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A new step in greenway planning and practice – the challenges of branding a cross-border greenway in Hungary

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Introduction

One of the most recent products of alternative tourism and thematic route development are the greenways in Hungary which were recently launched in 2011. As the authors of this article actively took part in the practical process of the creation and initiation of the Baranya Greenway in 2012, (Szabó, G. and Csapó, J., 2012), in our present article we lay the emphasis on the branding process of a cross-border cooperation program on the Hungarian-Croatian border at the Baranya/Baranja area.

Besides tourism development, the presented initiatives rely on forming a sustainable society and a healthy lifestyle as well where the major focus is on strengthening the co-operations between the different actors, the community development of the local population, strengthening of the non-motorised transport forms and heritage tourism of course at both sides of the border.

Background/Literature Review

On the contrary to mass tourism, one of the latest forms of soft tourism are the greenways. According to the greenway concept, these routes are created by the local community, prepared for visitors who are not only enquiring about nature and culture, but consider the importance of the protection of nature, and are enthusiastic about alternative transportation modes (Fábos, J. Gy. 2010, Szabó, G. et al. 2014). This ecotourism product concept is an initiation for creating sustainable society and healthy lifestyle, for strengthening of international cooperation, for local community development, for strengthening sustainable transport forms and also reinforcing heritage tourism. (Murphy, D. and Mourek, D., 2010)

As mentioned in the abstract, this is a bottom-up initiative, a thematic route created by the local community for tourists who are interested in nature and culture, and who prefer alternative forms of transport, such as hiking, cycling, equestrian very importantly on the bypasses and accommodation roads (Sharpley, R. 2000). As for the settlements of the greenway it introduces the local attractions, monuments, customs and heritage, organises the events and festivals of their cultural heritage and offer local products for the tourist. (Bárcziné, K. J. 2010, Miller, G. A. 2003)

Goals and objectives

In this article the authors aim to reveal and present an innovative (eco) rural tourism product brand of the South Transdanubian Region, Hungary from the point of view of product development and branding. Since tourism seeks for newer and newer alternatives for mass tourism, we believe that one of the tools for local development and local involvement can be the application of the innovative forms of ecotourism as primarily bottom-up initiatives.

The study, based also on our earlier research and publication results (Aubert, A. and Csapó, J. 2015, Szabó, G. et al. 2014), provides an insight to the general tourism characteristics of the region and the Baranya Greenway and the Baranya Green Brand, and reveals our method how we intended to create and function its branding procedure. Since – parallel with the development and stages of our research and the later functioning of the greenway – we already published our former results in this topic, the present article focuses mainly on the next step of the development process, the importance of regional branding and reports our results in achieving and applying the methodology in connection with the proposed Baranya Green Brand.

Method(s)

The relevant data and sources of information were gathered by our research team on field from the first half of 2013 until the second half of 2014. During this period first we carried out field trips to collect and create a punctual and scientifically categorised attraction survey (indicating all the relevant tourism attractions of the region) and then we finished this work by collecting all the service providers of the concerned settlements who are related in any aspects to tourism.

After this we appointed the exact route of the greenway which activity was primarily supported by GIS methods as well, since the route consist mainly byways and dirt roads, also strengthening the concept of sustainability.

During the field trips we carried out interviews and deep interviews with the local population, the possible stakeholders and NGOs in order to receive exact and relevant information on the needs and demands of these actors taking fully into consideration the principles of subsidiarity.

As for desk research we focused on the scientific elaboration of the collected field data.

Results

The Baranya Greenway

The successful tender of the Baranya Greenway was achieved in March, 2012 as part of the Croatia-Hungary IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013, tendered by the Gyeregyalog.hu Association.

The territory of this initiative covered regions from Osijek (Croatia) to Western Mecsek (Hungary) (Fig. 1.). The major geographical areas, landscapes and attractions of the greenway are the Western-Mecsek, the South-Baranya-Hills, the Villány-Siklós Wine Route, the Bóly-Mohács Wine Route, the Danube-Drava National Park, the Baranya-Triangle – Kopácsi-Meadow and the areas along the Drava.

