

UNIVERSITY OF PANNONIA

Doctoral School in Management Science and Business Administration



**István György Vizi**

**The Action Radius of Tourism:**

**The Expansion of the Time/Distance Dimension of Travel in the Lake Fertő  
Region**

Dissertation (PhD)

**Thesis Book**

***Supervisors: Dr. Antal Aubert and Dr. Katalin Formádi***

Veszprém

2025



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## 1. Objectives of the Dissertation, Research Questions

The modern era of global tourism – according to Michalkó and Rátz (2019) a “total” form of tourism – responds sensitively to the changes in our environment, just as the environment perceives every change in tourism. As an active participant in modern tourism, whether as an educator, researcher, or practitioner, it is necessary to respond sensitively and attentively to these changes.

In tourism, geography and time play a decisive role in terms of demand and supply, encompassing the sending and receiving regions as well as the space of travel between them. In modern tourism, the question is no longer whether the distance between the distinguished places of space can be bridged, but rather we seek to understand which supporting and constraining factors—often invisible on the surface of the processes—play a significant role, beyond (or in symbiosis with) the relationship between time and space. Such significance once belonged to the Iron Curtain or the Berlin Wall, while today factors such as business interests or cultural attitudes hold comparable weight. Thus, in the demand–supply system of tourism, the relationship between time and space is complemented by a variety of factors to which the market must pay much greater attention than is currently the case.

Change, alongside the constant economic, social, technological, and environmental dynamics, surrounding us highlights another central professional attitude which, - not only in this dissertation,- extends beyond openness to the world: integrated thinking. In this spirit, a military-scientific concept within the interrelations of time and space that introduced a novel perspective into the research activity was chosen. This concept is the military-scientific theory of the action radius, formulated by the late distinguished military historian Géza Perjés (1917–2003). I first encountered Perjés’s brilliant theory in the second half of the 1980s during my historical studies, where it became one of the inspiring and defining theories of my university years. It was this theory that inspired the thought experiment presented in this dissertation: how a military-scientific theory might be situated in a tourism context, and whether it could at the same time serve as a basis for constructing a new conceptual framework for tourism. This is done through a novel interpretation that faithfully conveys the tourism-theoretical concept being created, by adapting this outstanding professional theory of military history. The fine-tuned, carefully considered introduction of a military-historical concept into tourism may even appear heretical; however, the logical and forward-looking structure of the dissertation demonstrates not only its relevance but also its scientific novelty.

The research focuses on the Fertő Lake region, located along the current Austrian–Hungarian border. It is of symbolic significance that, with the completion of the final section of the bicycle path around Lake Fertő in the autumn of 2015, the area was unified into a fully cyclable region. (The first historical step toward complete accessibility around the lake, however, is connected to Miklós Esterházy “the Shining” II (1714–1790), who in 1781 cut across the marsh between Eszterháza and Pomogy [Pamhagen] with a so-called pile road.)

This 2015 development may also be regarded as historically significant, since for many centuries the narrower Fertő Lake region had constituted a geographical, economic, and social unity prior to the Treaty of Trianon. Today, the lake lies within the border region of Hungary and Austria (Burgenland). The European Union’s Schengen Agreement, through the everyday reality of free and uncontrolled border crossing, appeared to offer the possibility of an economic, social, tourism, and political re-integration of this unity.

It is, however, essential to recognize the actual substance of this connection, which is presented in this dissertation. To this end, the present situation of the Fertő region is described, with a sensitive exploration of the idea of belonging together, emphasizing the sense of shared identity within the former territories of the historic Sopron and Moson Counties. The radius of action and the geographical scope of the study can also be interpreted from a spatial perspective, which is rarely used by tourism researchers. The division of an aristocratic family, just like the fragmentation of the physical and social geography of the area, symbolizes the historical path that continues to influence the Lake Fertő region to this day.

