CRISIS MANAGEMENT OF HUNGARIAN TOURIST ATTRACTIONS BEFORE AND DURING THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to examine how the crisis management of tourist attraction sites evolved before and during the coronavirus epidemic. Eighty-seven in-depth interviews were conducted with managers responsible for crisis management of attraction sites, examining the stages of preparation and response regarding the perception of the crisis, setting up a crisis plan and crisis team, defining priorities and measures during the coronavirus pandemic, and the lessons learned. Results have demonstrated that most had neither a crisis management plan nor experience gained from previous crises. Most of the enterprises set up a business management team consisting of managers, which then defined the retention of the workforce as a primary priority, while the steps that were taken mainly related to working from home and the use of public wage subsidies, as well as a rethinking of communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic represented an unprecedented "super-shock" for the tourism sector (Wassler & Fan, 2021). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), 62 million jobs in tourism were lost globally in 2020 due to the pandemic. Small and medium-sized enterprises, which make up 80% of the sector, were particularly hard hit by an 18.5% drop in jobs (WTTC, 2021). More than 592 million people became ill from COVID-19 and nearly 6.5 million died worldwide following its onset at the beginning of August 2022 (worldometers.info, 2022). The economic and social impacts of the pandemic are wide-ranging (Irimiás, Csordás, Kiss, & Michalkó, 2021; Kovács, 2020), with the tourism sector particularly affected by it due to travel restrictions and social isolation (Lenzen et al., 2020; Nicola et al., 2020).

The importance of tourism and the impact of COVID-19 on the Hungarian economy is indisputable. Hungarian tourism had seen dynamic growth until 2019, with foreign and domestic tourism spending increasing by 21% in the year preceding the epidemic. The value of investment in tourism-specific sectors increased by 18%, and the output of the industry contributed 10% to domestic GDP, including spillover effects. However, following a successful year in 2019, the tourism sector was hit hardest in 2020 by the restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 epidemic (Hungarian Central Statistics Office [Központi Statisztikai Hivatal], 2019), causing a marked decline in almost all segments of tourism and hospitality. Guest nights in commercial accommodation fell by more than half compared to 2019. The number of outbound trips by Hungarians visiting Hungary fell by about half, and the number of inbound trips from other countries was also lower than in the preceding year (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 2021). In 2021, the economic impact of the restrictions due to the epidemic was much smaller than in 2020, but in February 2022, the Russian-Ukrainian war created a new threat (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 2022). The war affected tourism in many ways like the rise in oil prices, soaring inflation, and economic difficulties, and because of this, tourists didn't travel (Pan, Wu, & Morrison, 2024).

The impact of the coronavirus outbreak on tourism has already been analysed from many angles. COVID-19, which existed for almost two years, is clearly different from previous health risks that affected tourism (Kökény, Kenesei, Marton, Birkner, & Michalkó, 2022). The impact of COVID-19 was more global and industry-wide than previous health risks, requiring drastic action in social and business policies, as well as in individual lifestyles (Park, Kim, & Kim, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic impacted not only at individual and community levels but also at national and international levels, as the social, health, economic, and political consequences were unavoidable, albeit indirectly (Németh & Tokodi, 2022). The economic losses in the tourism sector were eight times larger than the impact of the 2008 financial crisis (UNWTO, 2020). According to Sánchez-Cañizares, Cabeza-Ramírez, Muñoz-Fernández, & Fuentes-García (2021), health-related crises and risks have a particularly large impact on tourism demand and the business performance of service providers because travel plays a significant role in the spread of the epidemic. Zhang, Song, Wen, & Liu (2021) highlighted the transformative and innovative opportunity created by a pandemic of unprecedented impact like as brand-new services (Kökény, Jászberényi, Syahrivar, & Kökény, 2024).

Research is likely to shift away from the previous critical agenda (e.g. over-tourism) and enter a new phase of tourism support with a focus on rapid crisis recovery. The dominant management focus that the tourism academy has adopted in recent years will not change (Wassler & Fan, 2021). Many scientific articles deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, research conducted by Zhong, Sun, Law, & Li (2021) discovered long-term effects concerning the future. The questionnaire survey conducted by Kukanja, Planinc, & Sikošek (2020) examined the crisis management practices of companies based on different company size (micro, small, and medium).

There have been many attempts to research the crisis management of sectors that suffered great losses during the pandemic, particularly accommodation (Hao, Xiao, & Chon, 2020; Jiang & Wen, 2020; Lai & Wong, 2020; Le & Phi, 2021) and hospitality services (Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou, & Zopiatis, 2021; Guzzo, Wang, Madera, & Abbott, 2021; Hu, Yan, Casey, & Wu, 2021), but attraction sites were much less in focus despite suffering serious losses as well (Wang, Tian, Filimonau, Ning, & Yang, 2022). Itani and Hollebeek (2021) examined how attractions adapted to social distancing induced by COVID-19 and the expected impact of this on consumers' intentions to purchase virtual reality (VR-based vs. in-person) site visits, both during and after the pandemic. Yang, Ruan, Huang, Lan, & Wang (2021) examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourists' real-time on-site emotional experience, and their results are significantly lower than before the outbreak of COVID-19. This suggests that tourism destinations should not only focus on attracting tourists, but also pay attention to restoring the tourism experience in the boom phase of tourism.

