

# THESES OF DOCTORAL (PHD) DISSERTATION

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## The role of tourism developments according to model areas of Fejér county

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## **1. Background of the work, objectives**

The role of tourism research has become increasingly important nowadays, because the significance of tourism is remarkably high (MORLEY, 1990, DEMUNTER, 2008). Regional science emerged from the interdisciplinary of geographical spaces (DÁVID L., 2015), examining the spatial actions of society in a complex manner. Regional studies research the social and economic processes that occur in space. LENGYEL-RECHNITZER (2004), NEMES NAGY (2005), AUBERT- BERKI- SZABÓ (2008), and MICHALKÓ (2007b) focus on the territorial processes of tourism.

Tourism has various effects, leading to changes in both sending and receiving areas. However, it is important to note that it is hard to study these impacts separately, because there can be significant overlaps between different groups (DÁVID L, 2015).

Some of the tourism research focus on studying tourism processes, actors and the relationships between them. Research on the general model of tourism emphasizes the impacts of tourism. These studies highlight the multidisciplinary and intersectoral nature (PEARCE (1981), BUTLER (1993), MICHALKÓ (2007c). The continuous expansion of the conception highlights the complexity and social significance of tourism.

In current research, complexity comes to the front, which is examined through the application of dynamic frameworks (JAKULIN, 2017), revealing the relationships between various variables (MÁHR, 2019). System models take into account environmental factors and sustainability aspects, collectively explaining the changes (SZIVA, 2010).

The issue of safety is also prominently featured, there are numerous studies in this topic (BUJDOSÓ- GYÖRKI, 2011, DÁVID ET.AL., 2007), as it is very important in tourism (ZSARNÓCZKY-MOLNÁR- GARAMVÖLGYI, 2019).

VOLO (2009) characterizes tourism as a market of experiences that must be highlighted during communication, determininig information search, pricing, the main message, and prior expectations (DANYI- IVÁNYI- VERES, 2020). Most travelers are confident, know their goals, and actively use digital tools, so destinations need to provide a WOW experience (JHA, 2016).

Cultural tourism plays a significant role in the tourism market, being a primary motivation for travel. The demand for culture is dynamically increasing, correlated with the changes in consumer habits and rising discretionary income. It is a complex and diverse product, found almost everywhere (CSAPÓ, 2012).

In my dissertation, I examined how tourism developments contributed to the destination's growth and recognition in model areas. Although large attraction developments were implemented in these areas, there were not any survey about the impacts among visitors, and my dissertation aims to fill this gap. The research analyzes cultural attractions I have worked in previous projects, providing me a wide insight into their activities and these developments have measurable economic and social impacts. The attractions include the Károlyi Castle in Fehérvárcsurgó, the Gorsium Archaeological Park in Tác, and Székesfehérvár. The relevance of my research lies in the fact that, as I know, there have been no similar studies before connected to the model areas, so my research has new result. Considering the 2021-2027 European Union development term, it is worth to evaluate the developments as they can serve as a basis for further decision-making and defining development directions.

## **1.1. Targets and aims of the research**

In the preparation of my dissertation, my goal is to highlight the role of tourism in regional developments and examine visitor's feedback related to developments. I have formulated three hypotheses for my research:

### **H1. Developments positively contribute to the economic growth of the model areas and increase job opportunities:**

Tourism contributes to economic growth and job creation in model areas. Tourists support local businesses through their expenditures, including hotels, restaurants, shops, and service providers. This creates opportunities for business expansion and new investments, potentially resulting new workplaces. By increasing tourism revenues and the number of jobs, the region's economy strengthens and develops, which enhances the quality of life of the population and increases competitiveness.

### **H2. Developments stimulate further infrastructural investments in the region, which profitable for locals if developments are not excessive:**

The growth of tourism encourages infrastructural development. Investments in hotels, transportation networks, cultural institutions, sports facilities, and other tourist infrastructure may be made to meet the needs of tourists. Transport infrastructure is essential for accessing the destination, as ensuring utilities, public lighting, and access to services, too. All of these developments benefit the local population; however, it is essential to strike a balance and avoid excessive and disruptive development, as this could lead to negative attitudes among locals. Therefore, it is recommended to apply the DOXEY Irridex method (1975) in the case of tourism-related developments, which aims to search for the destination's carrying capacity and emphasize the importance of planning.



### **H3. Developments increase regional image and attractiveness, enhancing visitation and competitiveness:**

Tourism can enhance the image and attractiveness of a destination, forwarding an increase in visitor numbers and overnight stays. Positive tourism experiences and a good reputation attract visitors and strengthen localism. Expanding services, increasing the number of attractions, or improving existing ones increases visits both retraining and new visitors. Image also boosts tourism competitiveness, which contributes to the region's economic development.

## **2. Methods and Materials**

The aim of this dissertation is to present the role of tourism in regional development in three selected areas within Fejér County, where significant developments took place during the first half of the 2014-2020 European Union Programming Period.

The study focuses on the period before the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically between 2017 and 2019. The tourism sector experienced a significant decline during 2020-2022, and it only started recovering in 2023. The impact of the developments could be first observed from the year of 2017. There has been a long period between the term of the research and the dissertation, because of family and health problems of the author.

During the research there was utilized a combination of primary and secondary research methods to achieve the research's objectives.

### **2.1. Secondary Sources**

#### **2.1.1. Literature Review**

The basis of the secondary sources was the analysis of the existing literature throughout the preparation of the dissertation. This involved defining basic concepts, examining tourism as a system, defining the characteristics of the tourism market, and studying international and domestic literature on tourism demand and supply. The literature review includes the examination of related scientific fields necessary for a comprehensive approach since multidisciplinary is essential in tourism research.

### **2.1.2. Statistical Data**

During the preparation of dissertation, statistical data from the Central Statistical Office (KSH) databases were considered to examine the number of guests and guest nights in Fejér County, as well as changes in the average length of stay between 2013 and 2019. The interval provides a good comparison to the research period.

### **2.1.3. Analysis of Documents**

The dissertation includes a detailed analysis of relevant development policy documents and legal regulations, helping for integration with the research. These sections describe the content of the documents and provide information related to the county.

## **2.2. Primary Research**

During the preparation of the dissertation, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods were used.

### **2.2.1. Questionnaire Survey**

The questionnaire survey is the most commonly used method in tourism research, often complemented by other methods, such as in-depth interviews. The questionnaire was standardized to ensure that datas could be comparable. I have analysed the purpose of the visitors' travel, the length of their stay, their opinions about the development and environment of the attractions, the available programmes, and also included some statistical datas related to the visitors' gender, age, place of residence, and education.

The questionnaire primarily consisted of ended questions with multiple answer choices. However, respondents had the opportunity to provide their opinions and make suggestions during the completion of the questionnaire. The survey was made personnel, several times, in the researched areas.

#### **2.2.1.1. Quantitative Research**

In the quantitative research, hundreds of questionnaires were prepared and filled out by visitors of the selected areas.