At the intersection of history, military history, and tourism studies, the dissertation introduces the concepts of destination/attraction action radius and tourist action radius as new technical terms in tourism theory in relation to geographical space. In this dissertation, I will refer to the concepts of destination/attraction action radius and tourist action radius uniformly as action radius. I will demonstrate that modern tourism is a complex field in which theoretical work in various scientific disciplines and elements of business life are indeed capable of advancing the development of tourism through scientific theories and scientific creativity, with elements of a scientifically rigorous research attitude.

The theoretical significance of the research topic's objective is that the action radius theory has not yet been examined in Hungary in the context of tourism. The dissertation provides a new scientific approach and interpretation by applying the concepts of tourist and attraction action radius to the traditional scientific and geographical approach to tourism demand and supply at a destination. The conceptual umbrella of action radius establishes a new approach that allows for a more innovative, multifaceted, and deeper understanding of how tourism works.

The practical significance of the research is that the action radius model developed can also be applied in the management of other tourist areas.

The main objectives of the research as follows:

1. Illustration of how the action radius theory can be adapted to a supply and demand approach to tourist destinations;
2. Developing a new scientific approach, the action radius model, within the tourism system, which describes the relationship between cultural distance and physical distance and can be adapted to other regions.

The related "research objectives" are as follows:

- Examining why the Fertő region does not appear as a unified tourist destination in either Hungary or Austria;
- To explore why, in the absence of a unified space, Austrian visitors are not relevant to tourism consumption in Hungary and what are the reasons behind this;
- Mapping how they relate to practical (market) trends and what challenges stakeholders face in their professional activities in the region;

This paper seeks answer to the following research questions:

- Q1: What factors prevent Austrian visitors from using Lake Fertő as a unified tourist area, and in this context, what determines the extent of the cultural distance?
- Q2: What factors—such as border awareness, prejudices, or deliberately applied Austrian tourism policy strategies—influence the lack of demand from Austrian visitors for domestic tourism offerings, particularly in the case of Esterházy Castle?
- Q3: Why are there no cooperative economic and social processes between Austrian and Hungarian actors in the Lake Fertő region, what problems do local actors face, and are they capable of effective long-term cooperation?
- Q4: How can the military science concept of action radius be adapted outside the context of tourism in terms of time and space, and in what other directions can the concept be expanded?

## **2. Theoretical background**

To summarize the theoretical findings of this paper, it can be concluded that the attractiveness of tourist destinations can best be understood in terms of complex space-time dynamics, where location, accessibility, availability, transport networks, and the personal characteristics of travelers all play a role. According to the literature, the attraction's catchment area is basically determined by the accessibility of the destination, the movement patterns of tourists, and cultural distance. Although gravitational models attempt to map the spatial structure of visitor flows along space-time dynamics, there is no universal metric. It is important to note that accessibility plays a role in destination selection mainly when the attractions in a given location/region are similar, while in the case of attractions with a unique selling point, it takes a back seat (this will be significant in the case of Lake Fertő due to the almost identical offerings on the Austrian/Hungarian side, especially in terms of accessibility, due to the mental images formed by Austrian tourism destination management organizations). Personal factors influencing tourist movements, such as local knowledge and cultural preferences, further nuance the theoretical framework of the destination's catchment area. Although many studies have examined the role of space/time dynamics, the literature lacks a tourism-specific operationalization of the concept of “action radius.”

### 3. Research objectives

#### 3.1 Research hypothesis

Hypotheses are the guiding principles of research, describing characteristic causal relationships related to the subject of the research in the form of statements about the expected research results, which must be verified or refuted during the research (Bonz 2015:20).

Based on the research questions formulated above and the literature review, the hypotheses of this thesis are as follows:

**H1:** Austrian visitors are not primarily hindered from using Lake Fertő as a unified tourist area by physical or geographical factors such as accessibility or distance, but rather by the degree of cultural distance, which is primarily based on intercultural differences. (Q1)

**H2:** The Lake Fertő region, which refers to a unified geographical area prior to the Treaty of Trianon, can no longer be considered homogeneous, there are political, economic, social, and cultural obstacles to a uniform interpretation of the region. (Q1)