Based on these considerations, we identify a relevant need to answer the following research question: How did the crisis management of Hungarian tourist attraction operators evolve before and during the coronavirus epidemic?

The study reviews the impact of epidemics on tourism in general, then in Hungary in particular. After presenting the possibilities of crisis management in tourism, the primary research aims to assess the differences in crisis management among Hungarian tourist attraction site operators. Following a description of the methodology and sample selection criteria used to answer the research questions, the results of in-depth interviews with the staff members responsible for crisis management at the attractions under study are presented, examining the stages of preparation, response, and recovery with regard to the perception of the crisis, setting up a crisis plan and a crisis team, defining priorities and measures during the coronavirus pandemic, and any lessons learned. Besides its academic contribution this study also provides recommendations for the managers of attraction sites.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. The impact of epidemics on tourism

Potential sources of crises in tourism include terrorism, economic, political, technological, and socio-cultural threats, as well as health crises, regardless of whether the pathogens in question affect humans or animals (Mazilu, Marinescu, Bălă, & Dragomir, 2019; Mátyás, 2017). Although the level of health risk has decreased in most destinations due to today's modern health care, the threat still puts constant pressure on tourism businesses because they have to be on constant alert (Buhalis & Costa, 2006).

There are few theories that identify health crises as a separate category among the types of crises; however, one such example comes from Chedli and Kchaich (2016), who, in addition to economic, financial, political, and social crises, also refer to situations that threaten public health and significantly increase mortality as officially state-declared health crises.

Epidemics have long caused social and economic changes. Sometimes they have minimal impact, but at other times the transformations can be unexpected, changing contemporary paradigms (Hall, Scott, & Gössling, 2020).

An epidemic is "the occurrence of a given communicable disease in a given area or community at a significantly higher than expected frequency or above a specified threshold level over a specified period of time, or at least two related cases, the relation of which is supported by epidemiological evidence" (National Centre for Public Health, 1998, p. 3). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), animal cases do not initially pose a threat to humans in pandemics, but this can change, and the virus may then sporadically be detected in humans. Later, limited spread can be observed before larger outbreaks develop and then eventually the virus spreads to other countries. After the peak of the epidemic, the number of cases starts to decrease and then falls back to normal seasonal influenza levels. This is the moment in which to review and share lessons with other countries and to assess the performance of the health care system (WHO, 2020).

Infectious diseases have always been present throughout human history, with some pathogens appearing at different times; that is, some epidemics have broken out in multiple waves (Jamal & Budke, 2020). During the 20th century, developed countries reduced some severe epidemics with the help of vaccines, clean drinking water, and sewage networks (Petrosillo, 2019), but in the 21st century the threat posed by the spread of viruses has increased again (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020).

Many articles have dealt with the way in which diseases affect tourism. SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) can be considered one short crisis that had effects that were regional but severe (McKercher & Chon, 2004; Zeng, Carter, & De Lacy, 2005; Wang, 2009), and more serious than avian flu (McAleer, Huang, Kuo, Chen, & Chang, 2010). Other diseases like swine flu (Page, Yeoman, Munro, Connell, & Walker, 2006) (H1N1) (Lee, Song, Bendle, Kim, & Han, 2012; Page, Song, & Wu, 2012), foot and mouth disease (Blake, Sinclair, & Sugiyarto, 2003; Irvine & Anderson, 2006), malaria, yellow fever, dengue, and ebola (Novelli, Burgess, Jones, & Ritchie, 2018; Rosselló, Santana-Gallego, & Awan, 2017) have also attracted the interest of researchers.

The emergence of infectious diseases is one of the consequences of global tourism. In addition to urbanisation and globalisation, tourism also increases the rapid spread of viruses (Hilsenrath, 2020). We travel more frequently and further than before, but increasing mobility includes not only travel for tourism but also migration (Petrosillo, 2019). Other causes of epidemics include population growth, urbanisation leading to overcrowding, mass production of food, famine and war (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020).

In pandemic-affected destinations, the number of visitors and workers decreases significantly (Zissis & Christos, 2008). In the case of a health crisis, travel is reduced in household spending due to insecurity (Petcu & David-Sobolevschi, 2020). Research by Senbeto and Hon (2020) shows that while pandemics cause anxiety for all potential travellers, women are more sensitive to such situations.

2.2. Crisis management in tourism

The success of a destination is largely determined by its ability to create safe conditions for tourists (Ghaderi, Paud, & Wang, 2014). Scientific studies on tourism crises can be divided into two main categories: risk perception at the individual level (demand side) and crisis management at the collective level (supply side) (Qiu, Park, Li, & Song, 2020). The process of crisis management can be divided into three parts: pre-crisis preparation and prevention, management of a crisis situation, and post-crisis measures (Mazilu, Marinescu, Bălă, & Dragomir, 2019). In order to mitigate the negative effects of a potential crisis, effective preparation is needed by both the destination management and the tourism service providers:

budgets for emergency management, a communication strategy, and staff training (Mazilu, Marinescu, Bălă, & Dragomir 2019). According to Martens, Feldesz, & Merten (2016), this phase also involves learning from previous crises. Attention must be paid to unusual signals from inside and outside the organisation that indicate a crisis. By recognising them on time, the harmful effects of the crisis can be reduced or even eliminated (Paraskevas & Altinay, 2013). However, statistical methods cannot measure perfectly the effects of unexpected events. Therefore, statistical forecasts must be adjusted with expert opinions (Sanders & Ritzman, 2001).

