

DIAGNOSIS ANALYSIS OF AGRO-TOURISTIC POTENTIAL OF THE BANAT'S PLAIN

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Abstract *The interest aroused by rural space has increased steadily these last years in the E.U., and rural development is considered as a basic point of Agricultural Community Policy, particularly from the point of view of labour occupancy. Banat's plain area is characterized by a remarkable tourist potential, thus the aim is to apply an integrated policy of sustainable rural development that allows valorising all types of potential in the rural space. By analysing tourism potential in the area we managed to identify three plain areas as a premise for developing the most touristic forms and particularly agro-tourism. We selected the most representative localities in the plain area from the point of view of economic development and of natural and man-made potential (Periam, Teremia Mare, and Cenad). After, a diagnostic analysis was made of the potential (natural, social and geographical, cultural and historical, economic and agro-touristic) and we presented the agro-touristic offer, favouring and restrictive elements in the development of agro-tourism potential in the Banat's plain.*

Keywords: *agro-tourism, rural development, Banat, plain*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainable development starts from the idea that nature as the only source of life resources should be protected for both our present and future. Concerns about sustainable development are the results of a complex of problems that constitute the object of mankind: degradation of environment, uncontrolled expansion of urban areas, and poverty.

The coordinates of sustainable rural development should start from a triple analysis – economical, social and ecological. Any action has its impact therefore this should define sustainable development strategies and policies. Adopting good economic solutions can have negative social or ecological effects. The most dangerous form of pollution is the practicing of intensive and industrialised agriculture: pollution in agriculture means soil pollution at a great scale and with vast ramifications, including human food. Economic development and growth cannot be separated from ecological ones. Rural inhabitants, i.e. the suppliers of touristic services, touristic villages and products, i.e. the touristic offer, are key elements in rural development, in rural tourism and in agro-tourism.

Natural touristic resources in the Banat plain area are represented by the totality of physical and geographical elements which are able to appeal to potential tourists, thus ensuring the valorisation in the area. The natural touristic resources are of great interest in the beginnings of any tourism area and are the starting point in its value that should be ensured by the construction of a proper technical and material basis, capable of warranting tourists' needs.

Cultural and historical attractions, too long considered as less attractive than natural touristy sites, are increasingly more important. Man-made touristic objectives are perhaps nowadays the main elements in assessing a recreational space, also indicating cultural, historical, and economic development level. Man-made touristic sites and natural sites are closely connected.

Practice showed the importance of multi-disciplinary teams in decision making to avoid negative effects. In order to identify problems, resources, trends, and needs, one should analyse sustainable development at every level.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The mapping of Banat's plain area is based on the following criteria:

- identification of plain, hill, and mountain areas;
- assessment of natural potential and of cultural and historical assets;
- access routes, accessibility;
- touristic site groups and their attractiveness index;
- environmental pollution degree;
- urbanising degree, population, and human resources.

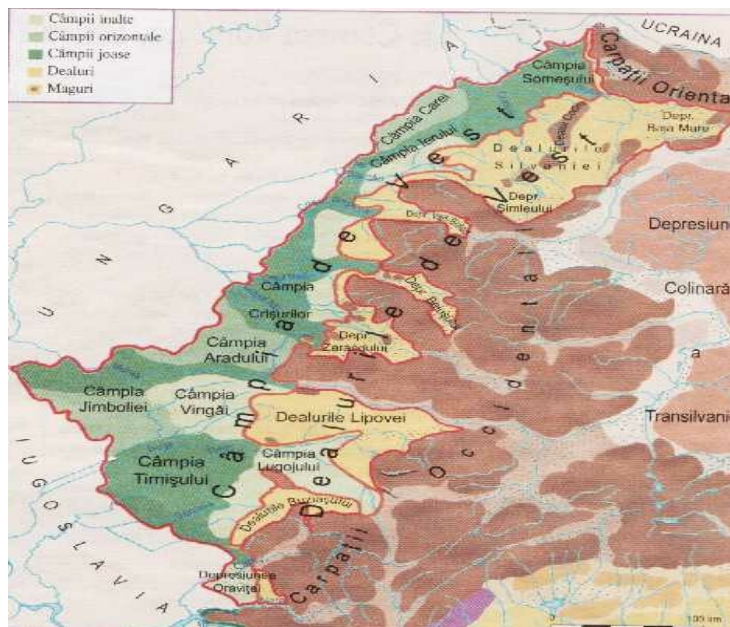
Implementing agro-tourism in the Banat plain area need to observe the following three elements:

- economic agents;
- agro-touristy programmes;
- proper management in organising.