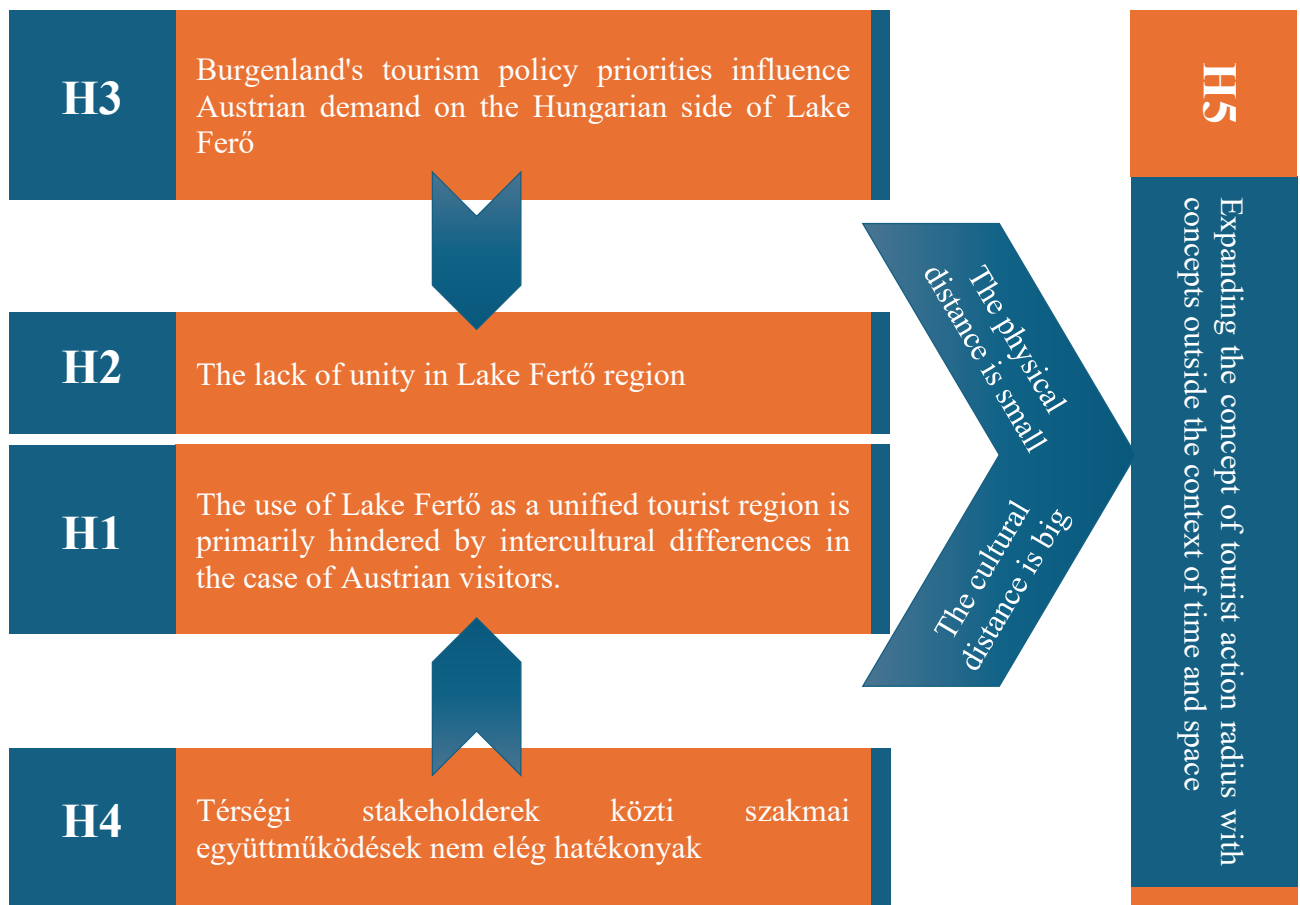
**H3:** The role of Austrian visitors on the Hungarian side is significantly lower compared to the importance of the region's tourism supply (e.g., the visitor numbers of the Esterházy Palace). The main reason for this lies primarily in the different priorities of Austrian tourism policy. (Q2)

