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Thematic Parks in the Tourism System

Inductive aspect of the model of adventure parks

Theses of the PhD-dissertation

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1. Introduction

Tourism has become one of the most dynamically developing sectors of world economy during the past sixty years, while it witnessed basic internal structural changes. *The appearance of new attraction types – among others the thematic parks – transformed the traditional values; the experience as the essential element of the product became the focus of the system, which exceeded the former periods' demand for rest and relaxation.* The popularity of these sites is proven by the fact that nowadays they can be found among the most visited attractions of the world, though both the international and national scientific researches have dealt with their analysis only partially.

In present-day tourism the thematic destinations represent a development direction, which can be present with a competitive supply both on the international and national tourism market in the long run as well. The effort to form complex establishments focussing on a single topic can raise the visitor's – the tourist's – satisfaction level, therefore setting the frames of a successful operation in the long-run. *Nowadays the differentiation of the thematic attractions can be observed, the most significant representatives of our times are to be found among the thematic routes and thematic parks.* In the case of thematic parks the topic choice results in the formation of basically different park types, in which the changes of motivation structures play a fundamental role. Beside the culture-centred themes, there are also topics with a physical geographical base. Among the trends detectable within the tourism market the demand for spending leisure time actively is getting more and more emphasized, the ideal location of which can be represented by the herewith examined *adventure parks*.

The adventure parks belong to the new attraction types of tourism, the international and national demand trends forecast their continuous growth and spreading. As a special type of thematic parks, they are grouped into the artificial attractions, though their relationship with the physical environment is more intensive than in the case of the classical parks. The adventure parks also aim at the entertainment and the provision of customer experience, but the range of functions can be extended and enriched by the growing game element supply. There are several parks of this type in Hungary as well, which specialize in a given game element or provide a complex supply. Both types can be successful, which fact can be proven by numerous practical instances. The author of this dissertation *aims at the analysis of the most prominent actors of the national adventure park market, which – based on their annual number of visitors – belong to their region's leading active tourism attractions. The establishment of a complex product structure results in the involvement of several related services not only in the tourism sector, but also in terms of directly and indirectly concerned sectors; this leads to the successful realization of the much emphasized multiplication effect of tourism.*

2. Aims

In this dissertation the author aimed at the establishment of a theoretical model based on inductive research methods, focussing on the operation of thematic parks – being the representatives of new tourism attraction types –, as well as on one of its special type, the adventure park.

The essential scientific literature applied in the dissertation involves the basic terms of tourism, such as resource, attractive feature, attraction and destination. Due to the numerous model-like innovations of product- and attraction development, the parks are the most visited tourism establishments, while their resource demand reflects different characteristics from that of the traditional attractive features/attractions. *Therefore, in spite of the fact that the above mentioned terms represent the base of the structure, the continuously changing and developing structure of the sector, as well as the realization of the special characteristics of thematic parks make it necessary to analyse this specific relationship.* The comprehensive evaluation of the thematic parks makes it indispensable to *summarize, synthesize and improve the basic terms of tourism and tourism geography.*

The heyday of thematic parks took place in the 1960s, since then the growing number of parks as well as their differentiation has been noteworthy. *According to the author's hypothesis the changing motivation structure played a determinant role in this process. As a research issue arises the relationship between the travel motivations and the thematic park types, on the other hand the investigation of the demand and supply of present day thematic parks, their probable change and forecasted trends, which define the chances and improvement directions of the thematic parks.* The author's aim is to examine *the factors affecting the forms and structure types of the parks, as well as to explore the role of physical environment in this process. Although there have been attempts made to define the place of parks within the tourism structure – based on the international scientific literature – these remain at the level of international and classical parks. The dissertation adapts the national features in the model, which highlights their special national roles as well.*

Compared to Western Europe, the thematic parks appeared in Hungary only with a considerable delay, which has reasons related to the demand, though basically to the supply as well. *The national market of the thematic parks differs significantly from the international market, which is due to the essential role of natural, social and economic environment. According to the initial hypothesis, the parks – based on their general establishment and operational characteristics – belong to the attractions to be found in Hungary's developed regions, where not only the development of tourism supply, but also the demand generated by visitors and local inhabitants becomes an outstanding role. If the parks are connected to developed regions, their spatial equalization effect – similar to other products – becomes also disputed. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 2000s, the national regional development and tourism policy realized the effects generated by the parks, which process is represented in the dissertation in chronological order, related to the support structures.*

The adventure parks are the youngest actors within the market of thematic parks, though their supply expanded extremely fast. The international scientific literature deals with them only marginally, while the scientific investigation of the national instances has not been started yet, however, they are the actors of tourism attractions at national/regional level. *In the third logical unit of the dissertation the author analyses the theoretical and practical aspect of the operation of adventure parks. Based on former assumptions, the adventure parks offer through their roles a higher quality, than the amusement parks or aqua parks based on mass tourism – this fact can also be proven by their integrative functions.* Subsequent to the outline of the topic's theoretical basis, *the characteristics of the practical realization were discussed in a case study, which was carried out with the involvement of Hungary's largest adventure parks. Among the settlement factors of the parks, the role of each*

geographical space was an emphasized viewpoint, as well as the investigation of their interaction, which is a possibility to make up a typology for the adventure parks.

3. Applied methods

The completion of the dissertation is special, because it scientifically examines a topic, which has already operating instances. The researches substantiating the model of thematic parks are still completely missing from the national investigations, though the rapid growth of their market draws the attention directly to their reason for existence.

The applied methods of the dissertation are presented according to the division of primary and secondary methods, being generally used in national human geography. Besides the secondary methods, the primary methods played also an important part in the thesis, in order to be able to carry out an exact analysis and evaluation of the operational characteristics of the national thematic parks, as well as of their roles in tourism.

3.1. Scientific literature and theoretical basis

The *secondary sources* represented the basis of the adaptation of scientific literature concerning the topic of the dissertation. Within the framework of this, the basic terms of attractive feature, attraction and destination were defined, and were critically analyzed according to international and national scientific literature. The theoretical substantiation also clarifies the relation between the terms used in the dissertation. Although these are basic terms generally used in tourism, their interpretation is ambiguous. The analysis of the *international scientific literature* related to the topic did not only involve *international specialized books*, but also the *scientific periodicals* (Tourism Management, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Travel Research, Travel&Tourism Analyst, and Annals of Tourism Research) were emphasized. Even if the international scientific literature deals with adventure tourism in detail, it pays a minor attention to its realization within parks, namely to the adventure parks. The national scientific literature of thematic parks is very poor, only a few Hungarian authors have dealt with this topic so far. During the *adaptation of the scientific literature* the author also involved the investigation of some parts of related scientific fields (e.g. recreation theory, or the basis of management and marketing theory from the field of economics) in order to provide a complex approach. The wide scope and the multidisciplinary approach in tourism researches are indispensable, since tourism itself has inter-sectoral features – therefore it is impossible to apply the research results of a single scientific field exclusively.

The introduction of parks as well as their market analysis was only supported by official *statistical data* at international level, which are published regularly by the TEA¹ and ERA². The author attempted to represent the latest data in the dissertation, and if it was possible, to demonstrate the spatial and temporal changes as well.

¹ TEA: Themed Entertainment Association

² ERA: Economic Research Associates

3.2. Primary research

The author's aim was to apply the *qualitative* and *quantitative* methods parallel in the investigation procedure. The *quantitative research based on provider questionnaire*, while the *qualitative based on personal questions, deep interviews and observations, field surveys*. The processing of the research data was completed with computer-based and statistical methods.

Questionnaires

In order to analyse the issues and hypotheses being pointed out in the aims of the dissertation, *questionnaires* were filled out, and their output was evaluated. The characteristics of the establishment and operation of adventure parks were processed within the framework of a questionnaire filled out by the national establishments.

