

## CONTEMPORARY ETHNOGRAPHIC REALITIES FROM THE VILLAGES OF CARAS-SEVERIN COUNTY

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**Abstract:** Caras-Severin County is located in the southwestern part of Romania. Through its varied, particularly attractive relief, where numerous historical and archaeological monuments are integrated with the rich ethnographic, folkloric and cultural traditions, it offers great possibilities for tourism in the most diverse forms. Depending on the particularities of the landscape and the tourist objectives (natural and anthropogenic), several tourist areas can be defined within the county, which, in turn, are further subdivided into isolated objectives. Numerous elements of touristic value related to the natural setting and especially to the mountain area, to cultural-historical and art monuments, the richness of the ethno-folkloric fund, complemented by the position in the territory, the variety of traffic arteries constitute a tourist offer with a high potential, especially a rural one.

**Key words:** village, ethnographic value, Caras-Severin County

### INTRODUCTION

The Romanian rural mountain spaces are much more disadvantaged than the rest of the spaces on the territory of the country from the point of view of the possibility of practicing agricultural activities and at the same time offer the optimal premises for reorientation towards other complementary activities to the basic one - agriculture. This dual vision of the mountain spaces represented the main motivation to address the theme of the tourist [3,5] (agritourism) phenomenon, [1,2,10] seen as a good alternative for socio-economic revitalization of these spaces [7,8,14].

The Romanian village, through its millennial existence, represented the vein of continuity of our people on this territory, today's Romania, as an adaptation to the geographical environment, which constituted the crucible of its formation, of its culture and civilization. The agritourism potential of the Romanian village [9,6] is particularly complex, comprising natural and cultural-historical components of great variety and tourist appeal.

The analysis of the tourist Caras village is necessary, thereby offering a viable alternative for the development of the rural environment, [4,13] for the reorganization of the economic, social and cultural life currently existing.

Located in the southwestern part of Romania, in an area where all forms of relief meet, with the rich plains of Caras and Timis, with hills with extensive orchards and forests, with mountains that shelter countless flocks of sheep, with unsuspected underground riches, with its mild climate, Caras-Severin County is an ancient hearth of Romanian history.

In terms of size, Caras-Severin County is the third largest from the country and has rich industrial traditions, the first furnace, the first mountain locomotive from South-Eastern Europe, but also extraordinary natural beauties. Numerous parks and nature reserves have been established to protect the natural heritage and for the enjoyment of tourists.

From a territorial administrative point of view, Caras-Severin County has 77 territorial administrative units of which:

- 2 municipalities Resita, Caransebes;
- 6 cities: Anina, Baile Herculane, Bocsa, Moldova Noua, Oravita, Otelu Rosu;

- 69 communes with 287 rural localities.

**Table 1.**

**The administrative-territorial frame of the County**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Component towns</i>	<i>Belonging villages</i>
<b>A. MUNICIPALITIES</b>		
1. Resita – the county residence	1	1
2. Caransebes	6	1
<b>B. CITIES</b>		
1. Anina	2	-
2. Baile Herculane	2	-
3. Bocsa	1	-
4. Moldova Noua	4	-
5. Oravita	3	4
6. Otțelu Rosu	2	-
<b>C. COMMUNES – 69</b>	<b>COMPONENT VILLAGES - 287</b>	

*Source: Caras-Severin County Council*

The share of natural resources is overwhelming. The thermal waters, the generous mountain setting (65.4% of the county area), the Danube gorge, the five parks (four national and one natural), the hydrographic network with some of the most pitoresque gorges in the country and the multitude of caves and karst formations make natural resources the main tourist attraction of the county.