**H4:** The professional activities and cooperation of regional stakeholders are not sufficiently effective, since in recent decades no functional and regular cooperative network has been established that builds common goals and trust. This hinders the advancement of economic and social processes. (K3)

**H5:** The military science concept of action radius takes on a new meaning outside the context of tourism space and time when examined on the basis of various geographical and social factors, i.e., the concept can be expanded to include infrastructure, digital accessibility, the influence of local communities, or motivational factors in tourism, complementing push and pull elements. (Q4)

#### 3.2 The theoretical framework of the research model

## 1. Theoretical framework



Source: Own Edit

### 3.3 Research methodology

Due to the complexity of the research questions, mixed research methods were used. Within the framework of mixed research, data was collected from several sources: first, I used secondary data, and secondly, I relied on primary sources. As part of the primary research, a questionnaire survey was conducted and structured interviews were held with the relevant regional actors. The following summary table (Table 1) shows which data sources and research methods were used for the hypotheses related to each research question. I will then briefly discuss the relevance of each research method to the topic of the dissertation.

**Table 1.: Review of methodology**

Research Question	Hypothesis	Methodology
Q1	H1 – H2	interview, content analysis
Q2	H3	interview, content analysis
Q3	H4	interview, survey questionnaire
Q4	H5	content analysis

Source: Own Edit

### 3.4 Summary

The following table (Table 2) summarizes the research methodology.

**Table 2.: Overview of Methodology**

	Survey among residents of Fertőszéplak	Content analysis of bicycle tourism information boards and websites in Nordburgenland	Content analysis of accommodation providers' websites in the Nordburgenland / Neusiedler See tourism region	Structured interviews with stakeholders of the Sopron–Fertő tourism area
Research method	Quantitative research	Content analysis	Content analysis	Qualitative research
Purpose of the study	To explore the relationship between geographical space and the settlement	To analyze the quality and content of information transfer	To examine the presence of cross-border offers (attractions, service providers) on accommodation providers' own websites	To assess opinions regarding the tourism competitiveness of the region
Time of study	March–April 2016	2023, 2024	May–June 2024	2016
Target group	Permanent residents of the settlement over 14 years of age	Map-type information boards <a href="http://www.burgenland.info">www.burgenland.info</a>	Accommodation providers in Nordburgenland (Austria)	Regional stakeholders (mayors, entrepreneurs, princely family, National Park director, World Heritage site director)
Location of study	Settlement of Fertőszéplak	Nordburgenland, B10 kerékpárút térsége és <a href="http://www.burgenland.info">www.burgenland.info</a>	<a href="https://www.burgenland.info/uebernachten/suchen#/unterkuenfte-Nordburgenland">https://www.burgenland.info/uebernachten/suchen#/unterkuenfte Nordburgenland</a>	Sopron–Fertő region
Sample size	236 respondents	9 types of installed information boards	564 websites from 33 settlements, of which 163 were analyzed in detail	13 interviewees
Methods applied	Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis	Content analysis	Content analysis	Sociological in-depth interview

