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*Sustainability Issues in Postmodern Tourism, Examining  
Corporate Social Responsibility in the Hotel and Hospitality  
Industry*

Thesis of the doctoral dissertation

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## Introduction

The world has come to the era of "total tourism" (MICHALKÓ – RÁTZ 2017)<sup>1</sup>, where the tourist no longer consumes the "product" made for him, but for him the unusual or non-home environment is the product itself.

Postmodern tourism is the next stage in the development of modern (mass) tourism. However, the diversification of travel patterns, tourism and the flow of tourists everywhere does not mean a more balanced distribution of the mass. Negative (environmental and social) impacts still cause problems in overrepresented tourist places. The issue to be solved goes far beyond the boundaries of tourism, and with the help of the sustainable development thinking scheme (and its suggestions as a model), world tourism is also trying to find sectoral solutions.

In my dissertation I deal with illuminating the complexity of the problem, outlining it and analyzing one of the most important field of tourism, the hotel and hospitality industry. My aim is to focus on unsustainable practices resulting from modern travel, and to propose solutions within the industry.

## Research objectives and tasks

Based on my primary research experience and the study of the literature, I set the following research objectives:

- C1 – Interpretation of the sustainability of tourism in Hungary, investigation of their anomalies**
- C2 – Mapping CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), show the illegal and unethical factors and practices in the hotel and hospitality industry**
- C3 – To evaluate the social and environmental problems of tourism in Hungary and to find answers to it**

The aim system of my research, the relation of the individual research objectives and tasks to each other is illustrated in Figure 1 below, which, besides assigning the tasks, also suggests the nature of the necessary methodology.

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<sup>1</sup> Michalkó G. – Rátz T. (2017). Turizmus 3.0 – Totális turizmus. *VI. Magyar Turizmusföldrajzi Szimpózium. Turizmus 3.0.* Budapest, 2017. 10. 06.