The author examines the operational features of the parks having a complex supply, since these can appear even as individual destinations on the tourism market and can be operated as primary attractions. As a minimum requirement, the *complex supply* should *involve at least three different game elements, and the presence of at least one related to tourism*. The above listed criteria are satisfied in the case of the following establishments: Mecsextrem Park (Pécs), Holdfény Liget (Gyöngyösfalu), Oxygen Adrenalin Park (Sástó), Serpa Adventure Park (Balatonfűző). The supply was analyzed with *standardized questionnaires*, which focused on the formation, operation, inner structure and outside – regional – relationship structure of the parks in a complex point of view.

The *data was managed* with the MS Excell programme, while the *completion of the maps and figures* took place with the Corel Draw software. The graphic illustrations – figures and maps –not only represented, but also served the function of model creation.

Deep interview, field surveys

The *method of the deep interview* was applied during the questioning of the park managements. The standard questionnaire meant the basis of comparability, while the deep interviews highlighted the local characteristics and specialties. During the *field surveys* several functioning Hungarian parks were visited and involved in the comparative analysis. The author could observe the processes, problems and critical issues in connection with the operation.

4. Results

4.1. *The interrelationship and the definitions of resources in tourism, attractive features, attractions, destinations*

In the first part of the dissertation the basic notions of tourism supply – resources in tourism, attractive features, attractions and destinations – and their correlation were examined. *The author draws the attention to the importance of the interdependent relations between the individual terms and components, as well as to the essential cooperation, which will be the principle of the formation and successful operation of thematic parks.* According to the

investigations, the basis of every product- and capacity development should be represented by the comprehensive evaluation of the resources in terms of tourism, which could also be the starting point of the realization of sustainable tourism. *The author claims that the terms of attractive feature and attraction have to be distinguished. The dissertation prefers the process aspect, in which the first stage is the presence of the attractive feature, while the result of the transformational – developmental – process is represented by the attraction. In case of the destinations, the regional aspect seems to be relevant, according to which the destination is the complex entity of the tourism supplies interlinked within a given space.* While the theoretical models involve the above mentioned terms separately, in reality they frequently overlap each other.

The first, theoretical chapter of the dissertation, the definitions of attractive feature, attraction and destination were given in order to support the typological ordering of parks and the identification of their characteristics. *The thematic parks are those attractions in tourism, where the attractive feature as principal endowment is incomprehensible. The attractive feature is represented by the topic together with its related game elements and rides. One of the special characteristics is that in the case of thematic parks, an attractive feature in itself – without any attraction – cannot exist.* Another important fact is that the parks *can form independent destinations*, which can offer programs lasting even for several days. The game elements in themselves are not enough for a successful operation, the complete serving of the visitor need related services as well, the next stage of which could be their appearance as real destinations. *The thematic parks represent the terms of attractive feature, attraction and destination simultaneously, which means challenge for the designers and managers of the establishments alike.*

4.2. Thematic parks in tourism

The focus issue of the dissertation, the thematic attractions represent one of the most prominent product developmental lines in world-wide tourism. The following table summarizes two of the most important trends of thematic supplies, namely the main characteristics of thematic parks and thematic routes. In Hungary, the terms related to product development often overlap each other; therefore the notion of cluster and experience-chain is also included in the table, which highlights the centre activities.

Table 1: Comparison of the thematic attractions, the cluster and the experience-chain

	Thematic park	Thematic routes	Cluster	Experience-chain
The geographical aspect of development	spot-like	along a line	network	along a line / network
The geographical extension of development	settlement	small region / region/nation / international scale	regional	small region / region
Characteristic products	active tourism heritage tourism	heritage tourism, wine and gastronomy, man- made heritage, religious tourism	health tourism, cultural tourism, ecotourism, equestrian tourism, wine tourism	changing; it means the junction of products
Actors	partnerships (for- profit and rarely non-profit)	partnerships (generally non- rarely for-profit sphere)	partnerships (both non-and for-profit spheres)	partnerships (both non- and for-profit spheres)
Field of cooperation	not characteristic	attractive feature / attraction / services	methodological cooperation, product development	general product development

Source: own edition

The thematic park is one of the outstanding actors of thematic attractions, which initially served mainly as means of recreation and relaxation, though along with the development of tourism, they became touristic targets. The second half of the twentieth century can be called the era of thematic parks in tourism. *Meanwhile, the supply of parks has also changed significantly, most prominently marked by the appearance and spreading of new types. Therefore, the classical amusement parks were first accompanied by the open-air and covered aqua parks, later by the heritage and adventure parks. The formation of new-generation parks was generated and supported by the transformation of the motivation structure of demand.* The developmental line of parks is special due to the fact that the larger parks appeared earlier than the smaller ones. The largest parks are connected to the demand of mass tourism, which ensures the multi-millions of visitors for long years and decades. Further to this, the most popular parks can be found in the geographically and demographically largest Western European countries; these parks rely on local demand.

For a long period of time, the thematic parks were classified as man-made attractions, which are the most artificial, since they are independent from the geographical space, can be built almost everywhere in the world, and their chosen topic can be universal as well. This claim is valid for today's Disneylands and their followers, but the new types of parks return to the local endowments more frequently, and use them as the basis of their product. *Therefore it can be claimed that they are less dependent from the local resources in terms of their topic choice, though the local natural-social-*

economic environment receives a more prominent role during the choice of location. On the other hand, the individual supply of parks is determined by the product development relying on local endowments.

The market of thematic parks is concentrated even nowadays, though in the past period, we could witness the establishment of smaller parks as well. The classical amusement parks and their water-linked versions, the aqua parks are still large, while in the case of heritage parks – and even more prominently regarding the adventure parks – the appearance of smaller-scale establishments are also observable. *This process can be explained by the fact that the demand for capital, as well as the need for continuous capital reconstruction and in-flow capital of the amusement and aqua parks is the most significant, while the requirement of returns is strict, having the private capital in the background.*

The thematic parks' complex structure of attractive features and motivation makes it possible to highlight not only their central function (entertainment), but also many other additional functions, which guarantee the special status of each park. *The rapid extension of parks shifts towards the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, though according to the number of visitors, the first place is still represented by the establishments focussing on mass tourism and the satisfaction of basic needs. Among the newest types of thematic parks, the heritage and adventure parks extend the function of entertainment, and aim at the higher levels of needs.* The changes of post-fords' tourism – e.g. the intensification of demand orientation – generate the modification of supply developmental trends.

Table 2: The functions of thematic parks

Functions	Types of parks		
	Amusement park and aqua park	Heritage park	Adventure park
Entertainment, relaxation	+	+	+
Recreation	+	+	+
Propagation of healthy living	- / +	-	+
Forming and strengthening of identity	-	+	-
Teaching/education	-	+	+
Team building	-	-	+
Self-fulfilment, setting out the limits of performance	-	+ / -	+

Source: own edition

The various types of thematic parks aim at the demands on the different levels of hierarchy of needs, the lower and higher levels alike. The topic choice based on local endowments as well as the methods of the applied attraction management can offer services satisfying the tourists with basic needs and those with more complex, higher level requirements alike. Based on the extended Maslow pyramid, Table 3. displays the motivations of travels related to each hierarchy level and the types of thematic parks. According to the above listed factors, there is a logical relation between the target hierarchy level and the temporal order of the formation of thematic parks.