The quantitative research consisted of the following stages:

- Selection of the studied areas,
- Compilation of the questionnaire,
- Administration of the questionnaire survey,
- Evaluation and processing of the survey results.

#### **2.2.1.2. Qualitative Research**

Within the qualitative method, the questionnaire survey included open-ended questions for respondents to provide detailed answers. Additionally, in-depth interviews and field visits were conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the areas.

The datas from the research were analyzed using statistical methods.

I have made more statistical analyses and I have used Excel an SPSS programmes. I have made diagrammes, frequency and correlation analyses.

### **2.2.2. Creating SWOT Analyses**

During the research, several SWOT analyses were conducted to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the studied areas. SWOT analyses are valuable tools for evaluating the internal and external factors that either support or hinder the achievement of specific goals. These factors are identified and organized through a matrix, making them visible and comprehensible. My goal of conducting these analyses was to assist decision-makers in determining future development directions for the model areas.

### **2.2.3. In-Depth Interviews**

In-depth interviews were conducted with the management of the researched areas, experts and representatives of Székesfehérvár and county municipalities. This method complemented the results of the questionnaire survey, allowing for a deeper understanding of the researched areas.

### **2.2.4. Field Visits**

During the field visits, I used personal monitoring and I got first hand experiences about the operations, challenges, and operational risks of the researched areas. These visits also provided an opportunity to initiate conversations with local residents, leading to a more comprehensive and multi-perspective understanding of the regions.

### 3. Results and discussion

During the preparation of the dissertation, three cultural attractions in the model areas in Fejér County were examined during the period between 2017 and 2019. This period was chosen because the developments took place in the first half of the 2010s, and the research focused on their monitoring. The period of the dissertation ended in early 2020, considering the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which practically halted the tourism industry for the following two years, and only started to recover in the second half of 2022. Fejér county has a lot of significant cultural attractions, so that I analyse cultural tourism in the following model areas: Károlyi Castle, Fehérvárcsurgó, Tács-Gorsium Archeological Park and Székesfehérvár, as can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure1.: Map of Fejér county and model areas

*Forrás:* [https://konyvtar.vmk.hu/hw/Fejer-termeszeti-ertekek/1\\_fejr\\_megye.html](https://konyvtar.vmk.hu/hw/Fejer-termeszeti-ertekek/1_fejr_megye.html)

### **3.1. Károlyi Castle, Fehérvárcsurgó**

The Károlyi Castle in Fehérvárcsurgó is located in Fejér County, within the Mór wine region. Currently, the castle is owned by the Hungarian State, with its management entrusted to the Hungarian National Asset Management Company. Since 1997, cultural and tourist operations have been carried out by the Károlyi József Foundation, a member of the international network of European Cultural Meeting Centers. The main goal is to utilize cultural and art heritages that have lost their original roles.

The restored buildings, authentic furnished rooms, interactive attractions, and cultural programmes provide a wide range of cultural opportunities for visitors. The offers contribute to the relaxation of tourists and positively impact their personal development.

As my interviewees say, the operation of the castle aims to create a high-quality, complex tourism product that raises the region's tourism appeal and contributes to shaping the region's tourism identity. Another goal is to join to Hungary's most significant castles such as Esterházy Palace in Fertőd, Grassalkovich Palace in Gödöllő, and Festetics Palace in Keszthely, as one of the most distinguished architectural and horticultural heritage sites in Hungarian castle tourism. The castle is also an important center for Francophone culture in Hungary, which can increase its utilization.

The questionnaire explored several factors. According to Figure 2, the distribution of visitors shows that most of them come from the county. This is also related to the duration of their visit, as the majority of visitors come for a short excursion, as illustrated in Figure 3. During the research period, significant

numbers of visitors came from Budapest and Komárom-Esztergom County, but their numbers did not come close to the proportion of county residents.

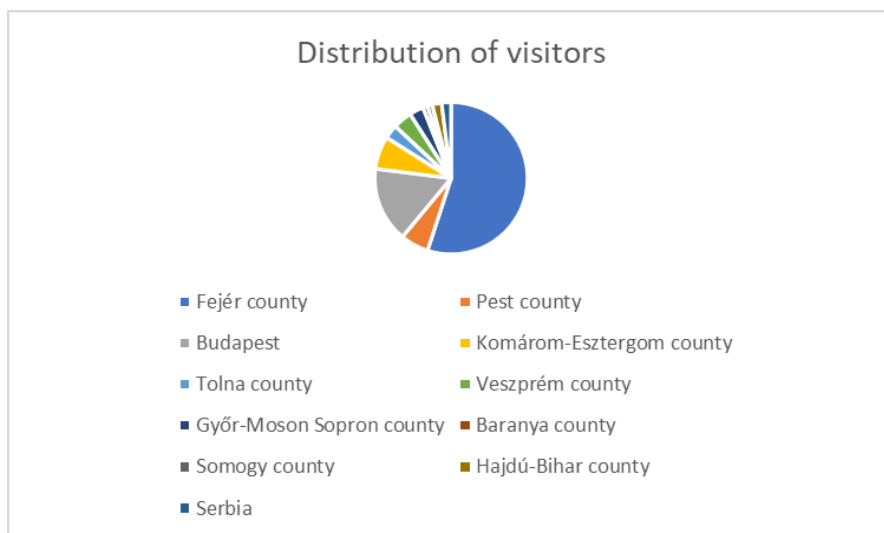


Figure 2.: Distribution of visitors

*Source: own work*



Figure 3.: Duration of visit

*Source: own work*



Analyzing the distribution by age we can establish on Figure 4 that majority of visitors fall within the middle age group of 20 to 65 years old. Generally, there are more male visitors than female visitors. A significant proportion of visitors have been to the castle multiple times, and it is interesting, that those who have been to the castle earlier, have visited it more than 10 times. This data confirms the previous thought that visitors mainly come from within the county, and the castle is a popular destination for short trips for locals in the surrounding areas. Visitors typically arrive with their families.

61% of visitors came for relaxation purposes, while approximately the same percentage mentioned attending events as a reason for their visit, as this question allowed for multiple answer choices. Only 1% of respondents arrived for non-touristic purposes.

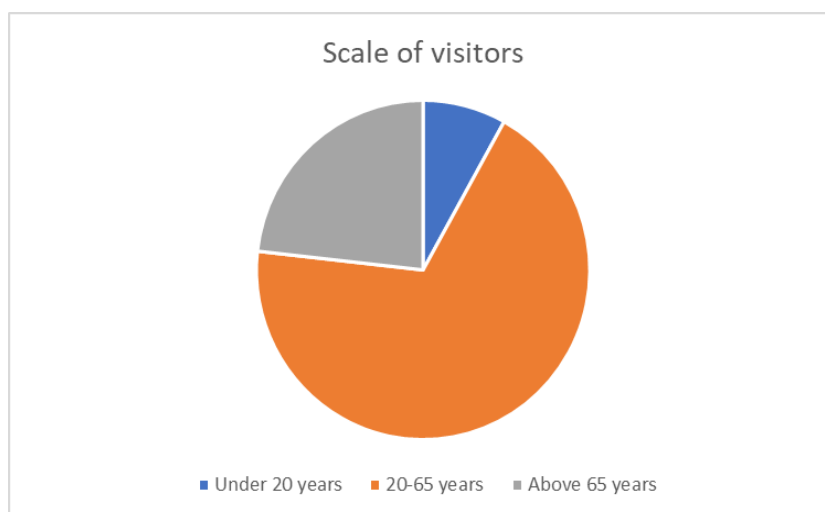


Figure 4.: Scale of visitors

*Source: own work*

The questionnaire was an ended questionnaire, but respondents had the opportunity to provide their opinions and make suggestions. Most respondents suggested placing more benches, installing mist gates, expanding the range of

wellness services, and building a playground. Additionally, many respondents recommended offering restaurant services at more favorable prices.