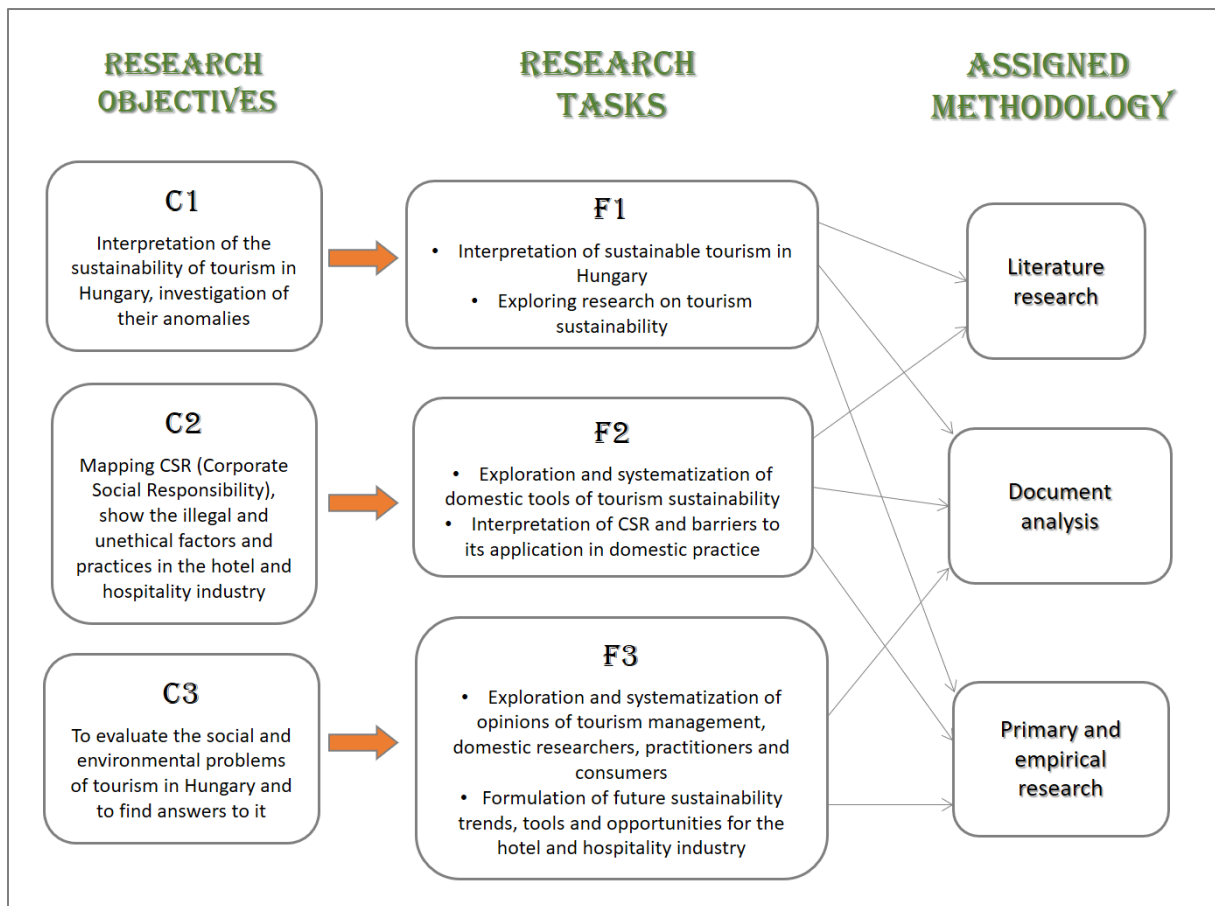


Figure 1 - Research Objectives and Tasks. Own editing

The three objectives and the three research task groups assigned to them define the pith of the dissertation, and I assigned three different relevant research methodologies to fulfill them. In the course of the literature review, I set out the fulfillment of four sub-tasks of two objectives, thus highlighting the relationship between sustainability, the idea of CSR and domestic tourism, and practical tools for solving socio-environmental problems. In order to fully explore the sustainability of the hotel and hospitality industry, a comprehensive analysis of relevant strategic plans and corporate programs were also required.

The most extensive research component in the dissertation is primary empirical research, which includes several elements (questionnaire survey, interview, Delphi research) that are essential for each objectives and for most research tasks.

## Research methodology - methods used to achieve goals

When choosing the research methods I tried to choose empirical research methods that help to highlight the issue from several angles. Qualitative and quantitative methods are prominent in the tools of social geography, so I used the following methods:

- Research based on secondary sources
  - Processing of literature
  - Document analysis as a research method
- Primary researches
  - Questionnaire and structured interview
    - „Sustainable gastronomy” research
    - Examining sustainability in Hungarian restaurants
    - Acceptance CSR in the hospitality industry
    - Hotel stars and CSR in Hungarian hotels
  - Delphi research
    - Qualitative (first) scope of Delphi research
    - Quantitative (second) scope of Delphi research

## **Results and conclusions**

### **Conclusions drawn from the evaluation of literature**

Even in the era of "total tourism", tourism has been a dynamic sector of economic development, but only part of its potential is utilized. Yet, over the past decades, many warnings have come to the professional's attention regarding sustainable development, moderate consumption, environmental protection and, later, the importance of preserving social values. Today's tourism is in a rather sensitive phase where, along its steady growth and expansion, changes in the nature of the activity are being observed (turning away from 4S tourism and the eruption and polurativity of alternative forms of tourism) and a high degree of uncertainty can be perceptible (whichever factor of tourism environment we are examining).

In 2017 and 2018, tourism decision makers were most interested in the "overtourism" phenomenon and its suggestions for solutions, which, as a solution proposal, were closely linked to the Year of Sustainability and the related series of actions and programs.

Disciplinary foundations of my dissertation cover several topics (sometimes subordinate to one another, sometimes completely different fields), to process and align with each other to find common points. If the triple bottom line is defined as a large system, so tourism is one branch of the economy, but its activities also affect the other two pillars. Within the tourism system, the hotel and hospitality industry is defined as a smaller sector. Sustainability, located in the intersection of the three pillars, is the second great starting point for which, although it is impossible to distinguish it from other branches of the economy, I examine its components on tourism. The focus is on an idea that, while being born to sustainability, is defined as a system of economic and corporate governance and must be interpreted specifically in relation

to society and the environment. So the subject of the narrowest study is the CSR in the hotel and hospitality industry, its tools, opportunities, practices and the barriers in Hungary.

CSR and sustainability in the hotel and hospitality industry are already evident at many points and good practices and examples can be gathered from all over the world. What I find more problematic is the lack of a system, which is a wrong approach - even within the profession - that it is a special, costly, or compulsory activity. I miss the enlightened mentality that sees sustainability endeavor as the most natural business practice that everyone from management to employee to guest considers as basic fact.

The sector inquiry regarding the gray and black economy, as the most important barriers in ethical business conduct has been really instructive, since no one has tried to examine this in Hungary beyond the analysis of official statistics. This is a special area of research, it is difficult to quantify and no relevant data are available. In addition, most of the primary research (questionnaire, in-depth interviews) cannot be applied to study the field, since no one is happy to disclose these actions, especially not for the whole sector. I have found contradictions in researches and reports that have been prepared so far, mostly in foreign countries, but the exploration of the rootcauses and the elaboration of an effective research method are still awaiting.