Table 3: The relation between Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and the thematic parks

Maslow’ hierarchy	Motivation	Relation of thematic parks with the hierarchy model
Physiological needs	Recreation, relaxation, entertainment	Aqua parks, amusement parks
Safety needs	The health and balance between the body, spirit and soul	Aqua parks, adventure parks
Love and belonging	Belonging to a social group	Heritage parks
Esteem	Professional and social acknowledgement	Adventure parks
Self-actualization	Exploration of the limits of individual performance	Adventure parks
Need to know and understand	Gaining knowledge	Heritage parks, adventure parks
Aesthetic needs	Appreciation and searching beauty	Heritage parks, adventure parks

Source: based on Aubert A. 2006, own edition

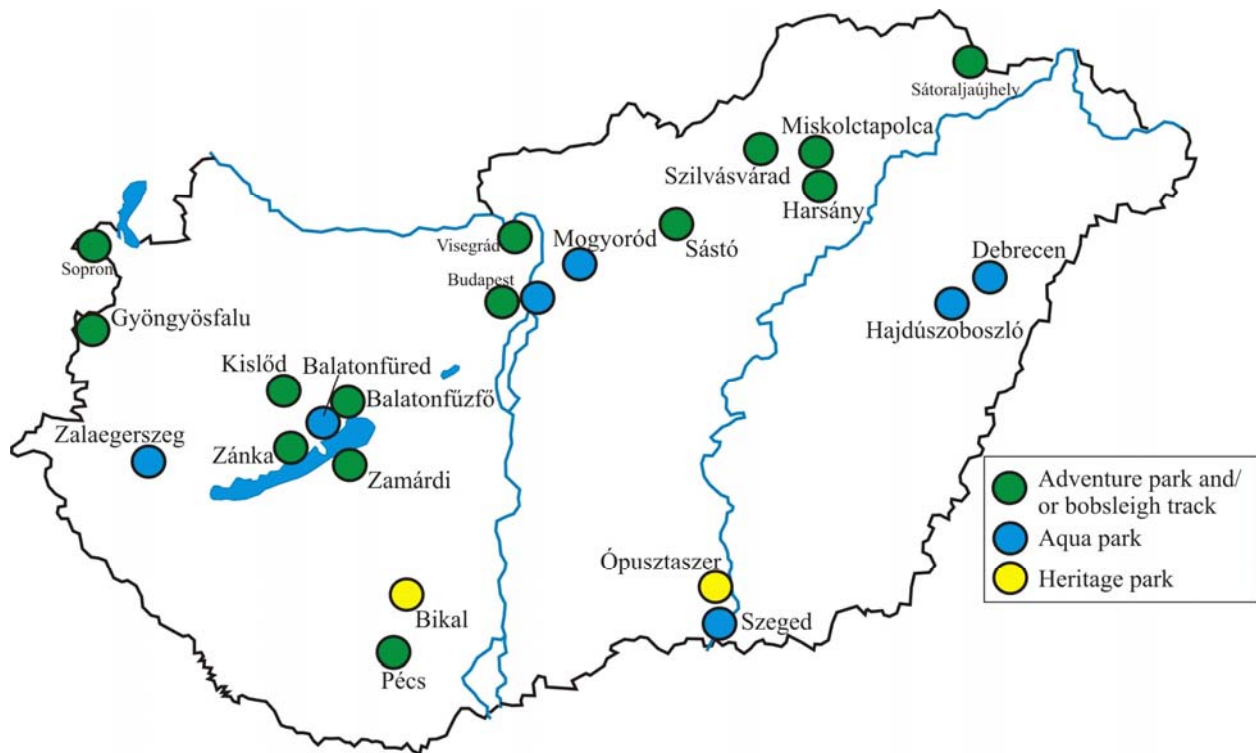
The *demand of thematic parks* is characterized by complexity, besides the common target groups there are special segments only typical for a given type of park. The variedness of their demand is even more extended by the local inhabitants, who are also returning guests in addition to the tourists and day-trippers. During the shaping of games, services and programmes the needs of the different segments have to be considered.

Thematic parks in Hungary

In Hungary, the formation of thematic attractions has been hindered by the lack of financial resources and by the postponed change of the social values and lifestyle for a long time. In terms of social-economic development, general values and consumer goods, Hungary presently shows the signs of the transition between the „economic miracle” and the „post-materialist society” – without the economic miracle. Nevertheless, the application systems rely on the Western European patterns in terms of leisure time and tourism, and support the developmental trends characteristic for the leisure society. Therefore in both cases of recreation and tourism, the demand shifts toward the thematic supplies.

The market of the national thematic parks is still lagging behind, and has only a few actors. The aqua parks are the most popular, which also work as aquatic amusement parks; their formation has been subsidized by the application systems since the beginning of the 2000s. Besides the aqua parks, the largest number of thematic parks is represented by the adventure parks, which meant the narrower topic of the dissertation. The development of the parks was held back – and is partly still hindered – by the lack of capital, the low level of affective demand, and the lack of support.

Figure 1: Thematic parks in Hungary

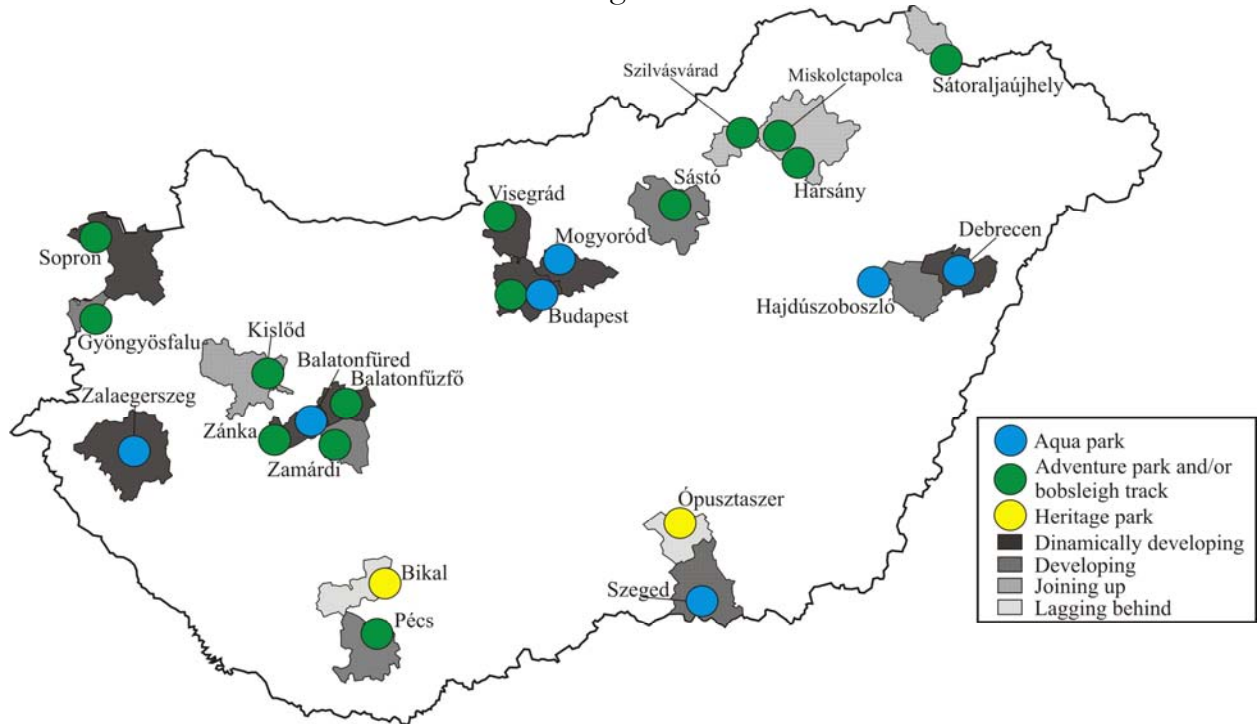


Source: own edition

The formation and operation of thematic parks is closely connected to the social-economic development, which fact is proven by the spatial location of the Hungarian parks. Regarding the *supply*, the capital-intensive feature of the parks is also detectable in the costs of the establishment and maintenance of the park. *Compared to the other capital-intensive tourism products, the role and development of the social-economic environment is up valued by the fact that up to the last couple of years, not even the application resources have supported the realization of adventure parks.* Regarding the *demand*, the role of the social-economic background is strengthened, since a significant part of the park visitors consists of the local inhabitants and the guests from the neighbourhood, who visit the establishment with a given frequency. The establishments based on the higher motivation level of tourism sector settle down near the consumer market, which also assumes the endowments and environment of developed regions and small regions. The following map displays the *relationship between the thematic parks – together with some of its types – and the development of small regions.* Except for two parks, every establishment can be found at least in a *joining up*, or rather in a *developing or dynamically developing small region.*

According to the above mentioned facts, one can claim that the thematic parks' influence on regional development can be observed both regarding the multiplication effect of income and employment, though the equalizing power is only marginal. The role of tourism products in decreasing the differentiated regional concentration is proven at the level of thematic parks as well, which situation can be changed through the application systems.

