# MANAŽÉRSKE REAKCIE NA ODVRÁTENIE ÚČINKOV PANDÉMIE COVID-19 VO VÝCHODOMAĎARSKÝCH PODNIKOCH CESTOVNÉHO RUCHU

# VEZETŐI REAKCIÓK A COVID-19 VILÁGJÁRVÁNY HATÁSAINAK ELHÁRÍTÁSÁRA A KELET-MAGYARORSZÁGI TURISZTIKAI VÁLLALKOZÁSOKNÁL

# MANAGERIAL REACTIONS FOR WARDING OFF THE EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN EASTERN HUNGARIAN TOURISM ENTERPRISES

Ádám Kálmán Sánta – Norbert Beták – Lóránt Dénes Dávid

## Abstrakt

*V roku 2020 sa naším svetom prehnala epidémia spôsobená vírusom SARS-CoV-2, takzvaná epidémia koronavírusov, aká tu ešte nebola. Mala vážny vplyv na zdravotníctvo, sociálnu starostlivosť, priemyselnú výrobu a dokonca aj na poľnohospodárstvo. Zmenila fungovanie vzdelávacích systémov a podrobila skúške celú ľudskú spoločnosť. Okrem toho v rokoch 2020 a 2021 vážne poškodila najmä jednu oblasť a je príliš skoro na to, aby sa dalo presne povedať, kedy a ako sa úplne zotaví. Ide o odvetvie cestovného ruchu a hotelierstva. V tomto článku sme sa snažili zistiť, ako podniky cestovného ruchu reagovali na počiatočné obdobie šokov, ako reagovali na narušenie svojej činnosti, ktoré nemohli ovplyvniť, akým výzvam čelili v súvislosti s nasledujúcimi vlnami epidémií a ktoré z týchto riešení chcú analyzované podniky uplatniť v dlhodobom horizonte. Štúdia vychádzala z hotelov vo východnom Maďarsku a s ich manažérmi sa uskutočnili expertné rozhovory. Možné zmeny v postojoch spotrebiteľov na strane dopytu ilustroval dotazníkový prieskum po tretej vlne pandémie v Maďarsku (februára 2021).*

***Kľúčové slová:*** cestovateľské návyky. COVID-19. dopyt po cestovnom ruchu. krízový manažment. podnikové reakcie.

## Abstract

*In 2020, the so-called coronavirus pandemic, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, swept through our world in a way not seen for a very long time. The phenomenon had serious effects on healthcare, social care, industrial production, and even agriculture. It changed the operation of education systems testing the entire human society. In addition to this, one economic field suffered particularly serious damages in 2020 and 2021, and it is not yet possible to say exactly when and how it will fully recover. This industry is none other than the sector of tourism and hospitality. In our paper, based on the initial, shock-like period, we looked for the answer to what answers did the enterprises interested in tourism gave to the operational disturbances which they could not influence, what challenges did they face in the several consecutive epidemic waves and which of their reactions and solutions can be used in long term by the analysed enterprises. In the study, we took hotels, attached restaurants and a bath operating in Eastern Hungary as a basis and conducted interviews with their general managers. The possible changes of the consumer* *attitudes and preferences of the demand side were illustrated by the results of a questionnaire survey conducted after the third wave of the pandemic (February 2021) experienced in Hungary.*

***Keywords:*** travel habits. COVID-19. tourism demand. crisis management. enterprise reactions.

## Theoretical starting points of the solved problem

In tourism, annual designations are often used as slogans customized to special products or important areas (*e.g. the Year of Gastronomic Tourism, the Year of Green Tourism or the Year of Waters*). In light of this, we could ironically entitle 2020 as "*the year of the coronavirus*". All over the world, international conventions, domestic political discourses, major annual events, health activities and many other areas were revolving around this global pandemic. But what it mainly wove through was the everyday life of the people. We learned what does digital distance education or "home office" work mean in practice, and in many developed countries, citizens experienced such personal restrictions that humanity has not lived since World War II. In many countries, changes generated by the pandemic are still cause interruptions or operational disturbances for businesses, employees, and citizens even in 2023. That is why we wanted to examine the reactions of the enterprises involved in Hungarian tourism, especially those that are interested in the hotel industry operating in Eastern Hungary.

The natural and dynamic development of tourism can be one of the defining elements of the modern 21st century world and the global economy (WEF, 2019; WTTC, 2020; WTTC, 2021). There are factors that can drastically hinder the development of tourism not only regionally, but also globally. The most common factor that can strongly discourage or even completely bring the development of tourism to an abrupt stop is war and the accompanying devastation caused by the belligerent parties to natural and cultural resources. Consider the Iraq war between 2003 and 2011, the destruction of ancient Assyrian, Babylonian, Roman and early Arabic monuments in Syria by the ISIS or the war in Eastern Ukraine that has been going on in the Donbas and Crimea since 2014 (Hall, Timothy, & Duval, 2004; Turku, 2018; Sass, 2020). In addition to wars, natural disasters and their consequences also often set back the tourism of a region. An example of this is the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake along the San Andreas Fault in California, the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami (Sumatra–Andaman earthquake) that devastated South and Southeast Asia, the negative effects of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans in 2005 or the earthquake in Turkey and Syria this year (Chacko & Hawkins-Marcell, 2008; Tang, 2018; Rindrasih, 2019).