Visitors were asked to offer an opinion about the castle and the park. According to Figure 5, the evaluations were predominantly positive. Nearly 80% of the visitors highlighted the environment, the level of development and the quality and quantity of the programmes as the main positive aspects.

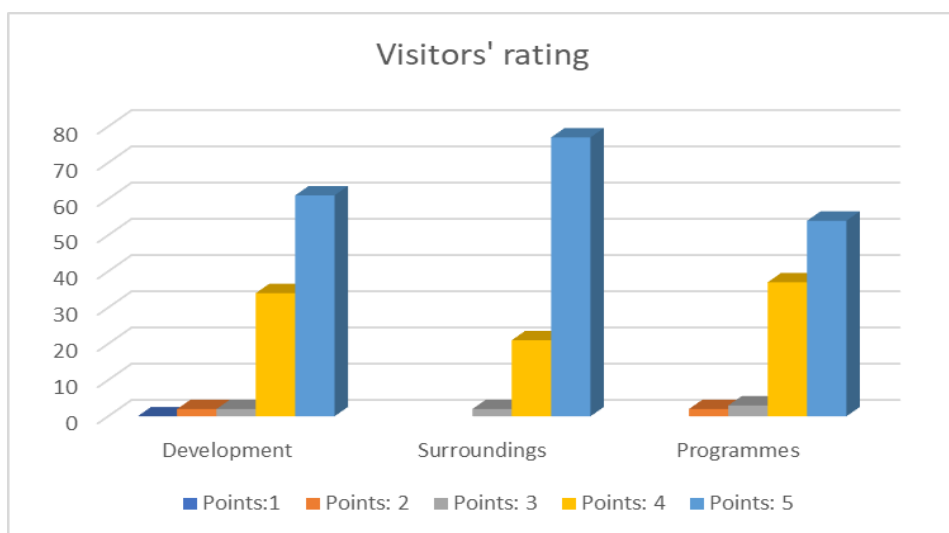


Figure 5.: Visitors rating

*Source: own work*

## Actualities

Since the research period, the Károlyi Castle has numerous developments. The most significant of these is the opening of the Stable Building in the second half of 2023, which has been transformed into a modern visitor center. Here the visitors can explore the life and history of the Károlyi family with the audiovisual elements. Additionally, a digital-equipped event room has been established. The exhibition is modern, interactive, and complements the attractions of the castle. Furthermore, a historical playground consisting of

several elements has been created for the enjoyment of the youngest visitors, and the castle's park has been renewed with planting of numerous plants, which can be viewed through guided botanical walks.

The "Music in the Castle Park" programme has been organized multiple times, during which chamber orchestras of the Alba Regia Symphonic Orchestra perform works by composers like Bach and Haydn at various locations in the park. The candlelit night castle visits have been a great success and several temporary exhibitions have been organized, attracting a significant number of visitors. Educational services for school groups are also available.

The castle's website offers an interactive virtual tour and a presentation about the castle's history, as well as the option to schedule a castle visit. It's honourable that castle visits are possible every day of the year, with multiple time slots.

The castle continuously improves its services and offers high-quality programmes that attract a lot of interest. Several qualitative changes have occurred since the research period, which is important for the destination's development. However, it would be worthy to introduce permanent programmes that can be enjoyed during guaranteed guided tours. For example costumed guided tours or the opportunity to "experience" the aristocratic life by wearing appropriate clothing and using -specific tools. From spring to autumn it would be advisable to make better use of the park, offering activities such as horseback riding, bicycle rentals. The lake in the park could also offer various opportunities, including boating. Increasing the number of benches and waste bins in the park would be practical as to install drinking fountains, too.

### **3.2. TÁC- Gorsium Archeological Park**

The other research area in the dissertation is the TÁC-Gorsium Archaeological Park which is located in Fejér County, 14 km away from Székesfehérvár. It was founded in 1958 and has been open to the public since 1962. It has been declared during the interviews that the park covers an area of 28 hectares, of which 6 hectares are excavated and suitable for presentation. The site connects two periods using the original road network of the Roman era: the city from the 2nd-3rd century and the 4th-century city. The expanded area has been opened to visitors, allowing them to freely explore the archaeological remains.

The researched project was titled "Quies-Gorsiense – Gorsium, the Antique Isle of Recreation" with the identification number KDOP-2.1.1/B-2f-2010-0002. The support amounted to a net 651,880,835 HUF, which was completed with the necessary retention by the Municipality of Székesfehérvár.

Thanks to the project, a Visitor Center was constructed with permanent and seasonal exhibition spaces, reception area, modern plumbing area, technical and staff rooms. The Fresco House received a new protective building, as the dining hall and its cellar were placed under protection too. As part of the monument reconstruction, the eastern wall section of the fortress with two sides and one corner tower was built, which also serves as a belvedere. The office and the repository were renovated too with two exhibition rooms, and the internal space and two façades of the Zichy cellar were also completed. Additionally, a parking lot was set up in front of the Visitor Center.

The purposes of the development were the followings:

- Longer stay of visitors at the attraction sites.
- Higher experiential value, reaching a broader target audience.
- Higher rate of returning guests.

- Increasing revenue by providing high-quality services and proportional expenditures, generating higher local tax and other incomes.
- Creating and ensuring market access for tourist products that determine the region's tourist offer.
- Strengthening the position of the region as a tourist destination.
- Ensuring the economic background of sustainability through the utilization of natural and cultural-historical values.
- Creating new employment opportunities.
- Raising the experiential value of the tourist attraction and developing interpretation methods.
- Creating a thematic offer by linking sites of similar interest, extending the length of stay for visitors.

As a result of the development, the archaeological park became the main element of the region's tourism image. Due to the attractions, visitors spend an entire day at Gorsium, and to see everything, they tour the excavated areas of the former Roman settlement. The exhibition spaces and the city wall reconstruction were placed in a way that every important point in the area offers a memorable experience to visitors. It was important that visitors get a taste of each period, as the site includes remains from different eras: a cellar and dining hall from the early 2nd century, a residential house (Fresco House) from the late 2nd to early 3rd century, and the reconstruction of a city wall section with towers from the 4th century.

In 2017, a questionnaire survey was conducted in the park. A total of 140 questionnaires were completed.

