

# HUNGARY IN THE CONTEXT OF TOURIST VISITS FROM SLOVENIA – SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF TOURIST TRAFFIC AND INTERNET TOURISM OFFER

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## Abstract

Hungary established itself as a major tourist destination already decades ago, when it became renowned for its thermal spas and rich cultural and architectural heritage of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy. In the recent years, the country has attracted tourists and daily visitors with a diverse tourism offer, which ranges from activities in natural protected areas with high levels of biodiversity to international festival events and famous traditional culinary and wine products. In 2015, the country recorded over 10 million tourist arrivals, among which foreign tourists prevailed. Due to geographical vicinity, as well as historical, social and political similarities, Hungary also represents a popular destination for visitors and tourists from Slovenia. According to the Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia, about 46,000 tourists from Slovenia visited Hungary in 2014. This number is based on the criterion of at least one overnight stay in Hungarian accommodation establishments and is therefore underestimated in the aspect of Slovenian visitors, since many Slovenians visit this country in a single day. In the paper, authors analyse the spatial distribution of tourist traffic and present the main characteristics of (organized) Slovenian tourist visits to Hungary. The main part of the research is focused on the analysis of the internet-based tourism offer, provided by Slovenian travel agencies. The offer was subjected to a detailed review that concentrated on its spatial distribution.

**Key words:** Hungary, tourists from Slovenia, organized travel packages, analysis of the internet-based tourism offer, travel agencies.

## INTRODUCTION

Hungary has established itself as an important tourist destination already decades ago, attracting tourist flows from all over the world. In 2015, the country recorded more than 10 million tourist arrivals, with a sharp increase in the number of foreign tourists experiencing record growth in recent years. In Hungary, 3.5 million foreign visitors arrived in 2008, reaching 4.9 million in 2015 (Hungarian Central Statistical Office [HCSO], 2016a). The country boasts with a varied tourism offer covering many thermal spas, extensive protected areas of nature with a high level of biodiversity and a rich cultural and architectural heritage of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy, which is particularly pronounced in the capital of Budapest. The United Nations Educational,

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Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognized the exceptional nature of the selected places, which included 8 sites in the country on the list of world natural (1 unit) and cultural heritage (7 units) (UNESCO, 2017). Tourists are also impressed by the Hungarian culinary and wine products, specialties and internationally recognizable festival events.

Hungary began to open to the foreign visitors in the early 1960s, when the communist regime was relaxed, and since then there has been a steady increase in the tourist visit (HCSO, 2016c). Tourism has developed in this area already in the period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, when visitors to particular destination would visit it mainly for health reasons, since the main focus was on thermal spas (Kocsis and Schweitzer, 2009). Hungary today invites guests with the slogan "Think Hungary, more than expected", where the main tourist destination is the capital of Budapest (Tourism in Hungary, 2015). If we classify the tourism sector according to the motive of the visit, we can find out that the following types of tourism are present in Hungary: 1) visiting cultural and natural sights, with the focus primarily on the capital of Budapest and the places under the protection of UNESCO's cultural heritage; 2) visiting health resorts and the spas, since this type of tourism has a favorable geological composition of the soil for development possibilities throughout the entire territory of Hungary; 3) attendance at congress events (Kocsis and Schweitzer, 2009; Pöörler, 2013).

Due to its geographical proximity, historical, social and political circumstances, Hungary is traditionally a popular destination also for visitors and tourists from Slovenia, who are visiting it throughout the year for various reasons. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, the debated country attracted about 46,000 tourists from Slovenia yearly, who traveled there individually or in an organized group, thus creating at least one overnight stay. This ranks the country on the eighth place according to the number of trips from Slovenia to foreign countries (SORS, 2016). In 2014, the Hungarian Central Statistical Office recorded the arrival of 26,314 Slovenian tourists, who generated 51,503 overnight stays (HCSO, 2016b). In this research, we want to define the main characteristics of (organized) tourist trips of Slovenian tourists to Hungary, focusing in particular on the spatial orientation of their visit through the Hungarian tourist regions.