But not only natural forces with a physically perceptible form, such as a hurricanes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, or human activities, such as wars that can affect the global economy and thus tourism in a negative direction. The past decades have revealed that factors dangerous to the development of the globalized world can also be of biological origin. Just think about SARS, Ebola, dengue fever or other seemingly exotic diseases that could sweep the world like wildfire if humanity is not careful enough (Cooper, 2005; Avraham & Ketter, 2016; Rosselló, Santana-Gallego, & Awan, 2017; Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020; Jamal & Budke, 2020).

Throughout its history, human civilization has been plagued by many epidemics that affected a significant part or even the entire population of our planet. Such a well-known epidemic was the plague known as "Black Death" spreading across Europe, Asia and North Africa in the middle of the 14th century, the Spanish flu (H1N1) that spread between 1918-20, the Hong Kong flu (H3N2) present between 1968-70, SARS present between 2002-04, the Zika virus, avian flu or even the Ebola epidemic (Potter, 2001; Ross, Crowe, & Tyndall, 2015; Meglécz, 2012; Abeysinghe, 2013).

The mentioned and similar diseases and epidemics spread through food, water, respiratory tract or vectors, may be able to block interest and realized demand in an area among tourists for months or even years (Tasnádi, 2002; Michalkó, 2012). Of course, there are diseases that people can protect themselves against by prevention, following and keeping proper health protocols thus preventing infections that previously spread like deadly epidemics from gaining strength again, and occur only in a small number of cases (Nagylucskay, 1995; Ross, Crowe, & Tyndall, 2015; Jamal & Budke, 2020).

As demonstration, in Table 1, we summarized in chronological order, which of the government reactions and measures affected the tourism and hospitality sector during the first two waves of the pandemic.

Table 1: Brief timeline of the governmental reactions in the COVID pandemic's first year, related to tourism in Hungary

| Date of introduction | Action introduced |
|---|---|
| 31 January 2020 | Hungarian Operational Task Force was formed. |
| 04 March 2020 | First cases in Hungary were announced. |
| 11 March 2020 | Hungarian government declared a state of emergency, partial border checks re-implemented, introduction of mandatory mask wearing, banning all indoor events temporal cease of operation of all accommodation types. |
| 03 May 2020 | The Hungarian Tourism Agency publishes it's own Covid-19 handbook, which contains the necessary recommendations for reopening after the first wave. |
| 17 June 2020 | Termination of the first state of emergency. Temporary cancellation of the tourism development contribution and local tourism taxes. |
| 15 July 2020 | Classification of European countries in terms of the severity of the coronavirus pandemic. Limitation of the number of inbound tourist. |
| 01 September 2020 | All Hungarian borders are ordered to close for foreigner leisure travellers. Delivery of goods is still allowed. |
| 02 November 2020 | Re-introduction of mandatory mask wearing at indoor places. |
| 11 November 2020 | General suspension of operation of accommodations and restaurants, prohibition of holding public events. |
| 14 November 2020 | Second partial lockdown with curfew starting at 8 p.m.; restaurants were allowed to offer meals to go, hotels were allowed to receive only business guests. |

(*Source: own processing*)

The timeline of the Hungarian measures against COVID-19 contains many repeated measures. This is due to the procedures provided by health protocols were very similar, coordinated, even parallel in several countries. In addition to this, based on previous experiences and observing the intensity of the pandemic, the government and the epidemiological management considered it logical to introduce similar measures in accordance with the situation.

## Objective and methodology

In our study, we approached the changes in the operation of tourism enterprises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic from two perspectives.

We tried to explore the reactions of the consumer side with a questionnaire, in which, based on the opinions of 419 respondents, we processed how the attitudes of the persons involved in the research has been modified related to the changes experienced in the first two waves of the pandemic period in Hungary. The survey was conducted in the spring of 2021. The questionnaire included 5 sociodemographic questions and 25 content-related questions. Of the content-related questions, 6 were related to travel habits of the respondents before the pandemic, 7 were related to their booked trips at the time of the survey, and 12 were related to their expected preferences in the future. All topic-specific questions were close-ended questions that were included in the questionnaire as single-, multiple-choice questions or rating scales.

Actors of the supply side were asked with structured experts interviews during which we asked them about the impacts of the different pandemic waves that affected the tourism enterprises they manage. During the interviews, we discussed the experienced effects going through 3 larger dimensions (pre-pandemic, peri-pandemic, post-pandemic actions) with a total of 14 questions. The questions included the following topics: The questions included the following topics: what initial difficulties occurred to the affected enterprise by the appearance of the virus, how they coped with guests' fears during daily operations, how they experienced the forced closure ordered by law and what long-term solutions they found, which have since become part of their daily operations.

