

EQUESTRIAN TOURISM IN THE VILLAGE OF KÉTPÓ AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

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Abstract: *In the course of their work, the authors dealt with the development of equestrian trails, a rapidly developing segment of Hungarian equestrian tourism. The study was based on literature sources and the students' experiences in equestrian tourism. The observations focused on the presentation of the services and attractions provided by the Kétpó village of Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County and its surroundings. In addition to the description of the current state, the situation of the examined destination was presented in the form of a SWOT analysis.*

Keywords: *equestrian trail, equestrian tourism, destination management, Kétpó village, tourist services*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism in the rural regions can be grouped into the following categories [7]:

- Thermal tourism
- Castle, seat tourism
- Gastronomy tourism
- Craftsman tourism
- Equestrian tourism
- Ecotourism
- Hunting tourism

According to the results of an analysis of the stakeholder and potential consumer surveys, five types of fusion tourism development directions emerge, and one development direction targets the niche market that requires special experiences [13]. These include nature-loving water-based sports tourism, environmentally friendly fishing tourism, adventureseeking bicycle tourism, exploratory youth tourism, and guest-welcoming event tourism.

Priorities of some Hungarian regions by the categories of tourism:

- Dél-Alföld (Southern Great Plain): health-, thermal-, active-tourism;
- Dél-Dunántúl (Southern Transdanubia): healing- and thermal-tourism;
- Észak-Alföld (Northern Great Plain): through the development of touristic products, to become a high quality life-, health- and recreation center of Central-Eastern Europe [9].

According to Cretu [5], from a demographic point of view, ecotourists can be grouped as follows:

- young professionals with a high income, but little free time;
- young tourists with backpacks and young people resting with a small investment;
- families with children over 8 years old who are looking for adventures where they can relax and have fun with their children;
- people aged between 45 and 65 who have time to travel alone without children and have high expectations regarding the price/quality ratio of tourist services.

According to a domestic survey, those who actively participate in tourism are most often looking for a complex experience of the rural way of life and imagine relaxation in a calm, often close to nature environment. The price of the accommodation and the attraction or the distance to the destination matter much less (Figure 1.).

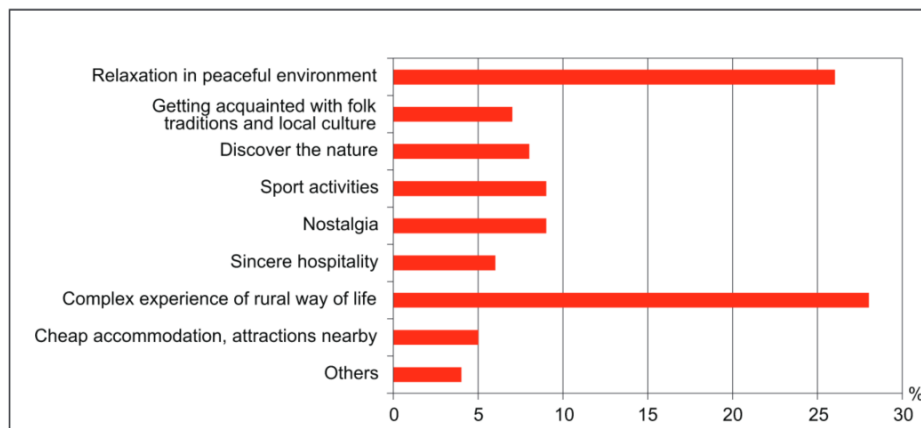


Figure 1. Distribution of the sample based on motivation [11]

Equestrian tourism includes very diverse and complex activities; many see it as a form of adventure tourism and Hungarian steppe equestrian traditions, rather than a manifestation of equestrian culture. Equestrian tourism packages should include horseback riding or carriage rides, horse care, adventure and learning about the natural environment. It must be avoided that equestrian activities, especially in protected areas, have a negative impact on the environment along the routes or in the rest areas [17].

Along with the increase in the number of tourists, the interest in equestrian tourism also increases. Many tourist destinations can be promoted with horse and buggy tourism solutions, especially in places that are difficult to reach by car or public transport [2]. The possibilities and success of the development of such attractions depend on many factors (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Factors determining the type, quality, feasibility and attractiveness of riding attractions [18]

Hungary generally considers itself an equestrian nation. In order to strengthen this, the popularity of hobby riding, equestrian sports events, horse shows and all paid services related to horses is developing within the framework of equestrian tourism. The demand for off-road riding, which is available all over the country, is increasing among foreign tourists. Equestrian tourism is perhaps only surpassed in popularity by wellness facilities (but their marketing activities are much more elaborate) [4].