RESEARCH RESULTS

1. Touristic mapping of Banat's Plain

The Banat Plain, as part of the Tisa Plain, occupies approximately 1/3 from the total province area and is graduated in high plain (Vinga, Gataia, Socol, Buzias), terrace plain (Recas, Sudrias, Binis, Mures) and low plain (Bega-Timis, Aranca, Moravita, Jimbolia).



Banat's map

1.1 The Timisului Plain

This area is located in the southern part of Timis County and has 6 towns: Ciacova, Deta, Banloc, Foeni, Ivanda and Diniasi. Near Foeni lies the local high-interest balnear station named Ivanda, with its thermal water springs and curative value. Next we find the Jebel commune, dated 1334. Its Serbian church built in 1871 holds ancient religious paintings.

Banloc commune, situated 6 km from Deta is an ancient settlement, with a castle that dates from 1750 and the only scientific location, the Banloc Park that has emerged by surrounding the old castel. It stretches for 8 ha and contains an important collection of ten 70 years old black pines. In the area we can find two fishing ponds at Ciacova (4 ha) and Deta (3 ha). The area holds the usual fauna and flora, but we must mention that Banloc held the first rice exploitation in Banat that unfortunately is now out of use, traces of irrigation canals and dams can still be seen.

The touristic potential in the area is relatively low both in size and volume. In Deta there is a potential for balnear tourism at its two pools and with its hotel it can serve as a stopping point on the way to Banloc castle or Partos Abbey. Also, the Timis river crosses through Ciacova commune and in Cebza and Gad small camping sites and lodges can be found all along the river.

1.2 The Jimboliei Plain

With its population mainly in the rural area, agriculture is the primary focus. Located in the western part of Timis County, the Jimboliei Plain has nine communes: Lovrin, Beba Veche, Cenad, Dudestii Vechi, Teremia Mare, Sinpetru Mare, Periam, Lenauheim and Comlosu Mare and two towns: Jimbolia and Sinnicolau Mare.

The area is abundant with archeological sites and architectural monuments. Here we can find the Morisena stronghold in Cenda commune, dating since the X-XVIII century, the Periam necropolis from the iron age I B.C. and the roman settlement at Sinnicolau Mare from the II-III century. At least 5 inns and old mansions are found nearby most of them dating from the XVIII century.

The western part of Timis County holds the biggest number of protected areas and natural reservations: the Cenda forest (279.2 ha), the Great Island Cenad (3 ha), the natural reservation for bustard protection at Beba Veche (2.178 ha) and the Igris islands natural reservation (3 ha). Another interesting location is the Sisitac mound, a hillock of about 12-15 meters high of unknown origin that has preserved archaic steppe vegetation. Due to its small dimensions it is in danger of being invaded with weeds and acacia trees, evidence of poor local managing.

The natural reservation at Beba Veche is one of the few location where the bustard (*Otis tarda* L.), once a frequent specie in our country, can be found. In 1980 there were plans to create a reservation with permanent research and protection but judiciary land problems and the lack of funding have made it difficult to the day.

The Mures river has several small islands near Igris but only one has been accepted by the local birds for nesting. They have come from the Great Island Cenad, 10 km down-river where their habitat has been disrupted by massive deforestation. The island has a luxurious vegetation with *Pupulus* sp. and *Salix* sp. and is home to the big and small cormorant (*P. Pygmeius* L.). Any disturbance of the colony is practically impossible, the island being situated at the border with Hungary.