Two of the surveyed hotels mainly focus on the business segments, while one focuses specifically on recreational travellers. However, due to its infrastructural possibilities, the third hotel also maintains constant contact with the business segment in connection with smaller-scale events. Professional athletes are the third most important segment in the clientele of the surveyed hotels. Two of the three hotels have public restaurants, meaning that not only the hotel's own guests can eat in the given restaurant, but they also serve non-resident guests with prior reservation. The third hotel only has the possibility of Bed&Breakfast, its guests' dining needs are met through a contractual partner company (a nearby restaurant). Each of the three hotels has its own specialty, one is located in a complex integrated with a conference centre, while the other is in a complex combined with an indoor water park. The third is located in the most prominent area of the given settlement, only 50 meters away from the most important, nationally known attraction in the downtown of its settlement.

## Results and discussion

In our paper, we wanted to explore the changes caused by the initial stages of the pandemic in the operation of Hungarian tourism enterprises. To do this, we first present the main results of the data collected in our questionnaire survey, which includes the changes in the preferences of those potential tourists who are in the examined sample, then we would like to present the results of the structured interviews with the managers of the tourism enterprises.

The recovery of international tourism is progressing more slowly than of a given country's domestic tourism (WEF, 2022; OECD, 2022). After all, this was an understandable expectation at the time of our survey, because certain countries developed and used their own protocols, which were not always consistent with other countries' objectives and measures. Decision makers took into account the number of cases, their entire socio-geographic extent, and the entry/departure requirements of each country. That is why, in the past two, nearly three years, the proportion of domestically oriented trips was higher than that of trips made by foreigners to Hungary or the travels made to abroad by the Hungarians (HCSO, 2023a).

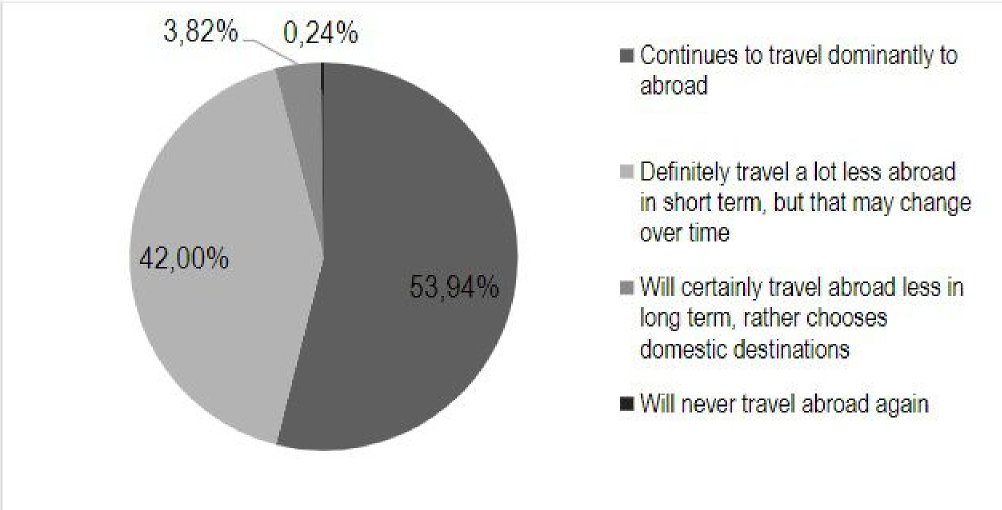


Chart 1: Distribution of respondents' opinions on the number of trips they expect to make abroad after the pandemic
(*Source: own processing*)

But at the time of the first and second wave in Hungary, there was no accurate data for this. It was only possible to get to know the travelling expectations of the public. Therefore, during the period of our survey, we asked the respondents in the sample what expectations they had regarding their future international and domestic voyages. We were curious about how they see the future, which has now been realized, and what destinations they will prefer, whether they will spend their spare time in domestic or rather in foreign destinations. Only a very small part of the survey respondents (0.24%) answered that they would no longer visit foreign destinations at all, fearing an epidemic situation that would last for years. 3.82% of the participants answered that they would definitely choose domestic regions and settlements for their trips and would only rarely travel abroad. 42.00% of them thought that, although not in a situation burdened by the pandemic but with the improvement of the international situation, they will definitely return to foreign destinations in addition to domestic ones. A significant majority of respondents (53.94%) believed that regardless of whether they plan to travel within Hungary or to other countries, everything will return to normal after the virus situation and they do not expect any change in their previous travel preferences so they primarily continue to travel abroad, but they will take part in domestic leisure trips as well.

In addition to the factual international restrictions, the changes in the proportion of domestic trips also indicate that the regular operation of tourism in Hungary has changed. Of course, the drastically reduced, low-level number of guests and number of guest nights were also experienced in Hungarian domestic tourism, which with the gradual change of restrictions, started to show a "recovery" tendency. However, a logical question arises as to whether the level of interest in Hungarian tourist destinations has changed or not in the past COVID years. To demonstrate this, regional statistics published by Hungarian Central Statistical Office can be used.