Figure 2: Relationship between the types of thematic parks and the development of small regions



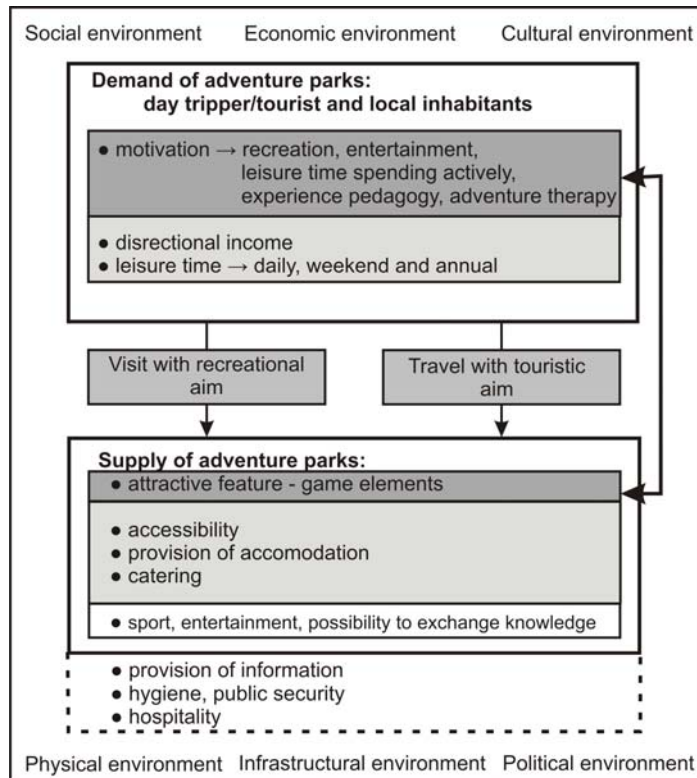
Source: own edition

4.3. Examination of the operational model of adventure parks and its practical materialization

The thematic parks – among them the adventure parks – have a special position in the tourism system. On the one hand, *they are capable to fulfil the role of attraction and destination simultaneously. Their existence as destination is based on the more and more extending circle of related services, which enables the formation of a complex product package.* In economies with a significant touristic purchasing capacity and capital intensive tourism providers, the adventure parks become destinations, while *in Hungary this process started only a short time ago.*

During the investigation of parks, the *model of tourism system* by Lengyel M. (1992) has been modified with the *product characteristics of the adventure parks*. Regarding the *demand*, besides the visitors with tourism aim, the parks are complemented with the function of recreation, while the *supply* includes the structure of each element of the product as well. The new aspect allows a complex examination of the relationship between the parks and the physical environment.

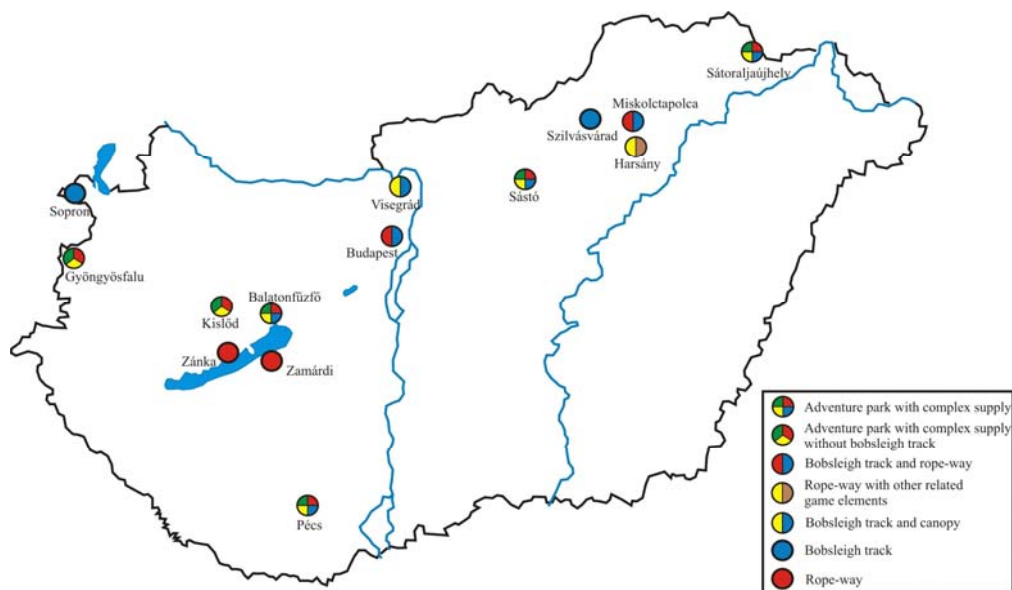
Figure 3: Adventure parks in the tourism system



Source: based on Lengyel M. (1992) modified by the author

In Hungary, the location of adventure parks is highly concentrated. Among the *natural endowments*, the characteristics of the relief intensively influence the position of the parks. Further to this, *not only the accessibility factors*, but also the *touristic position* and the *proximity of larger towns/agglomeration zones* are determinant. The parks with a complex supply are connected to the suburban zones, while those with only a couple of game elements can be found in *accentuated tourism areas*.

Figure 4: Adventure parks in Hungary



Source: own edition

The *demand for adventure parks* is complex in Hungary as well, which is the result of the complexity and/or specialty of the supply. One part of the parks focuses on one or two game elements and a given group of the demand is present, while the larger parks have a more complex supply portfolio, and therefore realize a differentiated demand orientation. The *classical demand segments of adventure parks are the school-class excursions, corporate guests/visitors, families, party of friends* (Table 4.). The *philosophy should be supported by the game elements as well, and a supply portfolio satisfying the needs of the target group has to be formed*. Primarily in the urban regions, not only the tourists/day-trippers, but also the local inhabitants can visit the park regularly, which phenomenon could be an important factor in terms of operation and development.

Table 4: The motivation of visiting adventure parks in case of the main target groups

Market segment	Motivation of visiting an adventure park	Levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs	
School-class excursions	Gaining knowledge, aspect formation, experience pedagogy	Gaining knowledge	Self-fulfilment, exploration of the limits of performance
Corporate visitors (business guests)	Community strengthening	Predominance, professional progress, success and acknowledgement	
Families	Entertainment, active recreation, aspect formation	Entertainment, recreation	
Party of friends	Entertainment, active recreation		

Source: Aubert A. – Jónás-Berki M. 2009

The simultaneous presence of target groups in the adventure parks influences both the tasks and aspects of development and operation, e.g. the service portfolio and the circle of related services. The consumer characteristics and behaviour of the primary target groups are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: The consumer characteristics of the potential primary target groups of adventure parks

Local inhabitants	Day-trippers /tourists within the framework of leisure time tourism	Corporate tourists (business guests)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorter period of stay, • Concentrated game usage, • Events, • The lower level of making use of related services, • Returning/committed visitors, • Individual and group visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer period of stay (a day/half a day), • Balanced game usage, • Higher demand for related services, • First, but frequently experienced visitors, • Individual and group visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer period of stay (a day/half a day), • “Rental” of the park within the frameworks of corporate days, • Events, • Organized programmes, • Demand for high-quality related services, • First and returning guests, • Group visitors