From a touristic point of view we can group the opportunities in three types of activities:

- A recreational tourism and short-period wellness, near the towns of Jimbolia and Sinnicolau Mare with the main attractions being the natural reservations and the thermal water pools.
- A multicultural tourism in a place where there is a high level of inter-ethnic concentration, like the Serbians (Pesca), the Bulgarians (Dudeștii Vechi), the Hungarians (Cenad), the Swabians (Teremia Mare) or the Romanians (Lunga). This type of tourism implies visiting these location in their moment of authentic festivals like the kirwei, ruga, hram or bucsu.
- The vineyard at Teremia Mare, once famous for their red wines can be a starting point for the wine production in the area.

1.3 The Muresului Plain

The area is situated between the Mures and Bega rivers, the Lipovei hills and the Jimboliei plain and is the most extended of the high plains. It has loess deposits and an artificial mineral water spring at Calacea dated 1880. Lipova town has many social and historical touristic sites like the Franciscan and Orthodox Abbey or the ruins of Soimos stronghold and has the potential of becoming an important touristic area.

Nearby, on Sistarovatului Valey lies a balneo-climatic spa that harnesses the mineral spring water for drinking and treatment.

2. Agro-touristic potential of selected localities in Banat's Plain

2.1. Periam

Situated in the NV part of Timis County, in the Jimboliei Plain, Periam sits on the banks of Mures river. It has a surface of 9.834 ha, 2302 existing households and a stable population of 6629 inhabitants making it one of the most populated commune in the whole county.

The first commune record dates to the year 1331 under the name Priamus, later in 1761 being called Periam. In 1892 the hat factory "Lux" opens up, being the first of its kind in the SE Europe, and still to this day uses local raw materials to produce over 500.000 pieces/year. There were over 30 watermills on Mures river, the last one being disbanded in 1944.

The locality has 125 private economical agents with agriculture being the primarily economical activity (7.669 ha arable land cultivated 41.07% with wheat and rye, 25% with corn and 11.17% with sun flower).

Agro-tourism can thrive here in Periam due to the natural potential of Mures river and Periam harbour, the vast cultural and folkloric patrimony of multiethnic blend. Most locals are good farmers and many households have risen to the level of an agro-touristic location due to their hospitality.

2.2. Cenad

With its total surface of 8.491 ha and 1559 households, Cenad village is situated in the western part of the country and is a crossing point into Hungary. It has a rich historical past that has been lost in the mists of years, but its existence since the ancient times is attested historical works. The existing historical Cenad bore different names, "Ziridava" of Geto-Thracian origin, later becoming the residence of a dacian tribe named "Moresiana". Cenad had the first school in our country in the years 1036-1046, with 30 students and the teaching language was Latin.

The basic activity of the area is agriculture with 6505 ha arable land. Being a border town on a major road artery which makes the transition to Hungary, has the advantage that it is transited by many tourists. So with a good promotion of local agro-tourism in the future in a village where tourists are always coming or leaving, Cenad can become a resting place where tourists can enjoy the culinary quality of the place.

2.3. Teremia Mare

The first documented record of the village was in the year 1257 and between 1690 and 1700 it was a german colony. Teremia Mare is situated in Jimboliei plain in the western part of Timis County.

Drilling to average depths revealed potential geothermal waters with temperatures of 80-90 degrees that now run the heat for 65 institutions and households. The methane gas exploited from the geothermal waters is being used in 85 households.

The cultural and historical potential of the area is significant, with many historical monuments such as "The Tumuli Plain" at Nerau, the Romano-Catholic Church from the XVIII century and the "Holy trinity" monument from 1806. There is also the cultural Teremia Mare centre that houses the Wine and Vineyard Museum and an art collection

Teremia Mare area is one of the vineyard areas of Banat with 452 ha and the agro-touristic potential is high due to the geothermal waters and historic background. A great part of its inhabitants has moved to Germany and their desire to know their backgrounds and origins can be a starting point, many tourists still come to attend the religious ceremonies. Through rural development programs like SAPARD, the city council can encourage its citizens to develop households as agro-touristic accommodations.