Based on Figure 6, the age groups of the visitors were examined, and it can be observed that the majority of visitors belong to the 35-59 age group, but there is

also a significant representation of older age groups. Interestingly, visitors under the age of 18 did not complete the questionnaire.

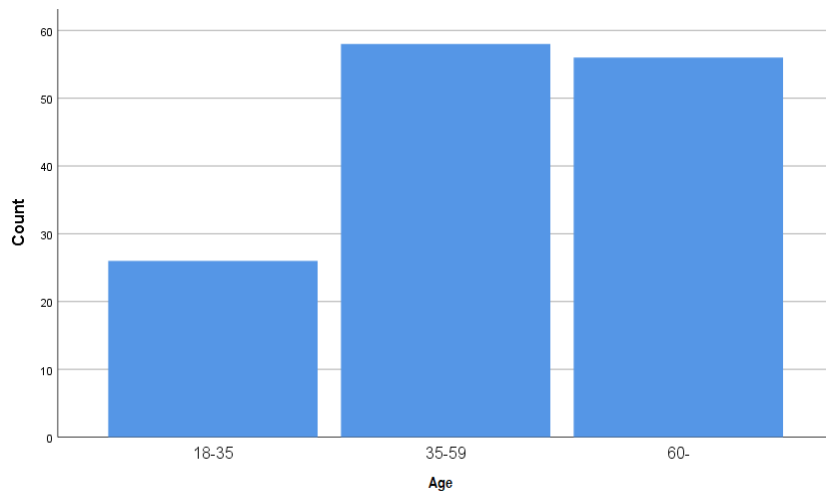


Figure 6. : Age groups of visitors

*Source: own work*

Based on Figure 7, the research also examined where the visitors came from into the Archeological Park. It has been found that during the reaeached period nearly 34% of the visitors came from the Budapest - Central Danube Region, and a similar number of visitors came from the Central Transdanubia region. Additionally, there were also visitors from abroad, and one respondent did not specify his or her home.

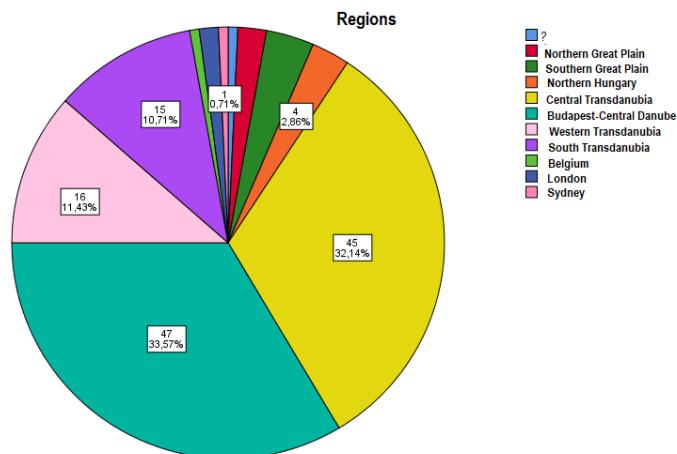


Figure 7.: Visitors resident

Source: own work

The research also aimed to assess the visitor's satisfaction with the development of the Park.

Based on Table 1, 39% of the respondents rated the facility as "excellent," and an equal percentage rated it as "average." Only 7% of the respondents believed that further development was necessary for the area.

Table 1. : Rating of development

Source: own work

**How do you look development from tourism aspect?**

		Frequency	Percentage in all	Percentage of valid answers	Relative frequency
Rates	Needs development	10	7,1	7,2	7,2
	Moderate development	19	13,6	13,7	20,9
	Average development	55	39,3	39,6	60,4
	Ecellent	55	39,3	39,5	100,0
	Total	139	99,3	100,0	
Missing		1	,7		
Total		140	100,0		

I examined the tourism development from the perspective of kurtosis, which represents the vertical shape of the distribution, as shown in Figure 8. Kurtosis indicates whether the distribution is peaked or flat compared to a normal distribution. From the graph, it is evident that the shape of the tourism development analysis is peaked and symmetrical, indicating a positive distribution.

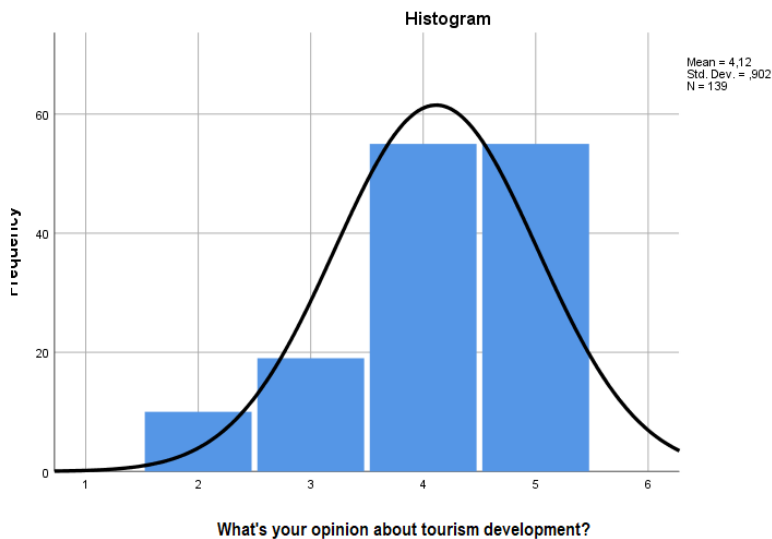


Figure 8.: Kurtosis

*Source: own work*

The research also aimed to find out if there is a correlation between the age group of visitors and the frequency of their visits to the Archaeological Park. This was investigated using correlation analysis. The results indicate a moderate-negative correlation between these variables, which is statistically significant with a significance level of at least 1%. The negative sign suggests that the relationship is contrary - the older the individual, the more likely they have visited the Archaeological Park.



Furthermore, I examined whether the visitors would be willing to return to the Archaeological Park in the future. According to the hypothesis, they would come back because of the continuous development and the improvements in programme quality. The research confirms this, as shown in Figure 9, where high percentage (96%) of respondents expressed their purpose to return.

Among those who responded "no" to the question, the main reasons were:

- The Floralia is interesting and well-developed, but one visit is enough.
- Single visit is enough
- There are lots of other attractions in the country, and the exhibits do not change significantly.

