TOURISM POTENTIAL IN CARAS VALLEY AREA

POTENȚIALUL TURISTIC ÎN VALEA CARAŞULUI

ALINA BIROVESCU[1], ANA MARIANA DINCU[1], RAMONA CIOLAC[1], R. GHERMAN[1], A. COROIAN[1]

[1]Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Agricultural Management Faculty Timisoara, Romania; maridincu2004@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The Caras Valley area lays between the rivers Caras and Nera, in Caras-Severin county. This area differs from other Banat areas by the great tourism potential, particularly through the keys of a unique beauty, and Caras Gorges (19 km), Nera (18 km), Garlistei (9 km), Buhui (8 km), and others. Oravita town, situated in this area, has a great touristic potential: the Theatre Mihai Eminescu, the oldest theatre in the country, Vulturul Negru (Blak Eagle) Pharmacy, the first "mine pharmacy", the first steam locomotive, the first train station above the ground-floor, the first mine center in Banat and so on. And this is just one locality with touristic potential from Caras Valley.*

Key words: *Caras Valley, vestiges, traditions, folklore, history*

INTRODUCTION

Caras river runs through Romania for 50 km, in Caras-Severin county, through the rural localities Caraşova, Goruia, Giurgiova, Ticvaniu Mare, Gradinari, Varadia, Vrani and ends its journey in the village Iam, before entering Serbian teritory, in the province Voivodina. The Caras Valley distinguishes itself among other ethnological regions such as Almas, Danube or Barzava Valleys through its widely interesting keys, vineyards, haystacks covered meadows, hills mantled in fruit bearing trees and caves of age immemorial. The tourism potential, arheological vestiges, folklore and traditions make this region unique in Banat and Romania, also.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The authors have used the methods of work: identification and data collection, processing, analysis, observation and interpretation. In this paper

we analyzed the touristic potential of Caras Valley, an area with a lot of important natural and cultural objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Caras Valley area can develop an intense touristic activity as a result of high potential of the area. This potential combine the beauty of the nature with historical past and cultural legacy of this people.

The Caras river originates in the Anina Mountains, north-east of the town of Anina, through Izbucul Carasului, close to the sources of Barzava and Nera rivers, through the confluence of the streams which cross Culmea Certej, Puscasul Mare (Anina Mountains). It runs through Romania for 50 km, originally flowing to the north, then, in Carasova village, the first locality where it emerges after crossing Cheile Carasului, it turns south-west. Its course runs through the rural localities Caraşova, Goruia, Giurgiova, Ticvaniu Mare, Grădinari, Vărădia, Vrani and ends its journey in the village Iam, before entering Serbian teritory, in the province Voivodina. The river underlines the Romanian- Serbian frontier on a segment of 4.1 km. Its 60 km course through Serbia ends close to the village Stara Palanka, where it flows into the Danube. The Caras Valley area lays between the rivers Caras and Nera, guarded by Anina Mountains, between two districts of the eight privileged districts identified in Banat, during the period 1342-1658: in north, the district Carasova and, in south, the district Ilidia.

Although multi-ethnic in composition, with good neighbourhood relationships never rising any issues, Caras Valley kept its rural areas purely Romanian. Excepting a couple of settlements colonized by Bufeni (colonists from the Oltenia region) and/or Germans, the colonization have been done in Oravita and Anina mainly, because the two were mining centers,

The identity of the area Caras Valley particularly took shape in the second half of the 18th century, at the same time the austro-turkish war ended, under the advantage of an economic and material population's prosperity growth. In Caras Valley, most colonists from the villages where the colonization took place in the first wave blended in with the native population , most of them settling down in mining and economic centers as Oravita, Anina, Resita.

