

RURAL TOURISM RESOURCES IN DOGNECEA, SMALL PIECE OF HEAVEN IN MOUNTAINOUS BANAT

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***Abstract:** The Romanian rural area represents the cultural and national civilization patrimony, and it constitutes the source of spirituality and historicity in Romania.*

Rural tourism can become an incentive for local development in many rural areas. They allow speeding traditional economic activities and capitalizing cultural particularities, offering jobs and stopping rural exodus, at the same time.

Dognecea is situated at the basis of the mountains of Dognecea, where traditions, customs and culinary art are kept. It also has a rich cultural potential and it represents a special touristic attraction.

Rural tourist activity in Mountainous Banat is currently developing, especially in settlements such as Văliug, Gărâna-Brebu Nou, Poiana Mărului and Clisura Dunării, where most bed-and-breakfast accommodation is situated. Tourist resources in the rural area make this area a precious tourist destination both on a national and an international level.

***Keywords:** rural tourism, touristic village, touristic resources, mountain area, traditions*

1. Introduction

The rural tourism represents a method to preserve the natural and human qualities of a given geographic area. In the specialty literature, there are numerous definitions resulted from the way issues have been approached. The official definition launched by the World Tourism Organization in 1997, and other European bodies, which specifies that rural tourism is “a form of tourism which includes any tourism activity organized and conducted in the rural area by local population and which exploits the local tourism resources (natural, cultural-historical, human) as well as the tourism endowments and structures, including the pensions and agro-tourism farms. As a consequence, the rural tourism is a form of tourism performed in the rural area referring to tourism

activities organization inside the rural community, highlighting local history, day by day life of local population with its specific customs and traditions, along with the tourism endowments and equipment.

Both the rural tourism and agro-tourism are based on three coordinates: space, people and products, thus, space without people's existence would not represent a support for cohabitation and space without products would not respond to the tourism consumers' needs. The rural tourism has developed by exploiting the favorable characteristics of the three base elements concurring to the accomplishment of tourism act (Cocean, 2002, page 215):

- rural space (village hearth and estate) as a support for life and development of specific activities;
- rural population as an element of continuity for centuries of folk customs and traditions of villages, transformation factor for natural environment and local resources;
- natural products (natural riches) satisfying both personal demands and the tourism offers designated to hosted persons.

The tourism village is a rural settlement, picturesque, well built, situated in a non-polluted natural environment, keeper of traditions with a rich historical past, which - apart of the political-administrative, economic, social and cultural functions – fulfills the temporary function of receiving and accommodating the tourist arrived to spend a holiday for an undetermined period of time (Minciu R., 2004, page.90).

Main component for the performance of rural tourism in our country, the tourism villages are rural settlements located in a picturesque and pollution free environment, in the most various landforms, from the Black Sea seaside and the Danube Delta to the mountain area. Grouped on basis of their specific, the following types of tourism villages are identified: landscaping and climacteric villages; spa villages; tourism for winter sports; fishing and hunting villages; pastoral villages; villages with objectives of scientific interest; villages with historical, art, and architectural monuments; tourism ethno-folk villages; tourism villages for artistic and handcraft creation; fruit-wine tourism villages (Cocean and collaborators, 2002, pages 221-222).

The Romanian tourism villages, through their ethno-cultural and ethnographic specific, originality and richness of geographically-related own resources, constitute an unprecedented tourism product and may contribute to the discovery of our country as a possible tourism destination.

The beauty of the nature in our county, along with the historical monuments of national and international value, creates the premises to obtain an important economic contribution to the rural tourism sphere.

2. Rural tourist resources – the main factor in attracting tourists

The presence of two elements has determined the development of rural tourism in the last years. The Romanian touristic area has a large variety of cultural and historical elements: folk art, ethnography, folklore, traditions, historical sites, as well as natural scenery.