The degree of risk perceived is influenced by the information conveyed through the media, the characteristics of a given tourist's personality, and their experiences during their previous trips. Furthermore, the opinions of friends and acquaintances play an important role in the travel decision process (Burns, Lester, & Bibbings, 2010). According to Song-Agócs and Michalkó's research (2022), following the Covid-19 pandemic, the Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) tourism segment is among first to be reactivated (Song-Agócs & Michalkó, 2022). Cui, Liu, Chang, Duan, & Li (2016) conducted research on what the risks for tourists are during a trip, what they fear most, and which influences them most. Visitors are concerned with human risks and psycho-social risks, and they pay most attention to food safety and weather risks. However, they are later more concerned about costs, quality of service, and the risk of natural disasters and accidents.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the events industry, leading to widespread festival cancellations and necessitating adaptation. Based on the study of the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture region, the four pillars of PwC's Risk Management Model (detect, protect, react, restore) were used and analysed (Lőrincz, Formádi, & Ernszt, 2023). The biggest challenges for event organisers during the pandemic were uncertainty and unpredictability, with increased financial, human, and mental risks and burdens. However, the positive benefits of the period and the future developmental directions of sustainable festivals were also highlighted (e.g. small-scale, family-friendly events).

In case of an emergency, it is essential to set up an operational unit at the destination that also supervises the communication centre. The intensity of communication must be increased, and preparations should be made to ensure that all stakeholders are informed in a continuous and credible manner (COMCEC, 2017). If the media presents a negative image of areas affected by the epidemic, travellers will associate that area with a dangerous image in the long term, and this perception can only be changed at great cost by the destination management organisation at a later stage (Novelli, Burgess, Jones, & Ritchie, 2018). One of the lessons learned from the H1N1 outbreak was that it is not enough to focus on facts and emphasise expertise when communicating, as fake news also appeared constantly in the media (Lee & Basnyat, 2012). The WTTC highlights that "dominating" social media is essential, as it is the main source of news for a great many people. The body dealing with the crisis must have credible communication on all platforms (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018).

The tourism businesses concerned should also move to crisis management-based operational management. It is of great importance that they communicate with their guests in a continuous and transparent way and facilitate destination-level communication (Martens, Feldesz, & Merten, 2016). The role of governments is essential in mitigating the effects of the crisis. They must focus on the distribution of resources, strengthening communication between stakeholders and providing financial assistance (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Incidentally, communication is key in any action taken. If the public are aware of what needs to be introduced, restricted or banned and why, there will be fewer people who will oppose or take action against these measures (Németh & Tokodi, 2022).

Once the crisis is resolved, recovery can be slow (Novelli, Burgess, Jones, & Ritchie, 2018). The image of the destination needs to be stabilised, which can only be achieved through a coordinated marketing campaign (Avraham, 2016; Péter, Németh, Katona, Gölléný-Kovács, & Tollár, 2019). The rebranding of destination image is a necessary step in the market recovery (Zhang, Song, Wen, & Liu, 2021).

Coordinated cooperation between the private and public sectors is needed, with government support in the form of subsidies and tax incentives. In the longer term, the focus should be on rebuilding the destination, identifying renewed market needs and opportunities, and opening up untapped opportunities and market niches that have emerged in the aftermath of the crisis. It is also necessary to build on the lessons learned during the crisis and ensure that local tourism professionals are equipped with the requisite knowledge to better respond to a new crisis (COMCEC, 2017).

The crisis may even be helpful in encouraging destination management and service providers to improve in order to be better prepared to face future challenges (Buhalis & Costa, 2006). McKercher and Chon (2004) pointed out that effective protection also requires international cooperation and networking.

Current research focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on tourism, more specifically on tourism attraction sites. However, tourism was affected by more than one type of crisis at this time. Shortly after COVID-19, the tourism industry was hit hard by the Russia-Ukraine war (2022), which radically changed European tourism. Millions of Russian and Ukrainian tourists stayed at home, causing a serious demand crisis in some countries (e.g. Italy, Cyprus, and even Hungary). Rising energy prices also negatively impacted tourism in European countries. In addition, the refugee crisis deterred many tourists from vacationing in southern Italy or Spain (Muradzada & Aliyex, 2023).

3. DATA AND METHODS

The research question is the following: How did the crisis management of the operators of tourist attractions evolve before and during the coronavirus epidemic?

The research sub-questions are:

Q1: What was the last event that led tourism operators to perceive a crisis situation before the coronavirus outbreak? What measures were taken at that time to avoid further crises? What lessons were learned after the crisis?

Q2: What were the main risks to the operation of domestic tourist attractions before the outbreak of the coronavirus?

Q3: What level of crisis readiness was there at the surveyed enterprises before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic? Had emergency planning been carried out?

Q4: What colleagues were commissioned to solve problems related to the coronavirus epidemic at domestic tourist attraction operators? What positions did the crisis team consist of?

Q5: What priorities were set by operators of domestic attractions during the coronavirus outbreak?

Q6: What specific crisis management measures were taken in the organisations surveyed?