Having a rich deposit of coal, copper, silver and gold, Romanian teritory was exploited by the Austrian state, as an administrator of these

lands. In order to provide transportation for these deposits to the Danube, in 1847, the first rail-road in the country was founded between Oravita and Bazias. Then, in 1861, a new rail-road was founded, between localities Anina and Oravita. To build the 33,4 km of road, there was need for ample structures: 14 tunnels 2084m length (the tunnels, dug in hard limeston, last even nowadays), 10 viaducts 843m length, walls to support the mountainsides on 9946m length and cuts through the mountains on 21171m length. The route runs in the central and western side of Semenic Mountains, it goes around the mountains from Maidan – Bradisorul de Jos, passing through the Jitin Valley, then it goes up to Carasova, where it gets very close to Resita, only to go down slowly to Anina, afterwards.

The splendour of the landscape, the size of the structures and the resemblance between this route and the Semering rail-way in Austria, are the reasons for its surname The Semmering from Banat'.

In Caras Valley, we find two of the thirteen national parks: the Semenic-Cheile Carasului National Park and the Cheile Nerei-Beusnita National Park. The first is located in Carasova and comprises 60% of the locality's area. Here, we can find three of the four protected caves in Caras-Severin county (Popovăț, Buhui and Comarnic) and other eight caves, morphologically, speleogenetically, paleontologically particular; one of them, Rasuflatoarei Cave is unic in the south-west of Romania. The park, also, contains the only virgin beech forest in Europe, with a surface of aproximately 5000 ha. Cheile Carasului are aproximately 19 km long and are located in an area which contains one of the most beautiful karstic phenomenon in Banat, dolines, caves, quays. At this kind of distance we also find Cetatea Carasului (Caras Fortress), surrounded on three sides by precipice. The first written mention concerning the existence of the fortress lasts from 1323, when this one and the one from Virset had the same owner, master Nicolae. By the time it appeared in documents, the fortress belonged to the king of Hungary, Carol I Robert de Anjou. The fortress was conquered by the turcs in 1520.

Beside the exquisite landscapes and the medieval building, Carasova becomes conspicuous through its cultural identity. The land, occupied in proportion of 90% by ethnic croats, make the citizens of Carasova unique through their specific costume (an old version of the Croatian costume), traditions, custom, but, mostly, through the "crasovenesc" dialect, originated in Slav language, which, according to linguists, is closer to the dialects in

the south-est of Serbia and to the one in the west of Bulgaria (the torlak dialect) than to the croatian dialects. The forefathers of the inhabitants of Carasova came here from the south of the Danube, but their precise origins are no longer known. That's why, old researchers considered them, according to their interest, to be either serbians, or bulgarians. The facilities offered by Croatian people determined most residents of Carasova to register, in the last census, as ethnic croats, although, some time ago, any association with Serbian, Bulgarian or even Croatian people would have been inacceptable.

In his way to the frontier, the Carasova river gets river Garliste as a tributry, in the locality Goruna. The river Garliste originates in the Anina Mountains and, on his course, Cheile Garlistei spread on 9 km, begining at 3-4 km after exiting Anina and finishing aproximately 1 km before entering the village Garliste. The rezervation Cheile Garlistei is part of the Semenic-Cheile Carasului National Park and strikes through the beauty and wildness of its sceneries and through its limestone slopes which tower on both sides of the quay. On the entire surface of the quay and, then, all the way to entering Anina, on both banks of the river Garliste, there are square ruins of old buildings, all placed at aproximately equal distance from one another. As far as the role of these ruins is concerned, the opinions are divided. According to some, they used to be watermills, while others say that they were old lime pits or old stupas (which, in the past, were used for washing canvas rolls).

Walking further on Caras Valley, we reach Varadia, a rural locality housing the archaeological site "Dealul Chiliei" (Chilia Hill), which also contains the Roman camp Arcidava, located on the imperial road from Lederata to Tibiscum. Arcidava was the usual residence of King Burebista. The romans built here a military camp and, in its proximity, a rural site emerged. The archaeological researches produced a native pottery, from Roman period, which leads to the conclusion that the Dacians kept on living here even under roman domination. During Iustinian's rule, the fortress used to be called, also, Recidiva. The fortress was discovered in 1881, by the archaeologist Carol Torma, who finally identified Arcidiva as the settlement from Varadia.

