

## Assessment of Tourism Potential Development in Banat Mountains

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### Abstract

*To improve global performance, every economic agent within the tourism industry must react to the evolution of all aspects related to the tourism potential and must be aware of their significance. Research conducted falls under this logic and contributes to enriching the information corresponding to the means through which the forms of tourism practiced in the Banat mountainous region might influence the increase in the area's tourist potential quality. The theme selected aligns with the area of high interest with reference to familiarizing with and highlighting tourist resources and destinations in Romania for both the academic and economic environment.*

**Key words:** tourism, Banat, potential, hospitality, marketing

**J.E.L. classification:** Z32

### 1. Introduction

Tourism management implies the analysis of any activity related to tourism and accommodation services from the perspective of allotment and spatial rapports with other facts. Tackling it only considering the spatial relationship, although this approach is an important characteristic of geography in general, does not correspond to researchers' requirements in tourism management. Thus, neither the dynamic and evolution in time of facts, nor the analysis of connections or causality relationships within a system can be forsaken.

Banat is a territory with ancient inherited structures, constantly renewed by the succession of influences and dominations that it was subjected to throughout history. The identity of Banat is conveyed, paradoxically, by its capacity to assimilate values of different origins and harmonize them into a composition where, although the initial nuclei lose their clear shapes, scarcely it happens that they be integrally "blended in" as to form a homogenous mass. The reverence for the other's specificity is a long-ago set rule, which is confirmed by the lack of intercultural tensions in an area traditionally characterized by an extraordinary entwinement of nationalities, religions, customs, mindsets and internal organization. All these formed powerful arguments for developing tourism in Banat, inheritor of a multicultural material and spiritual patrimony of high value, not yet popular and included in the national and international travel circuits.

### 2. Presentation of specialty literature

In specialty literature, tourism is described as a solution to all economic issues of a country or region, being simultaneously responsible for balancing the payments scale as private equity generator in numerous industries (Neacsu *et al*, 2016, p. 14). As a result of the current economic environment instability, travel agencies are determined to organize themselves in a new fashion, while searching for management methods in order to control a potential crisis context, which turns up current existing theories. An important characteristic of all modern approach is the idea according to which all resources, both natural and especially human must be directed towards achieving organizational objectives. As social and economic phenomenon, tourism starts to be enhanced in Europe as of 1880, in 1905, in the modern significance of the term, being firstly defined as a phenomenon of our times based on the increased necessity to improve the state of health and change the scenery, on the development of the feeling of openness toward natural beauty

(Guran, 2015, p.7).

Through its offer, tourism capitalizes on the human, natural, cultural and climatic potential which is rendered as a territory's richness only if the numerous and various public and private actors contribute to its creation, promotion and development as well.

As the tourism economy grows in a much more alert rhythm than other economies, it determines the emergence of certain issues with positive or negative impact on the environment, material or non-material patrimony and local population. The major decisions regarding the intervention manner to solve this kind of problems as well as the future predictions for the industry's development must be made by the state authorities only subsequent to consulting and partnering with all stakeholders including the affected stakeholders.

Tourist potential has two components and is defined as the total of the attraction factors pertaining to the natural or artificial environment capitalized by way of tourist arrangements producing tourist flows of internal and international character moving toward destination areas where tourist products resulted from a potential and its set-up, are being consumed (Dinu, 2005, p.47).

### **3. Research methods used**

Research in view of documenting this work was conducted within the main tourist areas in the Banat Mountains, especially the Nerei Gorges. The data were processed also based on surveys and group discussions held with the accommodation unit managers. At the basis of the research there stood: the National Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, The Common EU Agricultural Policy, the Sustainable Development Strategy regarding the mountainous area as well as the current legislation with its regulations on classifying travel structures. The methodology approached started from an initial phase to identify, select and evaluate heritage values as well as other elements of interest for the cultural tourism. In the second phase the strategic proposals for cultural tourism development in Banat were elaborated.

For the research conducted, two public consultations were organized with the purpose of identifying the groups interested in developing cultural tourism in Banat – public authorities, travel operators, cultural institutions, active NGOs in the cultural or travel field; of unfolding an x-ray on the field's current state in view of existing obstacles investigation in the direction of developing tourism in general and cultural tourism in particular; of identifying and harmonizing the potential directions of cultural tourism in Banat. The sociologic investigation was applied to participants with the purpose of assessing respondents' perception on the current tourist activity in Banat and the cultural tourism development potential within the region. Respondents were randomly designated being representatives of the cultural institutions, travel operators, local authorities and active NGOs in the tourism field of Banat region.