Hungary, as in many other aspects, but also from the point of view of tourism, is a strongly capital-centric country. The pandemic has greatly changed this. In Table 2, we can see that in 2019, the "classic" order of popularity and proportions between the regions can still be seen based on the number of guests (HCSO, 2023b). The most popular among domestic tourists was the capital city (Budapest) and its surroundings, followed by the Balaton Region and Western Transdanubia. This order changed during the pandemic based on data from recent years, Western Transdanubia was preceded by Northern Hungary, while the capital region and Lake Balaton changed their positions in the ranking. However, we can notice much greater differences in the proportion of visitors of these regions. Compared to the base year of 2019, the proportion of visitors to Lake Balaton among all regions has more than doubled, while that of the capital city has almost halved. The temporary suspension of domestic restrictions in the summer periods of 2020 and 2021 may have played a role in this, when, traditionally, the typical resort towns of Balaton and the areas with lower population density suitable for excursions perform much stronger than in the pre- or post-season.

Table 2: Proportion of tourist arrivals by the Hungarian tourist regions from 2020 to 2022, compared to the survey's respondents' preferences

| | Budapest–Central Danube Region | Lake Balaton | Northern Hungary | Northern Great Plain | Southern Great Plain | Western Transdanubia | Southern Transdanubia | Central Transdanubia | Lake Tisza |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Respondent preferences for 2020 | 12,9% | 41,1% | 20,8% | 5,5% | 7,4% | 14,1% | 6,2% | 3,6% | 8,6% |
| Fact 2019 | 49,5% | 17,4% | 10,5% | 8,0% | 8,2% | 12,3% | 4,8% | 5,6% | 1,2% |
| Fact 2020 | 37,2% | 31,4% | 18,1% | 12,8% | 13,7% | 17,4% | 8,6% | 8,1% | 2,1% |
| Fact 2021 | 27,5% | 41,0% | 22,0% | 15,9% | 15,6% | 17,6% | 11,2% | 9,5% | 2,5% |

*(Source: Own processing based on the data of Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2023b; 2023c)*

If we examine that how the respondents of our demand-side survey felt about the domestic regions they would visit, we can see much greater differences compared to the performance data actually realized. Among the respondents, the area of Lake Balaton clearly dominated, which is probably due to the fact that border crossings between the countries were strictly restricted and Hungary does not have a large seaside resort area. In the light of this, the Balaton Region was a logical choice for the summer voyages of Hungarian travellers. Among the respondents' preferences, it should be noted that fewer of those who completed the questionnaire planned to travel to the Capital Region than to the Western Transdanubian region, and among the respondents there was also a high interest towards the Lake Tisza region (8.6%).

But to examine this topic, it is not enough to take only the regional visits of Hungarian tourists into consideration. It is also important what type of accommodation does a tourist choose for staying in a certain destination. That is why we wanted to assess whether there is a difference in the accommodation choice preferences of those who filled out the questionnaire compared to the real data or not. Although the number of items in the sample is only 419, the results obtained are close to the Hungarian domestic travel trends experienced in 2021 following the second wave of the pandemic in terms of types of accommodation chosen by travellers (Chart 2).

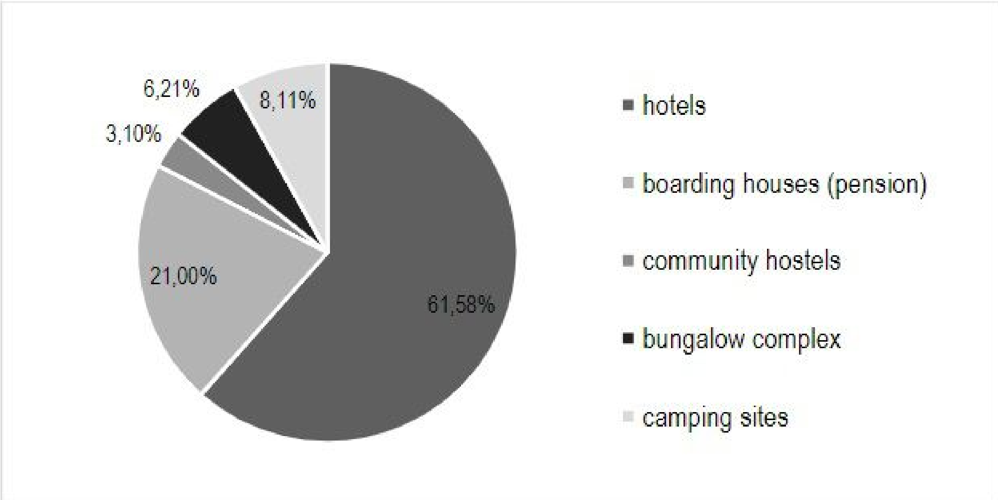


Chart 2: Distribution of respondents' opinions on the type of accommodation they will choose for travel right after the pandemic
(*Source: own processing*)

At the time of the survey, a significant majority of survey participants (61.58%) believed that they would spend their guest nights in hotels during their travels in the period immediately following the pandemic. Less than a quarter of them (21.00%) thought that they would choose boarding houses (pensions) for their trips as type of accommodation because they have a higher level of comfort, but with much less tourist arrivals than hotels. In the survey as a type of accommodation, this was followed by campings (since they have a large open area) with 8.11% of the answers, while 6.21% of respondents indicated bungalow complexes and only 3.10% of the questionnaire fillers would have chosen community accommodations. In reality, the distribution of the number of domestic guest nights in commercial accommodations in 2021 were as follows (HCSO, 2023): Hotels – 66.99%; guesthouses – 16.33%; campings – 7.02%; community accommodations – 5.98%; bungalow complexes – 3.68% (HCSO, 2023b).