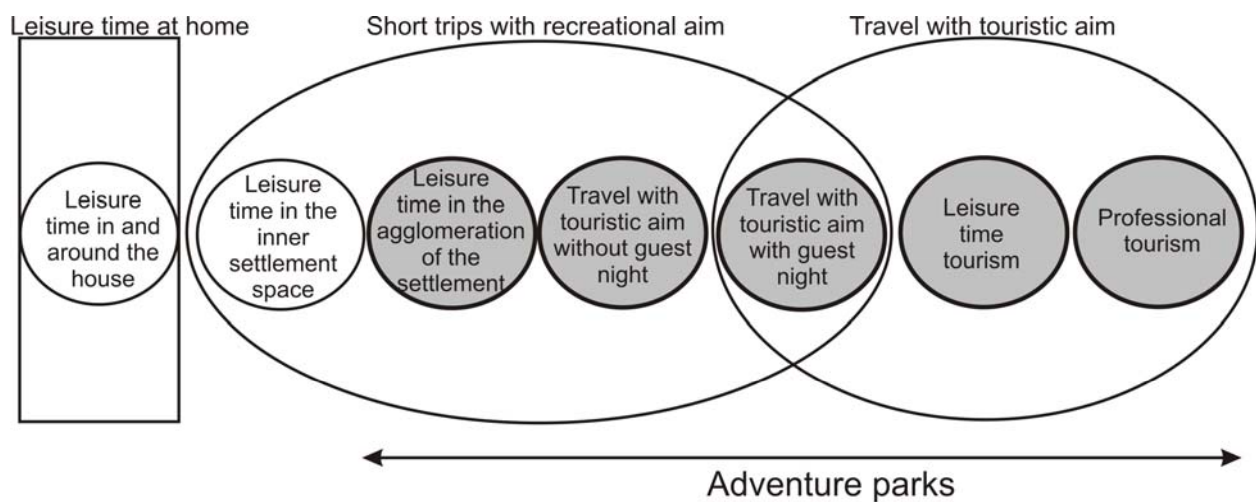
Source: own edition

The most important feature of adventure parks – at the same time their greatest advantage – is the supply flexibility, which enables them to offer high-quality, complex and adventurous services for several target groups. *Contrary to the classical thematic parks representing mass tourism, the aspect and operational philosophy of adventure parks shifts toward alternative tourism. The integrative functions displayed in the dissertation highlight the fact that they represent a higher developmental level, which is the base of their success and popularity.* The characteristics of their demand and supply were analyzed based on the operational model, during the investigation of the *integrative role* of adventure parks. Due to the complex structure and function of the establishments, the integrative feature of the parks can be interpreted along several dimensions:

- *adventure park, as the meeting point of the tourist and the local inhabitants,*
- *mass tourism and sustainability, closeness to nature,*
- *the park, as tourism attraction and destination,*
- *entertainment, teaching and education, community strengthening,*
- *suburban recreational functions.*

Out of the *integrative functions*, the theses focuses primarily on the *suburban recreational function*, which highlights the fact that the adventure parks located in the above mentioned regions are places of tourism and recreation at the same time. *In terms of recreation, the parks are linked to sport recreation; while in terms of tourism, they are connected to active tourism. Within tourism, the comprehensive usage of the spaces of the parks can be classified as the spaces of leisure and corporate tourism.*

Figure 5: Adventure parks in the geographical typology of touristic and leisure time spaces



Source: based on Monheim 1979 and Aubert A. 2005 modified by Jónás-Berki M. 2009

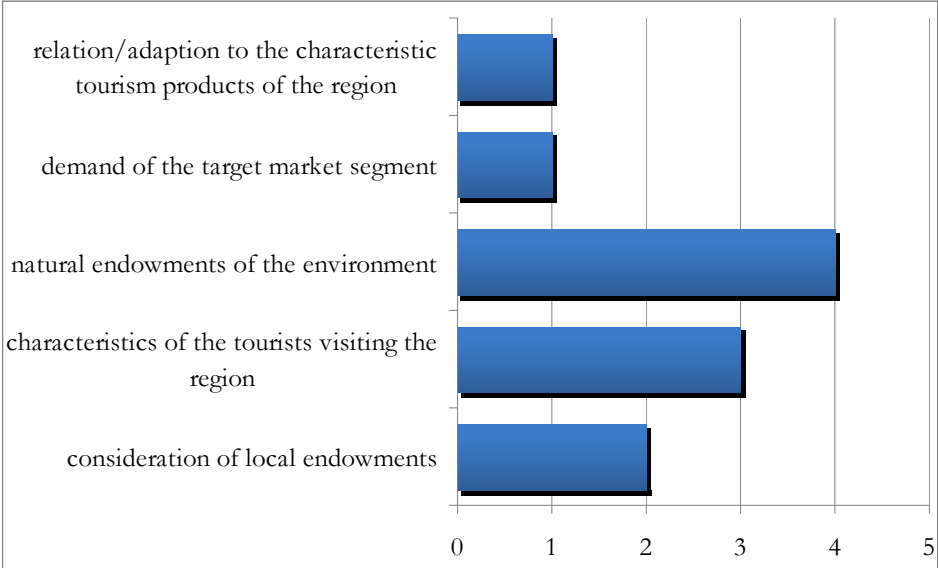
The adventure parks can be found in Hungary’s suburban-, as well as in its central regions of tourism. The recreational processes present in the urban regions are supported by the economic stability of the small regions, and by the effective demand. Most of the *adventure parks* are linked to the *vicinity of the settlements*. *The basis of the effective demand is represented by the agglomerations, prospective agglomerations and by the central settlements of settlement-groups. The parks can also renew brown fields: through the changed function, the local*

community and its vicinity gains a higher level of lifestyle; through the modern touristic and recreation supply a better social and economic situation can be reached.

The *case study* of the dissertation discusses the incorporation of the characteristics and operational process of the adventure parks into the theoretical model of thematic parks, therefore it represents the basis of the inductive aspect of the model and typology of the adventure parks. The theses emphasize the most prominent features of the investigation aspects, which play a key role in the structure of adventure parks as well.

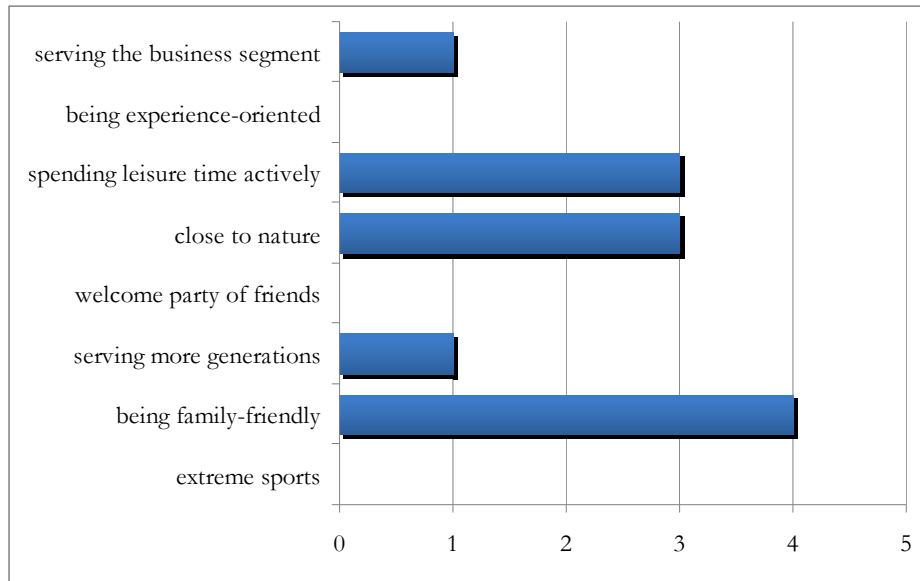
According to the author, one of the most important characteristics – and at the same time the fundamentally differentiating factor – of the adventure parks is the *outstanding role of the natural environment in the structure of the product*. This preliminary hypothesis was proven by the answers given to two questions included in the questionnaires, i.e. it appeared among the aspects considered during the building-up (*Figure 6.*) and in the operational philosophy (*Figure 7.*).

