

## THE TOURISTIC IMPORTANCE OF GYULA REGION IN THE NEW DESTINATION STRUCTURE DEFINED IN 2020 – FROM PAST TO PRESENT

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The management system and organisational structure of national tourism fundamentally was renewed in Hungary in 2016, which had several new elements. The five determined 'important tourism development areas' as destinations became the new frame for developing tourism in 2016 and 2017. Destination system was also renewed in 2020, when not only the official names and territorial range were overviewed, but also eleven destinations were created and six new ones were determined. Among these destinations the Gyula region consists of the least number of settlements only two (Gyula and Békéscsaba). The article focuses on the research questions of what processes and events led to the creation of the current tourist offer of the two municipalities of Gyula tourist region and how the area performed in the years 2020-2022. By examining the socio-economic changes in the two settlements after the Second World War, the roots of the current level of tourism development are explored. The analysis of the statistical data series available from the Central Statistical Office and the National Tourism Data Supply Centre are used to analyse the specificities of the period 2020-2022. Since the two cities have different tourist characteristics, they cannot be considered major competitors, and in fact Békéscsaba's dominant position in business tourism can be well complemented by the spa services offered in Gyula. In both municipalities surveyed, tourism operators faced challenges due to travel restrictions resulting from the COVID pandemic, but the dominant domestic visitor share in the tourist area meant that guests returned quickly after the closures.*

Keywords: destination, tourism development, tourism region

JEL codes: Z32

### **INTRODUCTION**

The management and organisational system of domestic tourism was fundamentally renewed in 2016, the most important element of which was Act CLVI on the state tasks of developing tourist areas, adopted at the end of the year. During 2016-2017, 5 priority tourism development regions were defined, firstly Lake Balaton and Sopron-Fertő, then Tokaj, Upper Tisza, Nyírség, and thirdly Debrecen, Hajdúszoboszló, Hortobágy, Lake Tisza, and finally the Danube Bend was defined in a government decision.

In September 2020, the words ‘priority’ and ‘development’ were removed from the definition of destinations, and six more tourism areas were added to the list of tourism units. Regarding the newly implemented system, it can be stated that, on the one hand, the whole territory of Hungary will no longer be part of a destination. On the other hand, a tourist destination does not necessarily have to consist of a single coherent area but can also have a mosaic structure.

Of the six newly created tourist areas, the uniqueness of Gyula and its region is first most noticeable in the number of settlements, as it is made up of only Gyula and Békéscsaba (*Kis & Bagdi, 2022*). The town of Gyula seems to be the most important settlement in the region, where several developments have been implemented in the past or are underway, such as the HUF 1 billion in funding for the complex tourism development of the town under the Széchenyi 2020 state development programme. The investment to increase the region’s competitiveness in tourism started in mid-2023, during which the Ladics House and the Centenary Confectionery will be renovated and even connected. The bicycle network will also be extended (*Gyulai Hírlap, 2021, 2023*).

Over the past three decades, accessibility has become a key issue for the economic development of the whole Békés county, especially in the eyes of the public, but the M44 motorway has been decades in the making. The M44 road became part of the political campaign at the turn of the millennium, because of which the section between Kecskemét and Békéscsaba was named in Annex 1 of Act CXXVIII of 2003 on the public interest and development of the express road network of the Republic of Hungary (as a motorway-level development) (*Netjogtar.hu, 2023*). In the following years, there was virtually no progress in its implementation, because this section is not an international transit route and could not count on EU funding. Finally, in the spring of 2009, the expropriation of the land along the route of the planned road was halted (*Teleki, 2009*). By the end of 2004, the section of road No. 44 between Békéscsaba and Gyula was widened to four lanes instead of the whole section (*Nagy, 2019*).

However, one election cycle later, a budget allocation was made for the planned M44 motorway, resulting in the Tizsakürt-Kondoros section being opened in 2019, the Kondoros-Békéscsaba section in 2020 and the Tizsakürt-Lakitelek section in 2021. The Lakitelek-Kecskemét section is currently under construction (*MTI, 2022*). As regards the eastern end of the M44, the idea has been put forward in recent years that the section should be developed towards Salonta to achieve international connections. This would mean that Sarkad would be the beneficiary instead of Gyula (due to its significant crop storage capacity) (*bebir.hu, 2023*).