We were also wondering that how potential domestic tourists felt about the restrictions affecting not only their travels, but also their daily lives. Therefore, with given the possibility of multiple choices, we asked the respondents in our survey to indicate which of the main mandatory restrictions introduced and experienced up to the period of data collection bothered them the most (Chart 3). Based on the answers received, the questionnaire fillers were most bothered by the night curfew, which was indicated by more than three quarters of the respondents (76.61%). This were followed by the mandatory use of protective masks (50.84%), and by the use of paper-based vaccination certificates (42.00%). The least bothering for the respondents was the use of plexiglass sheets used at the receptions while check ins or administration, separating the employees from the customers (14.80%).

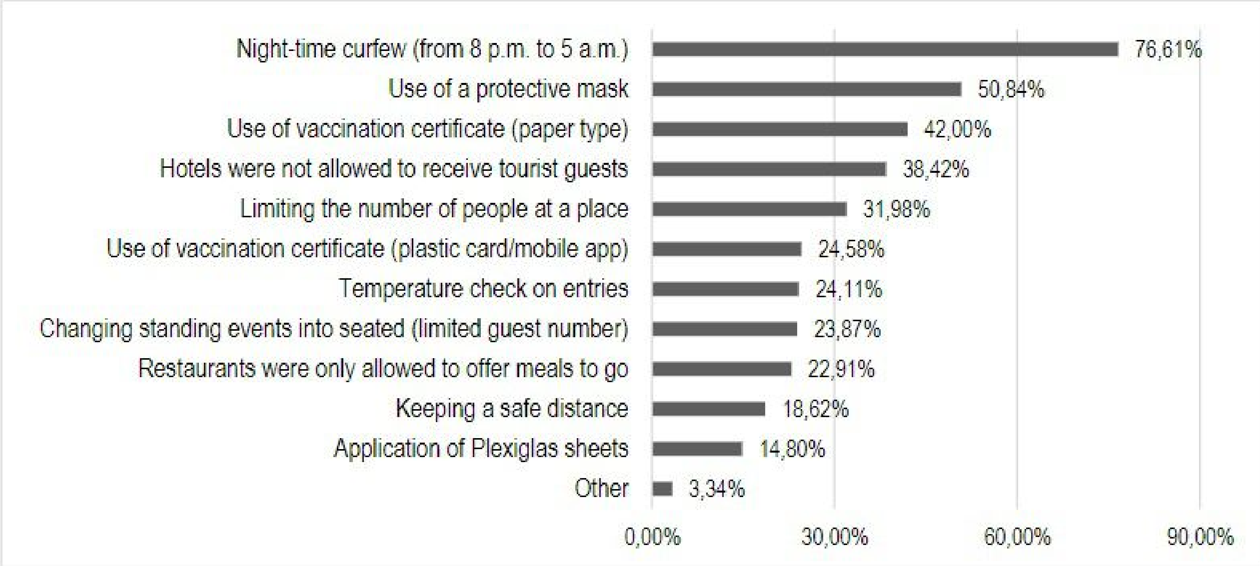


Chart 3: Mandatory restrictions introduced in Hungary, which bothered the respondents the most
(*Source: own processing*)

However, a question arises as to how the tourism service providers were able to respond to the changes experienced on the demand side caused by the pandemic. In order to get answers and get to know the reactions, we conducted expert interviews with hotel and spa managers. The service providers included in the study are operating in Eastern Hungary, in the Northern Great Plain region.

The operations of all of the interviewed enterprises were limited by the epidemiological regulations introduced for understandable reasons. In pursuance of this, all three hotels were forced to close twice in the first year of the pandemic. The wellness and the conference hotel tried to maintain contact with their regular guests despite the closure, but they also tried to open up to possible future potential guests. One of the hotels revealed that, with the help of the hotel's senior employees, they created short professional contents (mainly focusing on gastronomy) that could be understood easily by laymen and uploaded for their own social media platform.