Figure 6: The most important aspects considered during the building-up of the park



Source: based on the questionnaire data, own edition

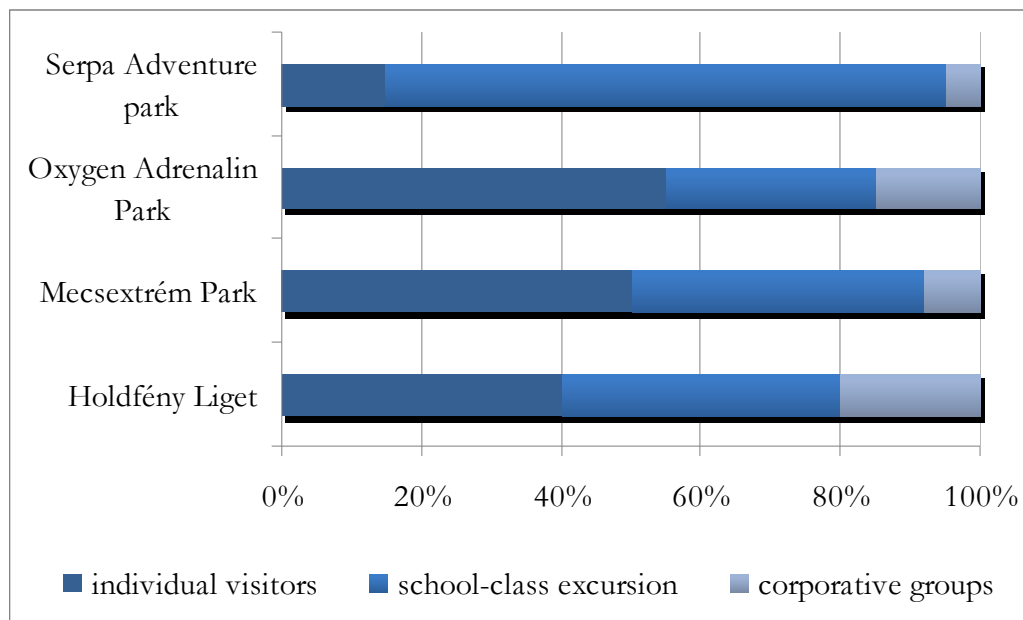
Figure 7: The operational philosophy of the park (the 3 most frequently mentioned)



Source: based on the questionnaire data, own edition

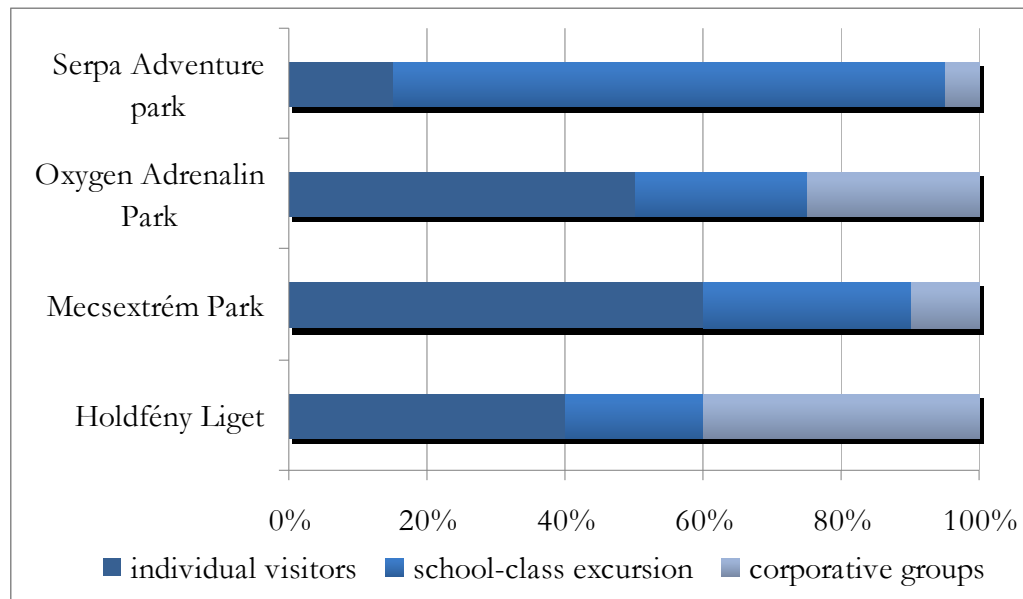
Another special characteristic of the adventure parks, namely the complexity of demand was also verified in the examined parks with a complex supply, which can be regarded as the location of not only individual visitors, but also of youth tourism (school-class excursions) and corporate tourism (corporate groups). Each target groups are represented to a various extent related to the number of visitors (Figure 8.) and the incomes (Figure 9.).

Figure 8: The composition of the adventure park demand related to the number of visitors



Source: based on the questionnaire data, own edition

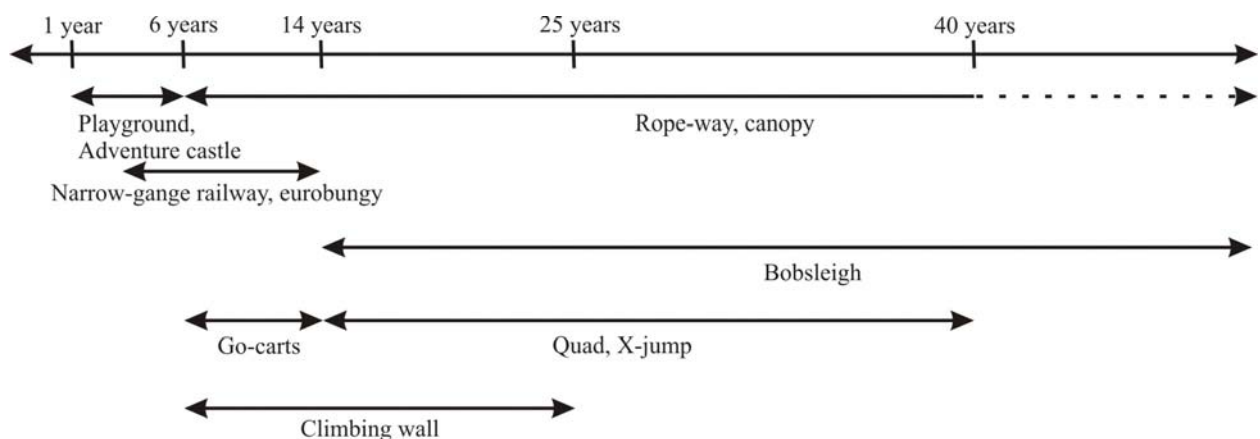
Figure 9: The composition of the adventure park demand related to the incomes



Source: based on the questionnaire data, own edition

The supply of the adventure parks significantly influences the composition of guests. Each game element – although generally serving more than one age group – has a major target group, for which they provide the most experience (Figure 10.). According to the data of the questionnaires it is unambiguous that one of the most popular game elements, namely the rope-way can be utilized among the widest range of visitors. This fact can be the reason for the trend of opening establishments, which offer rope-ways exclusively, e.g. the Challenge Land in Budapest, the Adventure Park in Zamárdi.