In the proximity of rural localities Sasca Montana, Sasca Romana, we find the second national park in Caras Valley, that is Cheile Nerei-Beusnita National Park. Cheile Nerei are the longest quay in the country,

having 22 km. Inside the rezervation, we find caves, as it follows: Boilor Cave, Dubova Cave, Lacul Dracului Cave, Cotu Porcului Cave, Sperantei Aven, Valea Ulmului Mic Aven. In this national park, we can distingush Ochiul Beiului, a legendary infinit blue puddle, with a surface of 284 m^2 and a depth of 3.6 m. The lake Ochiul Beiului is located close to the three waterfalls of Beusnita river. The natural rezervation with the same name, the wild surroundings and the nearby ruins of the medieval fortress Ilidia, all of these make the most beatiful touristic sites in Banat.

The urban locality Oravita is a place of premieres. Here, there was built, in 1816, in a Vienner barogne style (after the Vienner theatre, Burgtheater), the first building in Europa lit by acetylene lamps and, at the same time, the oldest theatre in the country, the Theatre Mihai Eminescu.

On this theatre's stage, there were performed plays and music shows from the farthest corners of the planet. Profesional bands from Europe and from around the world performed here, for example from: Vienn, Paris, Berlin, Sankt Petersburg, Budapest, Graz, Innsbruck, Belgrad, Roma, New York, Philadelphia and so on. Among the Romanian celebrities who performed on the stage of the theatre in Oravita, we name Constantin Tănase, Constantin Nottara, Zaharia Bârsan, Ciprian Porumbescu and George Enescu. The special acoustics of the hall requires no sound amplification. In 1868, the troope Pascaly, having our great poet Mihai Eminescu as a sufleur, at that time, performed on this stage.

It is still Oravita where the first "mine pharmacy", Vulturul Negru (Blak Eagle) Pharmacy, was open. Founded in 1763 by Edward Winter and moved to its actual centre since 1790, the pharmacy represents a genuine edifice, a real jewel of Banat, from Habsburg domination. Nowadays, it functions as a museum and it includes an important collection of pharmaceutical and medical gadgets and considerably old medical books, all very well preserved. In the museum, there is also a remarcable cash register, perfectly functional. This cash register seems to have been used also as a safe, as it has an ingenious antitheft system. Furthermore, using a simple switcher, the cash register calculates the amount of cash the client has to pay, according to the time, meaning day or night.

Oravita has even more first-things, thatis: the first steam locomotive, the first train station above the ground-floor, the first mine center in Banat, the first furnace for melting non ferrous metals in Romania, the first mountane school for learning blacksmithing and mining (the first free

profesional school in Romania and the south-east of Europe) and the first commerce and industry fair (montane products, 1869).

From Caras Valley, we have the first folklore collections and manifestations. In 1840, Arthur Scott, superintendent on the estates of the count of Iam, who had heard and had been fascinated by the beauty of the stories told by local peasants, gathers them and, in 1848, together with his brother, Albert, publishes them in Stuttgard, under the title "Romanian stories". Another german, Kunisch, a traveler through Banat, becomes a devoted collector of stories, the most known being "The beauty without a body", story which inspired the "Evening star" of Romanian poetry, in his short incounter with Banat.

Caras Valley strikes through its natural environment, the splendour of its sceneries, the beauty of its quay and lakes, the archaeological vestiges and cultural sites, the costumes and traditions sacredly kept by its people.

CONCLUSSIONS

Little-known on national and even regional level, Caras Valley area enjoys a great tourism potential, but little exploited. Caras Valley strikes through its natural environment, the splendour of its sceneries, the beauty of its quay and lakes, the archaeological vestiges and cultural sites, the costumes and traditions sacredly kept by its people. It is a remarkable place that provides a valuable insight into the region's past and the origins of the romanian people.

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