Our primary research, conducted in March-May 2021, is based on structured interviews with managers of organisations operating in the tourism sector in Hungary. Within the framework of our qualitative research, we interviewed 87 business managers from different areas of the country either in person or online. The organisations included in our study were selected using a snowball method following expert recommendation. The essence of the snowball method is that we initially visit a few members of the target population, and after that we recruit more and more people through the participants interviewed.

In addition, since Hungary's attractions are significant both in terms of natural and manufactured, we involved service providers from both dimensions. Based on Michalkó (2016), who grouped the sights in his study and formulated different attraction types according to the field of activity, our goal was to include all attraction types listed in Table 1 and Table 2. Finally, 25 natural and 62 manufactured attractions were selected (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Number of interviews with managers of natural attraction sites

Type of natural attraction	Number of interviews (pcs)
Flora and fauna	7
Waters	6
Volcanism	3
Astronomical phenomena	3
Climatic and weather phenomena	2
Topography	2
Scenic beauty	1
Soil conditions	1
In total	25

Source: Author's research, 2021

Table 2. Number of interviews with managers of built tourist attraction sites

Type of built attraction	Number of interviews (pcs)
Gastronomy	8
Medical treatment	8
Cultural traditions	6
Historical buildings	5
Living spaces resulting from the social work sharing	5
Special collections	5
Stations in the lives of famous people	4
Worlds of production and work	4
Unique works of architecture	4
Shadow site	3
Services and sites for physical activity	3
Sites of historical events	2
Specific forms and spaces of human coexistence	2
Spiritual sphere	1
"The best of all"	1
Public artworks	1
In total	62

Source: Author's research, 2021

4. RESULTS

The majority of the interviewees in our empirical research of Hungarian attractions service providers were managers (45), but a large number of top managers (35) were also represented. In addition, five owners and one mayor took part in the research, while the position of one interviewee was not known.

The majority of interviewees (30) have been working in the same company or organisation for 10-20 years. The period the interviewees are in a given position shows a similar picture, but most of them have been working in their current position for 1-3 years (30 people), and the frequency of interviewees who have been in a position for 10-20 years (20 people) is also high.

Of the businesses and organisations included in the sample, most (25) can be considered "young", as they were founded between 2010 and 2020. A similar number of enterprises (21) were created between 2000 and 2009. In addition, a significant proportion of the sample is made up of businesses and organisations founded before 1969 (19), with a brewery, a porcelain factory and a castle having the longest history.

The majority of the organisations represented by the interviewees were small enterprises (31) in terms of the number of employees in 2019, but a large number (20) of medium-sized enterprises were also present (Table 3).

Table 3. Frequency of the average statistical headcount of the sampled organisations in 2019

Organisation size	Average statistical number of employees (persons)
Micro-enterprise (1-9 employees)	19
Small business (10-49 employees)	31
Medium enterprise (50-249 employees)	20
Large enterprise (250 employees)	10

Source: Author's research, 2021

One of the consequences of the economic downturn caused by the pandemic was the lay-off of workers. In 2020, the sample included three more micro enterprises, two small enterprises and one large enterprise less than before.

Many organisations made serious efforts to retain staff: "Of course we have been affected by the crisis, but we treat everyone like family, so we have tried to keep everyone, and we have succeeded, so the number of employees has not changed."

Nevertheless, 38 interviewees reported a decrease in the number of employees, 17 companies had a decrease of 1 to 5 employees, 9 had a decrease of 6 to 10 employees, while 12 organisations had more than 10 employees in 2020 less than in previous year. On average, the surveyed organisations laid off between 10-25% of their employees because of the epidemic situation. At the same time, there were some companies (3) that shed more than 50-60% of their workers as a result of the pandemic, with 2 cases having only 13-14% of their 2020 statistical headcount compared to 2019.

The number of employees increased for 9 organisations and stagnated for 29. Typically, the attractions that were able to increase the number of employees were those that were part of an industrial company (automotive, brewing), that also had agricultural activities (wineries) or that allowed outdoor activities during the period under review (ski resorts, arboretums).

Another possible impact of the pandemic was a drop in visitor numbers. Table 4 shows that in 2020, compared to a year earlier, attractions with lower visitor numbers increased in popularity, while attractions with more than 100,000 visitors decreased in traffic. In 2020, only four of the attractions surveyed (three spas and one cathedral) attracted more than 500,000 visitors.

Almost all of the businesses represented by the interviewees are active in several areas. In addition to tourism, 53 are involved in education, 48 in nature conservation and 39 in heritage protection. In addition, gastronomy (8), sport and recreation (5), accommodation services (5), event organisation (6), agriculture (2) and industrial production (4) were among the activities reported.

The majority of the organisations in the sample are privately (32) or publicly (22) owned, 16 are owned by municipalities, 4 by churches, 2 by foundations and the same number for university-run institutions. One of the attractions surveyed is owned by an association, while 8 organisations have mixed ownership.

The operation of institutions shows a similar picture, but the number of institutions run by for-profit enterprises is higher (40). Of the institutions represented by the interviewees, 19 are run by municipalities, 18 by the state, 3 by churches, 1 by a university, 2 by foundations, and 3 by mixed management.

Of the institutions represented at interview, 36 are part of a network, typically cultural, academic or nature conservation. The surveyed attractions are mainly part of networks operating in Hungary, while 6 enterprises operate in an international system and have international connections.