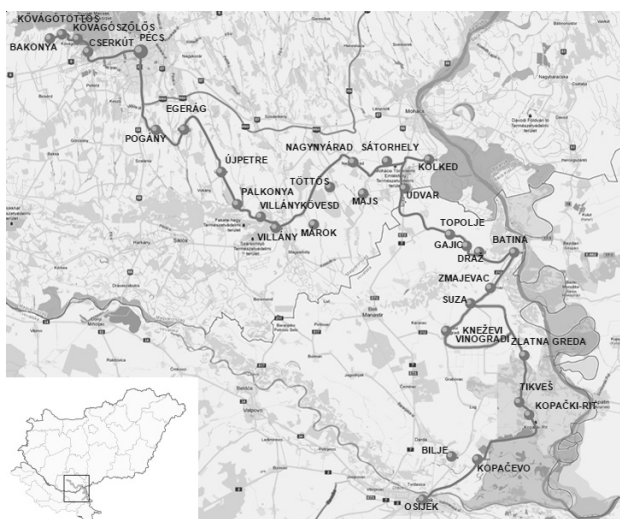


Figure 1. The trail of the Baranya Greenway thematic route (Source: Based on <http://www.baranyazoldut.eu/> ed. by Horváth, Z. 2016)

The branding process of the Baranya Greenway

We believe that the introduction of the branding process in this paper of the Baranya Greenway is useful both for the academic sphere and for the practice as well since this is first of all a new initiation and also because it strongly correlates with numerous regional development principles of the EU, in connection with regional brand creation and cross-border cooperation as well.

According to our ideas the branding process involved: destination image, brand identity development, destination positioning and of course destination branding, a process which is used to develop a unique identity and personality

that is different from all the competitive destinations. Due to these processes the given area can and should become a marketable product and the settlement or the settlements will also appear as a brand.

We would like to make the Baranya Greenway be capable of a two-directional communication. It is an important object to develop it to a tourism brand, moreover a regional tourism brand. It can be utilized in tourism and with the cooperation of the two sides of the border, Baranya and Baranja counties can become a destination both for domestic and for foreign tourists or visitors.

During the process of creation of the Baranya Green Brand, in order to determine the potential elements of the brand, we reviewed the followings:

- The outstanding natural and cultural values of Baranya and Baranja County, along the Baranya Greenway.
- The survey of the specific motivations of rural tourism.
- An analyses referring to the image of Baranya and Baranja.
- The accentuation of the advantages derived from our earlier established eco-qualification system.
- Questionnaire surveys of local community and tourism topics.

For the complex branding process we have to add associated and integrated products in the development agenda, and also have to analyse the „added values” and its elements such as the experiences of the potential consumer, the physical reality of the settlement, the culture and past of the settlement, the notions and image about the population of the settlement and the image of the settlement about itself (settlement identity).

Of course by achieving all this, the major aim is to demonstrate the competence and uniqueness of the given region. Fig. 2. introduces the identified and categorised attraction structure of the settlements.

In order to achieve our goals first we worked out a complex qualification system for the service providers. The basic idea was that only those tourism actors can take part in this initiative who meet the complex standards – strongly based on sustainability and responsible tourism – of guest catering, accommodation services or tour guiding. The services provided by the actors of tourism will provide the basis for the branding or simply the image of the greenway which later on serves as a motivating factor for the possible demand.

During the creation of the qualification system – based on local experts’ opinions as well – we have significantly relied on the standards carried out by the Green Globe (Sasidharana, V. et al. 2002, Global Ecolabelling Network,

2004, <http://greenglobe.com/>), so our system is also based on four pillars: (1) sustainable management, (2) social, economic pillar, (3) cultural heritage pillar and (4) environmental pillar.

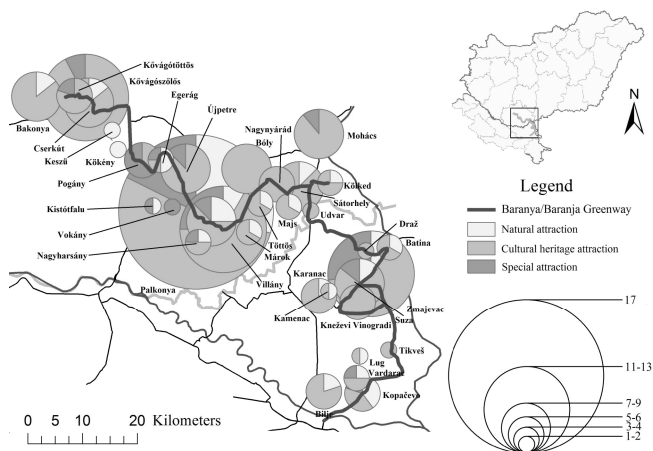


Figure 2. The number and type of attractions at the settlements of the Baranya Greenway (Source: Based on Go Green HUH/1101/1.2.2/2011 ed. Horváth, Z. 2016)

An important step in branding, in order to raise the attention of the demand, is the creation of the logo of the greenway. The variations of the Baranya Greenway are demonstrated in Fig. 3. visualizing the steps of the logo creation process (since figures can be published black and white, please concern that the colour of the figure is originally green).