## **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

The paper is divided into two parts. The first part we analysed the official statistical data of the tourist visits from Slovenia to Hungary, using data from both the Slovenian and Hungarian statistical offices. The second part of the paper contains an overview of the online offer of the Slovenian travel agencies that organize trips to Hungary. This part of the research is methodologically based on previously conducted analyses of the tourism offer of Slovenian tourist agencies for the Croatian coast (Kerma, Koderman and Salmi, 2009), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Koderman and Kerma, 2010) and Austria

(Kežar and Koderman, 2014). We used the database of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia (CCIS), which manages the register of the tour operators (CCIS, 2015). In the first phase, the survey included the identification of all Slovenian tourist agencies or tour operators offering tourist services in the Hungarian territory. The offer of selected companies was then subject of content analysis and covered various aspects of the advertised services.

The analysis was based on the diploma thesis of Tomaž Kostanjšek, where the authors of this paper participated as supervisors and collaborators. In his research, Kostanjšek also investigated the frequency of the advertised destinations, the type of services, duration and price (Kostanjšek, 2016).

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF TRAVELS OF SLOVENIAN TOURISTS TO HUNGARY**

In the early 1990s, Hungary was among the Slovenian tourists, along with the sights offered by Budapest, known especially for shopping tourism, as the border towns of Hungary and the villages were full of buyers from Slovenia. At the time, special shopping coaches drove visitors to the most famous shopping center in the border town of Lenti. The peak was reached in 1995, when more than 20,000 day-to-day shopping buses were registered at the Dolga vas border crossing. Their number later dropped rapidly. The reason for this lies in the fact that in the mid-1990s, stores and larger shopping centers began to appear in Slovenia, where cheaper or cheap goods could be bought as well (Litrop, 2003).

Today, Slovenian tourists in Hungary are no longer connected (only) with cheap shopping, but are attracted by city tourism (sightseeing of cultural and historical sights, cuisine, cultural events) and health or wellness tourism. These facts were evident from the completed analysis of the offer, which was advertised by Slovenian tourist agencies in case of a visit to Hungary. Pe oler (2013) elaborated the image of Hungary as a tourist destination for tourists and tour operators in Slovenia. The author concludes that the Slovenian tourists do not recognize Hungary as a tourist destination sufficiently, since most of the visitors connect the country in question only with Budapest and partly by the Lake Balaton, while the rest of the offer is not well known to them (Pe oler, 2013).

## **ARRIVALS AND OVERNIGHT STAYS OF SLOVENIAN TOURISTS IN HUNGARY**

The data of the Hungarian Statistical Office show the data only for the period after 2011, which makes it difficult to determine the trend of the actual tourist traffic since the five-year period represents an insufficient time frame for more precise conclusions. The table 1 shows that the number of tourist arrivals from Slovenia is decreasing

(exception is 2014). The decline in arrivals is also followed by a decline in the number of overnight stays (exception is 2012) (HCSO, 2016b).

Tourists from Slovenia represented a modest 0.25% of all tourist arrivals to Hungary, while the share of Slovenian tourists compared only with foreign visitors is 0.53%, which ranks Slovenia to the 35<sup>th</sup> place according to the number of tourist arrivals to Hungary (HCSO, 2016b).

**Tab. 1:** Number of arrivals and overnight stays of tourists from Slovenia in Hungary and index between 2011 and 2015

YEAR	NUMBER OF ARRIVALS	INDEX (%)	NUMBER OF OVERNIGHTS	INDEX (%)	AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY
2011	27,571	100.0	55,451	100.0	2.0
2012	27,171	98.5	61,453	110.8	2.3
2013	26,906	97.6	53,587	96.6	2.0
2014	28,530	103.5	54,383	98.1	1.9
2015	26,314	95.4	51,503	92.9	2.0

Source: HCSO, 2016.

The statistical data show that Slovenian tourists travel to Hungary only for a short period of time, which results in an average length of stay of about 2 days (in 2015). The latter corresponds to the fact that the majority of (online) tourism offer available to Slovenian tourists included shorter trips, which usually last up to two overnight stays.