Interviewees were asked to name one case each in which slow and rapid change had taken place in their organisation prior to the coronavirus outbreak, and to formulate the lessons learned in relation to the speed of change.

The slow changes were mostly related to changes in the pricing and sales system, the organisational structure, and the support and tendering systems. For wineries, slow change is almost the only characteristic of the nature of their business: “For example, if I want to plant Cadarca somewhere, it will be wine in 5 years.”

Rapid changes are typically caused by a sudden event, such as a rule change due to an accident (building a new slide) or a change of location. This could be the replacement of a supplier or maintenance company or organisational improvements to improve the quality of products or services. Interviewees also included the dismissal or recruitment of staff.

Almost half of the organisations considered that there had been no major change in their operations, attributing that to the right structure of the organisation or brand, continuous monitoring of the market, and their ability to solve problems.

The key lessons learned from interviewees include that a company needs to be adaptable, flexible, and innovative. It must be alerted to change and find solutions to problems. “It is worthwhile developing a plan for as many possible situations as possible, as early as possible, so that when you have to act, you can react as quickly as possible to changing circumstances.” It is also important to monitor and respond to changes in guest needs and to focus on marketing.

We considered it important to learn about the last crisis in the businesses represented by the interviewees before the coronavirus outbreak, to examine the measures taken then, and to learn lessons to avoid further crises. Almost half of the organisations surveyed reported that they had not experienced any previous crisis. The events that were identified as crises, the actions taken, and lessons learned by the other interviewees are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Events experienced as the last crisis before the outbreak of the coronavirus, actions taken and lessons learned

Events	Actions	Lessons
Natural disasters (hailstorms, climate change, forest fires)	• taking out insurance • improving farming	• concentration of plantations is necessary • measures to improve the ecological status of grassland habitats

Economic crisis (2008)	• loan rescheduling • competition among suppliers • cost cutting to achieve • branding • strengthen reliability in communication, new communication strategy, stronger communication	• it is worth taking out a fixed-rate loan based on the Hungarian Forint • “Stretch until the ceiling is reached, i.e., invest in something with high equity and little external funding or where the funding is subsidised and not a repayable loan (e.g., EU tenders).” • it is not necessary to respond to the economic crisis by raising prices, as this is when solvent demand falls • financial stability, building up reserves
Investment crisis	• a reduction or delay in the amount of aid • extended closure due to investments	• better and more effective communication with the contractor
Changes in leisure habits and supply side	“Our main target segment is families, for whom there are now more and more free family festivals, venues and programmes. With parking fees, admission tickets and a restaurant on the Skanzen [open air museum] grounds, the average family can spend more than 10,000 forints on a visit. It’s hard to compete with, say, a free family festival in the Városliget [city park]...”	

Source: Author’s research, 2021

Our research focused on the three main risks that interviewees anticipated for their business operations prior to the outbreak of the coronavirus (Table 5).

Table 5. Three main risks faced by the businesses represented by the interviewees prior to the coronavirus outbreak

Markets	Highest risk 16 (demand), 2 (supply)	Second highest risk 11 (demand), 9 (supply)	Third highest risk 5 (demand), 6 (supply)
Weather	12	4	1
Labour shortages	15	13	5
Financial	9	12	8
Technical	9	5	3
Economic	6	3	8
Security	2	3	-
Health	4	2	-
Organisational	1	2	2
Legal	-	1	4
Political	1	1	1

Source: Author’s research, 2021

For the sampled businesses, the biggest risks are clearly the lack, retention and finding of suitably qualified staff, and market risks (fall in demand), yet only 26 organisations provided a written risk analysis. Natural and gastronomic attractions (e.g., wineries) highlighted weather as a primary risk to be taken into account when developing their strategy. According to respondents, the second most important risk is also related to the market and labour shortages, and financial risks were also highlighted. The latter mainly refers to the lack of financial stability, while the market risks are more strongly linked to the demand side (the ability of the attraction to meet consumer expectations, i.e. is the supply sufficiently diverse? And does it meet modern technological conditions?) and the perceived threat from the supply side, i.e. from competitors. The third biggest risk identified by businesses is in market, financial and economic conditions (the possibility of obtaining subsidies, tenders, current economic trends). Before the pandemic, only 6 enterprises identified a health risk and these organisations addressed this threat mainly by promoting the health of their employees and visitors.

A contingency plan would have been of significant help to businesses during a pandemic, so we also asked whether the sampled organisations had a contingency plan in place before the outbreak of the coronavirus, and whether they had any contingency planning in place. The vast majority of organisations did not have a contingency plan in place prior to the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic. Some did not have a crisis plan due to their specific situation (agricultural organisation, small organisation) or did not feel the need to have one, but after the outbreak of the coronavirus they considered appropriate to have one. "We did not have a contingency plan before the outbreak, but we had one in place for the second wave."

Only 10 respondents reported having a comprehensive crisis plan in place, many of them as a result of an earlier crisis: "We learned in 2008." Several organisations had plans in place in case of an event: "We have contingency planning in place if a big storm comes and we have to evacuate the area and people, or if there is an accident."

There were some organisations without a crisis plan, but whose business plans, strategies and marketing plans included sections on emergency management. "The business plan always takes into account the potential impact of emergencies."

One respondent explained the lack of a crisis plan as a result of resilience: "There is no plan, but we are constantly training ourselves to react quickly to any change/crisis."

