

## LOCAL TOURISM - A FORM OF THERAPY THROUGH REDISCOVERING THE TREASURES AROUND US AND "HEALING CLOSE TO HOME"

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***Abstract.** The paper "Local tourism - a form of therapy by rediscovering the treasures around us and "healing close to home" proposes an analysis of the potential of tourism in Timiș and Caraș-Severin counties, two regions that harmoniously combine natural and cultural heritage. In an era of globalization and distant destinations, the work brings to the fore the charm of the places that are right "a step away from home" – from the picturesque villages in the Făget area and the vineyards of Recaș, to the spectacular landscapes of the Danube Gorge, the Nera Gorges or the resorts of Baile Herculane and Văliug. Local tourism is seen not only as an economic activity, but as a link between people, traditions and nature. By capitalizing on existing resources and promoting authentic experiences, it contributes to the sustainable development of rural communities, to the preservation of cultural identity and to the formation of an emotional bond between the visitor and the place. The paper emphasizes the idea that the real tourist treasures are not necessarily the famous ones, but those that hide stories, silence and local soul. By rediscovering Timiș and Caraș, we are actually rediscovering the essence of an authentic, simple and profound Romania.*

***Key words:** local tourism, rural tourism, sustainable development, authentic experiences*

### INTRODUCTION

The counties of Caraș-Severin and Timiș, located in western Romania, represent two areas with a special tourist potential, where nature, traditions and cultural heritage are harmoniously intertwined. [2] From the spectacular landscapes of the Semenic Mountains and the Nera Gorges, to the charm of the Banat villages and the urban vitality of Timisoara, these places offer multiple opportunities for relaxation, knowledge and rediscovery of inner balance. Local tourism thus acquires therapeutic valences, inviting "healing close to home", by reconnecting with nature and the authentic values of the community.

Today, the counties of Caraș-Severin and Timiș are at an important moment, in which the development of tourism must be combined with the protection of the environment and the promotion of local identity. The region is distinguished by the diversity of natural landscapes, spa resources, traditions and specific gastronomy, which are not only tourist attractions, but also essential elements for responsible tourism that is beneficial for the physical and mental health of visitors.

### MATERIAL AND METHOD

This paper aims to analyze the role of local tourism as a form of therapy and means of rediscovering community values in Caraș-Severin and Timiș counties. The paper will also discuss the challenges associated with tourism development, such as the need to conserve natural resources, protect cultural heritage and involve local communities in promoting sustainable tourism. This paper will highlight both the opportunities and challenges shaping the future of local tourism as a form of 'healing close to home' in this region rich in natural and traditional resources.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The counties of Caraș-Severin and Timiș are located in the south-west of Romania, being part of the historical region of Banat. Their geographical position, on the border with Serbia and close to Hungary, gives them a strategic importance and a high tourist potential. Caraș-Severin stands out for its predominantly mountainous and hilly relief, dominated by the Semenic, Aninei and Locvei Mountains, while Timiș, with its residence in Timișoara, is located in the plain area, offering easy accessibility and well-developed road and rail connections. Timisoara's "Traian Vuia" International Airport is the main air entry point for tourists who want to explore the mountainous Banat.

Historically, these territories have been influenced by multiple civilizations – Dacian-Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian – which have left their mark on local culture, architecture and traditions.

The development of tourism in Caraș-Severin and Timiș counties reflects a diversity of tourist forms, which contribute to capitalizing on the natural and cultural resources of the region. [3] In Caraș-Severin, spa, mountain and ecological tourism occupies a central place. The Baile Herculane resort remains a major attraction, recognized for its sulphurous hot springs and for the climate with therapeutic effects on rheumatic and respiratory diseases. At the same time, the Nera Gorges – Beușnița National Park, Ochiul Beiului Lake, Beușnița Waterfall or the area of the Trei Ape and Văliug mountain lakes attract more and more tourists passionate about ecotourism, hiking and relaxation in the middle of nature.

In Timiș County, urban and cultural tourism is developing around the municipality of Timișoara, a city with a rich historical and architectural heritage, declared European Capital of Culture in 2023. The city's cultural events, festivals, and multicultural heritage contribute to increasing interest in educational and recreational tourism. In the rural area, the Banat localities promote traditional tourism, authentic gastronomy and experiences related to village life, offering visitors a form of reconnection with the simple and authentic values of the place.