#### TOURIST TRAFFIC FROM SLOVENIA BY TOURIST REGIONS OF HUNGARY

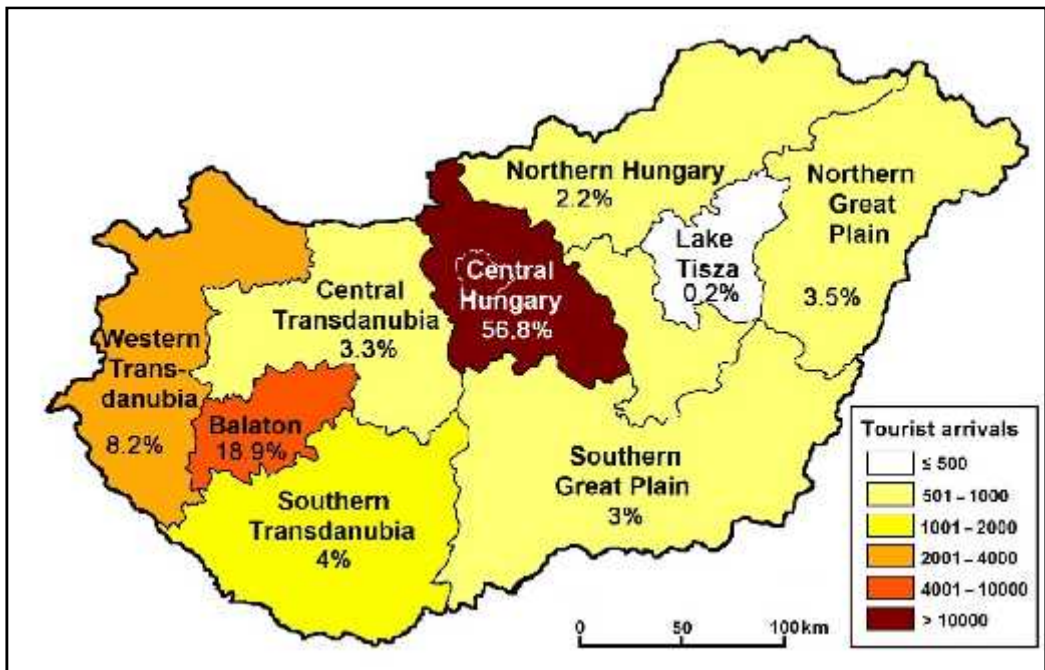
In the analyzed five-year period between 2011 and 2015, we found that Slovenian tourists mostly visit the tourist region of Central Hungary, which is in line with the fact that this region is the most visited Hungarian tourist region in general. This tourist region registers about 15,000 arrivals of Slovenian tourists each year (14,945 in 2015). The region of Central Hungary is followed by the Balaton region with approximately 5,000 tourist arrivals from Slovenia (4,974 in 2015), while the other regions recorded a smaller visit (Table 2, Figure 1). Other tourist regions are also facing fluctuations in the number of arrivals, while the most visited regions are characterized by a smaller number decline in the last debated year. The regions of Southern Transdanubia and the Southern and Northern Great Plains recorded a slightly higher number of arrivals in 2015 (HCSO, 2016b).

**Tab. 2:** Number of arrivals of Slovenian tourists by tourist regions of Hungary between 2011 and 2015

Tourist region	2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	ARR.	%	ARR.	%	ARR.	%	ARR.	%	ARR.	%
Central Hungary	16,587	60.2	15,093	55.5	15,912	59.1	16,450	59.1	14,945	56.8
Balaton	5,476	19.9	5,183	19.1	4,956	18.4	5,795	18.4	4,974	18.9
Western Transdanubia	1,813	6.6	2,273	8.4	1,902	7.1	2,532	7.1	2,158	8.2
Southern Transdanubia	997	3.6	1,427	5.3	1,149	4.3	954	4.3	1,046	4.0
Northern Great Plain	795	3.3	1,186	2.9	1,071	2.5	665	2.5	908	3.0
Central Transdanubia	451	2.9	654	4.4	746	4.0	882	4.0	873	3.5
Southern Great Plain	904	1.9	787	1.7	682	1.6	543	1.6	784	2.2
Northern Hungary	521	1.6	459	2.4	434	2.8	663	2.8	578	3.3
Lake Tisza	27	0.1	109	0.4	54	0.2	46	0.2	48	0.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27,571</b>	<b>100.</b>	<b>27,171</b>	<b>100.</b>	<b>26,906</b>	<b>100.</b>	<b>28,530</b>	<b>100.</b>	<b>26,314</b>	<b>100.</b>

Source: HCSO, 2016b

In 2015, Slovenian tourists registered the longest average length of stay in the Northern Hungary region (2.5 days), while the average length of stay in the Northern Great Plain, Southern Great Plain, Balaton and the Western Transdanubia region was 2.3 days. Although it is difficult to evaluate these indicators only from the statistical data, we can conclude that the number of overnight stays is also related to the distance of each region from Slovenia. The tourist region of Balaton and the Western Transdanubia are closest to the Slovenian border, but we can assume that in their case, the average length of stay is influenced also by the purpose of the trip. These regions are mainly known for spa tourism, therefore we can assume that individual tourists from Slovenia also spend vacation in this area and usually stay here a longer period of time (HCSO, 2016b).