In June 2023, the Hungarian government suspended the implementation of 270 domestic investments, including the “Preparation of the section of the M44 expressway between Békéscsaba and the border (Salonta)” under No.182. Therefore, at the end of 2023, there is no decision on the final direction, the next years will be about the elaboration of the construction plan (*Minister for Construction and Transport, 2023*).

Gyula was connected to the national railway network by a branch line, which had the consequence that before 1945 there was no passenger rail service between the

capital and Gyula. The disadvantaged situation of the former county town persisted even under socialist rule, because, for example, even in 1988 there was no regular bus service to Budapest, although it was already possible to reach Makó, Zalakaros and Aggtelek (Erdősi, 1991). It is typical that the rail ‘rationalisation’ of Gyula because of the economic crisis in 2008/2009 reduced the accessibility of Gyula by 7 minutes, which was the fifth most significant deterioration at the municipal level in the country (Dusek, 2010). The renovation of the railway station building is also long overdue.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The aim of the research is to identify the main stages of tourism development in the two settlements forming the tourism region under study, the course of development of the settlement attractions until the development of the independent tourism regional level, and to assess the tourism performance of Gyula region as an independent tourism area in the period 2020-2022. The inclusion of the impact of the COVID pandemic in the study was necessary due to the timing of data availability.

The research questions are:

- What processes and events have led to the current tourism supply of the two municipalities forming the Gyula tourist region?
- Based on the detailed accommodation data collected by the National Tourism Data Centre, how does the tourism region perform in the period 2020-2022? How have local tourism operators been affected by the COVID pandemic?

The literature related to the region is rather scarce, which may be due to the fact that Gyula is “one of our youngest spa towns” (Vajda & Vadas, 1990, p. 128), but Békéscsaba was not considered a tourist centre in the past (Tánczos-Szabó, 1976). We do not intend to publish a complete bibliography, but we would like to summarise the most important features, turning points and events related to the towns.

In our research we have used publicly available data collected by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. Due to the changing statistical data collection methodology in tourism, we also requested data series for the study area from the National Tourism Data Centre, which were made available for the period 2020-2022. For the analysis of tourism performance, in addition to professional tourism indicators, a growth rate forecast was carried out.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Historical perspective - an overview up to the change of regime**

The relationship between the two towns was already unusual in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the sense that Békéscsaba had a 50% higher population than Gyula, despite the latter’s status as a county seat. Moreover, Békéscsaba was only declared a town in 1918, although in 1910 it already had a population of 42,000. The railway (Szajol-Arad line) connected Békéscsaba to the national network in 1858, while Gyula was connected by a branch line only in 1871.

Over the past 100 years, daily life in Gyula has been greatly affected by the fact that the Treaty of Trianon established a new Romanian-Hungarian border near it. This peripheral location resulted in Gyula losing its status as a county town in 1950. This geographic disadvantage still has an impact in the 21<sup>st</sup> century if we only think of the accessibility of the city (proximity to motorways). For example, according to a study carried out in 2005, Gyula and Békéscsaba were considered remote places on the mental map of the Hungarian population, as were Nyíregyháza, Kőszeg and Lenti (Michalkó, 2007). In contrast to their geographical location, the city's economic geography and tourism potential are much better, so that Gyula and Békéscsaba were not considered peripheral either during the period of state socialism or after 1990 (Pénzes, 2013).

The mid-to-second half of the 1970s can also be seen as a turning point in Gyula's life since the way in which the domestic settlement stock developed was an important agenda item at the governmental level. For example, related research shows that Békéscsaba, Békés and Gyula are closely related to each other in national comparisons. For the "three cities" to function more effectively, some form of division of labour was needed, and Gyula leaders then suggested that their cities focus on their tourism industry (Tóth, 1980).

The role of Castle Spa in urban development is undisputed. As for the history of the bathing culture in Gyula, it is worth noting that it dates to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but the construction of deep wells did not begin until 1943, and due to historical events, the first swimming pool was opened in 1951 (*varfurdo.hu*, 2023), but the Castle Spa was only opened in 1959. The restoration of Gyula Castle was completed in 1962 (Bereczky, 1968). During the socialist period, the Castle Spa was developed in several stages, including a HUF 5 million investment in 1968, which attracted 12-15,000 visitors a day during the high season. Gyula was a well-known spa town by the 1970s (the bath was declared a spa in 1971) and was the 3<sup>rd</sup> most important tourist destination in the Great Plain behind Debrecen and Szeged.