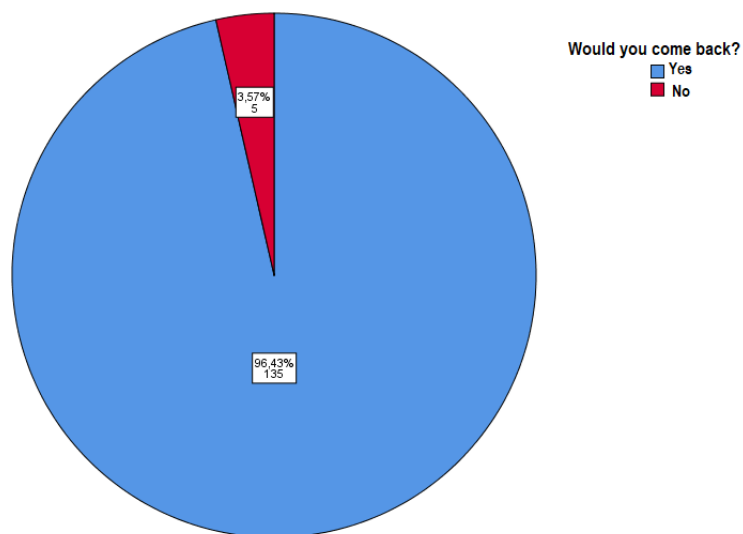


Figure 9. : Returning visitors

*Source: own work*

The research also examined the number of visitors between 2004 and 2017, as shown in Figure 10. During the renovation period, the Park remained closed and was not accessible to visitors for several years. However, in the year of the re-opening, despite opening only in April, it immediately reached the number of visitors of the pre-closure year. In the following year, the number of visitors tripled.

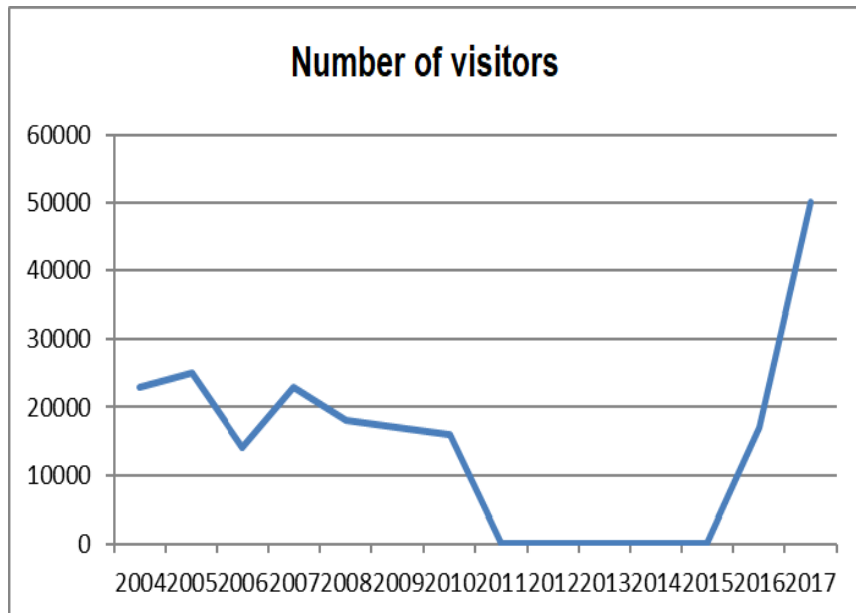


Figure 10. : Number of visitors

*Source: own work*

The research also searched for the visitors' suggestions regarding the development of the Archaeological Park. The most important statements are:

- Providing better transportation options, such as having a few daily bus routes directly to the Park or implementing a dedicated shuttle service between the bus stop and the Park.
- Improving marketing to increase awareness of the Park.

- Adding more informative descriptions, and display boards for better understanding.
- Introducing interactive films about the Roman era.
- Creating models about the ancient settlement.
- Establishing a café.
- Developing some houses and street sections into living exhibits.
- Providing information about other Roman archaeological parks in Hungary.
- Adding more resting spots both indoors and outdoors.
- Installing a telescope at the belvedere.
- Installing child-friendly and interactive installations.
- Displaying the names and purposes of the buildings.
- Descriptions of jewelry and pottery materials.
- Offering multilingual information.
- Organizing more theatrical performances.
- Continuing archaeological excavations.
- Planting the area with flowers.
- Renovating buildings.
- Providing live guided tours in period costumes.
- Establishing an interactive playground.

In the summer of 2019, a new questionnaire survey was conducted with the participation of 77 individuals. The results indicated that the majority of visitors came from the middle age group, mainly from Székesfehérvár and its surrounding, Budapest and its surroundings, as well as from the Balaton region, as illustrated in Figure 11.

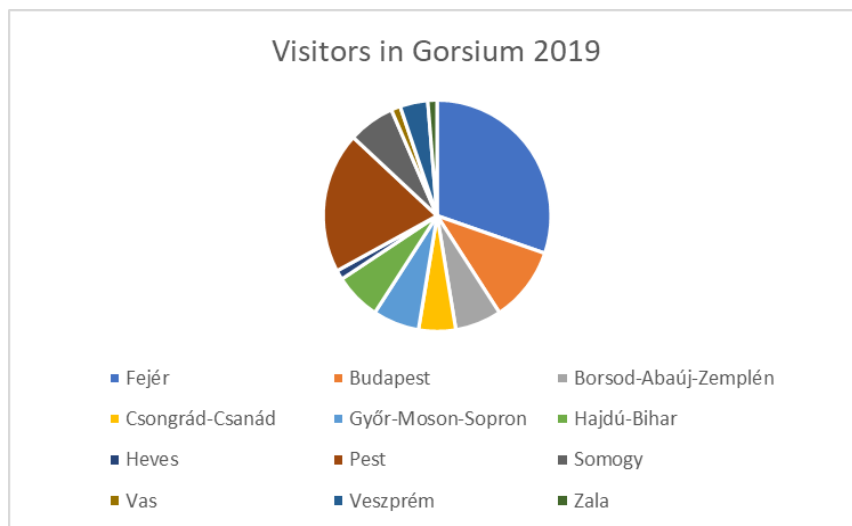


Figure 11.: Visitors in Gorsium 2019

*Source: own work*

Approximately one-third of the visitors had been here before, while the majority were new visitors. Based on Table 2, nearly 40% of the visitors rated the quality of services as excellent, while 27% considered them average or worse.

Table 2.: Rating of development 2019

*Source: own work*

		Frequency	Percentage in all	Percentage in valid answers
Rates	Needs development	6	7,8	7,8
	Moderate development	15	19,5	19,5
	Average development	25	32,5	32,5
	Excellent	31	40,2	40,2
	Total	77	100	100,0
Missing		0	0	
Total		77	100,0	100,0

The questionnaire also included a rating scale to rate various services. Participants could rate from one to five points the indicators such as prices, purity, competence, and friendliness of the staff, as well as the quality of the programs, as shown in Figure 12.