### **4. Tourism forms practiced in the Banat mountainous area**

In Romania, the action of factors such as the input, significance and place that tourism must occupy in the state economic development is not completely acknowledged. Thus, only in 2007, in the Master Plan for National Tourism Development in Romania 2007-2026 do they observe the absence of a general policy for the industry's direction and guidance, document through which the Government wanted to set the basis for a sustainable approach for the Romanian tourism development. Achieving the Government's declared challenge determined that the drafted Master Plan have as immediate objective the creation of a general policy framework for the tourism industry's sustainable development and management in what regards the natural and cultural resources (World Tourism Organization, 2007, p. 1). It is important to highlight that the Master Plan anticipated the existence of a few future benefits for the population through tourism development, benefits that may be achieved by enhancing the cultural patrimony preservation and development. A few statistical data from the Master Plan show the serious underdevelopment of tourism in our country. In this regard, we consider that the structure and input of the cultural area for the tourism development are important to be acknowledged. The immovable cultural heritage

quantified in the national list of historic monuments is represented by over 30000 monuments out of which 6614 consist of objectives of national and international interest. The list shows that neither Timis County nor Caras Severin County are among the counties with the highest concentration of historical monuments and unfortunately, neither of the seven tourist objectives or areas included in the UNESCO global heritage are located in Banat.

The tourist potential of an area can be defined by the class of elements that might represent tourist attractions and that can be set-up for tourists' visit and welcoming. The tourist attraction concept expresses the emotional and cognitive-aesthetic side of the tourist potential elements which influence certain industries of the tourism demand through the impressions generated and the tourist resources include beside the natural or artificial tourist attractions the entire infrastructure and specific amenities that can be capitalized directly into traveling activities. According to the conditions offered by each locality or rural area but also as per the motives tourists have when traveling to rural localities, as tourism forms within the rural environment we can distinguish: cultural and heritage tourism, cultural-religious tourism, balneary tourism (for health recovery or preservation), business tourism, adventure tourism, rest and relaxation tourism, transit tourism, and last but not least winter sports tourism and hunting and fishing tourism.

To continue, considering the natural and artificial tourist resources, we will present the rural tourist potential of the Banat Mountains region classified as per the forms that we still consider to be in progress.

#### **4.1. Natural tourist potential of Banat Mountains**

Situated at the connection line between the Carpathian area and the Pannonian region and subjected to the far Mediterranean climate influence, the natural environment of Banat stands out through its complexity, diversity and uniqueness. Human print is evident and specific, especially marked by the interventions due to landscaping works, which started even from the XVIII century in an organized manner and subsequently continued. Nature was altered both in the mountainous space, by erecting new buildings, underground resources capitalization and exploitation but also particularly in the plain regions exposed to large remedy hydro-works.

These allowed habitat expansion, agricultural crops extension and led to the reduction of primary natural scenery. Banat yet preserves a series of singular areas slightly affected by human intervention which contributes to the biodiversity preservation and represent tourist attraction objectives.

The natural tourist potential in the Banat mountain area includes countless significant tourist attractions: the Danube gorge with its Big Boilers, Anina Karst Area, the Gorges and tourist attractions of Semenic, Nerei Gorges, Carasului Gorges, Aninei Mountains, Semenic Mountains, Comarnic Cave, Popovat Cave – speleological reservation, Valea Mare Reservation – floristic reservation.

The assessment of natural background, protected areas and green spaces brings highlight on the following impactful arguments underlying natural tourism development in Banat:

- The diversity in natural mountain, field and plain landscapes and the presence of countless complex stunning local views shape a group of typologically diverse objectives spatially concentrated and with high potential for tourist attraction; karst relief areas in particular and sub-Mediterranean mountainous landscapes stick out, respectively humid plain areas.
- The number and ample surface of national parks, parks and natural reservations, typological diversity and structural lushness of the protected natural zones contribute to maintaining natural balance, preserving biodiversity and stir up the nature lovers' interest.
- Preservation of traditional cultural values, biological diversity and original landscapes within natural parks produces a unique symbiosis with high attraction potential for cultural tourism.

Capitalization of these resources is reinforced by the existence of close important poles related to touristic demand (Timisoara, Craiova, Belgrade, Budapest, Bucharest etc.) but it depends on the smooth organization of local communities aiming internal and international visibility and accessibility for the Banat tourist area.