Stables generally provide the following services: riding lessons, horse training, horse keeping, feed sales, accommodation, camping, competitions, tour organization and event organization [16]. Among the services, activities are available depending on the size of the business. The situation of Hungarian equestrian tourism can be characterized as follows: Equestrian facilities and services can be found in Hungary. Unfortunately, we have to talk about some hindering effects: there is a lack of appropriate professional and specialized knowledge to manage equestrian businesses, there are not enough horse trainers and instructors to provide the appropriate services, there is also a lack of foreign language skills, there are no adequate horse stocks and designated riding routes. The organization of entrepreneurs involved in equestrian tourism is voluntary; there are nearly 400 members of a lobbying organization that has not yet covered this sector. The Hungarian Equestrian Leisure Sports Association organizes equestrian events and competitions throughout the country [15]. The aim of the association is to utilize and spread the physiological, psychological and socializing effects of horse riding in leisure sports, as well as to promote the creation of the necessary conditions for this. Today, the majority of horse service providers in Hungary operate in isolation. The most important interest of tourism service providers would be to organize themselves into a network of cooperatives offering complex equestrian tourism products. Equestrian centers can also offer other, complex offers to their guests. The president of the Association stated that according to their own survey, approximately 140,000 people in Hungary are engaged in horse riding at some level. According to their estimate, about forty percent of them take or would like to take part in cross-country and tour riding, if the conditions are suitable and the expected safe conditions can be created. He also said: they want to establish horse-friendly accommodations, settlements, and prepare restaurants for the program for the special needs of a horse-riding tourist visiting them [1].

Regarding the training of specialists, it is worth noting that since 2005, the Semmelweis University's Faculty of Physical Education and Sports has been training horse culture instructors. The course provides students with complex knowledge of equestrian sports, tourism, business and management in order for qualified equestrian professionals to work in various positions in the Hungarian equestrian industry to promote it [3].

In Hungary, a business that fulfills the personal, the business, and the site conditions may carry out equestrian service activities involving the riding of other persons. The National Food Chain Safety Office (NÉBIH), the animal health department of the county government office, the district office, and the clerk of the local government are also entitled to check that the conditions are met [6]. A public official register of equestrian service providers and the animals involved in the service is available on the Internet. Only horses that have been identified and have a horse passport issued by NÉBIH can take part in guest riding, and their owner can prove their suitability with an official certificate. The suitability test of the horses is carried out by the Hungarian Equestrian Tourism Public Association.

For equestrian tourists, it is not of particular importance for authentic accommodation to represent the vernacular style in its architecture or furnishings, rather they are looking for a house that is well equipped in accordance with the requirements of the time [12]. Most of today's tourists are looking for a high level of comfort. Animals around the house are important for families with children.

In Ópusztaszer, for example, in addition to Akhal Teke horse herd and Equestrian Camps and Tours, the events of the Historical National Park, religious places and events, the workshops and products of local artisans, as well as the natural values of the area are available [10].

The biggest attraction of Hungary is cross-country riding, which offers almost unlimited possibilities. Our climate is ideal for riding, you can ride outdoors from early spring to late autumn, our country's soil properties are favorable, dirt roads, lawns and sandy soils are typical, there are few rocky areas unsuitable for riding, our flora and fauna are diverse, the settlements are mostly far from each other [14]. Our biggest advantage over our competitors is that we have large, open, contiguous areas suitable for riding and horse breeding - these features are very limited in Western Europe.

In addition to these, for example, in Iceland, it is customary to sing and recite poems and stories related to the route, and even create new songs and stories. During the horse-riding tour, they will enter the guest book where they are staying. Usually, someone from the group writes a short entry about how many horses the group is traveling with, what route they took to reach this destination, and where they are going next, as well as thanking them for the accommodation [8]. It is customary for the whole group to sign their names. This is an important tradition of documenting the intellectual heritage of long riding in Icelandic equestrian sports, which should be considered for domestic adoption.

During the work, we looked for the tourist services and attractions that the settlement of Kétpó and its surroundings can offer to equestrian tourists.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

An inventory was made of the equestrian services of Kétpó and its surrounding area, as well as the natural and man-made values available from here. Websites, conversations with service providers and personal experiences were used for all of this. On the basis of all this, a SWOT analysis was prepared, providing an overview of the situation in the region.

RESULTS

There are many equestrian tourism places in Hungary, including 46 horse-riding places. In 2016, a uniform 1,813-km-long equestrian route network was created, with 31 new stops. Equestrian tourism includes many programs: e.g. horse-drawn carriage, show jumping, long-distance riding, and equestrianism. Most programs take place during the summer season.