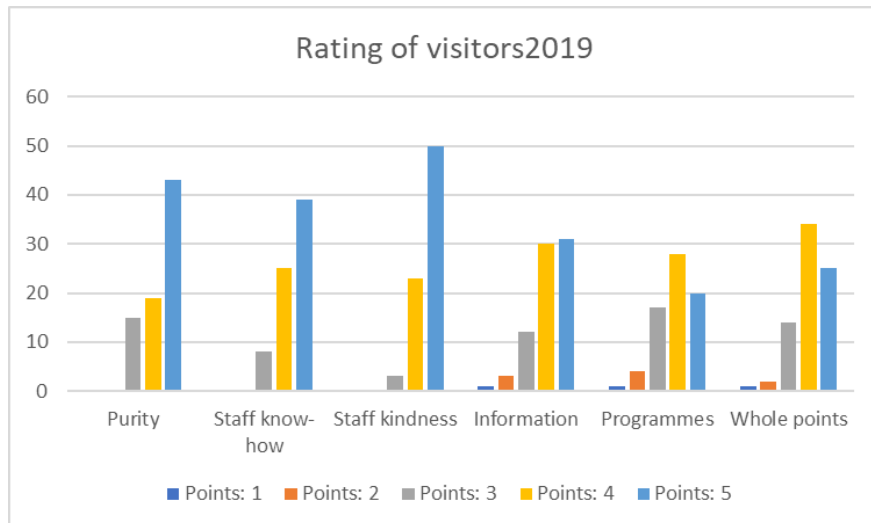


Figure 12. : Rating of visitors 2019

*Source: own work*

Evaluating the questionnaires, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- About 23% of respondents considered the prices average.
- Approximately one-fifth of the respondents rated the purity as average, but the majority had no problems with it.
- The kindness and helpfulness of the staff received excellent ratings from most visitors, which is appreciative.
- Two-thirds of the respondents found the quality and variety of the programmes to be satisfactory.
- Regarding the level of IT development, 75% of the participants considered it acceptable, but 25% believed that it needs improvement.

- Nearly 80% of the visitors overall rated the Park's development as good, which is a remarkable result.

Lots of the visitors obtained information about the Park from the internet or through recommendations from friends. Interestingly, none of the respondents indicated that they visited the archaeological park based on recommendations from accommodation providers.

Visitors were often surprised by the size of the area and the living history. The newly built belvedere and the theater were particularly highlighted, as well as the well-maintained park. Other positive aspects included the abundance of attractions.

However, some areas should be improved. Visitors noted the lack of a cafe or vending machines, as well as there aren't enough seating benches. They also expressed a desire for more scheduled programmes and guided tours.

More than 90% of the visitors expressed their purpose to return to the park in the future. Among those who wouldn't come back, various reasons were mentioned, such as the programmes are not being suitable for young children or the availability of other attractions.

Participants had the opportunity to provide development suggestions:

- Installing drink vending machines.
- Establishing a café.
- Creating a playground and interactive area for children.
- Offering more (children's) programmes.
- Improving signage.
- Providing more seating benches.

- Conducting more frequent guided tours.
- Implementing 3D models, visual projections, and dressed people in historical costumes.

In summary, the Gorsium Archaeological Park and Open-Air Museum is a unique attraction in Hungary. It was time to develop it and visitors patiently awaited the re-opening. The park's popularity has increased since its re-opening, as reflected in the rising number of visitors. It is essential to consider the development suggestions and improve the services to attract those who do not wish to return to the park.

Emphasizing interactivity is essential to increase the number of visitors and establish the Park as an internationally recognized attraction.

## **Actualities**

Similar to the Károlyi Castle, there have been several developments in TÁC-Gorsium Archaeological Park since the research period. With the renovation of the seating area in the open-air theater, the benches, made from a crossbreed of pine and redwood used in Roman times, will provide greater comfort during theatrical performances in the upcoming years. They also have plans to install tilts over the seating area for shading, using a technique of the Romans.

In 2021, the Hadrian's Stage was inaugurated, equipped with modern lighting and sound technology, making it suitable for concerts and theatrical performances. During the summer months, several camps have been organized, allowing participants to experience Roman life, learning about trainings of legionary soldiers, and taking part in archaeological activities.

The Archaeological Park offers educational programmes in various topics, and it's honourable that creative workshops are available for all age groups.

A unique attraction is a life-sized replica of a Roman river boat, measuring nearly 10 meters in length and weighing one and a half tons, which visitors can explore.

The most recent and exciting addition, although not directly provided by the Archaeological Park, is the evoking of navigation on the Sárvíz River according to Roman Age. The programme includes a guided rowing water tour at approximately 8 kilometers, during which participants can learn about the historical geography of the Sárvíz, the water routes, and the history of Roman boats. The lightweight boats are made in the style of Roman river boats. Along the tour, they visit the former excavation site of the palace related to the Seuso treasures, the Kula Tower, and finally the Gorsium Archaeological Park.

The Archaeological Park has organized the Fövény Day again, with the name "Castrum," This is a sports- and family day, and the Fövény Day Youth Military History Meeting, which includes military and historical performances, and the opportunity to try various sports. In 2023, the event had special significance as it included the impregnation of a plaque for Gabriella Nádorfi, with a tribute to her professional work.

The TÁC-Gorsium Archaeological Park is developing, offers an increasing number of services, and number of visitors are also increasing. It would also be worthy to provide guaranteed services for visitors. They should open a cafe or installing vending machines. Additionally, more benches should be placed in the archaeological site. Signage has improved significantly over the past few years; however, it would be interesting to expand this with QR code solutions and integrate digital experiences to the historical context.



### 3.3. Székesfehérvár, City of Kings

Székesfehérvár is one of the most historically significant and populous cities in Hungary. Throughout history, it has played central roles with varying significance and strength in different periods (DEMETER, 2017).

According to the pinion of my interviewees, Székesfehérvár is an aspirant place on tourism map in Hungary.

The city boasts several tourist attractions, most important are: medieval coronation city, a royal residence, the site of national assemblies, and the place where the Golden Bull was proclaimed. However, only a few relics from these historical events remain.

The most important tourism-related projects that funded by the European Union and domestic sources, granted to the municipality and expanded by it with the necessary fund, are the followings:

- Continuation of the " Rehabilitation of the City Centre": Rehabilitation of the Hiemer-Font-Caraffa building block's third phase for community purposes and the establishment of a baby museum, along with the rehabilitation of the Main Street and its surroundings,
- Creation of the Coronation Park,
- Rehabilitation of the Székesfehérvár-Sóstó Nature Reserve Area,
- Rehabilitation of the New City Centre-Várkörút,
- Establishment of a leisure park and promenade along Túrósák Road,
- Development of the Bartók Béla Square, Fehérvár's new Agora, and its surroundings into a community space,
- Development of the Palotaváros Lakes for sports and recreational purposes,

- Green City - Fehérvár's Lungs Program - in progress,
- Development of the Aranybulla Memorial,
- Development of bicycle paths - in progress,
- Árpád Dynasty Program:
  - Realization of the National Heritage Site, the stone repository, the Árpád Dynasty Research Institute, and the Visitor Center - in progress,
  - Implementation of the exhibition "Kings and Saints. The Age of the Árpád Dynasty" and reconstruction of the St. Stephen King Museum,
- Development of the Bregyó Youth and Sports Center, Regional Athletics Center,
- Development of the "Hungarian Holy Family" themed pilgrimage route with the participation of the Székesfehérvár Diocesan,
- Construction of a multifunctional hall- in progress.

During the questionnaire-based research, 97 individuals were surveyed at the National Heritage Site. This location was chosen because the Medieval Ruins- National Heritage Site is the main attraction of Székesfehérvár, as it served as the burial site of Hungarian kings. From the visitors' responses and personal conversations, it became evident that Székesfehérvár is primarily a day-trip destination, typically for a few hours, as illustrated in Figure 13.