The hotels (including their restaurants as well) and the spa tried to keep all their employees, despite there were some who wanted to change. In the municipally-owned wellness hotel and the spa connected to it, the leadership tried to achieve this by reorganizing the employees. Temporarily they were employed at other municipally-owned enterprises' administrative divisions (eg. public transportations, parking, heat supplier, waterworks, etc.) that do not maintain direct customer/guest relations. However, at the same time, the respective hotels waived the workforce provided during the services of external partners. The business hotel situated in the downtown is privately owned, so there was no opportunity for it to reorganize his employees in such way. For them, out of necessity, forced leave, unpaid leave, or termination of the employment contract by mutual agreement with the employee remained the only solutions. However, it can be said that this hotel has lost a minimal number of employees. The reason for this is that during the second mandatory closure in Hungary, guests traveling only for business purposes could already be received, however, it should also be mentioned that this was enough only to reduce their losses thus, this hotel, like the other two, was able to take advantage of the wage subsidy provided by the state on a tender basis. In the spa, the contracts of those employees who were hired from external service providers were terminated and an internal reorganization of duties was carried out, thus the gardening, cleaning, economic assistance, simpler guarding and protection tasks were carried out by the internal staff. In the case of the wellness department of the conference hotel, it occurred that they wanted to retain an external partner working as an individual entrepreneur, however, this particular employee, fearing of the illness, first suspended the massage service he provided, and finally stopped this activity and accepted an the administrative job in another sector, leaving the sector of tourism.

The supplier chains and networks of the interviewed tourism enterprises were not significantly affected by COVID-19. Before the pandemic, the restaurants mainly tried to buy from regional farms, directly from the producers. If they could not procure a certain raw material in sufficient quantity or quality directly from the producers, they turned to wholesale chains, whose operations were less hindered by the pandemic. In the case of the wellness and conference hotel, some of the services provided by external partners were temporarily suspended. If they had an internal employee who was suitable and able to perform the given task, he temporarily took the place of the service partner, but this only happened in few cases (mainly in the wellness hotel). The small-capacity downtown business hotel has a narrow network of partners, mainly related to the provision of raw materials, like textiles, cleaning products, office equipment, etc. and the performance of maintenance tasks, which, according to them, were not affected by this unusual situation. In the spa, the catering units (buffets and the small-capacity café) were closed, except for the summertime temporary opening-period, so they did not have to deal with food procurement due to the suspension of operations. During the mentioned summer period, they continued to cooperate with the actors of their previous supplier network.

In addition to intermittent subsidies, the Hungarian state tried to enable hotels, restaurants, spas and other service providers involved in tourism to operate by partially lifting the binding measures for tourism enterprises during the high season. In connection with this, we asked the interviewees which segment of their guests returned first. Surprisingly, in the case of the two business hotels, the guests of the MICE segment did not return, and in fact, the number of visits by them remained at a lower level until the end of 2021. The earliest returning guest segment was the family leisure travellers coming for vacation and relaxation. In addition to families, adult couples without children and tourists involved in health tourism also returned in large numbers to the surveyed wellness hotel. Besides, all of the surveyed accommodations received professional athletes, while observing special rules, but not only during the temporary opening. Since the interviewed restaurants are integrated parts of the hotels, they did not receive non-resident guests right away in the high season of 2020, they rather concentrated on serving the hotel guests, but upon prior requests, that happened only in a few cases, they also prepared meals-to-go.

In terms of their services and tasks, all tourist service providers in our study (all three hotels, their restaurants and the spa) did not change their product policy in the beginnings. They tried to keep the services they had already established. However, due to the mandatory closure, they were forced to review their operations in this context. With this review, they tried to reveal the areas in which they could reduce their costs, however in two of the three hotels, the services for which there was already low demand were eliminated terminally. As an additional task, the site-specific development and observance of binding epidemic protocols appeared at all the interviewed enterprises. In the case of the spa, the initial uncertainty of the guests was much higher, since many guests were afraid that the COVID infection might be able to spread with the pool water, so raising awareness, informing and enlightening the guests, based on the actual reports of the epidemiological authorities, also appeared as a priority task at the surveyed enterprise. Besides this, the examined service providers tried to fully comply with the recommendations contained in the COVID-19 Handbook (which is the epidemiological manual focusing on Hungarian tourism) prepared by the Hungarian Tourism Agency. In connection to this, the largest cost items were the floor markings and information signs, the protective masks adapted to the enterprise's brand, the plexiglass sheets separating employees from guests, the disinfectant dispensers with sensor and, of course, the constant acquisition of certified disinfectants. The general managers of the wellness and the conference hotels told us that, taking into account the types of disinfection equipment they used and the number of sanitizing points in their facilities, the costs of these equipment's were between 12,000 and 14,000 euros.

Despite the fact that due to the forced closure, a significant part of their income temporarily ceased, the interviewed companies did not apply drastic changes or large-scale price increases in terms of their pricing policy. The spa kept its entrance fees at the pre-COVID price levels, just as before, the hotels used the tool of dynamic pricing to determine their prices for different room types, in different periods, with different booking windows. However compared to the previous method of operation, two differences were observed in the case of the examined enterprises in this certain period. Taking into account the number restrictions, in order to be able to continuously hold events with a smaller number of participants, the business hotel combined with the conference centre tried to provide its customers a significant discount, in some cases over 20%, in relation to the room and equipment rentals. The other change in this period affected the restaurants, but the basis of the price increase implemented at them was not directly the pandemic, but the rise in raw material price levels.