Source: Own Edit

## 4. Research results

### 4.1 Highlighting independent, novel results

The tourism-specific interpretation of the concept of action radius—originally used by historians—contributes significantly to broadening the space–time construct of tourism theory, as it goes beyond traditional approaches that interpret the catchment areas of destinations primarily on the basis of physical distance and infrastructural accessibility (Tóth–Dávid 2010). The new theoretical construct places individual, perception-based constraints on tourist mobility at the center of analysis, thereby enabling the integration of both mobility-related and decision-psychological factors. The study of the space–time dimension of tourism is not new; Hall (2005a, 2005b) already emphasized that time, as a scarce resource, plays a crucial role in destination choice, particularly in the case of short-stay trips. In this light, the dissertation demonstrates that the perceived space–time relationship of tourists decisively influences the action radius—that is, the subjective range within which individual decisions regarding movement are made (Frändberg 2008). One of the theoretical pillars of the action radius concept discussed in the dissertation is the partial adaptation of the “space–time prism” model (Miller 2004, 2005). This application is novel in tourism research, since the model has previously been employed primarily in transport geography and urban planning contexts. The findings of the dissertation support the argument of Xu et al. (2021), namely that tourists make their decisions not on the basis of actual distance, but rather in terms of their personal time frame, their experience of accessibility, and their perception of mobility options—that is, which destinations fall within “reachable distance” for them. The action radius model proposed in the dissertation can facilitate the synthesis of existing gravity models (Yee–Ismail 2020) with behavioral approaches (McKercher–Lew 2003; McKercher 2008b). While the former seek to describe flows of mass tourism at a macro level, the latter focus on individual decision-making. Action radius is situated between these two approaches, providing an opportunity for a more nuanced understanding of space–time-oriented behavior, thereby offering a reinterpretation of destination accessibility. By introducing the concept of action radius into tourism theory, it becomes possible to address the limitations of classical attraction theories, which devote less attention to such “invisible” barriers as mental maps, lack of information, or cultural comfort zones—all of which exert a real influence on how tourists assess the accessibility of a given space (Gunn–Var 2003). The concept of action radius elevates the reading of tourism’s space–time theory to a new level, as it interprets tourism mobility not only in physical space but also in relation to the external factors affecting the internal, subjective time and decision-space within which actual tourist movement takes place. With this approach, the dissertation not only expands the conceptual apparatus of tourism theory but also opens up new avenues for empirical research capable of interpreting individual perceptions and mobility strategies in both spatial and temporal terms.

## 4.2 Formulation of theses

### *Thesis 1: Cultural distance and perception*

For Austrian visitors, the use of Lake Fertő as a unified tourism space is not hindered by physical distance or accessibility, but rather by cultural distance. This distance is rooted primarily in cultural perceptions, which shape the experiences of Austrian visitors and their relationship to the site.

The investigations confirmed that the notion of Lake Fertő as a unified tourism space is currently not relevant. It can be stated that there is no integrated Austrian–Hungarian Lake Fertő tourism region. The analysis of the spatial organizing power of the Esterházy family (economic, touristic, political, etc.) demonstrated that, since the Treaty of Trianon, the Austrian and Hungarian parts of the Lake Fertő region have undergone markedly different paths of social, economic, and political development, resulting in distinct living spaces in the two countries.

These differences extend across a broad spectrum of everyday social realities—as situated within Maslow’s hierarchy of needs—whereby Austrians, leveraging their economic superiority, contribute to the absence of a unified geographical, economic, or touristic space in the Lake Fertő region. The impact of time and space on the action radius highlights the non-unified use of the geographical space through the analysis of push and pull factors.

On this basis, Hypothesis 1 is confirmed.

### *Thesis 2: Political and social boundaries*

The geographical unit that existed around Lake Fertő before Trianon has ceased to be a unified entity, due to political, economic, social, and cultural differences, which together hinder the reinterpretation and realization of the region's tourism unity.

The strategic direction of Austrian tourism policy, and within that, Burgenland tourism policy, seeks to appropriate all the tourist values associated with the unified region (Pannonian lifestyle, etc.). All the values that were once characteristic of the geographical region before the Treaty of Trianon now also play a role in strengthening Burgenland's identity and are reflected in its tourism communications. Burgenland's professional tourism activities are one of the cornerstones of Burgenland's identity, an important element of which is that all elements of Burgenland's self-identity should appear in a unified identity, even at the cost of distorting reality by appropriating the most important and significant elements of the similar value system of neighboring Hungary and identifying them as Burgenlandian.

On this basis, Hypothesis 2 is confirmed.

### *Thesis 3: Changes in visitor demand as a result of tourism policy*

The proportion of Austrian visitors on the Hungarian side is lower than the significance of the tourist offer would suggest, for example in terms of visitor numbers to Esterházy Castle. One of the main reasons for this phenomenon is Austria's conscious tourism policy, which tends to encourage domestic tourism or promote other Austrian destinations.