The fact that Gyula was the thirteenth in the country to be awarded the status of a health resort in 1984 (and the number of settlements qualifying as health resorts did not increase until 2012) certainly served to strengthen its tourist character (*termalonline.hu*, 2015, 2022). The alkaline hydrocarbonate thermal water comes from several wells, the deepest well is at a depth of 2000 m, while the hottest well breaks up at 71°C (Vajda & Vadas, 1990).

### **Historical perspective - an overview from regime changes to the present**

As an administrative centre, Békéscsaba had a catchment area of approximately 100,000 people after the turn of the millennium, while Gyula was considered a medium-sized town with a population of around 30,000 and a catchment area of approximately 70,000 people (Kiss-Bajmóczy, 2001). In fact, Gyula even had a positive migration balance at the turn of the millennium, the highest in Békés County (Kovács & Bajmóczy, 2001). In a 2014 study on the categories of peripherality, based on an aggregation of the effectiveness of delimitation methods in the border area between Battonya and Salgótarján, Gyula was almost the only settlement that was not considered peripheral (Pénzes, 2014).

Although Gyula also faced new challenges after the regime change, its situation was better than that of other settlements in Békés County. In the decade before the turn of the millennium, the number of guest nights decreased in many settlements in the Southern Great Plain, while in Gyula the number tripled (*Csizmadia*, 2001). The Association of Hungarian Spa Towns was founded in Gyula in 1993 (*Szabó*, 2015). Since 1995 the Gyulai Várfürdő Kft. has been operating the spa (the local government is the majority owner) and several developments have been implemented in the town, which have also strengthened the tourism potential. For example, between 2001 and 2004, within the framework of the Széchenyi Development Plan, an investment of HUF 1.3 billion was made in the spa area to improve services (*Szűcs*, 2005).

At that time, the total capacity of the spa was 2.5 million guests per year, compared to 866,000 in 2003. But later, development funds were not lacking (*Radics et al.*, 2011), so that in 2008, based on tourism competitiveness, the Gyula sub-region was among the six most competitive border sub-regions in Hungary, but it was the only one in the eastern part of the country (*Bujdosó & Pénzes*, 2012). A local tourism destination management organisation was also established in 2010 (*visitgyula.com*, n.d.).

The tourist importance of the city is described by the results of a field survey in 2010, when the number of Romanian visitors in the Castle Spa, based on the number of cars with foreign license plates, was estimated at 15-16% on an average weekday, but doubled on weekends (*Nagy*, 2011). On the other hand, official statistics, such as the number of overnight stays, show that Gyula was/is one of the most popular settlements in Hungary in the last decade, largely thanks to the Castle Spa.

The role of Gyula as a tourist destination is well illustrated by the fact that in 2011, Gyula was the 13<sup>th</sup> most popular city in Hungary with nearly 240 thousand overnight stays, which were mainly - 93.5% - taken by domestic tourists (*turizmusonline.hu*, 2012). Thanks to the Aqua Palace, inaugurated in December 2013, the municipality moved up to 6<sup>th</sup> place in the national ranking with 353 thousand overnight stays (89% of which were domestic tourists) (*termalfurdo.hu*, 2015).

In the following years (e.g., 2017-2018) Gyula was essentially in 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> place in the ranking of domestic settlements, then in 2019 it dropped back to 12<sup>th</sup> place, but in the meantime the number of overnight stays increased to 425,000 (86.3% of domestic), and Gyula was part of a priority tourism development area (*turizmus.com*, 2020, 2021a, 2023). Due to the coronavirus epidemic in 2020, the annual guest numbers dropped to 53% (compared to 2019), which was enough to rank Gyula 10<sup>th</sup> in the ranking of domestic municipalities (*turizmus.com*, 2020, 2021a, 2023).

In Gyula, the average length of stay was 3.5 days in 2015, then gradually decreased to 3.1 days in the following years. As a result of a paradigm shift in 2016 (*Aubert et al.*, 2017), Gyula and its region finally became a tourist region in September 2020. Tourism is less important in Békéscsaba as a destination, with around 25,000 guests staying in the city between 2015 and 2019, while the average length of stay was typically around two days (around 50,000 guest nights per year in total).