From an economic and social point of view, local tourism has an increasingly important role in supporting the communities in the area. The revitalization of guesthouses, local initiatives to promote traditional products and the involvement of young people in tourism activities have contributed to the diversification of the offer and the creation of new jobs. At the same time, tourism based on respect for the environment and cultural heritage fosters sustainable development, maintaining the balance between the need for progress and the protection of natural resources. [1]

Local tourism in Caraș-Severin and Timiș is not just about relaxation and recreation, but becomes a real form of therapy – a "healing close to home". The direct contact with nature, the discovery of local traditions, the tranquility of the villages and the hospitality of the people offer visitors a state of balance and regeneration. Thus, tourism is transformed into a means of restoring the connection between man and the environment, between the past and the present, between the individual and the community.

Tourists can reconnect with nature and find peace and quiet in the following attractions in Caraș-Severin County: Herculane Baths, Nera Gorges, with Beușnița waterfall and Ochiul Beiului Lake, Dognecea Springs, Danube Gorge, Sasca Montana Village, Apple Glade

Tourists can also reconnect with the environment in the following attractions in Timiș County: Buziaș, Charlottenburg Village, Recaș Vineyard, Margina, Făget Villages, Surduc Lake

### ***Caraș-Severin County – nature that heals***

Caraș-Severin is, without a doubt, one of the most spectacular counties in Romania. Its landscapes, from mountains to caves, lakes, gorges and hot springs, make it a true "natural healing laboratory".

#### ***1. Herculane Baths – the source of silence***

The Baile Herculane resort, attested from the Roman period, is considered one of the oldest spa resorts in Europe. Its sulphurous thermal waters and mountain air create a unique combination for relaxation and restoration. Beyond the medical aspect, Herculane has a soothing energy, a special atmosphere: the old buildings, the Cerna River that flows gently and the mountains that surround it give the feeling that time has stopped. For many visitors, simply walking through its narrow streets becomes a form of emotional therapy.



**Figure 1. Panorama of Herculane Baths**

Source: <https://casalira.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/baile-herculane-oras-1.jpg>

#### ***2. Nera Gorges – nature meditation***

Cheile Nerei - Beușnița are a protected area of national interest, included in the Cheile Nerei - Beușnița National Park, which corresponds to the IUCN category IV (mixed type nature reserve), located in Caraș-Severin County, on the administrative territory of the communes of Sasca Montană and Șopotu Nou. [28]

The Nera Gorges, with the Beușnița waterfall and the Ochiul Beiului, are places that impress with their silence and color. The intense green of the forest, the turquoise of the waters and the silence of the birds create a state of deep calm. For the urban tourist, this experience is almost mystical: walking, breathing fresh air and contemplating nature become authentic mindfulness exercises, without labels or technologies.



**Figure 2. Beușnița Waterfall**

Source: <https://www.libertatea.ro/lifestyle/cascada-beusnita-parcul-national-cheile-nerei-3874790>



**Figure 3. Ochiul Beiului Lake**

Source: <https://planiada.ro/destinatii/caras-severin/lacul-ochiul-beiului-252>

### *3. The springs of Dognecea – remedies from earth and water*

In Dognecea, a quiet village near Resita, mineral waters have been flowing from the hills since Roman times. [5] The locals call them "the waters that give life to blood" and have used them for generations for drinking and bathing. In addition to the springs, the Dogega Lakes offer a picturesque setting for relaxation, fishing and walking. The atmosphere is serene, without tourist hustle and bustle, and the fresh air and dense forests create a natural treatment for fatigue and stress.

### *4. Danube Gorge – the balance between stone and water*

The Danube Gorge or Danube Gorge is a geographical region located along the north bank of the Danube, in the south of Banat. [4] The region, which is located on the territories of Caraș-Severin and Mehedinți counties, is bordered by the Nera River to the northwest and the Danube Boilers to the east. Spectacular from a geographical point of view, the area is also very important from the point of view of biodiversity, within it there are an important number of nature reserves, currently included in the Iron Gates Natural Park. [28] The Clisurii area, with the localities of Dubova, Svinița and Eșelnița, offers a quiet, contemplative tourism. The Danube, with its imposing gorge, creates a landscape that inspires respect and humility. The monasteries of Mraconia and St. Anne are spiritual retreats, where many tourists say they feel "a peace that is not explained, but lived."