The research and analysis showed that Austrian visitors (domestic and foreign visitors and second-home owners in the Nordburgenland region) do not prefer Hungary as a destination due to the analyzed activities of Austrian (Burgenland) tourism policy. Two examples of this deliberate diversion, also presented in the analysis, are the communication activities of accommodation providers encouraging visitors to spend their time within the country's borders. An example of this activity is the deliberate visual and communicative distortion of the length and usability of the Austrian section of the Lake Fertő cycle path in order to discourage cyclists from using the southern part of Lake Fertő in Hungary (several tools together have a multiplicative effect).

On this basis, Hypothesis 3 is confirmed.

#### ***Thesis 4: The cooperation of the stakeholders***

Tourism stakeholders in the Lake Fertő region are currently unable to cooperate effectively with economic and social actors in the region due to differing interests, inadequate communication channels, a lack of regular meetings to promote mutual understanding, and a lack of common strategic goals. Comprehensive cooperation between regional stakeholders would not only promote the development of the tourism sector, but would also contribute to the economic and social strengthening of cross-border local communities and increase the competitiveness of the region.

Based on the research, it can be stated that some of the stakeholders involved in tourism in the Lake Fertő region have long considered the lack of cooperation and collaboration to be the most significant problem. They acknowledge that historical circumstances have helped to preserve the natural values of the area, but it should be noted that those stakeholders who have a more traditional, business-oriented approach see the role of the National Park and World Heritage Site as more of a disadvantage and an obstacle than an advantage. The proximity of Austria is partly an advantage and partly a disadvantage, as marketing activities targeting the Austrian market have so far been unsuccessful. It is an advantage in terms of the attractiveness of the region, especially for residents of more distant areas, but partly a disadvantage because the region is at a disadvantage in several respects in terms of competitiveness. Among these, the low quality of the tourist infrastructure and the lack of services stand out.

On this basis, Hypothesis 4 is confirmed.

#### ***Thesis 5: Transdisciplinary expansion of the action radius***

A broad examination of the concept of action radius in tourism not only refers to its temporal and spatial location, but also takes into account its social, economic, and cultural contexts. The concept of action radius takes on new meaning in a complex, multidimensional context that takes into account new and relevant aspects of tourism. In this way, it can be expanded beyond space and time to include additional dimensions, such as 1) the cultural identity of local communities and their attitude towards tourism shape the possibilities for using space, including their involvement, willingness to cooperate, and receptiveness to tourism; 2) perceptions that influence visitors' motivations, e.g., enthusiasm for the history or cultural experience of the destination, also redefine distances; 3) digital accessibility and technology, which change the

way tourists obtain information and make decisions, with websites, social media, and travel apps making information easily and quickly accessible, influencing tourists' action radius.

Within the geographical space of the study, it can be demonstrated that, beyond the context of space and time, the case of two neighboring countries—once part of a unified geographical area—requires the examination of numerous additional elements. These elements reveal that only through broad-based investigations is it possible to analyze a formerly unified geographical region a century after its division. The introduction of the action radius concept represents a scientific novelty, providing a highly complex and comprehensive framework for analyzing and illuminating these processes. Beyond the dimensions of space and time, the action radius incorporates various push and pull factors, thereby enriching research and analysis with new layers of meaning. This, in turn, brings us closer to understanding the real economic, social, and touristic processes that can be uncovered in more forward-looking ways—including those with significant implications for business success. Moreover, the action radius also facilitates the understanding of intercultural differences. The findings of the dissertation support the validity of the thesis and confirm that the creation and introduction of this new concept is essential for conducting deeper analyses.

On this basis, Hypothesis 5 is confirmed.

### **4.3 Practical implications of the research**

In terms of practical implications, the dissertation refers to numerous practical consequences and real-life applications. In summary, the dissertation has two significant sets of practical implications. Practical implications in terms of methodology.

#### ***Practical implications in terms of methodology***

The application of the action radius model in the examination of the operation of tourist attractions in Hungary and in the related analyses provides a methodology for the most complete exploration possible, which sheds light on the situation from a different perspective—enabling a completely new situation analysis. The geographical scope of the study is a good example of how it can provide professional support beyond the current assessment of cross-border cooperation. The methodology can shed light on deeply rooted, hidden, invisible elements that immediately cast a different light on methods and practices that may have been established for decades. The novelty of the methodology will also provide alternative solutions for tourism stakeholders.