## 4.2. Cultural-religious tourist potential

In regard to cultural museum institutions, in 2017 in Romania, there were roughly 740 museums and public collections out of which 28 of national significance, 14 of regional significance and 41 of county significance. According to a study carried out by a group of experts in Timis and Caras-Severin counties there are 33 museums, collections, memorial exhibits and memorial houses of a larger or smaller significance, scattered throughout the entire said area (Aciu, 2009, p.15).

Heading toward the Banat mountainous area, that is Lugoj-Faget-Marginea, we are welcomed by a picturesque landscape – the area is called ‘Bucovina Banatului’ due to the small wooden churches built here, churches that witnessed the unfolding of history and unique techniques used hundreds of years ago. The most significant of these are: Topla, Margina, Grosi, Capat, Zolt, Povergina, Curtea, Nemtesti, Batesti, etc. These churches embody samples of architecture and painting that may be connected to the Romanian post-Byzantine tradition characterizing the surrounding regions (Transylvania, Oltenia, Muntenia) or even to the tradition of some neighbors such as Serbia. Most of the wooden churches date back to XVII and XVIII centuries; their list may be completed based on the inscriptions or notes scribbled on the walls, religious paintings or books. At present, there are 23 more wooden churches within the Timisoara Archiepiscopate and 2 more in the Caransebes Episcopacy. Monasteries are aeries where Christians search for inner peace, places of breathtaking beauty set in unsurpassed scenery, as the case of Calugara Monastery in Caras-Severin County, Izvorul lui Miron Monastery (or else called Balta Calda (Warm Pond) after the hot water spring flowing here) or Saraca Monastery in Timis County. The complex in Rudaria, through its singularity, antiquity and its spectacular quality of still being operational could stand alone as a key tourist attraction of Banat.

The itineraries pilgrims use are essential as they are not pursuing the shortest or easiest roads. They look for a circuit sprinkled with crucial sanctuaries, a devotion itinerary; the road is determined by the consistence of the supernatural (Deffontaines, 1996, p.56). In the orthodox tradition, beside consistence, also paramount is the intensity manifested in that place by a miraculous religious painting, relics or a person who lived as a saint. The essential element toward which the attention of all pilgrims is focused is the religious painting or the Saint’s relics, in the eastern tradition or the Saint’s statue in the western one.

Capitalization of the Banat cultural heritage via cultural and religious tourism encounters at present multiple hurdles caused not only by the above mentioned aspects but also by the lack of modern accommodation and alimentation conditions and a viable infrastructure as well as access roads, parking lots, sanitary structures. The lack of a specialized staff who could handle the monuments together with the absence of promotion are the main weaknesses in the tourism maximization of this highly diverse and rich heritage built.

These conditions impose new measures to limit the negative impact these factors bring and which, in the near future, will allow the protection, reconditioning and maximization of the Banat patrimony through cultural tourism at a national and international level..

## 4.3. Ethnographic and folklore potential

These zones offer a large array of ethno-folkloric attractions for potential tourists from traditional arts and crafts to the traditional celebrations, from customs to cultural events already adopted as traditions. Mountainous regions in Romania and particularly in Banat deserve a special attention and a political strategy at the European Union level from social, economic and ecological reasons. We could not even imagine contrasting the mountain regions with other categories of areas that are sensitive from an economic standpoint, like those less developed or the rural ones or sensitive areas from an ecological perspective.

All these areas need an attentive assessment of impacts and necessary adjustments, and adequate answers in regard to potential development, environmental protection and cohesion preservation at the E.U. level. Also, not all mountain areas are in the same natural, social and economic conditions. Some have tougher physical conditions than others; some are richer while others are poorer. Any strategy at the E.U. level should be flexible enough to adapt to this kind of diversity in compliance with the subsidiarity principle.

The economic development patterns of this time were ignorant to the fact that some natural resources are exhaustible and that the environment must be kept healthy for future generations. They led neither to ensuring equality between human beings nor to similar material, social and cultural conditions for human development. Due to these findings, the development crisis was defined as the rupture between the accumulation process and the assembly of spontaneous regulation mechanisms and social rapports regulation procedures, on the one hand, and the human - nature relationships, on the other hand (Harribey, 1998, p.6). Acknowledging this crisis made modern societies take measures in order to find a new development road as there was the possibility of destroying not only the environment but also our future.

Tourist maximization of the regional cultural heritage must be a consistent preoccupation of the authorities and experts involved in these cultural domains. The results thus yielded could be outstanding and beneficial on multiple levels: cultural, touristic and financial.

## 5. Recommendations proposed for the Banat tourist potential improvement

Based on research conducted, the SWOT analysis was carried out for the tourist potential in the Banat mountain area, illustrated in table 1.