The majority of visitors spent only one hour at the Heritage Site, indicating that the available opportunities do not take up them further. However, during the field visits, it also became clear that visitors generally plan to spend only 2-3 hours in the city, with the possibility of extending this time with a pleasant

lunch. This is a call for tourism-related organizations to provide interactive programmes that encourage visitors to spend more time exploring the city.

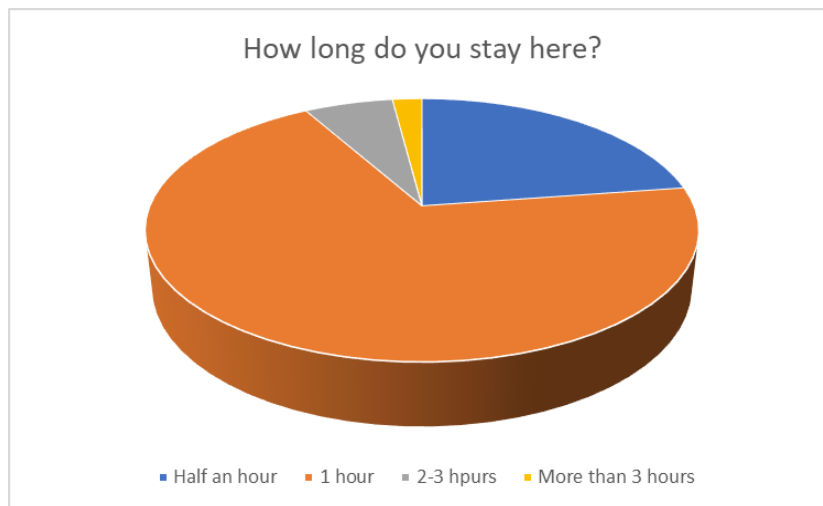


Figure 13.: Duration of staying

*Source: own work*

Visitors, however, provided highly positive evaluations of their experience. They highlighted the kindness and expertise of the staff at the Heritage Site. They gave prompt and accurate responses to visitors' questions, with significant courtesy, were greatly appreciated. However, the level of technological development received lower ratings during the survey. Visitors expect more interactive opportunities and experiential approaches during their visits.

The significance of purity and orderliness was emphasized by the visitor. This is very important, as they greatly influence the tourism experience. These aspects could leave a negative impression on guests, resulting in a less favorable experience.

Personal conversations with the visitors revealed that the spirit and ambiance of the place are the most pleasing elements for the staying. The unique atmosphere and the living history are truly attracting. Many also praised the Szent István sarcophagus, which added to the site's characteristic.

The lack of seating mentioned as a prominent issue. Visitors suggested adding more benches to allow for comfortable rest and deeper exploration of the historical ruins. They highlighted the importance of interactivity and modern technology to present history in a more attractive, exciting manner, leaving a lasting impression on visitors.

Additionally, visitors recommended keeping the ossuary open on a regular basis. Currently, it is only accessible to the public during the 20th August celebrations, but guests would be interested in viewing the remains at other times of the year.

As shown in Figure 14, a majority of the visitors gave an overall maximum rating of five to the National Heritage Site. However, it is important to consider the visitors' suggestions in the future.

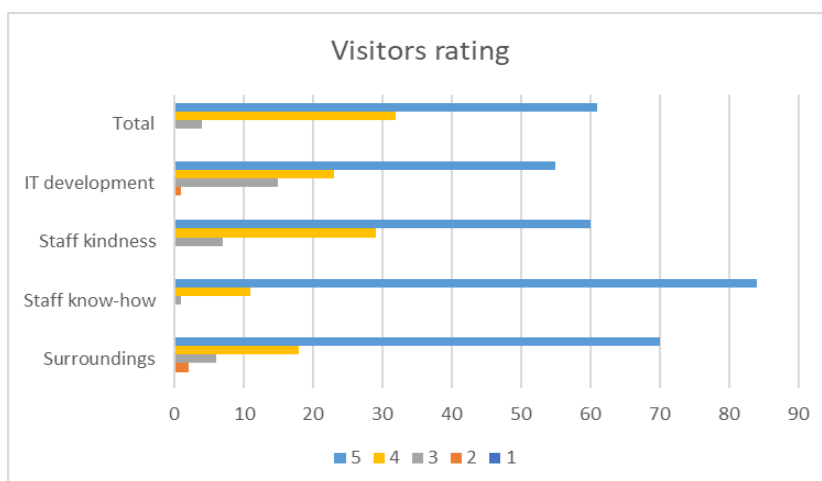


Figure14.: Visitors' rating

*Source: own work*

Visitors were also given the opportunity to provide development suggestions where interactivity and the lack of seating were mentioned. Additionally, they emphasized many suggested film screenings, visual tours and the need for a more interactive approach, the importance of living history. Visitors expect improved signage and more models or replicas related to the historical area.

## Actualities

Since the completion of the questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews, several positive changes have occurred in the city's tourism sector. Thanks to European Union funding and local investment, a number of developments have been implemented with a strong emphasis on sustainability and climate protection:

Construction of bike paths, connecting Székesfehérvár directly to Lake Velence, and the completion of the Budapest-Balaton bike route, which passes through the town, ensuring a well-connected network.

The "Green City - Fehérvár's Lung" project is in progress, involving the establishment of a leisure park and a 15-hectare forest, making it significant from a climatic perspective as well.

One of the city's major investments is the construction of a multifunctional arena that will host international ice hockey matches and serve as a venue for various other potentially tourism-related events.

Within the framework of the Árpád House Program, the development of the Stonehouse, Visitor Center and Research Institute is in progress.

The South Bypass, although less directly related to tourism, aims to improve accessibility to the destination and relieve traffic congestion in the city center.

Tourism services have significantly improved as well. The [turizmus.szekesfehervar.hu](http://turizmus.szekesfehervar.hu) website is modern and interactive, providing comprehensive information on the city's attractions, major hospitality establishments, and the possibility to make accommodation reservations. Additionally, there is a dedicated section for the MICE sector. The "Travel Tips" section allows for detailed trip planning, even for multi-day stays, but only two-day trips are available.

The Székesfehérvár app available on smartphones, primarily provides information for locals. However, it could be developed with a dedicated tourism section to display relevant information for tourists. The city is also accessible through the 2GO! and Pocket Guide applications, although the latter has only a few informations and „Go programme doesn't work at the moment. Improving these online information services is essential in today's digital age.

Tourinform offers interactive and themed brochures, focusing on cultural, family, active, and regional attractions.

The city provides tours by a Dotto road train and guaranteed city walking tours every weekend. Visitors can also participate in tours of the Heating Power Station, where they can see the giant royal puppets. The Sóstó Visitor Center organizes family and animal welfare programmes on weekends, and the city offers a wide range of weekend events with various themes, ensuring everyone can find a programme.

A recent service for overnight guests is the "Nyiss Fehérvár!" discount card, available from one night's stay, offering numerous discounts on the prices of tourist services within and around the city. This is a very positive development that is likely to boost the number of overnight stays.

