

COMPARISON OF GEOTOURISM ASSESSMENT MODELS: AN EXPERIMENT IN BAKONY–BALATON UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARK, HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT

Geotourism is a relatively modern sector of tourism that focuses on geologic and scenic values of a location. These values can be preserved and popularized a lot easier using the theoretical background of geotourism. UNESCO Global Geoparks Network is responsible for protecting and fostering natural, scenic and cultural values and especially geosites, that are the visible physical elements. As the positive economic and nature conserving consequences of geotourism are revealed, more and more communities try to identify spectacular and exciting geosites.

Our goal was to determine geotourism potential around Csopak. There is a large importance of this work, as assessment methods were not used here before. After designating potential geosites (with the help of topographic and geological maps) we applied two quantitative assessment models on the identified locations: the Geosite Assessment Model (GAM) and the Modified Geosite Assessment Model (M-GAM). GAM has been applied with good results in Hungary, but M-GAM has not been used before. As M-GAM involves tourists into the process counting with their opinion, it may give a more realistic view of the different important features of the geosites. The assessment work was consisted of GIS work, fieldwork and office work.

Owing to the two methods, we had different final values of geotourism potential counted from the educational-scientific and infrastructural values (and from the visitor's points in the case of M-GAM). We discovered that the proportion of these values carries major information. This ratio can be depicted as functions and diagrams, so we can easily derive what kind of features are more interesting or spectacular about each geosite. From this result we can draw conclusions about the future development trends: scientific or infrastructural values should be more effectively fostered.

Local communities and the Bakony-Balaton Geopark also work on maintaining and developing natural attractions. Using our results, geosites can be handled and developed as visitors expect it. The first geological hiking map of the area disseminating the outcomes of our study also help tourists and the Bakony-Balaton UNESCO Global Geopark too in caring about our well- or less-known natural treasures.

Keywords: geotourism, quantitative assessment, geopark, geosite, Hungary