Table 1 SWOT analysis for the tourist potential in the Banat mountain area

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
-existence of the mountainous area with a developed tourist potential; -existence of natural parks with stunning views, protected by law; -mountain treks and trails signaled with information and guiding signs; -existence of numerous gorges and caves; -promotion of tourism at international level; -developed hydrographic network; -existence of countless accommodations (bed and breakfast, hotels, cabins); -rural tourism and cuisine development; -countless (historic, cultural and folkloric) heritage objectives.	-high degree of pollution (ferrous metallurgy, thermal plants, gold and silver manufacturing centers); -few waste collection centers; -lack of funds for reconditioning Culture and Community Centers and historical monuments; -tourist signs damage; -poorly maintained roads and non-accessible; -low tourist education regarding environmental protection; -insufficient knowledge of people working in tourism in relation to tourist resources, objectives but also notions necessary in the said field;	-setting information and promotion campaigns for rural tourism and agritourism; -extending foreign investments for the tourism in the area; -promotion of specific products in the region; -training classes for employees from tourism field; -integrating the area in national and international travel circuits; -developing mountain and remote rural areas using European funds; -developing more trekking tours.	-monuments, museums and memorial houses damage; -existence of poorly informed investors with little knowledge of the tourism carried out in the area; -excessive deforestations may affect some tourist areas; -low level of education in the rural area; -migration toward cities and sending traditions and customs into oblivion; -a threat may come from foreign neighbors who may offer travel services for Romanian tourists at affordable prices.

Source: Author

This analysis indicates that the regional cultural heritage tourist potentiation must be a permanent preoccupation of the authorities and experts involved in these cultural fields. The results thus obtained may be spectacular and beneficial on multiple plans: cultural, tourist and financial. Paralleled with intensification of formal concerns about the environmental balance and citizens' standards of living, in reality there takes place the mitigation of local cultural landscape originality and authenticity. The imperfect replicas of indigenous landscaping and region equipping models yet insufficiently adapted to the area's specificity are propagated.

From the natural resources tourist capitalization standpoint, a negative effect is also given by the demographic decline of most of Banat, especially the mountainous Banat, where the natural landscapes with the highest attraction potential are concentrated. If the demographic pressure decrease may add a sense of balance in nature's favor, it is not beneficial to tourist capitalization as it reduces entrepreneurship spirit, discourages investments and cuts on the available tourism labor force.

A poise approach of the natural potential-cultural impact-tourist capitalization relationship must allow for the need for knowledge, conservation and preservation, systemic action for a sustainable development. In cultural tourism, visitors search for authenticity, especially when it comes to nature, but they cannot forsake modern life conditions. It's there where it lies the main difficulty for the cultural tourism organizers: to originally and attractively intertwine the wild nature authenticity with the need for comfort, namely objectives value with the modern tourist's need for diversity and playfulness.

At the core of the recommendations we suggest for the tourist potential development in Banat Mountains, there are two fundamental principles:

- Cultural heritage capitalization through tourism must be cautiously made.
- Developing cultural tourism in Banat must be a permanent concern for all stakeholders from the political, administrative, economic, cultural environments, civil society and population.

Recommendations proposed started from the necessity to maximize Banat heritage uniqueness, attractiveness and multiculturalism. In this regard the following major strategic objectives were defined:

- Developing cultural tourism in Banat must be a permanent concern for all stakeholders from the political, administrative, economic, cultural environments, civil society and population.
- Enhancing the cultural patrimony as the defining element of Banat area multiculturalism and attractiveness;
- Improving public's access to the local and regional patrimony values.

These conditions impose new measures to limit the negative impact these factors bring and which, in the near future, to allow the protection, reconditioning and maximization of the Banat patrimony through cultural tourism at a national and international level.

## 6. Conclusions

To sum up, regarding the heritage potential built up in Banat along history, we can assert that it is one of the largest and most diverse in the country. Highlighting, reconditioning, preserving and capitalizing this potential has been and continues to be a permanent concern of experts, and lately of local authorities as well.

The results of the research conducted allowed the elaboration of a SWOT analysis whose components led to the supposition that within the near timeframe, the tourist unit performances management in the mountain areas will progressively develop and the performance-based compensation mechanisms will possess a strategic importance. On their basis, the organizational structure of the economic agents involved will be reshaped to align the mountain tourism needs and available resources as best as possible.

The holistic approach, in an original process of the interaction between the natural resources strategic management and activities specific to mountain tourism concluded into proposing some organizational improvement methods so that the public could access local and regional heritage values thus the result being the Banat region capitalization as tourist destination.

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