The relief is characterized by a great variety - mountains (65.4%), depressions (16.5%), hills (10.8%) and plains (7.3%). The geographic landscape of the county, through the relief forms and the very large number of karst phenomena, with a special geological structure and a climate with Mediterranean nuances have determined the maintenance and development of a varied and rich biodiversity.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The purpose of this research is to bring at light the ethnographic realities from the villages of Caras-Severin County, by pointing the main folklore centers, cultural events with tourist attraction, specific ethnographic areas, each individualized by certain characteristic features. In order to achive the proposed objective was use as research method the qualitative study.

**RESEARCH RESULTS**

According to the production activities, in the lowland region predominate the villages that practice the cultivation of cereals, technical plants, vegetables and also animal breeding. In the Piedmont and mountain areas, the village practices an agriculture dominated by cattle breeding and fruit growing. Parts of the products obtained are used in the municipalities and towns of the county.

As a consequence of its geographical position in mountain landscapes, near reservoirs or on mountain slopes, with unique scenery, several villages acquire, in addition to their traditional economic attributes of cattle breeders and fruit producers, climatic and touristic functions, new occupations, which highlight the beauty and charm of the montage landscape of Caras-Severin County (Poiana Marului, Garana, Brebu Nou, Valiug, etc.).

The development process of industry and services both in the old hearths of activity in the cities and in the network of rural localities (in Ruschita, Rusca Montana, Constantin Daicoviciu, Toplet, etc.) has positive influences on the villages, [11,12] contributing to their uplift from an economic point of view as well as urban networks (water, sewer, natural gas, fixed and mobile telephony).

In choosing the position and geographical location, the village showed an obvious preference for the corridors between the mountain massifs, such as, for example, those along the Danube, Timis and Bistra, as well as for depressions (Almaj, Ezeris), with traces of material culture from prehistory. The type of valley with a variety of terraces and slopes is specific throughout the mountainous and hilly area. The numerous advantages - river water, accessibility to trade routes, procurement of goods, exchange of ideas and culture - justify the preferences of the population for the organization of rural sits in such geographical settings. Even in the plain regions, the river valleys - Nera, Caras, Barzava, Poganiș, Timis, with their tributaries, acted as polarizing factors of the rural settlements, which organized a mixed agriculture in the meadow areas with fertile soils, suitable among others to vegetable crops also.

The morphological characters - structure, texture, shape, as well as the size of the villages vary in relation to the nature and potential of the land on which the village was organized (intravillage), but especially the economic background, in continuous diversification, to which the hearth continuously adapted over time and in space. Thus, the average size of rural settlements per county is 725 inhabitants. Consequence of a more complex economic base, we meet villages with more than 3,000 inhabitants (Dognecea, Bozovici, Teregova, etc.) or on the way to becoming real river ports (Old Moldova). They have extended urban areas, compact structures, solid constructions (brick, tile, stone) with a high degree of comfort, building networks - which brings them much closer to the city.

The vast majority of rural localities from Caras-Severin County are classified in medium in size localities taking in the inhabitants. Among them are the villages with compact densities (Fizes, Ghertenis, Domasnea, Mehadia, etc.) with wealthy and rationally organized households.

There are rural localities with a population of less than 500 inhabitants, a fact that can be explained considering, in the case of many of them, the mountainous relief, which is more difficult to access and with conditions less favorable to human life. This contributed to the dispersion of the population in very small settlements. In the Cornereva commune, for example, there are 40 villages, most of which have less than 100 inhabitants. Similar to it is the Sichevita commune, which has 19 villages.

A similar situation can be found in the Almaj Depression, where 19 villages from the 34 existing ones have a population between 50 and 150 inhabitants. In all of them, the agricultural land is interspersed between the households that communicate with each other only through paths, winding through a suite of settlements with which they resemble in terms of architecture and way of placement in space. This geographical reality raises complicated systematization problems, because the same pastoral economic capitalization of the lands that created their conservation.

Given the diversity of the relief and the conditions for the appearance of localities in Caras-Severin County, the typology of localities is varied, covering practically all models of the Romanian typology.