Based on the experience of the managers, among the introduced epidemiological measures, the mandatory ones disturbed the guests, but they were able to accept them. According to the interviewees, the non-mandatory protection procedures and devices introduced on the basis of recommendations caused more remarkable inconveniences to the guests. The use of protective masks and Plexiglas sheets for separation during guest arrivals made communication and check-in quite difficult and inconvenient, especially for foreign guests, which also made the continuous communication with guests more complicated and longer during the guest's stay. It is worth highlighting that the service providers also experienced similar discomfort related to task performance. The restaurant managers highlighted that in order to implement the recommendations introduced for the safe and hygienic care of guests, the buffet breakfasts and lunches was temporarily cancelled and replaced with plate service. Due to this, the service times were extended and the kitchen workers had to use much more tools, meaning that on average, it took nearly two times longer to serve a guest and after the usage they had to clean a larger amount of equipment than before.

Previously, the surveyed service providers only had prepared emergency scenarios for only emergency events prescribed by the authorities, they had evacuation plans for bomb alarms, fire alarms, and disaster situations, which they regularly updated and practiced with their employees. According to the statements of the managers, they were not prepared for public health threats such as this pandemic situation. In light of this, like other actors in the industry, they did not have emergency scenarios that could be immediately applied to deal with such epidemiological emergency situations. Based on their newly gained experiences, the surveyed enterprises are intending to keep certain tools and measures in the long term. Particularly, the certain service providers want to keep their strict hygiene procedures and the tools used to implement these protocols. Since in Hungary, in addition to regular official inspections (made by the National Public Health Centre or the National Food Chain Safety Office, etc.), mandatory quality assurance, public health, and occupational safety regulations must be observed, thus the pandemic situation had not drastically changed their long-term protocols. The managers of the interviewed hotels, their attached restaurant units and the spa stated that they feel the continuous long-term maintenance of epidemic protocols unnecessary, but based on their experiences and the feed-backs of their guests/consumers, they would like to keep some of the protocol elements in view of the guests' sense of security (e.g. the use of the sensorial disinfectant dispensers).

In connection with the last point of our interviews, we have learned that during the initial waves of the pandemic, the interviewed enterprises treated the businesses that shared the same consumer market with them less as competitors, and more as partners to help. Although they closely monitored each other both regionally and nationally, with particular regard to their public information (especially the three hotel managers), they did this more in a benchmarking manner. As we heard from the interviewees, at the online meetings organized by one of the main Hungarian professional tourism organizations (Hungarian Hotel & Restaurant Association), hotel and restaurant managers not only demanded a fair and honest exchange of experiences, but actually did so.

## Conclusions

In our paper, we looked for the answer to how the enterprises interested in tourism in Eastern Hungary were able to adapt to the changes caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Similar to the citizens of other countries, Hungarian travellers were also absolutely uncertain in the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, mainly due to the lack of accurate information, hence in this period they dared to travel less. They refrained from traveling internationally due to the more difficult entry conditions and the fear of getting infected, but if they travelled, they preferred to do it domestically. Although our survey only focused on a narrow scope and lighted out only simple and temporary trends, similarities can be noticed if we make a comparison with the data provided to the HCSO through the NTDSC (National Tourism Data Supply Centre) system. Instead of the Hungarian capital, the tourists shifted to the direction of rural, mainly waterfront settlements, but it is important to mention that the people included in the questionnaire survey have probably returned to their previous travel habits, that is, they mainly travel abroad and only occasionally choose domestic destinations. In the topic of choosing an accommodation type to stay during the pandemic waves, comfort and the range of services continued to dominate among the respondents, rather than the lower number of guests being present at the same time, so both the survey and the real statistical data indicate the dominance of hotels.

Regarding the organizations interviewed on the supply side of tourism, it can be said that the biggest difficulty was caused by the compulsory closures ordered in the spring and late autumn of 2020 based on the legislation, since the organizations concerned could not influence these. However, they were able to adapt more easily to the factors they could influence. Due to the lack of income, a serious deficit arose on their financing side, which they only partially managed to make up during the partial reopening between the first, and second/third waves that coincided in Hungary. In order to reduce their deficit, they tried to exploit state tenders, the opportunity of service rationalization based on restructured organizational operations, and the closer contact with potential guests in the hope of the expected higher guest traffic ensured by the reopening.

## List of bibliographic references

Abeysinghe, S. (2013). When the spread of disease becomes a global event: The classification of pandemics. *Social Studies of Science*, 43(6), 905-926. doi: 10.1177/0306312713492559

Avraham, E. & Ketter, E. (2016). Destination marketing during and following crises: combating negative images in Asia. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 34(6), 709-718. doi: 10.1080/10548408.2016.1237926

Chacko, H.E. & Hawkins-Marcell, M. (2008). Repositioning a Tourism Destination – The Case of New Orleans After Hurricane Katrina. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 23(2-4), 223-235. doi: 10.1300/J073v23n02_17

Cooper, M. (2005). Japanese Tourism and the SARS Epidemic of 2003. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 19(2-3), 117-131. doi: 10.1300/J073v19n02_10

