

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING TOURISM IN AREAS WITH TOURISM POTENTIAL IN THE WEST DEVELOPMENT REGION OF ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** *The territory of the West Region can be divided into two sub-regions, confronted with distinct structural problems and different degrees of development. The first area includes the territories of Caraș-Severin and Hunedoara counties, to which is added the city of Nădrag in Timiș County, whose adjacent area has the biggest economic issues. This large area of the region faced a strong decline after 1990, and the restructuring process, slow and with great difficulties, generated a very high unemployment rate, increased poverty in the area and, subsequently, a marked decrease of the population because of emigration. In this context, the authors of this paper present the opportunities for development of the area through tourism, because the West Region has a rich tourist potential. All these tourist resources can contribute especially to the development of rural areas in the region being, at the same time, an alternative to solving problems in rural communities; on the other hand, they could solve the problems of the urban population.*

**Key words:** economic issues, tourism potential, development, tourism forms

### INTRODUCTION

Knowledge, research, improvement. and development of rural area are complex activities of vital importance for each country, both through the dimension of the rural area expressed by its area and by the share of the occupied population, as well as by the major importance of the rural economy consisting in productive, services, cultural-social, habitat, and tourism activities.

The main tourist fields presented by the RRNP refers to:

- Recovery and highlighting of the traditional cultural heritage by capitalizing on castle, fortified churches, monasteries, defence towers, curias, pilgrims, traditional gastronomy, traditional villages and houses, (former) mountain forest railways, narrow railway trains (to be develop at national level), and wine routes; in addition to this, the restoration of the mountain shelters, of the sheepfolds, and of the water mills routes in Banatul Montan;

- Modernization, maintenance, and extension of the visiting infrastructure of ecotourism destinations (visiting centers of protected areas, botanical and zoological thematic routes, etc.).

Recovery of the legislation related to mountain infrastructure and modernization, maintenance and extension of mountain routes (retreats, cabins, paths) and the broadening of the legislative framework for pedestrian, velo, nauticals without engine, and equestrian routes and financing pilot infrastructures are important factors of sustainable, inclusive rural development of the mountain area through mountain rural tourism.

Tourism should be regarded as a system including both offer and demand factors. Within this system, *demand factors* are international tourist markets, local tourist markets, attractions, facilities, and tourist services provided by residents. *Offer factors* within the tourist system are attractions (natural, cultural, etc.) and tourist activities, accommodation and other facilities and tourist services, transport, infrastructure, and institutional elements.

Although the impact that tourism may have is well known, however, the effects it can produce are ignored.

It is much easier to promote tourism than to control it. Its impact can be much more complex than it has been anticipated. It can consider both the creation of new jobs and the increase of the viability of marginal areas.

A complex development, but in an integrated conception, with a socio-economic efficiency, is possible under the conditions in which a systematic approach to problems is applied. In support of this idea, for each tourist area, certain principles and criteria must be taken into account, with a decisive role in its development, such as:

- Capitalizing on resources and developing the area by integrating them into development projects;
- Establishing functional links between the subsystems of the same area through cooperation and partnership in order to make investments that ensure economic and social growth;
- Conserving and improving of the conditions and quality of the environment by building up infrastructure and equipment in accordance with the norms and regulations of environmental protection;
- Achieving a balance in the development of tourist arrangements and supporting capacity of the natural and anthropic environment in order to avoid rapid degradation and exhaustion of tourist resources;
- Carefully capitalizing on resorts, localities, and tourist locations in order to avoid crowds and the location of other industrial, agricultural, and transport investments that might endanger the tourist function of these tourist interest centers.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

To analyze the opportunities of developing tourism in areas with tourist potential in the West Development Region of Romania, a whole range of methods, such as study of literature, field research, observation, synthesis, and generalization was used. The sources of statistical data are represented by the A.T.U. (communes), territorial structures of some offices and agencies (APIA, AFIR, agricultural directorates, associations and cooperatives, local territorial banks, etc.).