Figure 10: The game elements providing the most experience in case of each age group of the adventure parks

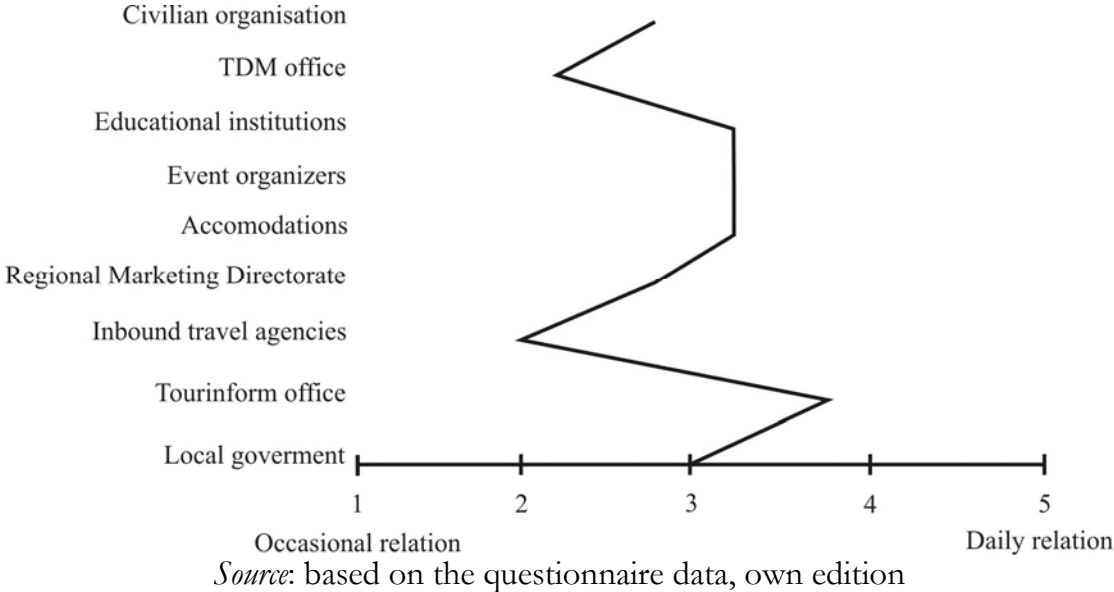


Source: based on the questionnaire data, own edition

The adventure parks are one of the youngest actors in Hungarian tourism – and also one of the most dynamically developing attraction types. One of the critical and controversial points in the model of thematic parks is the *shaping of outward relationship system* with the local/regional tourism providers. In order to evolve the multiplication effect of tourism, not only popular attractions, but also an expansive service supply is

necessary. The other partner group is made up of the organizations of the distribution channel, i.e. the event organizers, the inbound travel agencies and the regional marketing directorates (Figure 11).

Figure 11: The outward relationship system of adventure parks

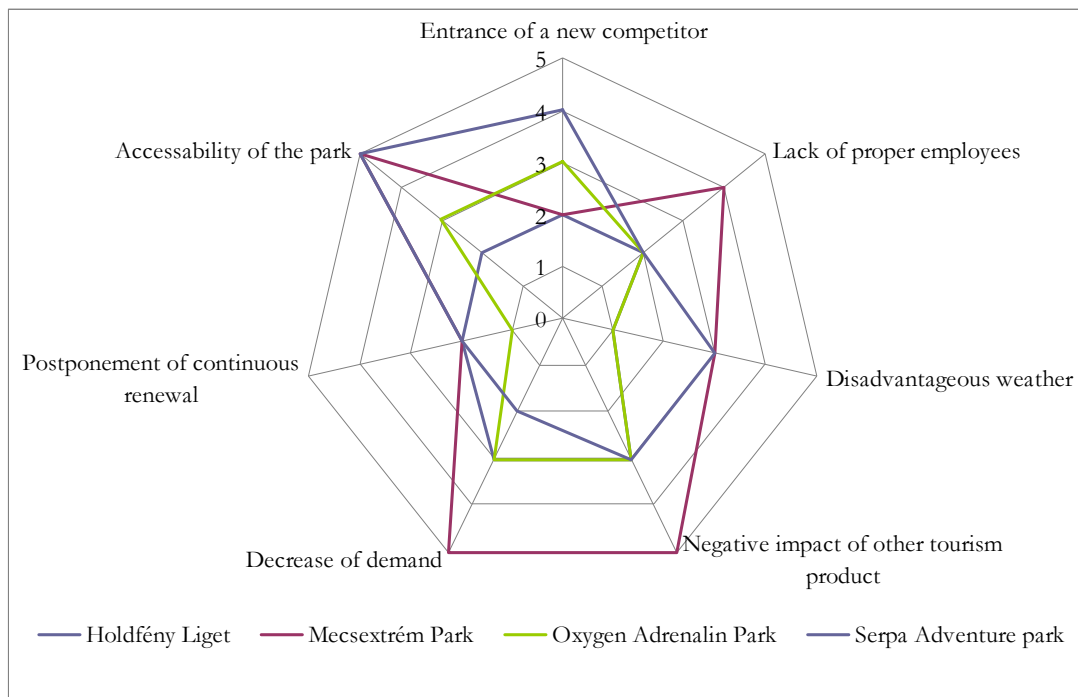


Among the long-term strategic development lines, every park ranked the requirement of *continuous renewal* first place. The simplest method is the annual introduction of new game elements. This aspiration can be observed in every park – namely it not only generates new (first) visits, it also motivates former guests to return to the park. The new game elements can be the base of attracting *new target groups* as well, while the importance of market extension received the second rank. The strategic development lines also include the *extension of related services* and the qualitative development of the already existing ones, which concentrate on the *accommodations* and *catering*.

During the mid- and long-term planning of parks one has to consider and evaluate those *risk factors*, which could endanger the safety and sustainability of the operation (Figure 13.). The following figure includes the factors, which were regarded as real risk factors in case of every park. *It was proven that the most prominent risk in the successful operation is represented by the postponement of continuous renewal, which can lead to the decreasing number of both returning and first visitors.* All in all, the risk of *disadvantageous weather* received second rank, but the answers differ from each other significantly, the reason for which can be found in the surrounding environment and the demand characteristics of the parks. The success of the tourism sector and each of its establishments are directly connected to the *qualitative and quantitative features of human resources*, which fact was verified by the questionnaires, since the *lack of appropriate employees* received generally third rank. The fourth rank among the risk factors was awarded to the *entrance of a new competitor* to the market. Although the national market can be found in an increasing period, *some regions already witness some concentration as well.* *The reach of the parks can be regarded regional, while in case of a complex product structure, it can*

be national as well. Therefore in some regions one can observe the saturation of supply, e.g. in the region of the Bükk Mountain (Northern Mountain Range) or in the eastern basin of Lake Balaton.

Figure 12: Risk factors in the sustainability of the operation of parks



Source: based on the questionnaire data, own edition

4.4. Creation of a definition, typology and model for adventure parks

According to the theoretical approaches of thematic parks and the case studies utilizing an inductive method, the author aimed at the *creation of a definition, typology and model for (Hungarian) adventure parks*.