Based on statistical data, some researchers have also used mathematical methods to evaluate the performance of the tourism sector at the municipal level, such as *Béres-*

*Virág & Vinogradov* (2018). Based on the Hoover Index, they were able to identify destinations (at the municipal level) that are average or better in terms of the number of overnight stays for less than forty domestic municipalities. According to their calculations, Gyula was classified as an average destination, while Békéscsaba was classified as a poor performance tourist destination based on 2003 and 2013 data (*Béres-Virág & Vinogradov*, 2018).

Gyula is currently one of the most internationally important complex spa towns in Hungary. In this group, for example, Bük, Hajdúszoboszló, Harkány, Hévíz and Zalakaros can be considered as having a single profile, while in the case of Sárvár and Gyula, other factors are present in addition to the dominance of health tourism. Gyula has the richest historical and cultural potential of the seven spa towns, just think of the castle, the Ferenc Erkel Memorial House, the Centenary Confectionery, or the Almásy Castle (*Köbli*, 2018).

Presenting the county seat's tourism developments, the primary attraction of Békéscsaba is the Munkácsy Mihály Museum. At the age of eight, Hungary's first globally recognised painter arrived in Békéscsaba as an orphan and lived with his uncle. He worked as a carpenter in the town for nearly six years. Upon his demise in 1900, the artist became the first individual to have a road designated in his honour. Since 1951, the county museum has been named after Munkácsy, and in 1994, the Munkácsy Mihály Memorial House was established in a separate structure. (*Munkácsy Mihály Múzeum*, 2024a) The Munkácsy district was established in 2017 as a component of the Modern Cities Programme with the aim of developing the first cultural district in the Southern Great Plain, thus enhancing the city's appeal to tourists. (*Veselič*, 2021) To demonstrate this newfound aspiration, several cultural events have been scheduled for 2024 as part of the Munkácsy 180 Memorial Year. (*Munkácsy Mihály Múzeum*, 2024b)

Békéscsaba organised the inaugural Csabai Sausage Festival in 1997 as part of its efforts to establish a unique tourist identity. This festival quickly became the town's distinctive symbol and one of the nation's significant culinary gatherings. In its initial occurrence, the event garnered a mere 55 teams, although by 2023, the number of participants had surged to over 1,000. The multi-day event is usually scheduled to take place on the national holiday weekend of 23 October. In 2014, the next step in the process of creating a positive image was the establishment of Csaba Park. The initial phase of this project involved the development of a "Sausage Courtyard", a museum and a facility dedicated to the production of sausages. The second stage involved the construction of a sophisticated tourist facility, which incorporated an event hall that eventually became the designated location for the event. (*CsabaPark*, 2024)

An instance of the advancement of the city's tourism attractions is the refurbishment of the Almásy Castle, which started in 2014, predominantly with financial aid from the European Union, and was ultimately inaugurated in 2016. The castle's permanent exhibition, situated adjacent to the Castle Baths, was inaugurated under the name "Weekdays and Holidays in the Castles of the Great Plain". Its objective is to showcase the daily existence of the Almásy family, namely their aristocratic lifestyle, incorporating interactive components. (*gyulai kastely.hu*, 2024)

The project's success is evidenced by the museum's five-year visitor count of 361,000. Furthermore, in addition to the previous tourist development, the Stefania wing had renovations between 2019 and 2021 to transform it into an event space. Additionally, a new gourmet restaurant called Csemegetár was established to serve culinary purposes. (*turizmus.com*, 2021b)

### The tourist region of today - statistical analysis of tourism intensity for the period 2020-2022

The two settlements of the Gyula and its region tourism area, Gyula and Békéscsaba, show significant differences in tourism characteristics (number and type of attractions, tourism infrastructure and superstructure), which means that the tourism performance of the two settlements should be examined separately. The regional level data provided by the Hungarian Tourism Agency show the extent and pace of change in tourism supply and demand, considering that the closures caused by the COVID pandemic have significantly affected the 2020 data.

In the year 2020, hotels were closed during the months of March and May as part of the government's efforts to stop the pandemic. Many units used the forced closures for restructuring, renovation and service upgrades, activities that were not necessarily completed by the summer period when the data was collected for the operating units (*Mondok*, 2023). The discrepancy between the number of operating accommodation units in 2020 and 2021 reflects this frequent shutdown (*Table 1*). In the summer of 2022, accommodation units that invested in heating and lighting efficiency improvements due to the energy crisis reduced the number of operating units, but this reduction did not undo the available capacity figures because units with higher occupancy rates did so during the pandemic closure and opened for the season (*Table 1*).