Companies with a contingency plan mostly anticipated uncertain economic situations (e.g. learning from the 2008 crisis), natural emergencies (e.g. storms) or dealing with accidents. It can be said that emergency planning was mostly carried out by organisations that had also carried out a risk analysis.

In addition, 58 respondents felt that their organisation adapts more easily to change and is more responsive than 5 years ago. For 17, there has been no change, while 3 have been slower.

Part of crisis management envisages when a crisis occurs, staff are assigned to solve problems. In the case of the coronavirus outbreak, 13 organisations (mainly built attractions) did not have a designated crisis manager or team, while the others had the following in charge of crisis management:

- an operational team consisting of: general managers, senior managers, marketing managers, technical managers, financial, communication and HR staff; in the case of municipal operations, the mayor, the notary, and the head of the finance department (40): ‘task force team, whose task was to define the operational processes that changed during the crisis, to develop new operational standards and communicate them.’
- for smaller organisations, everyone was involved in crisis management (12);
- one staff member per division/department (6);
- specific colleague (4);
- specific department (3);
- owner (2).

Our research also included an examination of the priorities that organisations set during the coronavirus outbreak. It can be said that the most important objective was to retain the workforce (65 mentions) and related aspects (e.g. maintaining wage levels, health and safety of workers, 12 mentions). “Not having to make anybody redundant, because the team that has been built up over time is very valuable.”

In many organisations employees have special skills, which is why retaining them was a priority: “We have specialists here and if we get rid of them because of the coronavirus epidemic, we may not be able to rehire them once the epidemic is over.”

However, it is important to highlight that for several respondents it was also important to maintain a sense of belonging and team spirit. Several respondents noted the need to keep the team together even at the cost of reducing wages. “The community was very cohesive because in the second wave, all of the workers gave up a certain percentage of their wages so that no one would have to be laid off."

In addition, priority was given to creating the conditions for financial (37 mentions) and technical operations (35 mentions). "Perhaps the most important thing is to maintain operations, which without financial stability and manpower will be unfeasible in the future." There were also some other aspects to which the operators of attractions had to pay attention, such as maintaining constant communication, a constant presence for guests (12 mentions), restructuring work (9 mentions), implementing the planned improvements (for online sales) (1 mention).

A number of specific crisis management measures were taken in the organisations examined. Most frequently mentioned were the use of public wage subsidies (38 mentions) and working from home (52 mentions). In addition, several companies highlighted crisis communication (40 mentions), not only offering their services but also sending messages to visitors: "We used social media to communicate, recalling historical examples that are similar to the current crisis situation. Our aim was to highlight the importance of hope and solidarity." Two other measures worth mentioning are the creation of an online webshop (13 mentions) and the reorganisation of work (19 mentions).

The interviewees' views on the question of having enough reserves to "stay alive" varied widely. There were 32 responses to this question, with 12 organisations reporting only 1-3 months of reserves, and 8 organisations reporting 4-6 months. Only 9 companies in the sample had sufficient reserves for at least one year. This suggests that few organisations paid attention to building up reserves in the period before the crisis.

The final question in the interview was how the organisations surveyed prepared for reopening (Table 6).

Responses to the question of preparing for the reopening ranged widely. Most respondents planned to expand the range and strengthen marketing, while maintenance and technological development were also important tasks to prepare for the future. "We have tried to use the time to improve the institution technically, preparing for future hybrid events." The outbreak highlighted some of the changes that are necessary: "The situation created by the coronavirus outbreak highlighted some of the things we need to think about, such as the expansion and reconfiguration of the indoor facilities. We think that after the epidemic, guests will not like small spaces where many people are crowded together, so we need to make changes in this area."

Table 6. Frequency of re-opening activities

Expanding the offer	36
Strengthening marketing	21
Maintenance	12
Technological development	10
Purchase/relocation of hygiene equipment	9
Recruitment of staff	9
Specific planning (preparation of camps, events, opening hours)	8
Renovation	7
Training	5
Gardening	3
Building relationships with service providers	2
Strengthening online sales	2
Developing a pricing strategy	2
Restructuring the organisation	2
Looking for a support scheme	2
Cleaning up	2
Minimising costs	1
Finding a new target group	1
Monitoring provisions	1
Stocking up on supplies	1

Source: Author's research, 2021

This approach was also adopted by many businesses which actively spent the "down" time preparing to offer their guests a unique and memorable experience when they reopened. In addition, several highlighted that they had started recruiting staff in May so that they could concentrate fully on their guests when they reopened. Another common point was that the organisations were engaged in intensive online marketing activities during the pandemic, which they were keen to maintain in the future. A key element of this will be uniqueness: "There will be plenty of hunters and few seals, everyone will be hunting for the adventurous travellers." Broadening the target audience was also part of future plans, "We have not taken anyone under 12 so far for the safety reasons, but now we are trying to come up with something for that, which would be good for younger children."