The polygonal settlements with rectangular (geometric) street layout are spread in the plain area and the river meadows and are the result of the "population" plans of the Austrian administration. With predetermined plans, these localities have evolved most of the time correctly, as a result of the assumed building regulations, which have become part of the collective behavior. From this category of localities belong: Maureni, Ramna, Scăiș, Fizes, Sosdea, Vermes, Armenis, etc.

The sprawling settlements with a mixed street network are the result of dwellings in the valleys of watercourses in hill and mountain areas. Dominant as number, being the natural consequence of the type of relief in Caras-Severin County, the sprawling localities are represented by:

- the cities of the county: Resita, Bocsa, Otelu Rosu, Oravita, Anina, Moldova Noua as well as

- rural localities such as: Berzasca, Liubcova, Sasca Montana, Ciudanovita, Toplet, Domasnea, Mehadia, Zavoi, Bautari.

Combination of the two typological models, the compact localities with a mixed network (areolar and radial) are the result of slow evolutions of the localities, adapted to the relief conditions. Generally located in depressed areas, they are represented by the municipality of Caransebes and large and medium-sized rural localities such as Bozovici, Ezeris, Brebu, Bania, Iablanita, Farliug, Ramna, Carasova, Buchin.

The category of scattered localities with unordered street grid is specific in Caras-Severin mountain areas and includes small and very small localities. The location in two mountain areas, Retezat and Locvei, groups a significant number of localities into two communes: Sichevita and Cornereva.

The average size of a household of the population in towns and cities (2.82 persons) is smaller than that of a household from communes (3.22 persons).

The house, the architecture of the house is the representative element for the appearance of the villages. The interior of the peasant houses, the crafts such as: weaving, as well as the popular technical installations, the mills, the processing of wool, objects of worship give the unexploited tourist universe of the Banat village. Most of the houses are painted in white and the carpentry is green. The landscape is uniform, neat and gorgeous.

Popular furniture is simple, rarely provided with ornamental motifs, but instead, interior fabrics adorn all homes. Among them we can mention the carpets in the guest room, bed, cradle covers, as well as all kinds of towels.

Referring to the popular artistic creation, we can say that there are no famous centers of folk craftsmen, as in other parts, but there is still no shortage of remarkable leather pieces and masterfully carved wooden objects (wooden cradles in which babies are carried on the paths between settlements). Crafts and pottery are an attraction for tourists. In the villages with tradition, it can be seen kilns for burning pots, the potter's wheel, as well as different crafts workshops.

From this point of view, Caras-Severin County represents a still alive ethnographic-folkloric area, the Romanian population from here - alongside which also live Serbo-Croatians, Swabians, Hungarians - being the creator of a specific art that harmoniously integrates into the unitary ensemble of Romanian popular culture.

In Caras-Severin County, six folklore centers are distinguished, and many cultural events with tourist attraction:

1. The Bistra and Timis Valleys with typical settlements for pastoral life
2. Almaj Valley - popular songs and dances
3. The Danube Valley (Clisura de Sus)
4. Cerna Valley (Craina) - unique objects of folk technique - mills.
5. Caras Valley - old cultural traditions
6. Barzava Valley (area where Germans, Hungarians, Serbs, Czechs, Slovaks live alongside Romanians) - popular port, ceramics.