## **RESEARCH RESULTS**

The West Development Region of Romania contains four counties: Arad, Timiș, Caraș-Severin, and Hunedoara, with a total area of 32,034 km<sup>2</sup> representing 13.4% of the country's area.

the West Development Region has a rich tourist potential which is, unfortunately, not enough valorise by local authorities. A compact area with varied tourist potential, with special features for agri-tourism, is in the mountain area of Caraș-Severin County, Clisura Dunării, in the Apuseni Mountains (near the city of Brad), as well as in the western and south of Hunedoara County (Retezat, Orăștiei Mountains, Sarmizegetusa). Thermal-balneary tourism (Băile Herculane, Moneasa, Lipova, Buziaș, Geoagiu-Băi, Călan, Vața de Jos), mountain tourism, sports tourism (tourist complexes from Semenic, Muntele Mic, Straja), business tourism (Timișoara) and transit tourism (the international routes Nădlac – Deva and Timișoara – Băile Herculane) are other important opportunities of the West Region.

The authors of the article highlight the main forms of tourism that can develop in the western area, concluding that the social effects of tourism development could benefit both the rural population through the economic effects produced, and tourists who enjoy cheaper tourism and high-quality agri-food produce in the rural area.

### **Analysis of Tourist Resources in Arad County**

Tourism in Arad County is based both on natural heritage and anthropic elements. It also benefits from a favourable position in the western part of Romania, being located on major road (TEN-T 7 and European roads E68 and E671), railway (TEN-T 22) and air (Arad International Airport) communications axes.

From a nature point of view, the relief is relatively well balanced: it decreases from east to west, including mountain sectors (*Codru Moma* and *Zarandului Mountains*), hills (*Lipovei Hills*), plain (*Western Plain*), depressions, gorges, and valleys (*Valea Mureșului*).

The natural resources are made up of protected natural areas (*Lunca Mureșului Nature Park*, *Dealul Mocrea-Ineu Mixed Nature Reserve*, *Moneasa Mixed Nature Reserve*, *Mocrea-Ineu Dendrological Park*) and mineral and geothermal springs (*Moneasa Resort*). The anthropic tourist potential is represented by historical objectives such as the fortresses (*Arad*, *Șiria*, *Șoimoș*, *Dezna*), over 20 castles (*Șiria*, *Curtici*, *Macea*, *Conop*, *Săvârșin*, *Birchiș*, etc.), monasteries, historical and architectural monuments (*Hodoș-Bodrog*, *Lipova*, *Radna*, etc.), churches (*Julița*, *Hălmațiu*, *Țărmure*, *Ionești*, etc.), ethnographic centers (ceramic production centers in *Bârsa*, *Târnavița*; folk costumes in *Șicula*, *Bârsa*, *Buteni*; traditional folk customs – *Girls' Fair from Mount Găina*, *Kiss Fair from Hălmațiu*), and rural economy (*water mills in Rădești*, *Valea Mare*, *Jacobini*, *Vârfurile*, *Roșia*).

The tourist potential of the county allows the practice of several types of tourism:

- Balneo-climatic tourism;
- Cultural tourism;
- Rural tourism;
- Active and sports tourism;
- Speleological tourism;
- Hunting and fishing tourism;
- Business tourism, weekend tourism, and transit tourism.

The main tourist areas of the county are the *Codru Moma Mountains*, *Mureșului Valley*, *Aradului Vineyard*, and the municipality of *Arad*.

### **Analysis of Tourist Resources in Caraș-Severin County**

Caraș-Severin County is known for the practice of tourism due to its remarkable tourism potential at regional and national level – mountainous relief and anthropic resources. This potential is enhanced by the favourable position of the county, on the border with Serbia, on two pan-European transport corridors, namely corridors IV and VII (Danube).