### **Conclusions from the document analysis**

During the phrasing of the dissertation I collected and tried to organize several strategic planning documents, sector reports, trend reports and sustainability publications. The guiding principle (especially in the case of strategic documents) was the exploration of the importance and extent of sustainability, which often resulted in more disappointing results as expected. Over the past one and a half decades, it has been evident that sustainability - in the correct sense - has been included in planning, but perhaps with the exception of the latest planning document (National Tourism Development Strategy 2030), it is only slow and compulsory part not providing real results.

The analysis of hotel companies' CSR strategies - and their lack - also yielded useful results. Since due to the research, most hotels operating in Hungary today are not aware of and planned for CSR or environmental protection even within the hotel chain, it is the result of an individual managerial decision and do not even have the focus of the management on the issue. Some refreshing examples are almost always the result of a foreign franchise and has very little efficiency in Hungary. Large international chains are represented by only one-two house, their market share is too small to dictate the direction of the sector. Most of the time they use CSR programs, which are determined by the leaders of the parent company and which fight for noble cause, but mostly do not focus on the problems affecting our country. This also means that even the hotels operating in Budapest are not able to exert the positive impact on the locals or the Hungarian economy that is stated in their objectives.

## Conclusions drawn from the questionnaire and structured interviews

Research topic in the field of tourism is not new, but not many expert focus on sustainability or CSR issues in the hotel and hospitality industry. During the research I have found that the willingness to answer decreases year by year, and the classical research methodological elements have to be slowly replaced and renewed so that future researchers can get relevant results on a certain topics. It will be a particular challenge to come up with a methodology that can replace questionnaire research in the future and deliver solid results.

I consider the results of my dissertation that the conclusions drawn from my own research are in line with the international literature and justify them. Such as the finding of the (too) slow spread of sustainability, the demonstrable difference between Western and Eastern mentality, the positive reception of CSR from both society and the tourism industry, which are proved by the results I have provided.

## Conclusions from Delphi research

The central part of the dissertation is the Delphi research and its analysis. Research on each of the issues examined (sustainability in tourism, social and environmental elements and issues, CSR in hotel and hospitality industry, unethical practices and prospects for sustainable tourism scenarios), based on expert opinions, it presented important results. The personal and professional background of the participating respondents is a guarantee of the credibility and relevance of the research results. Table 1 summarizes the number and content of participants.

Table 1 - Participants in Delphi Research

	1. Tourism experts (researchers, academics (person))	2. Tourism and hospitality experts (organizations and market representatives (person))	3. Sustainability experts (researchers, academics) (person)	4. Sustainability experts (representatives of organizations, associations) (person)	Total (person)
Number of requested experts	Man: 27 Woman: 33	Man: 45 Woman: 19	Man: 37 Woman: 23	Man: 30 Woman: 32	Man: 139 Woman: 107
First (qualitative) scope	Man: 14 Woman: 4	Man: 13 Woman: 2	Man: 11 Woman: 9	Man: 4 Woman: 5	Man: 42 Woman: 20
Second (quantitative) scope	Man: 5 Woman: 2	Man: 6 Woman: 0	Man: 4 Woman: 1	Man: 1 Woman: 4	Man: 16 Woman: 7

Own editing

From selecting and inviting researchers, conducting the two rounds to final analysis, each phase of the work has provided useful experiences for future research. Based on Table 1, the demographic, gender, and age distribution of the expert panel also proved to be appropriate and can be statistically analyzed. Negative experience is the lower intensity of willingness to fill in the questionnaire, which, however, corresponds to the international and domestic statistical average. The vast majority of the experts were positive to the request, and although there were some who could not complete it due to lack of time or other problems, I could count on their encouragement and support in almost all cases. It can be concluded from this that, apart from the scientific results, the attitude of the professionals working in the field of tourism and sustainability is exemplary and their helpfulness has often strengthened my belief in the ethical behavior and the idea of sustainability.

One of the most important experiences of the qualitative field of research was that the questions intensively motivated the respondents in the areas to be explored, which proved that I had chosen thoughtful and keynote topics for which most people had given ample opinions. This has helped the research, since many opinions are easier to categorize, evaluate and form a basis for quantitative analysis.

Experience in the quantitative field of research shows that experts, when placed within definite bounds, tend to shade their opinions. In almost all cases, it has been proven that everyone is more open-minded about the issues being examined - if one can freely express their opinion about them, but as soon as one has to form opinions on the same topic using rating scales, they are less likely to choose extreme values. At the end of the research, I find it effective to convert qualitative results into quantitative ones, since after reviewing the methodology only one person has contradicted his/her own opinion.

