

## **DURABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE TIMIȘ COUNTY: FOCUSING ON INLAND WATERWAYS**

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***Abstract.** The study focuses on some of the waterways in the Timis County in order to identify various possibilities of developing different forms of tourism. Thus, we offer for consideration some clear examples of how authorities may capitalize on the existing resources so that foreign and Romanian tourists may be attracted to the studied area.*

***Keywords:** durable development, inland waterways, Timiș County, tourism*

The present study aims to analyze the potential development of the Timis County and of some of the towns and villages taking into consideration the two main rivers that flow through the Timis County: Bega and Timis. The study is based on the project that was conceived by the staff of the Faculty of Management in Tourism and Commerce in Timisoara (Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University Bucharest) under the supervision of Dr. Cipriana Sava, the Dean of the Faculty. The project is called “Economic and social potential of the Bega and Timiș River valleys”. The project started in 2011 and it will continue until 2014. The main aim is to identify the economic and social potential of the towns and villages situated on the rivers Bega and Timis and to propose the implementation of the found solutions to local authorities.

Situated in the West part of Romania, the Timiș County has a total area of 8697 square kilometers and 407 towns and villages. Despite the fact that this county has one of the most dynamic economies in Romania, being situated in a region with one of the highest ratings of foreign investment, it is not well-known for a sustained tourist activity. One of the main reasons is the scarcity of natural tourist resources (it is a region mostly positioned on the Western Romanian Plain) and the poor exploitation of existing anthropic tourist resources. The development of cultural tourism has significantly increased since the county became part of the Danube-Kris-Mureș-Tisza Euro-region.

The main type of tourism practiced in the Timis County is business tourism. However, there are other types of tourism that should also be taken into consideration such as: event-based tourism, cultural tourism, health tourism, rural tourism, ethnic tourism, religious tourism. The development of tourism in Timișoara and the surrounding area is related to the existence of valuable anthropic tourist resources which are definitely capable of attracting tourists.

In 1999, the Romanian government decided to establish eight regions that could be developed according to Law no.151/1998 for regional development in Romania. They represent territorial entities that do not have administrative rights, as they are based on voluntary associations among different counties.

**Table 1. Romanian regions: territorial and administrative divisions**

Geographic regions	Counties	Area (square kilometers)	Population (thousand inhabitants)	Density (inhabitants/sq. km)
1. North-East	Bacau, Vaslui, Neamt, Iasi, Suceava, Botosani	36,850	3,743	101.6
2. South-East	Constanta, Tulcea, Braila, Buzau, Vrancea, Galati	35,762	2,868	80.2
3. South	Teleorman, Giurgiu, Calarasi, Ialomita, Dambovita, Prahova, Arges	34,453	3,375	98.0
4. South-West	Olt, Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinti, Valcea	29,212	2,341	80.1
5. West	Caras-Severin, Hunedoara, Timis, Arad	32,034	1,955	61.0
6. North-West	Cluj, Salaj, Bihor, Bistrita-Nasaud, Maramures, Satu Mare	34,159	2,766	80.7
7. Center	Brasov, Covasna, Sibiu, Alba, Harghita, Mures	34,100	2,547	78.7
8. Bucharest	Bucuresti, Ilfov	1,821	2,210	1213.8

Source: National Commission for Statistics “Statistics Annual in Romania” 2003

Taking into account the system of classification NUTS (Territorial Units Statistical Lists) established by Eurostat, which is the European Union Statistical Office the following administrative and territorial units can be found in Romania:

- NUTS I – not used at present. It includes 4 macro regions (1. North-West+Center; 2.North-East+South-East; 3.South+ Bucharest and Ilfov; 4.South-West+West);
- NUTS II – 8 developing regions;
- NUTS III – 42 regions that represent the 41 counties and the capital of Romania;
- NUTS IV: not used at present as there are no territorial units associations;
- NUTS V – 3,174 regions representing he cities, the towns and the larger villages.

The following counties are included within the Western Developing Region: Arad, Caras-Severin, Hunedoara and Timis. The largest and most important rivers that cross the two counties that belong to the Banat region (Caras- Severin and Timis) are Bega and Timis. This is the starting point for the project of the Faculty of Management in Tourism and Commerce which is meant to underline the importance and the social and economic potential of the rivers for the urban and rural centers that were built along these inland waterways.