The logo itself represents with its colour (green) the closeness to nature, the hilly and plain areas of the Baranya/Baranja region, and also emphasizes the alternative forms of transport with which one can travel around this thematic route.

The next step of branding was the elaboration of a webpage. We also organised study tours for journalists, local actors and schools with promotional purposes.

The other successful approach of the green brand is taking the local products to the markets. The produced bio, eco, organic and local tradition-based materials and products, and especially the comestible products, could play an important role in the creation of a common product brand.

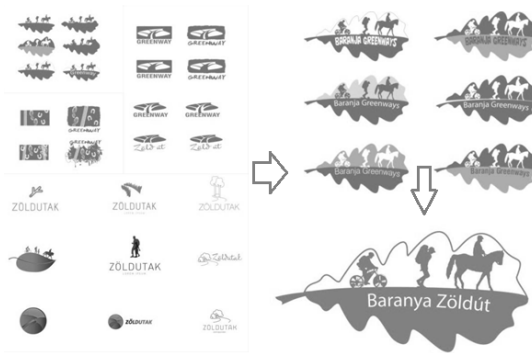


Figure 3. The logo variations (development) of the Baranya Greenway (Source: Szabó, G. and Csapó, J. 2014)

Along the settlements of the greenway a significant amount of producers and a wide range of local products production and supply can be found. Out of the 11 types of product group the most accentuated product is honey on the Hungarian side. Its producers add up to 38 in 11 settlements. The second most common local product is wine. In the Hungarian section of the greenway we found 36 such wine producers who can legally sell their products for tourists. At the Croatian side only one wine producer was identified.

Furthermore, one of the strengths of Hungarian side is the production of traditional meat products and dairy products. Relatively significant number of Croatian producers deal with the production of spices, herbs and special vegetable oils (Fig. 4.).

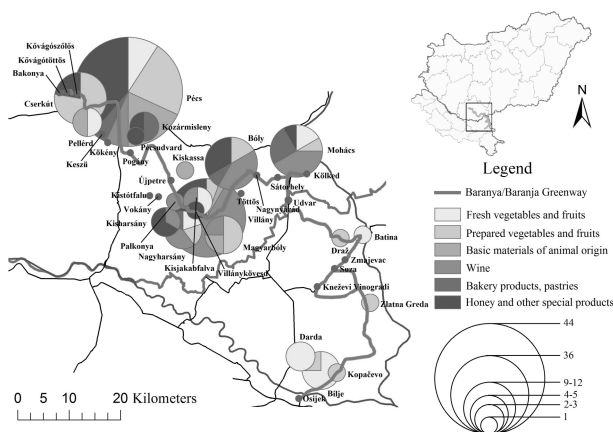


Figure 4. Local products at the settlements of the Baranya Greenway (Source: Based on Go Green HUHHR/1101/1.2.2/2011 ed. Horváth, Z. 2016)

Discussion and conclusion

Based on the aspects analysed in the preceding chapters we summarize our brand creating process of our cross border greenway initiation in the following steps.

In order to create a brand value we have to choose the elements which compose the brand. In the case of the Baranya Greenway the brand elements are the following:

1. unique natural environment,
2. the cultural heritage of the region (tangible and intangible heritage, traditions),
3. the qualified ecotourism products and service providers,
4. local bio, eco and organic products.

An important step is the creation of the structural frames of the branding and the designation of the responsible people/actors. The branding and the maintenance of the brand demand a conscious, organized process that is why it is inevitable to assign a brand expert for the brand organization who would deal with the complete branding process.

After this we have to introduce a strong, favourable and unique brand association. The Baranya Green Brand should be implicated with traditions and quality. So we have to build in such images which are twitted to traditions, ecotourism or sustainable environment.

We also have to increase the visibility of the brand and the brand elements and communicate it for a wide audience. During this marketing communication the target groups should be able to recognise the Baranya Green Brand with a clearly distinguishable image from the other product brands.

A very important step is to achieve the creation of brand loyalty meaning that the target groups should be able to identify themselves with the brand, its elements and its message. It can be most probably reached if visitors receive positive experiences at the Baranya Greenway by for example consuming local products which reinforce the authenticity of the brand message and so evolve an emotional linkage in the visitors. This is the way of forming an active and loyal connection.

The final step of this process is the creation of secondary associations in connection with this green brand due to which the green brands could be extended to other products and services of the greenway.

We believe that one of the uniqueness of this research, work and results is the utilisation of the regional geographical aspects and methods in the planning process which later can be adapted in any other greenway planning processes. The settlement level planning and the use of GIS methods makes our results new and useful in Hungary and even in Central-Europe where greenway planning is only at its initial stages.

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