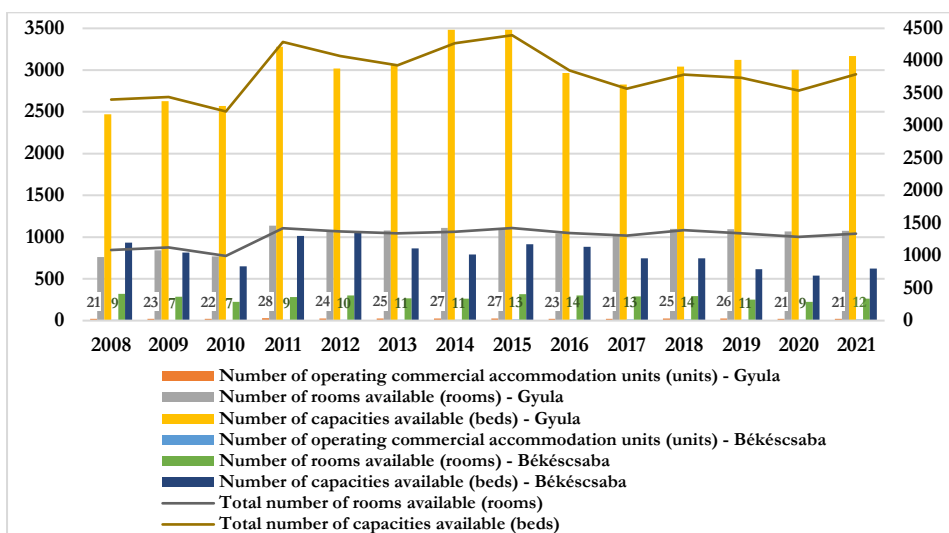
**Table 1: Available and sold capacity data for commercial accommodation in the period 2020–2022**

Year	Number of accommodation units in operation (unit)	Number of bed nights available (night)	Number of bed nights sold (night)	Room occupancy (%)
2020	509	787,411	170,016	22
2021	568	835,422	202,523	24
2022	542	875,466	292,933	33

The capacity data for commercial accommodation are given for 31 July of the year under review. Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2023), <https://statinfo.ksh.hu/Statinfo/haViewer.jsp>

The difference in the tourism characteristics between the two municipalities in the region is also reflected in the capacity of accommodation facilities (*Figure 1*).

**Figure 1: Available capacity data of commercial accommodation establishments in Gyula and Békéscsaba for the period March 2008-2021 (units)**

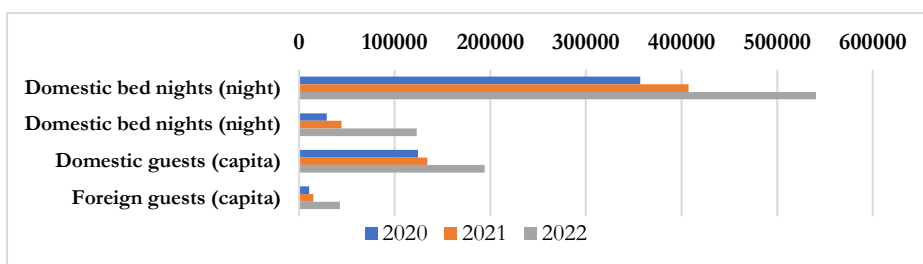


Source: Based on data series of HCSO (2023), <https://statinfo.ksh.hu/Statinfo/haViewer.jsp>

Gyula, which is a thermal resort, has almost twice as many accommodation units as the county capital. At the same time, the difference in the number of rooms available for rent is three times greater for each unit with a larger capacity. In 2021, the number of rooms per unit in Békéscsaba was 22, while in Gyula it was 51, and the ratio of beds was 52 and 151 respectively. The number of beds per room also shows the difference in the target groups of travellers: while in Békéscsaba the ratio was 2.37, in Gyula it was 2.94.

Although restrictions due to the pandemic have significantly curtailed foreign travel, there has been no proportional change in the number of foreign visitors or overnight stays in the year 2022 (Figure 2) due to the high number of domestic travellers.