Gössling, S., Scott, D., & Hall, M.C. (2020). Pandemics, tourism and global change: a rapid assessment of COVID-19. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 29(1), 1-20. doi: 10.1080/09669582.2020.1758708

Hall, M.C., Timothy, D.J., & Duval, D.T. (2004). Security and Tourism – Towards a New Understanding? *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 15(2-3), 1-18. doi: 10.1300/J073v15n02_01

Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2023a): *STADAT Database – 27.8.2.2. Tourist arrivals at commercial accommodation establishments by county and region.* Online [17.04.2023]. Available from https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/tur/en/tur0034.html

Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2023b): *STADAT Database – 27.2.1.14. Tourist arrivals at commercial accommodation establishments (monthly data).* Online [17.04.2023]. Available from https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/tur/en/tur0072.html

Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2023c): *STADAT Database – 27.1.1.20. Tourist arrivals and tourism nights at commercial accommodation establishments by tourism regions*. Online [21.04.2023]. Available from https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/tur/en/tur0086.html

Jamal, T., & Budke, C. (2020). Tourism in a world with pandemics: local-global responsibility and action. *Journal of Tourism Futures*, 6(2), 181-188. doi: 10.1108/JTF-02-2020-0014

Meglécz, K. (2012). A pandémiák története és kialakulásának okai. *Hadmérnök*, 7(1), 91-99.

Michalkó, G. (2012). A turisztikai kínálat struktúrája. In G. Michalkó (Eds.), *Turizmológia: Elméleti alapok* (pp. 82-92). Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.

Nagylucskay, S. (1995). A fertőző betegségek járványtana. In I. Dési (Eds.), *Népegészségtan* (pp. 61-187). Budapest: Semmelweis Kiadó.

OECD (2022). OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2022. Retrieved from https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/a8dd3019-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/a8dd3019-en

Potter, C.W. (2001). A history of influenza. *Journal of Applied Microbiology*, 91(4), 572-579. doi: 10.1046/j.1365-2672.2001.01492.x

Rindrasih, E. (2019). Life after tsunami: the transformation of a post-tsunami and post-conflict tourist destination; the case of halal tourism, Aceh, Indonesia. *International Development Planning Review*, 41(4), 517-540.

Ross, A.G.P., Crowe, S.M., & Tyndall, M.W. (2015). Planning for the Next Global Pandemic. *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*. 38, 89-94. doi: 10.1016/j.ijid.2015.07.016

Rosselló, J., Santana-Gallego, M., & Awan, W. (2017). Infectious disease risk and international tourism demand. *Health Policy and Planning*, 32(4), 538-548. doi: 10.1093/heapol/czw177

Sass, E. (2020). The Impact of Eastern Ukranian Armed Confliction on Tourism in Ukraine. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 30(2 supplement), 880-888. doi: 10.30892/gtg.302spl14-518

Tang, Y. (2018). Dark Tourism to Seismic Memorial Sites. In P.R. Stone, R. Hartmann, T. Seaton, T. Sharpley, & L. White (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies* (pp. 423-441). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tasnádi, J. (2002). A turisztikai kínálat. In J. Tasnádi (Eds.), *A turizmus rendszere* (pp. 110-129). Budapest: Aula Kiadó, Budapest.

Turku, H. (2018). Cultural Property Destruction in History and in the Present. In H. Turku (Eds.), *The Destruction of Cultural Property as a Weapon of War: ISIS in Syria and Iraq* (pp. 27-66). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

World Economic Forum. (2022). Travel & Tourism Development Index 2021: Rebuilding for a Sustainable and Resilient Future. Retrieved from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Travel_Tourism_Development_2021.pdf

World Economic Forum. (2019). *The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019*. World Economic Forum's Platform for Shaping the Future of Mobility. Available from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TTCR_2019.pdf

WTTC (2021). *Travel & Tourism – Global Economic Impact & Trends 2021*. World Travel & Tourism Council. Available from https://wttc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2021/Global%20Economic%20Impact%20and%20Trends%202021.pdf

WTTC (2020). *Travel & Tourism – Global Economic Impact & Trends 2020*. World Travel & Tourism Council. Available from https://wttc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2020/Global%20Economic%20Impact%20Trends%202020.pdf?ver=2021-02-25-183118-360

## Contact information

Ádám Kálmán Sánta
assistant lecturer
University of Debrecen; Faculty of Economics and Business; Institute of Rural Development, Regional Economics and Tourism Management
Debrecen, Böszörményi Str. 138.
Hungary, HU-4032
santa.adam@econ.unideb.hu

Norbert Beták
associate professor
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Faculty of Central European Studies, Department of Tourism, Nitra, Dražovská 4.
Slovakia, SK-949 74
nbetak@ukf.sk

Lóránt Dénes Dávid
full professor
John von Neumann University; Faculty of Economics and Business; Department of Tourism and Hospitality
Kecskemét, Izsáki Str. 10.
Hungary, HU-6000
david.lorant.denes@uni-neumann.hu
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Faculty of Central European Studies, Department of Tourism, Nitra, Dražovská 4.
Slovakia, SK-949 74
ldavid@ukf.sk