The natural tourist resources are represented by the totality of physical and geographical elements which are able to attract potential tourists, ensuring the touristic capitalization within a certain area. Natural tourist resources which belong to initial factors represent a great importance for the beginnings of tourism and it constitutes the initial point in capitalizing it, which is to be ensured by building a material basis able to grant the satisfying of needs. Good natural tourist resources may influence a certain area and transform it into an entertaining area. The natural tourist resources are present in mountainous areas, but also on the seashore. If we compare the fields with the mountain areas, we understand that the banality of fields disappears when speaking about the mountain settlements. Thus, the geographical features represent a modality to attract tourists especially from the cities, who want to escape the pollution and the crowds.

Anthropic tourist resources have long been considered a tourist attraction less important than natural resources. At present, anthropic tourist sites represent significant elements in the rating of a certain area. The attraction of anthropic tourist resources is manifested in a strong relation with natural tourist potential. Anthropic resources are the result of the interaction between people and the environment. These resources gain increasing importance, especially since new forms of tourism are developing, such as rural tourism that capitalizes on the cultural patrimony of the rural areas. Anthropic tourist resources are an important element in rating the recreational areas, and they are an indicator of the development level of culture, history, economy of the tourist area.

The diverse rural scenery, usually well preserved, life in the countryside, traditions and architecture are factors that enable the development of rural tourism.

3. Mountainous Banat and rural tourism

Mountainous Banat is mainly situated in the Caraş-Severin County, in the area delimited by Orşova - Cazanele Dunării. Caraş-Severin County is situated in the south-west area of Romania, neighbored by Timiş County (north-west), Hunedoara (north-east), Gorj (east), Mehedinţi (south-east) and Serbia (south-west). The area Orşova – Cazanele Dunării is formed by the town of Orşova and the villages:

Eşelnița, Dubova and Svinița in Mehedinți County. Mountainous Banat has an area of 9,015 kmp. Caraș-Severin County has a large variety of natural scenery due to the relief forms. There are various natural resources: thermal waters, mountains (65.4%), Clisura Dunării, five national and natural parks, rivers and springs, caves and karstic formations (Popovici, 1983, 50)

The characteristics of the anthropic tourist potential in Caraș-Severin County have been marked by different cultures, due to different occupations: the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire and Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Thus, after centuries of colonization, various ethnic groups have settled in this area, and their cultural traditions have marked the architecture, the lifestyle, the traditions and even tourist activity in its initial form.

The rich and diversified tourist potential allows many forms of tourism to develop (recreational tourism, adventure tourism, hunting and fishing tourism, karstic tourism, cultural tourism, etc.) as well as an intense rural touristic activity in the entire county.

Table 1. Tourist reception capacity in Caraș-Severin County (2000-2013)

Year	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total	78	102	143	149	181	186
Hotels and motels	21	22	29	33	32	34
Chalets	13	7	7	6	7	9
Tent camps and cabins	2	2	1	2	1	1
Villas and bungalows	17	15	8	9	11	10
Pupil and student camps	11	7	4	4	4	4
Urban tourist B&B	7	24	46	48	64	63
Rural tourist B&B	4	16	36	35	52	55
Hostels	-	2	5	5	5	5
Tourist rest camps	2	4	6	6	5	5

Source: County Statistics Caraș-Severin

From the data presented in Table 1, we can observe an increase in accommodation units in the entire Caraș-Severin County, from 2000 until 2013. The number of accommodation units has increased from 78 to 186, the most significant increase being in urban and rural bed and breakfast units. A decrease can be noticed in pupil and student camps as well as cabins and tent camps.

The first villages that were entirely tourist in this area are Gărâna and Brebu Nou. Many years ago, the German inhabitants from these

settlements used to rent rooms for tourists who went to the area, this being the first tourist in the rural area of Banat.

Other villages that adopted rural tourism in the area are: Văliug, Poiana Mărului, Gărâna-Brebu Nou, Sasca Montană, Dognecea, etc.