5. DISCUSSIONS

Health risks can endanger the safety and security of tourists (Jonas, Mansfeld, Paz, & Potasman, 2011), and worldwide pandemics like COVID-19 pose a significant threat in particular. Several articles, mainly related to accommodations and restaurants, have dealt with the crisis management of the pandemic, but to the best of our knowledge, no research has been conducted to examine the readiness and reaction of tourist attraction sites to the crisis. This area can be said to be critical since the main motivations for trips are usually attractions. In addition, while many restrictions were introduced for accommodation and catering establishments worldwide during the pandemic, fewer mandatory restrictions were imposed on attractions, so several factors could be decided at their discretion (opening hours, number of visitors, mask-wearing rules, etc.). To fill that knowledge gap and to provide academic and managerial implications, the present study has aimed to explore the crisis management measures of managers of tourist attraction sites before and during the coronavirus pandemic.

The previous crisis management experiences the attraction site operators concerned have had and the lessons they have learned from them are decisive in crisis management (Q1). Dealing with the crisis was made more difficult by the fact that half of the interviewees reported that they had no experience in dealing with crises, while the others mainly reported experience of natural damage, the economic crisis (2008-2009), and changes in the consumer habits of tourists. The main consequence of previous crises was that it is worth creating a crisis management plan, which prepares the organisation for different scenarios and when a crisis occurs, it must be handled in a flexible and innovative way and as rapidly as possible, in addition to continuously monitoring the expectations of tourists.

Part of the crisis management plan to be prepared is the management of risks, for which we asked the interviewed managers to identify the three main risks prior to the coronavirus outbreak (Q2). For the respondents, the biggest risks were changing markets, labour shortages, and financial risks, but technical, economic risks and the weather were also mentioned in several cases. Service providers listed a wide range of risks, suggesting that although nearly half of those surveyed had not experienced a crisis before the outbreak of COVID-19. They had a rational view of their economic role and understood the threats to their day-to-day operations. However, it can also be concluded that before COVID-19, service providers were generally not concerned with health risks.

Preparedness of a tourism enterprise for a crisis is helped by the existence of a crisis management plan, the existence of which was also examined (Q3). Only 10 respondents reported the existence of one; several had prepared one as a consequence of the effects of a previous crisis. Some businesses had a chapter on emergency planning in their business plans. Crisis management plans can be of different types. Depending on the type of crisis, it is advisable to prepare a passive, negative, defensive, or proactive strategy (Mikusová & Horváthová, 2019). The plan should prepare the organisation for a possible crisis by drawing on experience and recommendations, for example by preparing appropriate scenarios, setting up appropriate organisational structures, and offering specific training.

The COVID-19 outbreak caught service providers unprepared. They could not imagine what consequences it would have. Many had not prepared a crisis plan, because of the size of their business. This was a mistake, as it is often micro-enterprises that provide the livelihoods of entire families as the only source of income.

The reaction phase meant taking immediate and in some cases short-term, decisions which were impossible to prepare for in advance in the case of COVID-19. Even though measures taken in China in January-February 2020 were followed by businesses, it was not foreseeable what measures would be taken at the European, national, and local government level, nor could anyone have expected the complete closure of some service units.

In the case of crises, it is important to set up a crisis management team immediately, and part of our research investigated which positions made up the members of such a team (Q4). Only 13 investigated organisations failed to create a crisis management team, the others mainly delegated the top management (general managers) and senior managers (marketing, technical, financial, communication, and HR managers) to this.

The priorities determined during crisis management (Q5) determine the necessary steps (Q6), so the examination of these was also part of our research. The job of the crisis team was to manage the situation as best as possible in the event of an outbreak. Using the appropriate scenarios, in cooperation with the competent authorities, they ensured that the spread of the virus was prevented in the tourism service provider (e.g. medical examinations, clearing infected areas, possibly quarantine). In other words, we can say that the job of the crisis team is primarily to maintain contact with national organisations and local stakeholders, follow mandatory regulations, and adapt them to their organisation.

It is also important to inform employees and maintain employee morale. At the same time, the proper functioning of the business has to be ensured - if regulations allow it. Cooperation, such as liaison between the individual tourism service providers and tourism stakeholders, also has to be maintained (cf. Jamal & Budke, 2020).

Many organisations made the greatest effort to retain their workforce. Despite this, the number of employees decreased with most service providers. Most frequently mentioned crisis management measures were working from home and the use of public wage subsidies. Crisis management plans include a communication strategy that considers resources and identifies spokespersons in the event of a crisis (Mazilu, Marinescu, Bălă, & Dragomir, 2019).

Communication also underwent significant change. The messages of businesses were formulated along the lines of hope and solidarity. Additional measures included the creation of online webshops and the reorganisation of work.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Tourism is a fragile industry that is often and severely affected by crises. Businesses must therefore become resilient, as they have no prior cognisance of the timing, type and severity of crises. In the crisis management literature, current models tend to suggest the same approach, often ignoring the fact that the duration, scale, and impact of crises can vary greatly (Speakman & Sharpley, 2012).

Crises can be examined in a broader context as many crises negatively affect tourism. Yet the sector never before experienced a crisis as large as COVID-19. Before this national economic crises, natural disasters were limited to one destination, or slowly evolving demand changes made the activities of service providers difficult. Of these, we only examined the COVID-19 crisis in detail, but even with its passing, many new crises have arisen (e.g. problems caused by the Russia-Ukraine war).