The natural resources are based on the predominantly mountainous relief, represented by the *Banat Mountains* as a whole and, partially, by the *Retezat-Godeanu* group of the *Southern Carpathians*, on the important and extensive protected natural areas, of which four have a national park status (*Semenic-Cheile Caraș National Park*, *Cheile Nerei-Beușnița National Park*, *Domogled-Valea Cernei National Park*, and *Retezat National Park*), and one has a nature park status (*Iron Gates Nature park*), on thermal and mineral springs (*Băile Herculane Resort*), and on ski resorts (*Semenic*, *Muntele Mic*).

The anthropic tourist potential is well represented by archaeological vestiges of some *Geto-Dacian fortresses* (*Bocșa*, *Colțan*, *Ocna de Fier*, *Oravița*, *Sasca Montană*, etc.), *Roman castra* (*Vărădia*, *Mehadia*, *Teregova*, *Moldova Veche*, etc.), *medieval fortresses* (*Carașova*, *Mehadia*, *Coronini*, *Caransebeș*, etc.), *historical and religious art monuments* (monasteries, wall churches, and wooden churches), *historical and civil art monuments*, *architectural ensembles* (*Caransebeș*, *Oravița*, *Băile Herculane*, *Bocșa*, and *Anina*), *museums and memorial houses* (*Reșița*, *Caransebeș*, *Oravița*, *Vărădia*, *Ocna de Fier*, *Anina*, *Moldova Nouă*),

ethnography and folklore (folk architecture, popular techniques and equipments, fabrics, stitches, folk costumes, folk ceramics, ethno-folklore museums, traditional folk events, etc.).

**Table 1.**

**Important tourist areas of Caraș-Severin County**

<b>1</b>	<b>„Semenic” Tourist Area</b>
	Semenic mountain tourism resort
	Văliug – Crivaia
	Gărăna – Trei Ape
	Reșița – Secu
	Cheile Carașului – Carașova
	Munceii Dognecei – Bocșa-Ocna de Fier – Dognecea
<b>2</b>	<b>„Aurora Banatului” Tourist Area</b>
	Cheile Buhui – Mărghițaș – Anina
	Cheile Minișului – Bozovici – Țara Almăjului
	Cheile Rudăriei – Eftimie Murgu
	Cheile Nerei – Beușnița – Sasca – Ilidia – Oravița
<b>3</b>	<b>Muntele Mic – Poiana Mărului Tourist Area</b>
	Stațiunea turistică montană Muntele Mic – Caransebeș
	Poiana Mărului – Oțelu Roșu
	Valea Bistrei – Marga
	Valea Ruscăi – Rusca Montană
<b>4</b>	<b>„Băile Herculane” Tourist Area</b>
	Stațiunea balneoclimaterică Băile Herculane
	Valea Cernei – Domogled – Ineț
<b>5</b>	<b>„Clisura Dunării” Tourist Area</b>
	Clisura Dunării de Sus – Baziaș – Moldova Nouă
	Clisura Dunării de Jos -Berzasca – Cazanele Dunării – Orșova (Mehedinți)

*Source: Strategia de dezvoltare a județului Caraș-Severin (2021-2027)*

The main types of tourism that can be practiced are sports and adventure tourism, balneo-climate tourism, but also those related to anthropic resources: cultural tourism, rural tourism, event tourism, and transit tourism. The main tourist areas of the county are: the Țarcu – Muntele Mic – Godeanu – Retezat mountain area, Cernei Valley – Cernei Mountains – Mehedinți Mountains, the Danube Gorges, the Banat Mountains, Timiș – Cernei Mountains.

**Analysis of Tourist Resources in Hunedoara County**

Hunedoara County has, like Caraș-Severin County, a very important tourist asset – exceptional natural resources, as well as a cultural and historical heritage of national and even European importance. Although the location and accessibility to Western Europe is not as favorable as in the other three counties, however, the county is crossed by the Pan-European IV transport corridor, the TEN-T 7 road axis and the TEN-T 22 rail axis.