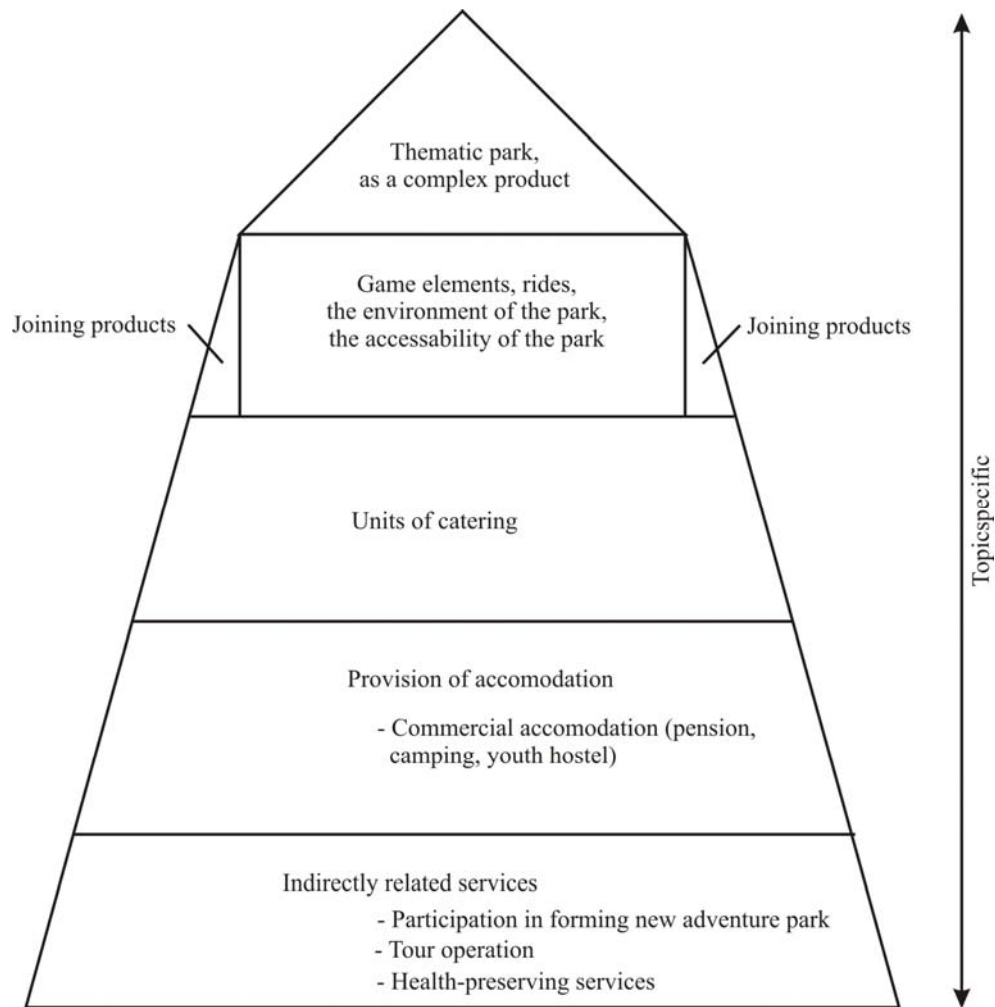
Creation of a definition

The author regarded the interpretation of Medlik, S. (1996) – referred to by Puczkó L. – Rátz T. (2002) – as a starting point in the creation of a definition for thematic parks; while in the case of adventure parks – based on their practical realization and characteristics – the author suggests the following definition: *adventure parks are such nature-based thematic parks, which have not only a touristic function, but can have recreational functions as well, aiming at even higher hierarchy levels of needs. The park consists of game elements assuming visitor activity, through which it reaches the original aim of experience-based recreation and gaining knowledge.*

Creation of a model

The basis of the creation of a model for adventure parks are represented by the product's building elements, having all a special topic, which functionally link the services together, and can develop the park into a real destination. The development lines are displayed in *Figure 12*. in a logical and structural order.

Figure 13: The model of the attraction development of a thematic park (adventure park)



Source: own edition

The following table summarizes the most important features of the thematic and adventure parks, as well as the most prominent differences between them.

Table 6: Summary of the characteristics of thematic parks and the Hungarian adventure parks

Characteristics	Thematic parks	Adventure parks
Function	entertainment, recreation	entertainment, recreation + education, gaining knowledge
Related level of hierarchy of need	basic biological needs	basic biological needs + higher levels of psychological needs
Attracting feature	rides, game elements	game elements
Type of visit	passive	assumed visitor activity
Base of the attractive feature	artificial, independent from the geographical space	natural endowments
Ticket system	one-day-fee	differentiated pricing
Opening hours	seasonal	seasonal
Tourism function	attraction and destination	attraction

Source: own edition

Typology of adventure parks according to the geographical space and the complexity of supply

The adventure parks belong to the artificial attractive features, but their construction and operation are established by the special structure of the natural-social-economic sphere of the geographical space.

The questionnaires unambiguously verify the fact that the most prominent establishing factor of the adventure parks is the physical environment, though it is not enough in itself to ensure a sustainable operation. Therefore the appearance of parks is generated by a given level and characteristics of the social and economic endowments. According to the location of the Hungarian adventure parks, the following types can be identified:

- parks with a complex supply structure, connected to the vicinity of large and medium-sized towns,
- parks with a complex supply structure, connected to nature-based tourism centres,
- leisure parks specialized in a few game elements, connected to large and medium-sized towns,
- parks specialized in a few game elements, connected to tourism centres.

According to the above mentioned facts, the Hungarian adventure parks are not only linked to large and medium-sized towns, but also to tourism centres, which feature determine both their operational circumstances and their characteristics (e.g. the structure of the ticket system, composition of the game elements, opening hours, target groups).

The parks with a complex supply structure, connected to the vicinity of large and medium-sized towns fulfil touristic and recreational functions simultaneously. The basis of their demand is represented by the townspeople, who visit the park for a couple of hours, and several times a year. Compared to the other venues, they have to handle a significantly lower level of seasonality. The foundation of the product is also embodied by the advanced touristic infra- and supra-structure of the towns, as well as by the better accessibility. The Hungarian examples for such adventure parks are the Mecsextrém Park (Pécs) and the newest park in Sátoraljaújhely.

The parks with a complex supply structure, connected to nature-based tourism centres are linked to the important tourism destinations of Hungary. Similar to the former type, a complex supply is present, which is made up according to the demand of the defined target groups (generally families, multi-generation travels). The demand basis of these parks is embodied by the tourists and day-trippers. The Hungarian examples for such adventure parks with a dominant profile are the examined Holdfény Liget (Gyöngyösfalu) and the Oxygen Adrenalin Park (Sástó).

The leisure parks specialized in a few game elements, connected to large and medium-sized towns are based on local inhabitants; they provide leisure time and recreational activities. The most popular game element is the adventure track-way, which has different levels of difficulty, and therefore satisfies the demands of visitors with various physical endurances. This park type is rather connected to recreation than tourism, though they enrich the tourism supply of towns. The Hungarian examples for such adventure

parks are the planned development in Kaposvár or the already operating Challengeland adventure track-way in Budapest.

The parks specialized in a few game elements, connected to tourism centres are based on the travels, but they can have an additional role in making travel decisions and in the choice of the venue. Through the extension of the programme supply they contribute to the formation of visitor experience. Its typical game elements/rides are the bobsleigh, the adventure track-way, maybe the climbing wall. The most prominent weakness of such parks is the fact that their operation is linked to the travels of the destination, i.e. they cannot – or can only restrictedly – influence the changes in travels. There are several typical instances for this type of parks in Hungary, which are generally connected to Lake Balaton or to the Bükk Mountain (Zánka, Zamárdi, Miskolctapolca).

According to the typology, the adventure parks in Hungary have not yet reached the development level, which would mean the status of a destination. The largest parks with a complex supply are primary attractive features in making travel decisions, through their planned development they could appear as individual destinations on the tourism market.

5. The possible application and further directions of the research

The starting point of the national investigations in tourism geography is generally a given settlement or region, and the authors focus on the analysis of tourism endowments. Therefore the former researches have been mainly descriptive works for a long time. The examinations of products were applied for the most prominent product types. *Besides the survey of the supply of thematic parks and thematic attractions the primary research of their demand is also necessary. Several examined parks indicated their support of the surveys of this kind.*

The author aims at the investigation of every type of thematic parks, thus the theoretical operational model involved in the third logical unit of the dissertation would be extended to aqua parks and to the heritage parks. As a result of this, it becomes possible to evaluate one of the most popular product development trends regarding the whole country. As a long-term aim, the author wants to investigate the appearance and development of thematic attractions in Hungary.

The further directions of research also involve the *detailed examination of tourism resources and the analysis of the establishment, operation and relationship system of parks.* The most positive consequence of tourism is realized through the multiplication effects in employment and incomes, which is the basis of spatial equalizing. Contrary to this, present-day studies highlight the fact that this mechanism can be questioned in case of several – mainly capital-intensive – products. *Within the frameworks of a comprehensive research, the author would like to examine the equalizing effect of given product types, and to construct a model based on their need for human resource.*

The potential utilization field of the dissertation is of course the *higher education*, where two B-level majors – Geographer BSc and Tourism-Catering BA – could apply

the research process itself, as well as its theoretical and practical results. One of the weaknesses of today's higher education is the predominance of theory. The solution is the dissemination of the applied research results: the integration of the practical problems and the case studies into the training could enlarge the students' horizon, and would support the formation of a more competitive knowledge and range of abilities.

6. Publications

6.1. Basic publications related to the dissertation

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