Table 2. Distribution of accommodation places in the rural area in Mountainous Banat

Village/ Town	Number of accommodation places
Baziaș	15
Belobreșca	9
Berzasca	84
Borlova	24
Bozovici	28
Buchin	16
Brebu Nou	112
Carașova	8
Constantin Daicoviciu	14
Coronini	98
Divici	37
Dognecea	28
Gârnic	22
Gărâna	352
Gornea	16
Liubcova	12
Măcești	12
Păltiniș	20
Pescari	14
Poiana Mărului	326
Pojejena	20
Potoc	4
Ravenska	12
Rusca Teregova	20
Sadova Veche	32
Sasca Montană	187
Sasca Română	46
Vârciorova	16
Văliug	377
Zorlențu Mare	10
Total	1639

We have to mention that the situation of accommodation places presented in Table 2 has been developed using web sites.

The largest accommodation capacity in the rural environment is in the area Văliug-Crivaia with 377 places, followed by Poiana Mărului with 326 places. In Clisura Dunării the maximum number is in Coronini, 98 places, followed by Berzasca with 84 places. The fewer accommodation places are in Potoc, only 4 places, and in Carașova, only 8 places. The accommodation units in Mountainous Banat are diverse: chalets, hotels, villas, bed-and-breakfast, secondary lodging, apartments for rent, etc. However, the most frequent accommodation units are the bed-and-breakfast type, classified with two or three daisies.

We can conclude that in the last years there have been a lot of investments in building accommodation units, especially bed-and-breakfast. Nevertheless, in some areas, new units need to be built, or the old ones should be improved. A good structure of the accommodation units and a good marketing promotion would improve the tourist arrivals in the area

The development of the tourist activity in the rural in the Banat region would make advantage of the potential of this area, as tourist activity can generate stability, and multiple economic and social effects.

4. Dognecea, a piece of heaven hidden in the mountains

The settlements in the mountain area are different from the settlements in the plain area, and differences can be seen in architecture, occupations and traditionalism. There are villages where old occupations have been transmitted for generations: mining and sheep herding. One of these settlements is Dognecea.

Dognecea is situated in the center of Banat region, near the mountains of Dognecea, on the river with the same name, approximately 23 km west from Reșița. (Nistoreanu, 1999, 33)

The Dognecea Mountains are low, with heights that remind of hills. The valley of Bârzava goes through these mountains, east-west, dividing them into two compartments: a north one and a south one. The south compartment is larger and higher: 617 m in the Peak of Culmea Mare. (Sencu, 1993 34)

The geographical coordinates are 21.752991° east longitude and 45.267399° north latitude. We can get here either from Reșița, or from Bocșa, on the national road Timișoara – Reșița (58 B).

Dognecea is formed of two villages: one with the same name and the other called Calina.

The name of the village Dognecea comes from the slave word „dugaeske” which means “long” and refers to the length of the village that goes for about 7 kilometers.

The area of the village is 7573 ha, out of which 424 ha inside the village and 7149 ha outside the village.

Dognecea is a very old settlement: there are very old Roman gold mines, silver, copper, plumb, and iron mines that continued to function in the modern period. In 1978, three ovens were discovered that are the proof of the use of mining in this village. Also the remains of a Dacian-Roman settlement were found, dating back to the 3rd and the 4th century after Christ. The present inhabitants of Dognecea are the descendants of the 13000 Romanians who came here from Oltenia, to escape numerous taxes in the 1700s. They settled down in Bocșa Montană, Ocna de Fier, Dognecea, Reșita, Văliug, Oravița, Ciclova, Sasca Montană, Straja. Part of the inhabitants came from Austria and Wurterberg in 1750. They were Germans who worked in the furnaces and foundries situated in the eastern part of the village.

According to the population census in 2011, the population in Dognecea is of 2,009 inhabitants, a decrease in comparison with previous years when there were 2, 044 inhabitants. Most of them are Romanians (89.35%), some are Germans (3.38%). 6.37% has not declared their ethnic belonging.