#### ***Practical implications within the analyzed region***

The results highlight that, within the Lake Fertő region, tourism professionals and stakeholders in the two countries hold different views on how tourism systems should function. In Austria, there is a conscious effort to build provincial identity and to establish an economic interest representation system through the creation of appropriate organizations, supported by significant economic power. The impacts of this system are extended beyond Austria's borders—primarily toward Hungary, though less perceptibly in the direction of Slovakia.

This deliberate activity, together with its elements and methodologies, can be further studied and interpreted by tourism professionals through this dissertation. By taking into account its mindset and underlying logic, they may be able to adapt these practices to improve the functioning of the Hungarian tourism system. A key practical implication of the dissertation is that it reveals the perspectives of Burgenland stakeholders and all actors in the regional tourism supply. Hungarian stakeholders need not lack the toolkit associated with Austrian objectives, nor handle them with excessive caution. Within the supply-demand system, Hungarian actors should freely employ instruments similar to those used for Austrian interest representation and actively compete with them, while carefully weighing both economic and ethical considerations.

Analyzing the spatial organizing power of the Austrian Esterházy family also reveals opportunities for adopting certain elements in Hungary. Hungarian stakeholders should consider whether elements rooted in the Esterházy legacy—but no longer under a unifying Esterházy “umbrella”—could, in part and at least in the short or medium term, generate positive impacts on tourism (including from an economic perspective). It is also necessary to move forward in harnessing the untapped potential of the transboundary UNESCO World Heritage Site, in order to achieve tangible results in the everyday reality of tourism.

#### **4.4 Outline of further research directions**

Future research will continue to focus on the Sopron-Fertő and Nordburgenland regions, investigating and analyzing push and pull factors which provide further support for identifying the intercultural elements that are still present in the former Iron Curtain, forming an invisible wall and barrier to crossing from the Burgenland region into Hungary. This supports the complexity of the action radius theory. Of these future research elements, I highlight five focal points:

1. Using quantitative research and content analysis, I will examine the tools used by Burgenland's tourist attractions and service providers to appeal to Hungarian tourist demand. I will explore the economic interests and objectives behind these additional tools in relation to Burgenland's tourist offerings.
2. The Esterházy family's role as land organizers will be expanded to include additional elements, including a new country in geographical terms, the Galanta region of Slovakia (in terms of the former Royal Hungary, the former geographical unit of the country now appears in the geographical space of three countries). The princely branch of the Esterházy family today bears the Galántha prefix. Thus, in my further research into the entire history of the Esterházy family, I plan to investigate not only the elements of the Austrian-Hungarian geographical space, but also the historical scale of the former Esterházy regions. As part of my tourism research, I will examine elements that highlight the fact that the Esterházy's were, among other things, the founders of sailing and motor sports in present-day Hungary, and that their activities continue to influence tourism to this day, even though they themselves are no longer an integral part of these activities in Hungary.
3. In the future, I will also examine the role of symbols, as the joint logo of the Fertő-Hanság National Park and the Nationalpark Neusiedler See–Seewinkel was not included in this dissertation. However, this shared logo further reinforces the symbolic

dominance of the Austrian side. Interpreting its meaning and assessing its impact will also require insights from other scientific disciplines.

4. A future research topic related to cultural distance concerns the juxtaposition of geographical proximity (shorter-than-average travel time) and cultural distance (a higher-than-average proportion of graduates). The aim is to address the question of why the social group in the Nordburgenland region—with high incomes, high educational attainment, and second homes located only a short distance away—does not engage with high-quality cultural events in Hungary (such as the Haydneum concerts in Eszterháza).
5. I also plan to conduct a quantitative questionnaire survey of the population in the town of Fertőszéplak. The purpose of this research is to replicate the 2016 survey to analyze changes over time. The results will reveal developments in the economic, touristic, and social dimensions of this thriving town over the past decade

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