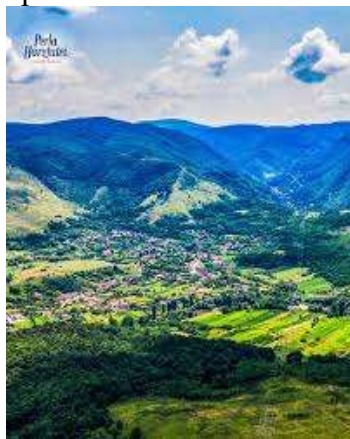
**Figure 4. Panorama of the Danube Gorge**

Source: <https://donauresort.ro/de-vizitat-clisura-dunarii/>

### *5. Sasca Montană Village – the gateway to the Nera Gorges*

Sasca Montană is one of the most charming mountain localities in Banat. The stone houses, the limestone hills and the nearby Nera Gorges make it a destination with a special energy. Sasca Montană is located in the south-west of Caraș-Severin County, Banat and Romania, in the mountainous area of southern Banat at the interference of the Locvei

Mountains to the west, the Almaj Mountains to the east and the Anina Mountains to the north-east, 17 km from the national road DN 57. [8] The place has a village vibe of alchemists – the ruins of the mines, the silence after sunset and the hustle and bustle of the forest create a balance between history and nature. Here tourists can practice ecological tourism, explore the Water Cave of Plopa or meditate on the banks of the Nera, listening to "the voice of the waters that whisper wiser than humans".



**Figure 5. View of the village of Sasca Montană**

*Source: Facebook*

#### *6. Apple Glade – "the place where the clouds rest"*

At the foot of Magura Mountain, the Apple Glade offers a picture that instantly soothes: the clear lake, the cold air and the smell of raw grass. Tourists come here for light hiking, waterfront walks, nature yoga, and meditation. A local says: "Around here, the clouds also stop for a moment, to breathe." This poetic image perfectly captures the therapeutic effect of the place: it makes you stop time.



**Figure 6. The painting of the Apple Glade**

*Source: <https://traveleurope.ro/turism-1895.html>*

#### ***Timiș – gentle hills, quiet villages and healing through culture***

##### *1. Buziaș – the waters that "tame the heart"*

Buziaș, also known as Băile Buziaș, is a city in Timiș County and represents one of the most important resorts in Romania. [6] Although better known, Buziaș remains an underrated gem. The dendrological park, the mineral water baths and the romantic architecture of the colonnades offer an ideal setting for relaxation. Locals say that "the waters of Buziaș tame the heart" – and this metaphorical effect is supported by medical research on the benefits of water on the cardiovascular system and beyond. Health tourism here also becomes soul tourism: the slow walk among the chestnut trees looking at the

squirrels but also the old people playing backgammon under the colonnades offers an image of natural balance.



**Figure 7. Buziaș**

Source: Facebook



**Figure 8. The colonnade of Buziaș**

## *2. The village of Charlottenburg – the symmetry of silence*

With an atypical name for a settlement in Romania, the village of Charlottenburg or Șarlota in Timiș stands out for the shape of its settlement in the shape of a circle. Declared a historical monument, the village retains the air of an era long over. At every step a deep silence follows you, letting you discover the interesting history of the place. [10] The main tourist attractions in the circular village of Timis are the few remaining secular mulberry trees, the Swabian houses, the hunting grounds, but also the Roman-Catholic church of the village. You can spend a few days in complete silence, admire the surroundings and enjoy the simplicity of the village. [10] Charlottenburg, the only round village in Romania, is a lesson in the geometric harmony of rural life. From the center of the village, all roads lead in a circle, as a metaphor for the return. The white houses, the manicured gardens and the complete silence create an ideal space for contemplative tourism and slow-travel. Visitors come here for photo tourism, walks and retreat, and many say that in Charlottenburg "you heal from the chaos of the modern world".



**Figure 9. The circle-shaped village**

Source: <https://wel.ro/attractie/satul-charlottenburg/>

### 3. *Recaș Vineyard – therapy through taste and story*

There is information about the vine culture in this area of Banat since the period of Roman rule and according to some old legends, Bacchus himself, the god of wine in Roman mythology, was born and spent his childhood on these lands. However, viticulture is an ancient occupation since the time of the Dacians, as we find out from the Greek historian Herodotus, who talks about their extensive vineyards. After King Burebista ordered them to be destroyed, they were re-established by King Decebalus and further cultivated in Roman Dacia. [11]

Wine has an old therapeutic symbolism – joy, relaxation, communion. In Recaş, wine tourism has become a complex experience: visitors discover the winemaking process, the story of the vineyards and taste local wines in a peaceful natural setting. This form of local tourism combines pleasure, education and relaxation, offering a "therapy through enjoyment".