The natural tourist resources are based on the very attractive forms of mountainous and depressed relief (the Meridional Carpathians – the Retezat – Godeanu and Șureanu groups, Poiana Ruscă Mountains and Apuseni Mountains), protected natural areas of which two are national parks (Retezat National Park, Jiu Gorges National Park) and two are nature parks (Dinosaurs Geopark Nature Park – Hațegului Country, Grădiștea Muncelului – Cioclovina Nature Park), dendrological parks (Simeria Arboretum), thermal and mineral springs (Geoagiu-Băi, Vața de Jos), and ski resorts (Straja, Parâng).

Anthropic tourist resources are numerous and varied and include Roman archaeological vestiges (Ulpia Traiana Augusta Dacia Sarmizegetusa, Sarmizegetusa Regia), medieval fortresses and castles (Corvin Castle, Deva Fortress), historical and religious art monuments (Deva, Hunedoara, Călugăra), museums and art galleries, ethnography and folklore.

The types of tourism practiced in the county are related to nature, namely mountain, sports, and adventure tourism, spa and recreation tourism, as well as to cultural-historical and economic activities – cultural-historical tourism, rural tourism, industrial tourism, transit tourism. The main tourist areas of the county are represented by the Retezat area – the Hațeg Depression, the Orăștiei Mountains, the Mureș corridor including Deva and its surroundings (Hunedoara, Simeria), Parâng Mountains – Vâlcan – Șureanu, Metaliferi Mountains.

#### **Analysis of Tourist Resources in Timiș County**

Tourism in Timiș County is mainly based on anthropic resources, especially economic and cultural resources, and less natural ones, as is the case for the other three counties. This tourist potential is reinforced by the very favourable position of the county in terms of accessibility and proximity to the western European sales market. The county is located on a Pan-European corridor (IV), on two TEN-T (7 and 22) axes, and it has an international airport (Traian Vuia International Airport).

The natural resources of the county consist in the karst relief forms of the Poiana Ruscă Mountains (Românești and Pietroasa caves), the mineral and thermal water springs (Buziaș, Căacea), nature reserves (Satchinez Ornithological Reserve) and the rich hunting and fish fund.

The tourist offer is completed by medieval castles and fortresses (Huniade Castle in Timișoara), architectural and monastery ensembles (Baroque Palace in Timișoara, Queen Elisabeta Castle in Banloc, Partoș Monastery, Săraca Monastery), cultural events and festivals, museums and memorial houses (Lugoj, Traian Vuia), ethnography and craft art (Banat Village Museum, Dumbrava).

The types of tourism practiced in the county are transit and business tourism, urban tourism, cultural-historical tourism, medical tourism, as well as spa and recreational tourism and hunting and fishing tourism. The main tourist areas of the county include the municipality of Timișoara and its surroundings, the Piedmont area of the Poiana Ruscă Mountains and the Buziaș – Recaș – Lugoj area.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The West Development Region of Romania has an extraordinary natural tourist potential and real opportunities for development of tourism only if important economic investments in the tourist infrastructure and in the transport infrastructure are made, which facilitate and support tourist activities. In turn, tourism, through its activities, generates important jobs and incomes, thus contributing to the general economic development of the region.

In this context, the strategic directions for developing tourism in the West Development Region of Romania can be supported by the strengths of this area: this is why we suggest the following activities to counteract the weaknesses of the region in order to increase its competitiveness on the tourism market:

- Modernizing tourist infrastructure;
- Developing tourist products;
- Promoting tourism;
- Developing human resources in the tourist sector;
- Supporting the development of sustainable tourism;

In our opinion, based on the studies carried out, knowing tourism forms and activities practiced in the West Development Region of Romania, we believe that the most neglected forms, although highly appreciated and sought by tourists, are rural tourism and agritourism. Although these forms of tourism are sought and appreciated by tourists for the much more accessible costs of holidays for a broader category of tourists, in areas with high tourist potential in the West Development Region of Romania, rural tourism and agritourism are little developed.

In order to effectively capitalize on the tourist potential available in the West Development Region of Romania, investments in the tourist infrastructure are necessary, consisting of the modernization of tourist accommodation and food service establishments, development of leisure bases, rehabilitation of access routes, etc.

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