**Table 2.**

**Cultural events in Caras-Severin County that may be events with tourist attraction**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Manifestation type</b>	<b>Period</b>
Danube Summer Folk Song and Dance Festival	Folk performance	June – Moldova Noua
Cultural exchange with the town of Grebenat in Serbia	Choreographic musical show	June – Racajdia
The international folklore festival "Hercules"	Parade of folk costumes, folklore show	July – Herculaneum Baths
International Jazz Festival	Established artists from all continents	July – Garana
The national festival of peasant brass bands "Oktober Song"	Peasant brass bands from Moldova, Oltenia and Banat participate	October – Caransebes
The "Sandu Florea" popular music contest festival	Vocal and instrumental contestants participate	April – Armenis
Vasile Varadeanu Choir Festival	Choirs from Banat participate	May - Oravita
Banat Black Pine Festival	Artistic collectives from Caras-Severin, Mehedinti and Gorj counties participate	June – Herculaneum Baths
The celebrations of Reșita	Artistic collectives from the country and the county	June – Resita
Choreography camp	Choreography from the Western area of Romania	June – Herculaneum Baths
The Golden Cauldron Festival	The ethnic Serbs from Caras-Severin and Timis participate	August – Moldova Noua
The "George Motoia Craiu" Festival	Vocal soloists and instrumentalists from the country participate	September – Oravita
The "Aurelia Fatu Radutu" national folk music competition festival	Guests from the country and the county	October – Resita – Bocsa
Preserving traditions with spring masks, parade and balls of spring masks	The most successful masks	March – Armenis, Ciclova Romana, Slatina Timis, Lapusnicu Mare, Eftimie Murgu, Bania, Sichevita, Moldova noua
The procession of spring. Spring colloquim in the field of ethnography and folklore	Traditional objectives from the county	May - Resita
Preservation of spring customs "Measuring the sheep"	Preserving the most authentic customs	April – May Banita, Sichevita, Valea Bistrei, Valea Timisului, Farliug
Meeting with the sons of the village	Preservation on audio-video support of customs from localities with tradition	Moceris, Ispas, Saint George, Armenis, Submarginea, Lapusnicu Naidas – May, Poiana (Buchin) – June, Calnic (Resita) – June, Valea Timisului – June, Lescovița – August, Prisian (Buchin) – August, Sadova Noua – September, Sadova Veche – September, Bania – September, Buchin – September, Sopotu Nou – October, Teregova – October, Fenis – October, Ravensca – November.
The procession of spring in Caras Valley, the Bat Festival	Traditional collectives from the area participate	May - Oravița
The holidays of Topletu	The formation in the area	June - Topleț
The rachia festival, the Ghita Rica Festival	Presentation of traditional products - show performed by bands from the area.	August - Teregova

*Source: Caras-Severin County Council*

The contemporary ethnographic realities in the villages of Caras-Severin County are so rich in values of civilization and traditional and current popular culture, that they keep tourist interest constantly awake. Phenomena and characteristic aspects of traditional popular culture are preserved here. There are households with a reinforced perimeter in several localities-Cornereva, Mehadia, Prigor, Jablanita, Teregova, Marga, etc., villages with a reinforced perimeter, especially in Rudaria, pastoral complexes specific to Banat, interior textiles, characteristic for traditional Banat peasant house, talented craftsmen,

especially potters and cobblers, a popular port with distinct features due, in part, to the excessive use of shiny gold thread in ornamentation, popular technical installations of old tradition, among which we note mills, peasant whirlpools, fishing tools and techniques specific to fishing in the Danube, ethnographic museums with a rich heritage, as well as original traditions and customs. The wealth of ethnographic testimonies and their variety is great, as in the case of other counties with strong traditions of popular culture.

One of the most famous ethnographic areas is the "Land of Zarand". Some notable localities in this field are: Batsa (popular port and ceramics); Barzava (ceramic center); Birchis-Capalnas (red ceramics and pottery); Buteni (popular wear: popular costumes in which red and black predominate, skirts).

Romanian folk art is, through its ancient tradition and the variety of its forms of expression, one of the most complex and - at the same time - attractive aspects of our popular culture.

The territory of Caras-Severin County includes several ethnographic areas, each individualized by certain characteristic features: Bistra Valley, Sebesului Valley, Timisului Valley, Timis-Cerna Corridor and Danube Gorge.

*Bistra Valey area* represents-due to its specificity-an important historical and ethnographic research objective, summing up essential features, common to the county, but differentiating - through some peculiarities related to color, decorative art or structure.