**Figure 10. Recaş Vineyards**

Source: <https://www.pressalert.ro/2014/09/podgoriile-de-legenda-de-la-recas-locul-perfect-pentru-o-iesire-de-o-zi-ce-soiuri-speciale-puteti-degusta-si-ce-obiective-atractive-se-pot-vizita/>

### 4. *Margina – the land of craftsmen*

The commune of Margina, with its old villages, has become a model of authentic rural tourism. Located in the north-east of Timiș County, tourists can participate in bread-baking, pottery, weaving, opinci making workshops and tasting traditional products. It is a form of therapy through gentle work that relaxes and gives meaning. A local woman relates: "When you knead the dough, you also knead your thoughts, and your soul is smoothed." Margina offers not only tourism, but a school of patience. It's the place where time stops for a second.



**Figure 11. Traditional crafts from Margina**

Source: <https://www.directbooking.ro/obiectiv-atelierul-de-ceramic%c4%83-marginea-16817.aspx>



**Figure 12. Pottery in Margina**

Source: <https://planiada.ro/destinatii/suceava/centrul-de-ceramica-neagra-de-la-marginea-54>

#### *5. The villages of Făget – forest air and fire stories*

Around the town of Făget there are villages that retain a rare authenticity: Bunea Mare, Curtea, Zolt, located right at the northern foot of the Poiana Ruscă massif. [14] Here tourists can take carriage rides, listen to stories by the fire, taste fasting dishes, or learn how to make "homemade butter whipped with stories". In these villages, time melts. People say, "Whoever comes here forgets his watch, but remembers life."



**Figure 13. Făget**

Source: <https://revista22.ro/faget>

#### *6. Surduc Lake – the silence of the small waters*

Surduc Lake is located in Timiș County and is a reservoir, being also the largest lake in western Romania, with an approximate area of 530 hectares. It's the place where you run away from the noise. Here, you can practice relaxation tourism, ecological fishing and reflection tourism – walks around the lake, picnics and bird watching. It is the ideal place for weekend tourism, where "you do nothing and yet everything happens": you breathe, you calm down, you gather.



**Figure 14. Surduc Lake**

Source: [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lacul\\_Surduc](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lacul_Surduc)

From the research of all these places, it is clear that local tourism in Banat is a living healing system: through nature – tranquility, fresh air, simplicity; through tradition – rituals, gastronomy, handicrafts; through community – humanity, stories, hospitality; through introspection – time for thought, prayer, silence.

In Caraș-Severin, healing comes from the strength of the mountain. In Timiș, it comes from the gentleness of the plain. Together, the two counties form a complete landscape of the Romanian soul: heights that inspire and expanses that soothe.

The research shows that tourists from western Romania increasingly prefer nearby destinations, where they can spend quality time without major financial effort. This trend also has a psychological dimension: getting closer to nature, rediscovering one's native places, reconnecting with the community and traditions bring real benefits for mental health. Local tourism becomes a form of holistic therapy: for the body, through movement, fresh air and local food; for the mind, by detaching from stress and simplifying the rhythm; for the soul, through the emotion of the place and the feeling of belonging.

In Caraș-Severin and Timiș, almost every corner has a healing story – a quiet lake, a forgotten path, an old church, a festival, a sight that makes you shut up. The real value of local tourism is that it gives us the chance to become tourists in our own lives – to look at familiar places differently and give them meaning.

## CONCLUSIONS

Local tourism is not just an economic alternative to mass tourism, but a philosophy of balance.

The study shows that Caraș-Severin and Timiș counties offer a perfect model for "healing close to home": nature, tradition, gastronomy, tranquility and community.

In a world tired of noise and speed, these places teach us that the answer is not in the distance, but in the vicinity. Local tourism restores the connection between man and earth, between soul and place, between present and past.

True therapy is not measured in kilometers, but in the depth of experience.

And when we rediscover the treasures around us, we actually discover that we are part of them too.

Because each village hides a story, each hill carries an echo of time, and each person becomes a fragment of a whole that breathes harmony. Local tourism does not mean just a walk-through picturesque place, but a return to the natural, to simplicity, to the values that have built our communities. He teaches us to be present, to look with gratitude and to listen to the silence that speaks more than any tourist advertisement.

In Caraș-Severin and Timiș, the visitor is not a simple tourist, but a guest of the place, a participant in the life of the community. Here, hospitality is not an industry, but a tradition. The tables are shared with a smile on their faces, and time seems to lose its haste. Every country road, every rustic guesthouse, every local product tells the same story: that authentic beauty doesn't need fireworks.

This form of tourism thus becomes an act of responsibility towards nature and towards ourselves. It protects landscapes, supports the rural economy and gives meaning to a way of life that, although old, proves to be more current than ever. In an era of globalization and cultural uniformity, local tourism becomes a bastion of authenticity.

Local tourism is more than a journey – it is a rediscovery of identity. It is the invitation to live with roots, to appreciate the small details and to understand that sometimes, in order to move forward, we have to return home

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