**Figure 2: Number of guests and bed nights in the tourism area of Gyula and its region in the period 2020-2022**



Source: Based on data provided by the Hungarian Tourism Agency (2023) on personal request.



The trend functions with the highest goodness of fit for each data item are domestic bed nights:  $y_{DRN}=41554x^2-74335x+389717$ , where  $R^2=1$ , foreign bed nights:  $y_{FRN}=31602x^2-79325x+76477$ , where  $R^2=1$ , number of domestic guests:  $y_{NDG}=25031x^2-65398x+164808$ , where  $R^2=1$  and number of domestic guests:  $y_{NFG}=11801x^2-31207x+29900$ , where  $R^2=1$ .

The change in the average length of stay in the tourist area is in line with the national trend: in 2020, the average length of stay of domestic guests in commercial accommodation affected by COVID was longer than that of foreign guests. This advantage levelled off by 2021 and, in line with the characteristics of the pre-pandemic period, by 2022 the average length of stay of foreign guests exceeded that of domestic guests (Table 2).

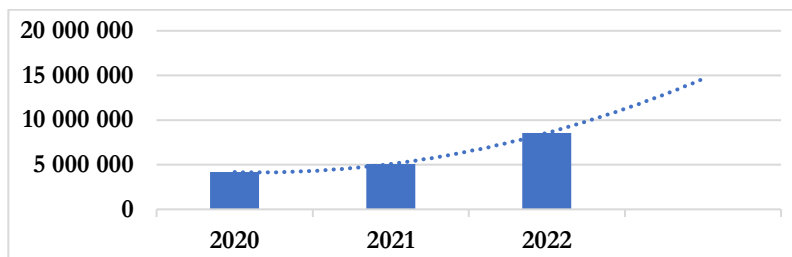
**Table 2: Average length of stay in the tourist region in the period 2020–2022**

Year	Domestic guests (nights)	Foreign guests (nights)
2020	2.9	2.7
2021	3.0	3.0
2022	2.8	2.9

Source: Based on data provided by the Hungarian Tourism Agency (2023) on personal request.

The tourism revenue from domestic and foreign guests reached HUF 8,561,961 thousand in 2022 (Figure 3), which means that the revenue per guest amounted to HUF 36 thousand. This willingness to spend was only 31 thousand HUF in 2020, the pandemic period. In 2022, thanks to the dominance of domestic guests, payments made with the Széchenyi Recreational Card amounted to around HUF 1 billion (*igyutazunk.hu*, 2023).

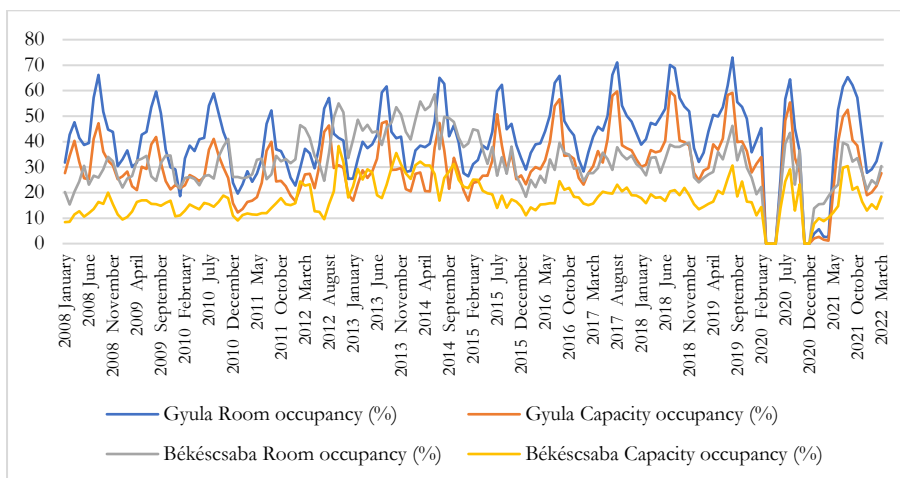
**Figure 3: Tourism revenue (in thousands HUF) in the period 2020-2022 in the Gyula and its region tourist region**



Source: based on data provided by the Hungarian Tourism Agency (2023) on personal request.