The academic literature has extensively studied the effects of natural and environmental disasters and even viruses (such as SARS and Ebola) on the tourism industry. However, the impact of the management of the COVID-19 health crisis on the attraction site sector is unprecedented. Although we can glean lessons from the past, COVID-19 is significantly larger in size and scope than previous epidemics (Zheng, Luo, & Ritchie, 2021). It is unique in that we have not faced a similar type of global pandemic since the 1918–1919 Spanish Flu epidemic (Pan, Shu, Kitterlin-Lynch, & Beckman, 2021). Closed borders, bans on public gatherings, closed attraction sites, and mobility restrictions across countries dramatically affected both domestic and international travel.

The restoration phase aims to restore the image of the tourism service provider once the immediate threat has passed and encourage travellers to travel and visit the service again. The recovery phase aims to restore the image of the tourism service provider once the crises has ended, emphasise the end of the emergency, and stress safety. The consequences of the examined crisis are expected to lead to a reorientation of attraction site service providers. As a result, changes in the preparation for and handling of crises are expected in the future. To this end, our research shows that the main areas for improvement are cooperation with other organisations, the provision of resources in case of emergencies, and the preparation of contingency plans. The search for new ways and solutions is essential and, based on the guest feedback collected on an ongoing or annual basis, most of the organisations surveyed suggest holding regular meetings to discuss the introduction of new products and services.

The COVID-19 crisis for Hungarian tourism operators was twofold: It was both a health crisis and an economic crisis, so any action taken had to take into account the relationship between the planned action or the action taken and the epidemiological and economic crisis. At the same time, a third aspect had to be kept under constant review: the long-term objectives of the undertaking. Short-term measures taken may mean that businesses that survived the crisis would not be able to recover after the crisis, for example because they did not have the right number of skilled staff. On the labour side, the disenchantment with tourism was also a major challenge. Many workers moved to other industries since the spring of 2020 and do not want to return to a sector that showed such vulnerability.

While some crises are beyond the control of management, organisations are often judged on their emergency response and reaction to such crises (Remondino, Penco, & Profumo, 2019). As the majority of operators lack knowledge and experience in crisis management, the Tourism Destination Management Organisations are encouraged to organise training and exchange of experience for tourism operators in the regions. According to the interviewees, the high level of employee engagement, the preservation of organisational identity and the availability of leadership competences to deal with crisis situations in the organisations surveyed are a strong basis for resilient organisations.

To avoid disincentives, crisis management should be seen as a process, i.e. constantly monitoring the signs. This requires building industry relationships, analysing trends and thinking in scenarios. A good way to monitor the noise would be to ask customers at the beginning of the service provision whether they are worried or unsure about anything. Building on this, service providers could focus and communicate better.

Furthermore, with the increasing flow of information and the improvement of people's safety awareness, health risks have become a significant concern for tourists, and risk perceptions would affect their travel decisions (Page, 2009). An up-to-date market segmentation is needed (risk-averse people cannot be relied upon, a target group may be excluded due to restrictions), therefore segmentation needs to be reinterpreted in the dimensions "solvent" and "decision competent".

The majority of tourism service providers surveyed recognised the need for crisis management planning, and a recovery plan should also be considered. This should include an assessment of the damage to machinery and equipment caused by the outage, and measures, services and recertification to regain visitor confidence.

An effective promotion of the recovery is essential (new certification or a new product would make things easier, but it is also necessary to communicate when the attractions are open regarding who can enter, updating the information). The key players in the recovery cooperation are the local partners, especially the Tourinform office and the accommodation providers, who the operators of the attractions should inform about opening hours and the conditions of entry. Staff management also has an important role to play and motivation, training, and quality assurance are essential in this situation.

From our perspective, this study has made important contributions to the literature on crisis management of attraction sites, but we have to recognise some limitations.

One of the limitations of the research is the relatively small number and heterogeneous composition of the businesses surveyed. Therefore, even though it is possible to make generalisations for the sector as a whole, especially when using other sources, these findings are not necessarily true for every tourism business. The other limitation of the research is the constantly changing circumstances and sometimes random, trial-and-error reactions to them. Another limiting factor was that only Hungarian attraction sites were examined.

As a continuation of the qualitative research, it is necessary to extend the research to more attraction sites and countries and a longitudinal study would be worthwhile to see how managers' opinions change after a few years.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare there is no conflict of interest.

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КРИЗНИ МЕНАЏМЕНТ МАЂАРСКИХ ТУРИСТИЧКИХ АТРАКЦИЈА ПРИЈЕ И ТОКОМ КРИЗЕ ИЗАЗВАНЕ ВИРУСОМ КОРОНА

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САЖЕТАК

Циљ студије јесте да се испита како се кризни менаџмент на туристичким атракцијама развијао прије и током епидемије изазване вирусом корона. Обављено је 87 дубинских интервјуа са менаџерима надлежним за кризни менаџмент на туристичким атракцијама, при чему су испитане: фаза припреме и реаговања у вези са перцепцијом кризе, успостављање кризног плана и кризног тима, дефинисање приоритета и мјера током пандемије изазване вирусом корона, као и поуке. Резултати су показали да већина није имала ни план управљања кризом, нити искуство стечено у претходним кризама. Већина предузећа је формирала тим за управљање пословањем који чине менаџери, који су потом као приоритет одредили задржавање радне снаге. Кораци који су предузети углавном су се односили на рад од куће и коришћење јавних субвенција за плате, као и на преиспитивање комуникације.

Кључне ријечи: *туризам, туристичка атракција, КОВИД 19, кризни менаџмент, перцепција ризика.*