My conclusion from Delphi research is that the differences between the opinions of the experts (and their intensive, often extreme nature) highlight the different levels and degrees of acceptance of the research area. Sustainability as an ideology immediately triggered an unexpected reaction in some respondents, which further complicated the questioning of tourism, unethical practices and CSR as areas. The topic is clearly divisive, which means the need for new explorations, not only at academic or professional level, but also among consumers, travelers, and decision makers. The good practices published in the above topics are the research results of the different sub-areas so do not highlight the complex problem, thus their treatment is not solved by publishing single suggestions. In this chaos that I see the success of my research by highlighting the contradictions and differences of opinion regarding the topics.

I consider the extension of Delphi's research (both in terms of grouping of experts and converting qualitative results to quantitative) as a new methodological result of the dissertation.

The range of research presented in the dissertation confirms previous results (such as the difficulty of interpreting sustainability in tourism, the slow response of the hotel and hospitality industry to the challenges of the 21st century, and the lack of ethical business



conduct, etc.). Summary the results, sorting them into my own systems, and presenting them from a new perspective through a primary research is novel increment of the study.

### **Theses formulated in the dissertation:**

**T1 - *The target groups' vision of a sustainable future shows extremes, suggesting that, thorough understanding of the research field, both pessimistic and optimistic worldviews are emphasized by experts.*** This proves that the question of 'sustainability' is very different from the very basic one.

**T2 - *Experts see environmental sustainability as a way of preserving the natural environment and using resources efficiently and rationally, while the key to create social sustainability is more than improving labor quality, creating social equity, preserving cultural heritage and general well-beng of the local population plays an important role.***

**T3 - *The perception of unethical and illegal practices in the domestic hotel and catering industry differs significantly in terms of sustainability dimensions (environment, society, economy).*** The most prominent of these are those related to workforce. Unfortunately, the acceptance of illegal employment is too high in society. Experts are more lenient with the existence of inadequate working conditions than with illegal forms of employment or underpayment. Natural environment offenses, both in terms of offending environmental damage and energy and food waste, are treated as common, well-established practices by participants in the research.

**T4 - *The least dangerous factor for the tourism of the future is the further expansion of consumption and the related general growth of tourism. Based on these, if the negative affects of unsustainable consumption and increasing tourism, are not highlighted, do not seem dangerous, and the concept of "suicide tourism" is unproven.***

**T5 - *Comparison of the two expert groups (tourism and sustainability experts) reveals that tourism representatives are more optimistic about the future than sustainability representatives, while the latter are more likely to opt for the middle ground.*** Tourism experts are generally more inclined to express more extreme or determined opinions, which may result from their in-depth knowledge of the subject, while sustainability experts' views and outlook are less volatile. If we examine the individual preferences of the interviewed experts, we find that women tend to be more of a middle ground and more prone to pessimistic attitudes.

### **Further research opportunities**

Although the range of available literature on tourism sustainability is constantly expanding, there are many misunderstood, ill-defined or superficial articles, plan documents, but also specialist books, which may distort the foundations of future research and results. Finding system among the definitions, analyzing the subordinate relations are task for the future, which may well be the desire of most tourism researchers. It may be an interesting task for me in the future to unravel the definitions of the hotel and hospitality industry, sustainable tourism and CSR, and their relation to each other.

The size and nature of the gray and black economy in the hospitality industry has not been scientifically analyzed in Hungary (and researchers have hardly researched it abroad). The recently formed international research group, the Yellow Tourism Consortium (<https://www.yellowtourism.org/>), has flagged the exploration of the relationship between international tourism and forensics. Closely related to this is the direction that I have begun in my research regarding unethical and illegal practices in the hospitality industry and which I wish to continue to examine in the future.

The research I have done in the past as a researcher - and described in my dissertation - also has many future potentials, as it would be worthwhile to conduct them again due to their various shortcomings. Each of the four primary studies could be extended to a representative sample. In the present case, the results flash the problem, but with the help of an expanded study, it would be possible to formulate complex solutions that could provide the tourism industry with strategic directions even in the long run.

In the light of the conclusions, Delphi's research clearly calls for a continuation. The topics under study offer many opportunities, and the developed methodology can be easily utilized in the future. Possible directions for expanding Delphi research:

- involvement of consumers and travelers
- involvement of political, regional and other decision-makers
- expanding the panels of experts
- application of methodology in other areas (travel agencies, airlines, destinations, attractions)

The scope limitations of the dissertation did not allow me to examine the surveyed sample in terms of gender, position, geographical location, and this will also be a next step in the future. In addition to the extensions listed, the relationship between income, education and other socio-demographic backgrounds and sustainability could be explored, both for the current group structure and for new study groups. To facilitate further research, a computer program specifically tailored to this Delphi research could be developed, but could speed up work on background analysis and conversions.

## List of major publications regarding the topic:

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