The first stage of the project was a thorough documentation that took place in different libraries situated both in Timisoara and in the rural centers along the Bega River. Thus, researchers had access to various types of documents (including monographs and newspaper articles) that went back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Documents were also collected from local authorities and from administrative officials from the following urban and rural centers: Margina, Făget, Răchita, Mănăștiur, Leucușești, Bethausen, Cutina, Bodo, Balinț, Chizătau, Ictar-Budiști, Topolovătu Mic, Receaș, Remetea Mare, Ghiroda, Timișoara, Utvin, Sânmihaiu Român, Uivar, and Otelec. The documents were examined and correlated to up-to-date maps and accounts so that the information used during the project should be into accordance with current facts.

The research was conducted in the area located along the Bega River, in the towns and villages situated along this river, in order to assess the economic and social situation in this region. The team made a preliminary inventory of the main activities that had been pursued by local people in the past and that could be resumed with some financial aid form local authorities. The collected data is to be published in a brochure which will be distributed publicly in order to raise awareness about the importance of capitalizing on the resources that can be found in the studied area. The assessment of the touristic, economic and cultural resources in the studied area was transmitted both orally (during conferences and symposiums) and in a written form (published articles) in Romania and abroad, in order to make the public aware of the existence of great potential in the Banat region.

The first stage of the project concluded that the assessment of the required resources of land, capital and labour for any proposed development and of their alternative uses is necessary, valuable and practical as it can be implemented with support from local authorities.

The second phase of the project started in October 2012 with the Danube Net international conference: “Improve mobility – Inland waterway. Focusing on channels”. The topics that were discussed by Hungarian, Serbian and Romanian participants were related to shipping options, water transportation and traffic, pollution of the inland waterways, possibilities to establish new harbours or to make old harbours functional. The speakers took into consideration the financial needs of a community and the necessity for sustainable development. Moreover, they assessed potential demand for new harbours and the facilities required by such an enterprise and actual demand – for the rehabilitation of existing harbours (the modality they will change if there is a transformation of the existing facilities. The conclusion of the conference was that the areas along Bega and Timis River have great potential. Unfortunately, there is little or no existing tourist activity and most land and other resources are uncommitted to the existing uses. The land can be alternatively used for agriculture, industry or residential development, or for tourism. If alternative sources of employment are available in the area, the quantity and quality of labour available for tourism has to be assessed in relation to other sources of employment. In this situation, a cost-benefit analysis is required, which is the purpose of the third phase of the project.

Thus, the third phase of the project will assess the needs of the tourists and residents of the area and the compatibility of tourism with the other activities. The cost analysis will also be required in order to evaluate the capital (private or public) that should be raised in order to implement the project based on the gathered data. With support from local authorities the Bega Channel and River will become more than a source of drinkable water, and the main activities that were pursued in the urban and rural centers in this area will be either resumed or replaced by tourism.

The Bega Channel that is 116 kilometres long, until it reaches the Tisa River has the great potential of attracting tourist who would take the boat to Serbian harbours or even further to the Danube River. The former harbor that was built in 1752 in Timișoara (Iosefin neighbourhood) could be rebuilt and thus, Romanian and foreign tourists could enjoy leisure activities going on trips down the river. However, if water transportation is to be resumed, the Bega Channel has to be cleaned up and dredged. According to Tănasă and Popa, money is not a major problem; the place where the contaminated mud from the bottom of the river will be stored represents a real issue.

Taking into account the fact that the international tourists are a valuable source of earning for developing countries, tourism should be considered an activity that could replace other activities that have been abandoned due to various circumstances. Visitor-spending generate income both for public and private sectors and it offers employment opportunities. Although tourism is related to the development of economic activity, it is an option that is wrth taking into consideration for the urban and rural centres along the Bega and Timis River. The project proposed by the staff from the Faculty of Management in Tourism and

Commerce Timisoara – Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University analyses all the opportunities and threats for the region, aiming to offer realistic solutions that could be implemented both in the long and in the short term.

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