In summary, tourism in Székesfehérvár is developing. The number of overnight stays has increased by 137% over the past 10 years, which is a remarkable achievement. However, according to feedback from accommodation owners, business tourism shows a growing trend. Due to its size and status as a county seat, the city and Lake Velence have the highest number of overnight stays in the county. It's essential to consider that, according to research results, the majority of visitors still view Székesfehérvár as a city for a few hours of sightseeing, but the city has much more to offer and encourages longer stays.

Further research could focus on examining "invisible tourism" among day-trippers to understand why they do not choose to spend more time in the city.

At the end of my research, I had the opportunity to interview Gábor Kígyóssy, the Chief Planner and a regional development expert of the Fejér County Government,. I asked him the same questions as the interviewees from the sample areas, but he provided answers from a county perspective.

The specialist said Fejér County is an emerging player in the tourism market. Apart from the county seat, significant numbers of overnight stays are only notable around Lake Velence. He considers Veszprém is the main rival for Székesfehérvár in cultural tourism, although cities like Tata, Esztergom, and Pápa also hold strong positions. Gorsium is regarded as the most significant Roman-era attraction in the region. Despite the presence of many castles in Transdanubia, Fehérvárcsurgó is well-positioned because of tourism developments, and thanks to the power of the Károlyi name.

He emphasizes the importance of reinforcing various domestic and international collaborations, as there have been examples of such partnerships in the past. In the coming years, he anticipates the strengthening of the destination, which will depend on how the region's tourism service providers adapt to changing circumstances.



## **4. Conclusions, and recommendations**

The result of my research are the followings, related to the assumptions defined in the hypothesis, and they also shape my recommendations.

### **H1. Developments positively contribute to the economic growth of the model areas and increase in job opportunities.**

Economic growth and new workplaces have occurred in all model areas, confirming the hypothesis. The increase in visitor numbers has led to higher revenues for attractions. It is important to note that these developments have not directly contributed to an increase in overnight stays but have extended the duration of visits. New workplaces have been realized in the model areas, where the researched tourist attractions serve as one of the main employers. The growth in revenues has also contributed to economic development, which promotes the overall development of the region. However, it is important that a development induces further developments as the quality needs to be continually improved to maintain visitor interest. Rapidly changing preferences require all attractions to continuously improve. There should be further research on examining "invisible tourism" among day-trippers.

### **H2. Developments stimulate further infrastructural investments in the region, which is profitable for locals if developments are not excessive.**

The hypothesis has been confirmed through the research. In the case of Székesfehérvár, there is clear evidence of multiplier effect, lots of new restaurants have been opened in recent years and accommodations improving their services. In Fehérvárcsurgó, due to the lack of accommodations, smaller guesthouses have been established. In the case of Tác, bicycle paths have been constructed, and the possibility of water tours on the Sárvíz has also begun.

In the 2014-2020 European Union term several other infrastructural developments have been realized in the model areas, which are not directly related to tourism, but increase the overall level of regional and tourist infrastructure. These developments benefit the locals by improving their quality of life and increasing the availability of services. The developments have not negatively impacted the local residents. As a result, there is peaceful coexistence between tourists and locals, and there is no overcrowding, even during tourist seasons.

**H3. The developments contribute to the regional image and attractiveness, increasing visitor numbers and competitiveness.**

The developments have contributed to raising awareness of the region, and visitor numbers have dynamically increased, confirming the hypothesis. However, the destination has primarily remained a day trip destination, and efforts to significantly extend the duration of visits have not been particularly successful. The number of day-trippers has considerably increased in the model areas, indicating an improved attractiveness of the destination. Infrastructure is available for longer stays, but marketing efforts should emphasize the available experiences to encourage visitors to spend a long weekend or even a full week exploring the region. It is essential to keep online platforms up to date with all necessary information, ensuring interactivity. The region's attractions can offer suitable leisure options for a week-long visit to various target groups. Creating package deals and fostering collaboration among service providers are important to achieving more success. Additionally, interactivity and tailoring messages would be important to specific target groups.

## **5. New scientific results**

The dissertation examines a rarely researched region from tourism perspective, Fejér County. In my literature research, I hardly came across any tourism-related studies of this area, mostly historical and archaeological literature was available.

1. The region is rarely investigated as a touristic place, there have been no previous studies from this view, so my research has new scientific results. The researched areas encompass the region's primary cultural landmarks, there have been nearly identical criterias during the research.

2. The results of the dissertation are good basis for decision-makers in tourism and help them for making decisions and determining further development directions. Similar work has not been done in this area earlier.

3. My work provides a summary of the county's tourism, the trends of statistical data that have not been previously compiled in a similar manner, so this is another new result.

4. There hasn't been previous research in the researched areas concerning the effects and follow-up of tourism developments. The opinions of visitors could not be recognized by decision-makers, even though such surveys are very important to improve service quality.

5. My dissertation serves as a form of visitor satisfaction survey in the researched areas, clearly highlighting what visitors expect, require, and what are the possibilities with they are particularly satisfied with.

6. The dissertation also gives new scientific results from the perspective of service and infrastructure development what can be used for decision-makers. Furthermore, it can be a base for monitoring the forthcoming developments.
7. My research contributes for searching the visitors' attitudes, preferences, interests, and expectations, which are important and new scientific results.
8. During my research, I made proposals for strengthening cooperation since it became evident that the half-day touristic destinations can only generate more overnight stays through creating of programme packages and cooperation. This is one of the most important scientific results of my dissertation. Further research could focus on examining "invisible tourism" among day-trippers to understand why they do not choose to spend more time in the region.
9. The research concluded that more interactivity and continuous service development are necessary in the researched areas to encourage previous visitors to return. Digitalisation is very important, the attractions should take more attractive IT developments.
10. It is important to provide high-quality and regular programme offers to increase the number of visitors.
11. Another new scientific result that emphasizing marketing and interactivity are also very important, and relayed messages to different visitor groups are necessary. Collective marketing communication should emphasize the experiences and focus on the fact that Fejér county is the destination of experiences.

## **6. The author's publications related to the subject of the thesis**

- Systematic literature review analysing smart tourism destinations in context of sustainable development: current applications and future directions SUSTAINABILITY 15 : 6 Paper: 5086 , 15 p. (2023)
- Analysis Framework for the Central Transdanubian Tourist Region X. KHEOPS International Scientific Conference, Mór, 20th April 2015., ISBN 978-963-89779-4-6
- Economic Indicators of Tourism Development between 2007 and 2013, in: Tibor János Karlovitz (editor): Cultural and social variegation in the changing economic nature, International Research Institute, 2014. ISBN: 978-80-89691-08-01,
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- Ensuring sustainability-a global challenge for tourism, 11th Annual International Conference on Economics and Business: Global challenges, local answers, Csíkszereda, 16-17th May 2014., ISBN: 978-973-53-1287-9

- Tourism as a Tool for Rural Development - Tourism-Oriented Developments in the Central Transdanubian Region, Hungarian Regional Science Association 11th Annual Meeting, Kaposvár, 21-22nd November 2013.

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