For centuries, the basic occupations were shepherding, cattle breeding, agriculture and fruit growing. Along time, a certain specialization of crafts from Bistra Valley was achieved in the villages - some having as main occupation the fabrication of skirts and woodwork, others with woodworking.

Located in the intra-mountainous depression guarded by the mountains and crossed by the Timis River, the *area* of the *Timis Valley* is characterized by a rugged relief, the reduced surface of arable land and, above all, the low productivity of land, which made the main occupation of the inhabitants to be fruit growing and cattle breeding.

In the *area* of the *Almaj Depression*, shepherding-along with fruit growing and agriculture-was, until recently, the main occupation of the locals. The former development of milling here explains the presence of an impressive number of water mills-constituting an important category of peasant installations that attracted the attention of ethnographers.

The *area of Carasova* is, from an ethnographic point of view, one of the most interesting. The cohabitation of the Romanian population with the Serbo-Croatian population determined a mutual influence of the port - it presenting a wide chromatic area that delights the eye through the alternation of geometric and floral motifs.

In the *area* of the *Danube Gorge*, which stretches from Bazias to Orșova, the inhabitants practiced, since ancient times, sedentary shepherding combined with mountain agriculture-occupations conditioned by the characteristics of the natural environment. To these are added fishing, fruit growing, viticulture, milling (as evidenced by the numerous water mills, with a horizontal wheel or with clowns) and woodworking.

Undoubtedly, the most famous specific element of the area is the plum rachia, beautifully packed or in pet, in containers that demonstrate the clarity, color and age. An annual rachia fair is organized in various locations: Baile Herculane, Zorlentu Mare, Armenis and Bautar.

Sheep's cheese from the villages on the Bistra Valley and from the Timis and Cerna corridors, villages that have pastures in the alpine and subalpine area of the mountains: Tarcu, Godeanu and Cerna.

Afinata - a special drink that is made from blueberries picked in August from the alpine and subalpine areas of the Tarcu, Godeanu, Cerna and Semenice Mountains, in the

villages of Banat and in the rural guesthouses on the Bistra Valley, the Timis Valley and the Cerna Valley and also in the villages of Brebu Nou, Garana and Valiug.

## CONCLUSIONS

It can, therefore, be easily stated - even after this brief review of the basic features of the main ethnographic areas from Caras-Severin County - that, through their characteristic elements of morphological structure, they preserve the unitary legacy of an ancient historical substrate, in which we discover the specifics of the Daco-Romanian autochthonous culture, but grafted - over time - with other cultural influences, preserved in different ways, then assimilated and interpreted in a specific way.

Ancestral Romanian customs should be used by agritourism service providers to attract tourists to the areas where these services are practiced. These customs are more frequently practiced during the winter, Christmas and New Year holidays. Spending Christmas and New Year according to the model of tradition becomes for the modern man the unique chance to know directly the most precious values of popular spirituality. The poetry of the carols, the dance, the music, the gestures and the impressive diversity of the ceremonial costumes, with symbolic state, incite curiosity.

Specific gastronomic elements are polenta with cheese, bacon (klisa), ham, dishes traditionally prepared from pork, mutton, dishes with Hungarian influences (goulash, potatoes with paprika), Swabian dishes such as strudel, dishes Serbian, Czech, Ukrainian; sarmale, steak in the dough are just a few of the multitude of gastronomic products specific to the geographical area of Mountain Banat and Varset. On the occasion of holidays and local festivals, meetings with village sons, gastronomic contests are organized.

However, there are also problems related to the correct utilization from a tourist point of view of the products specific to the area: food registration, improper packaging, European rules that endanger the originality of the product, the lack of restaurants with a specialty.

In conclusion: the development potential of gastronomy in Caras-Severin County is great. In this sense, it is necessary to organize as many cross-border gastronomic festivals as possible with the eight municipalities from South Banat, with the occasion of these events and manifestations to establish certain gastronomic records.

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