadays the not less valuable wines and spirits of the area have not been able to obtain similar reputation and level of attractiveness.

In most cases the main elements of the above mentioned and similar cooperation would consist in improving the transport-system together, or taking joint marketing efforts, and not the joint development of the attractions them selves.

APPENDIX

Attractiveness of some Central European tourist destinations

As the above mentioned lists show, Prague, Budapest and Warsaw have the greatest tourist attendance **in Central Europe. In the case of Central Europe's other destinations data on the extent of their real attractiveness can only be find exceptionally, based on which data we can assume a relatively modest tourist inflow.**

To showcase the above mentioned fact we enumerate some examples hereinafter:

Bulgaria – According to the homepage of http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=142186 the most visited Bulgarian city is Burgas with yearly 0,3 million tourists and with more that 1 million overnight stays.

Croatia – As mentioned earlier, the Adriatic is undoubtedly the most popular tourist destination in the country. Statistics show that in 2010 in mainland Croatia the capital, Za-

greb was the most visited spot (http://www.slovenia.info/pictures%5CTB_board%5Catachments_2%5C2011%5Ctvs_ang_e_12475.pdf) with 0,7 million overnight stays. In the meantime, according to the tourism statistics of 2010, the number of tourists arriving to the area's different regions were as follows: Istria 2,6 million, Primorje-gorski 2 million, Zadar 1 million, Split-Dalmatia 1,6 million, Dubrovnik 1 million; and there's no doubt that the majority of those visitors show up at the sea-coast as well. So, question arises whether the (mostly Croatian) Adriatic coast should be considered as a destination having similar level of attractiveness than the most visited places of Europe. Many people think that Croatian Adriatic is one of the most beautiful sites of Europe with its well indented coastline and its 1,108 islands and islets (of which only 66 are inhabited: <http://www.croatiaemb.net/>).

Czech Republic – The most visited town is Prague with nearly 4 million visitors; Cesky Krumlov ranks second, where the yearly number of tourists is slightly more than 1 million according to estimations (<http://business.ckrumlov.info/docs/en/ad2008022101.xml>). Statistics show modest number of visitors in other regions of the country: Jihomoravsky 1,1 million, Jihocesky 0,9 million tourists.

Hungary – The city receiving the most tourists in the country is Budapest. Its tourist trade (based on the number of tourism nights spent there 6 million visitors) is quite high even in international comparison. Nearly half – in 2010, 42% – of the foreign tourists staying for at least one night in the country came to the capital. According to the statistics the most visited destination of the city was its zoo (with 1 million visitors). The second most visited part of the country is the West-Hungarian Region (NUTS II) (with 25% of the visitors), and the third one is Lake Balaton (15% of the visitors) (source: KSH 2011). Among domestic tourists Lake Balaton was the favourite destination (KSH, 2011/b). On the list of the most visited Hungarian settlements Hévíz (900.000 nights), Hajdúszoboszló (800.000), Bük (700.000), Siófok, Balatonfüred and Sopron (500-500.000), Zalakaros and Sárovar (400.000) and finally Debrecen (300.000) follow (with significantly lower tourist flow) the first Budapest (MT46, 2011). As the Hungarian National Tourism Development Strategy's (NTS) monitoring report of 2007 stated in its point g.): the most significant attractions' tourist trade has not been examined yet in detail. Following this statement the monitoring report points out that "more than 24 museums, the World Heritage Sites, several National Parks and the two-thirds of the 61 baths supported within the framework of the Széchenyi tourism development program have received 100 thousand visitors per year" (ÖTM, 2008, p. 3).

Poland – Statistics show that in 2010 the number of overnight stays was 2,4 million in Warsaw, 1,5 million in Krakow, 0,7 million in Wroclaw, 0,6 million in Poznan, 0,4 million in Gdansk. However the number of all tourists and pilgrims has to be higher than that; e.g. more than 5 million visitors arrive to Czestochowa per year (http://www.staypoland.com/about_czestochowa.htm).

Romania – The most visited Romanian destination is the monastery of Dealul Mitropoliei standing on a small hill in Bucharest, which was visited by 2 million Christians in 2008, according to estimations (Țîrca – Stănculescu – Chiș – Băcilă).

Slovakia – The country's most attractive tourist places are its capital, Bratislava and the High Tatra Mountains (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovakia>).

Slovenia – The highest number of foreign overnight stays is in the spectacular Piran, one of the three major towns of Slovenian Istria (1,3 million) and in the capital, Ljubljana (0,7 million).

Based on the above mentioned statistics we can state once again that currently there is no other destination in Central Europe with a level of attractiveness similar to Prague and Budapest (and the popular Adriatic coast, undeservedly forgotten by the traditional rankings).

⁴⁶ Hungarian Tourism Ltd.

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