Agriculture is the main activity in the village, mainly potatoes and corn crops. Secondary activities include exploitation of forests, commerce and services. At present, there are no available jobs in the area, as the iron mines that were functioning Ocna de Fier have entered a preservation state. Young people have abandoned the village, which is mainly inhabited by old people and people living off social services.

The village is formed of two parts: the Romanian part also called “by the wall”, a part where Germans used to live, and the Gypsy part, also called “the valley” or “on the spring”.

Dognecea is attractive due to its geographical situation by the Dognecea Mountains, with the highest peak Culmea Mare (617 meters).

In the north there are two lakes - Lacul Mic, also called Water Lilies Lake, which is also a botanic reservation, due to the white and pink water lilies that grow on it; and Lacul Mare, which also called the Lake by the wall, due to the dam that was built on the Dognecea creek. The dam was built during the Austro-Hungarian occupation, when Maria Theresa was an empress.

The climate in Dognecea is temperate and the air is similar to that in a balneal spa, due to the large number of negative ions.

The flora is very diverse: in spring, there are geophyte plants, whereas in summer there are ombrophilous. The forests in Dognecea Mountains have a varied fauna represented by deer, roes, wolves, hares, wild boars, etc. This is the reason why hunting is one of the forms of tourism in this area. In the creeks and rivers there are many fish: carp, caras, pike, salmon, etc.

The village of Calina also belongs to Dognecea area. In this village there is a spring Izvorul Bruscel, which contains colloidal silver, a substance that makes its water very pure. According to the Worldwide Organization of Waters, the Calina waters are on the second place, after Evian water. In this village, there is also an orthodox church made of wood, which was built in Ciudanovița, in 1780, then was moved to Greoni, then to Brădișor and, finally, 100 years ago it was brought to Calina. The small church is painted in white, while the interior walls are not painted but covered with icons. The church is on the new list of historic monuments with the code CS-II-m-B-11053.

12 km away from Dognecea, in Ocna de Fier, there is the museum of Esthetic Mineralogy of Iron „Constantin Gruescu”, a museum with crystals and minerals. Constantin Gruescu opened in his own house a museum with various minerals, some of which are unique. There are stones brought from abroad (Brazil, India, England, Russia), and from around Romania (Ocna de Fier, Dognecea, Sasca Montană, Ruschița, Moldova Nouă).

The inhabitants of Dognecea have old traditions, such as “nedeea” or “ruga bănățeană”, a tradition that is seen every year during Easter. The inhabitants prepare dinner for their visitors and singing and dancing parties are organized (Olaru, 1996:20)

The Banat region is an intercultural area where various traditions, mentalities, laic practices, religious rituals have harmonized. Romanians, Serbians, Swabians, Bulgarians have all interacted along the years.

Touristically speaking, Dognecea has not developed very much in the last few years. There is only one bed-and-breakfast “Piece of Heaven”. It has three stars and 34 places in 8 rooms. Tourists can use equipment for water sports: kayaks, hydro-bicycles, boats, aqua-slides.

Many people from Timisoara have bought holiday houses in Dognecea. Unfortunately, touristic activity is only during summer.

5. Conclusions

Preserving the rural world with all that is significant from an economic, social, cultural point of view implies to initiate and develop a form of tourism. Rural tourism may play a role in preserving rural life

and stability, especially since depopulation is frequent, as young people leave their houses and lands to look for jobs in the cities.

Capitalizing on tourist resources in Dognecea, by practicing rural tourism, would bring more jobs for young people. In order to develop this form of tourism local authorities should take advantage of major cities situated close to Dognecea.

Rural Tourism cannot be developed separately from traditions. They should be used to make folk spirituality known to people. Developing rural tourism in Dognecea may offer the chance to capitalize on traditions, customs, folk costumes, local cuisine, all belonging to different peoples who lived here.

Mountainous Banat is original due to natural resources, its climate, fauna, flora, architecture, folk art, as they all combine in rural tourism. The touristic potential of the area may encourage adequate tourist products and a good marketing campaign in the region could bring important tourist arrivals.

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