**Fig. 1:** Share of tourists from Slovenia in Hungary by tourist regions in 2015.

Source: HCSO, 2016b.

## THE INTERNET TOURISM OFFER OF SLOVENIAN TOURIST AGENCIES FOR HUNGARY

At the time of the research, 455 travel agencies with a license of the tour operator were registered on the CCIS website (CCIS, 2015). In the first phase of the data collection, we excluded 84 tourist agencies (18.5%) who did not meet the criteria that the agency should have its own website. Out of the remaining 370 tourist agencies, only 86 (23.2%) offered tourist services referring to Hungary on their websites. The latter were then subject to a more detailed analysis.

### SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF TOURISM OFFER BY INDIVIDUAL TOURIST REGIONS OF HUNGARY

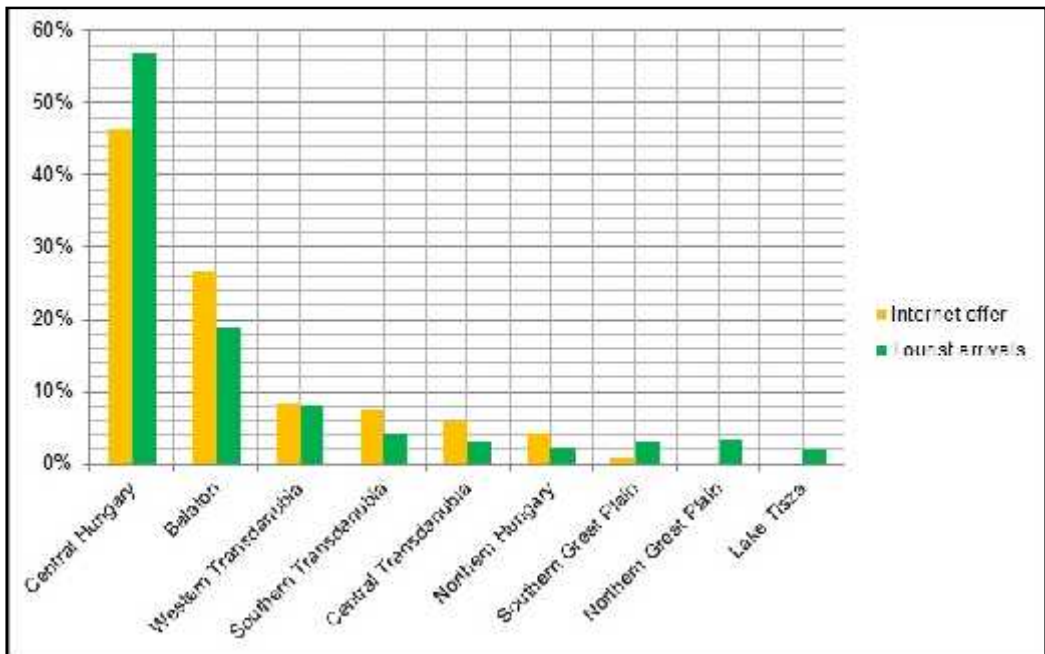
An analysis of the online tourism offer of the Slovenian tour operators gave us a good insight to destinations in Hungary that are the most attractive for Slovenian tourists. We focused on the spatial distribution of the tourism offer of individual regions, and the analysis showed that tourist agencies in their online offer most often advertise the Hungarian capital and individual places near Lake Balaton (most often Tihany village). From the online tourist programmes of the agencies it is evident that a significant segment of the offer also refers to the visiting of the historically important cities (for example the package tour entitled Castles of Hungary), where a visit to Budapest is

usually also included. Only a small part of the offer excludes the capital and focuses on tourist areas in the south and west of the country. The most frequently advertised tourist destinations in Hungary are presented in Table 3.