CONCLUSIONS

Tourism in this region of Romania is much less developed than in other parts of the country, such as the Prahova Valley, southern Transylvania with two poles Sibiu and Brasov, Black Sea, and Bucovina.

Promoting and developing agro-tourism in Banat plain area will result in an increase of social and economic potential of the area, and through large scale agro-touristic activities villages in the area will be able to preserve their real value.

To further help the development of agro-tourism in the three localities described above, we analysed the favouring and restrictive elements of each establishment.

Periam, a place with an abundance of favouring elements, an urbanistic plan for Periam harbor has already been made with 350 cottages planed and 40 already been buildt. The natural environment and Mures bank gives it a special attraction, and a plus is the good accesability both by car and by train. Its rural architecture and rich history, along with the thermal water spring make it a desirable area. As for the restrictive aspect, the Mures bank has not been arranged, there is no museum to display the ceramics and metal objects and the thermal water is not being currently used. Also a large part of the german population has left the village, losing part of the old customs. A sugestion would be if the town hall acted as a local promotor and redirect more funds into the infrastructure and roads.

At Cenad, the natural environment is special, with islands and forests that house vast fauna and flora. Fishing, hunting and sports can be practice in the area and its proximity to main road artery and border make it appealing. The main problem is the lack of agrotouristic housing that determines the foreigners to seek rest in other areas. Also, most of the reservation are off-limits being in the hungarian part.

Teremia Mare has a great rural potential due to its vineyards and wines, but also the geothermal water pools with temperatures of 80-90 degrees. Unfortunately, neither the vineyard plantations nor the pools are being looked after and are currently in a bad condition. The rural infrastructure is poorly developed with only 2 km of modernised road and with almost 1 km of thermal water piping without isolation or protection.

After diagnosis analysis and SWOT analysis of agro-touristic potential we identified the following strategic objectives for the development of agro-tourism in the Banat plain area:

- the development of regional organisational conditions specialised in promoting agro-tourism and alternative tourism;
- the official acknowledgement of areas with a rich touristic potential and the development of district cooperation with concrete responsibilities;
- the union of efforts in consolidating forms representing genre offers, in which both owners and local councils play a role;
- the conservation and protection of environment by taking all the measures concerning meadows, water courses, forest limits, etc.;
- the mending and modernising of roads and equipment;
- the setting of population and the control of youth exodus;
- the development of information and instruction of rural population;
- the protection, conservation, and rehabilitation of natural patrimony in areas of scientific interest and of cultural and historical patrimony.

Agro-touristic network in the Banat plain area should be represented at three levels: first a local level through economic agents, then the surrounding area through the Agro-touristic Agency and finally a national program through a dispatcher's office that centralise demand and offer and designs national promotional programmes.

These organisational levels focussed on agro-touristic activity correspond to the location:

- at a local level: lodging, boarding, and recreational activities;
- at a district level: identifying and certifying households, instructing and training inhabitants willing to practice agro-tourism, providing assistance and consultancy, surveying and encouraging agro-touristic activities, promoting agro-tourism, and integrating it in the national and international circuit;
- at a national level: developing national strategies for developing agro-tourism, developing legislative draft bills concerning the functioning of agro-tourism, developing and improving criteria for selecting agro-touristic boarding houses, training specialists in the field of agro-tourism, developing a national agro-tourism network and a data bank concerning agro-touristy offer, advertising, and publicity.

As a result of our analysis of the Banat plain area, we suggest the constitution of an Agro-tourism Agency that represent the interests of the area on both national and international levels. This agency should help inhabitants willing to practice this kind of business. It should be sustained through subscriptions from members practicing agro-tourism, and fees for services provided by the Agency: management and international activities (speleology, mountain climbing, mountain biking, endo-tourism), intermediation fees, fees for organising training courses and sponsorship.

Rural households have a lot to get from this Agency, particularly as far as professional activity and agro-tourism management are concerned. Ensuring a greater flow

of tourists, special offers, promoting new ideas can only become true if there is a unitary and coherent conception.

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