The village of Kétpó is located in the southeastern part of Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County. The neighboring settlements: Töröksszentmiklós from the north, Kuncsorba from the northeast, Mezőtúr from the southeast, Mezőhék from the south, Kengyel from the west, and Tiszatenyő from the northwest. Although its administrative area does not border Túrkeve, which is located about 20 kilometers as the crow flies, the proximity of this city also has an influence on the lives of its residents. During the 2011 census, 88.4% of the residents identified themselves as Hungarian and 0.7% as Romanian. The religious distribution was as follows: Roman Catholic 7.6%, Calvinist 17.3%, Lutheran 0.3%, non-denominational 56.7%. The estimated population of Kétpó in 2019 is 652 people.

Equestrian tourism in Kétpó is not large, but significant. Carriage drives usually take place in the summer season and a horse-riding stop is located where the stable was built in March 2022, and from then on it was opened as a stop. Kétpó is located in the southernmost part of the route. There are stalls with six places for the horses, and you can stay there in a tent or rest in the nearby Almásy Castle. They can provide a horse if you don't have one. There are many programs waiting for those who come there, hiking, carriage rides, you can try archery and you can also see native animals. The attractions are also not to be neglected, you can see the Hétvezér promenade and the Almásy Castle itself is beautiful (Table 1), great routes and beautiful landscapes await people, and the Tisza

lake and the main canal of Nagykunság are not far away. Their local team has already completed several tours, which means several kilometers. Starting from Kétpó, in August 2016, they appeared at a major equestrian meeting (Saddle Show), which was 120 kilometers away, and in 2019 they rode to the Hungarian National Assembly, which was 100 kilometers away, but they have already led several smaller tours. Several people stayed with them during the summer season, but the most interesting one was a French pilgrim who had already traveled thousands of kilometers by that time.

A total of 6 horses (3 Hungarian half-breeds, 3 Nonius) are kept in the settlement of Kétpó, of which four (1 Hungarian half-breed and 3 Nonius) can be found at the stopping/rest area (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The stable of the local rest area of the equestrian route

Table 1.

Man-made and natural values of Kétpó and surrounding area

MAN-MADE VALUES	NATURAL VALUES
Almásy Castle Lavender Festival Statues of seven conquering chieftains Alföldi Outlaw Cooking Festival Alföldi Jam Cooking Festival Outlaw Well Pói equestrian center Kövér's tomb chapel Mezőhék Statue of Mihály Táncsics Mezőhék Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church Támpont Buffet Tiszatenyő Wind power plant Törökszentmiklós Castle and Park of Szenttamás Nagykúria Inn Mezőtúr	Zöldövezet Memorial Park Historical memorial park depicting Hungary Harang-zug canal Main irrigation canal of Nagykunság Kurgans Rich fauna and flora of the puszta Old dry riverbeds

Source: authors

A SWOT analysis was used to evaluate the tourism status and opportunities of the settlement (Table 2).

Table 2.

SWOT analysis of Kétpó

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Natural features Diverse events Traditions and built heritage Committed local businesses Hospitality of service providers Enthusiastic young riders.	Seasonality of equestrian tourism Insufficient cooperation of service providers Demographic problems Lack of foreign language information on the settlement's website
OPPORTUNITIES	TRHEATS
Strengthening cooperation with neighboring settlements Broader marketing of Kétpó's values Reception of foreign guests in the village Closer cooperation with the regional TDM organization	Economic crisis phenomenon There are several settlements in the county that offer similar opportunities Local and surrounding attractions do not provide a multi-day program

Source: authors

CONCLUSIONS

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

- The demand for learning to ride and equestrian tourism is growing, especially among young families with a significant income.
- The area's agricultural road network facilitates access to the region's attractions by horse and carriage.
- The current resting place of the equestrian route meets professional expectations and can work together with other stops and entrepreneurs of the route.
- The resting place of the equestrian route needs closer cooperation with the regional TDM organization and the tourist offices of the towns in the area in order to achieve more effective marketing activities.
- Developments are made more difficult by the continuous increase in costs due to inflation.

- Due to the size of the settlement, it will be difficult for Kétpó to put together an all-encompassing tourist service package on its own.
- The current seasonal programs do not allow full-time equestrian services.
- Young horse-loving residents of the settlement are interested in the development of equestrian services. After their studies, they plan to work in the sector.

It is planned to continue the research by expanding it to a wider geographical area, as well as by conducting a survey involving both service providers and tourism users.

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