**Tab. 3:** The most frequently advertised tourist destinations in Hungary in the online offer of the Slovenian travel agencies

REGION	TYPE OF SERVICE	DURATION (days)
Central Hungary	Excursion, trip – shorter	1–2
Balaton / Western Transdanubia	Excursion, trip – shorter	1–2
Balaton, Central Hungary, Central Transdanubia	Trip – shorter	2–3
Southern Transdanubia	Excursion, trip – shorter	1–2
Western Transdanubia	Excursion	1

If the results of the analysis are compared with the data of the Hungarian Statistical Office, which deal with the share of arrivals of Slovenian tourists in regions of Hungary, we can find out a significant matching. The latter is also evident from Figure 2, which shows that a significant matching between the online offer and the share of arrivals can be traced in most of the Hungarian tourist regions. The Hungarian Statistical Office records 3.5% of the Slovenian tourists in the Northern Great Plain region, while this region could not be found in the online offer of the analysed tourist agencies. The differences between the online offer of tour operators and the data on the arrivals of the statistical office of Hungary can be partially explained by the fact that the categories are difficult to compare with each other, since we are not dealing with the related data. In addition, we have faced different time data acquisition - data on arrivals refer to the entire year of 2015, while we analyzed the online offer only in the winter (more precisely the New Year) period of 2015.



**Fig. 2:** Comparison of the shares of online tourism offer and arrivals of Slovenian tourists in the tourist regions of Hungary

In the Central Hungary region, which refers to 46.4% of all advertised online offers, the most represented destination is the capital of Budapest, which appears in the online offer both on its own and in combination with other destinations. The Budapest tour is often combined with a tour of cultural and historical towns in the vicinity of the capital (Szentendre, Visegrad, Gödöllő, etc.). Some of the tourist arrangements also included a tour of the capitals of different countries (for example Budapest, Bratislava and Vienna). The most frequently advertised offer combines the sightseeing of the two regions – Budapest in the Central Hungary and the village of Tihany in the region of Balaton. If we focus on the sights that were exposed in Central Hungary, we can conclude that, in the case of Budapest, the tourist programs of the agencies were almost identical. Itineraries often offer a tour of the following main attractions: national parliament, opera house, Stefan's Church, walk along the Heroes Square, the city park, Vajda Hunyadi Castle and Vaci Street, tour of the city market and the Castle Hill, and the view over the city from the Citadel. In tourist itineraries with an overnight stay in Budapest, visitors were usually given the possibility of a dinner in a typical Hungarian *csárda*, which is usually not included in the price of the trip. The other towns of the Central Hungary, which were found in the online offer, invite visitors with their baroque buildings and visible remains of the formerly powerful Serbian community (the city of Szentendre), or in the case of Visegrad, the former capital of medieval Hungary, the city walls and the Salamon's tower.



The biggest tourist attraction of the region of Balaton is the lake itself; the region is ranked second among regions with 26.6% of advertised arrangements. The most advertised online offer in this region included Tihany village, and the key tourist attractions of this lakeside village – pointed out by many tourist agencies – are the ethnological outdoor museum and the Benedictine monastery. Apart from the Tihany village, Keszthely is also mentioned several times in the tourist programmes, where visitors see the Festetics Palace and the Marzipan Museum, and Siófok, which is known for its diverse street festivals with various events.

The area of Lake Balaton is a part of the Western Transdanubian Region, but they are considered individually as tourist regions for the needs of the Hungarian Statistical Office, which is why we also show them separately. The share of online offer that refers to the Western Transdanubian Region is considerably lower compared to the Central Hungary and the Balaton (8.4%), however, tourist agencies offer a wide range of destinations in this region. Numerous arrangements related to the places that are close to the Slovenian-Hungarian border and are interesting for Slovenian visitors because of the Slovenian minority living there, as well as the places near Lake Balaton.

In the westernmost part of Hungary, which lies directly along the Slovenian border, the offer was mainly focused on the two locations of the Slovenian Porabje, namely Monošter (Szentgotthárd), which is considered the center of the Slovenian ethnic community in Hungary and where one can visit the largest Baroque church in Hungary, and Gornji Senik (Fels szölnök), where visitors can visit the church of St. John the Baptist and the memorial house of writer Janoš Kühar. The analysis of the online offer also showed that in this part of Hungary tourist can visit the national park rség and the smaller places connected with the Slovenian ethnic territory (Sola, Verica-Ritkarovci). The Western Transdanubian region was included in a small number of online arrangements, and here is a brief explanation of their sights: Sopron (visit of the old city center with a fire tower and a tour of the old Roman settlement), Kiseg (castle fort, Baroque houses), Fert d (Baroque castle of Esterhazy) and Györ (Baroque old town area). In the vicinity of the Lake Balaton there is a well-known thermal spa Hévíz, one of the largest thermal lakes in the world. When reviewing the offer for the Western Transdanubian region, we see that it is much more diversified than in the case of Central Hungary, while it is more difficult to compare it with the region of Balaton, which is a much smaller area with a smaller number of places we can visit.