The Hungarian Central Statistical Office data available on capacity occupancy of commercial accommodation facilities clearly show the strong seasonal exposure of Gyula, even though thermal and spa tourism is one of the least perceived seasonal tourism types. The strong presence of business tourism in Békéscsaba offsets the large fluctuations in demand in the city's data, with this effect being particularly true for the periods 2002-2011 and 2015-2020 (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Room and capacity occupation of commercial accommodations in Gyula and Békéscsaba in the period of January 2008 - March 2022 (%)**



Source: Based on data series of HCSO (2023), <https://statinfo.ksh.hu/Statinfo/haViewer.jsp>

The nationality distribution of visitors spending at least 24 hours in the destination in relation to the tourism area confirms the border location: Romanian tourists accounted for 16% of domestic visitors in 2022, while in the case of Germany, traditionally a strong sending country of Hungary, the share was only 1% in that year. This proximity also meant that the average length of stay of Romanian visitors in 2022 was one day shorter than that of German visitors. In the case of countries bordering our country, Austria and Slovenia, which are close to the western part of the country, also made only a small contribution to the number of visitors, and travellers from Poland, which is a major source of visitors for Northern Hungary, only visited the region in 2022 at the same rate as German visitors.

Interestingly, there were also some passengers from exotic destinations in the region: one from Saint Kitts and one from Nevis and Pitcairn in 2022, and from Mayotte and the Southern and Antarctic territories of France in 2021. A year earlier, during the COVID pandemic, guests from the Bahamas, Madagascar or Namibia were also recorded in the region's accommodation facilities.

Most domestic visitors came from the capital (19%) and Pest County (18%) to Gyula and its region, with the neighbouring counties of Hajdú-Bihar (8%), Csongrád-Csanád (7%) and Bács-Kiskun (6%) standing out among the sending regions. In 2022, the age distribution of guests was highest in the 45-54 age group (21%), followed by the 35-44 age group (18%) and the 55-64 age group (15%) (*igyutazunk.hu*, 2023). The data disproves the common belief that a thermal resort is only for the elderly to rest and relax.

Examining the tourist regional data, based on the data received by the National Tourism Data Supply Centre on *igyutazunk.hu* (2023) site, 59% of the nights spent by tourists were spent in hotels, 28% in private and other accommodation, 9% in holiday homes and 4% in guesthouses.

Day visitors were tracked using mobile cell phone information. These data show that the most visited places in the region were the Almásy Castle Visitor Centre and Castle Spa in Gyula, and the Gyula Castle and its surroundings in 2022 (*igyutazunk.hu*, 2023).

## CONCLUSIONS

Although the two municipalities under study have followed different paths of development in terms of tourism in the past, and their situation has changed a lot in the course of history, they have developed into a region with an independent tourism performance in the new tourism development structure. The proximity of the two towns (about 17 km) makes the two settlements easily accessible by road and by rail on the 128-railway line.

The Covid-19 pandemic had caught travel providers off guard and the industry was in a need to find solutions to cope with the unprecedented traffic losses caused by governments imposing restrictions without warning. However, not only had the travel industry lost a significant portion of its revenue due to the pandemic, it had also had to deal with changes in travel habits. Therefore, ensuring passenger safety will remain important in the post-pandemic era. One positive finding is that domestic destinations have clearly emerged as preferred travel destinations during times affected by pandemic-related lockdowns. In addition to popular and well-known tourist areas, emphasis is also placed on small, dispersed rural destinations that benefit areas with diverse attractions and rural character (e.g., spa tourism, equestrian tourism, cultural tourism, gastronomy).

Due to the different tourism characteristics of the two cities that make up the tourism region, they cannot be considered as primary competitors, and in fact, the business tourism dominance of Békéscsaba can be well complemented by the spa products offered by Gyula. The only competition can be identified in the field of cultural tourism, but in the case of Békéscsaba it is linked to the arts (Munkácsy Mihály Museum) and in the case of Gyula to the historicity (Gyula Castle, Almásy Castle).

Likewise, focusing on individual needs and avoiding mass tourism is an opportunity for the region. To achieve all this, the region must pay close attention to changing and digitally challenged consumer needs, changing lifestyles, and environmental, health and safety issues. The region's special geographical location also allows it to leverage its border location for marketing communications to Romanian and even Serbian tourists, as travellers consider shorter distances safer.

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