Considering the online offer of tourist agencies that relate to the remaining Hungarian tourist regions, we can conclude that it is quite monotonous, offering little choice for potential visitors. In the case of South Transdanubian region (7.5% of all offers), the largest number of packages referred to the city of Pécs, also known as the city of porcelain, and visits to this central city of the region can be combined with a tour of the city of Villány (visiting wine cellars and wine tasting). Only a few arrangements in this region advertised a visit to the city of Szombathely (the oldest Hungarian city lying on the former amber trade route, where the Roman remains are very well preserved). The

tourist online offer also included the opportunity to visit the region of Central Transdanubia (5.9%), with some of the arrangements related to the places near Lake Balaton, such as Sümeg (castle and a visit of the medieval games), Tapolco (a branched system of karst caves with the underground river) and Veszprém (cathedral, town hall, fire tower, door of heroes, ascent to the castle hill). In the analysis, we also missed the offer of handball matches in this, otherwise well-known Hungarian sport city.

Tourist agencies also advertise Hungary as a land of wines (mostly with the sweet Tokaji) in their arrangements and organize excursions to the Northern Hungary region (4.3%), where tourists visit the towns of Eger and Tokaj. A small part of the online offer was related to the Southern Great Plain Region (0.9%), where individual tourist agencies invite visitors to the Ópusztaszer National Park and to harvest peppers in the village and towns such as the Kalocsa (visit of the Paprika Museum), Kecskemét (sightseeing of the city with the Baroque market), Hajós (visit of the wine cellar), Kecel (visit of the military museum). Additionally, the Southern Great Plain region is also known for the extensive grassy landscape called *pusta*, and many tourist agencies had included a visit to one of the traditional Hungarian farms in their programmes.

During the analysis of the online tourism offer, we did not find a programme or arrangement, which would offer the possibility to visit the Lake Tisza or the Northern Great Plain regions.

## CONCLUSION

Despite its relatively small size, Hungary is one of the most attractive destinations, both at European and global level. In the period from 2001 to 2015, the state increased the number of tourist arrivals of domestic and foreign visitors for more than 71 percent. Tourists from Slovenia made 26,314 arrivals and 51,503 overnight stays in this country in 2015, and thus do not represent a significant share in the structure of Hungarian tourism (their share among all foreign tourists in that year is only 0.53%, which according to the number of tourist arrivals ranks Slovenia on 35<sup>th</sup> place). It should be added that these data are only those tourists who spend at least one night in this country, so we can conclude that the number of visitors from Slovenia would be much higher, in addition to one-day individual excursions to Hungary.

After completing the analysis of 86 Slovenian tourist agencies that offered tourist services for Hungary, we found that shorter trips were dominant among the most frequently advertised packages (with a majority share of 56% within all analyzed types of services), followed by organized excursions (with a 26% share). These short trips and excursions were generally geographically oriented to the city of Budapest and to the Lake Balaton area. There were 82% of all analysed tourist services concentrated in the mentioned tourist regions during the survey, while 75.7% of all registered tourists from Slovenia were attracted by these two regions in 2015.

In the central part of the paper, we analyzed the various sets of data, which resulted in a comparison of the spatial orientation of the tourism offer advertised by the Slovenian travel agencies and recorded indicators of the Hungarian statistical office on realized arrivals and overnight stays of Slovenian tourists. The matching can be described as high, as illustrated in Figure 2 (Comparison of the online tourism offer and arrivals of Slovenian tourists by tourist regions of Hungary). Finally, we can critically add that for a deeper understanding of the characteristics of organized tourist trips from Slovenia to Hungary, it would be also important to conduct structured interviews with the main agency providers who organize excursions and trips to this country. In addition, it would be beneficial to explore the online tourism offer of Slovenian agencies in several periods of the year, since such a study would undoubtedly give a more comprehensive picture of the spatial orientation of the tourism offer in Hungary, as well as its forms and intensities in different seasons of the year. In this respect, a survey conducted on the demand side, that is, among Slovenian tourists visiting Hungary, would also be appreciated in order to be able to verify the actual motives for their visit to the debated country.

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