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# „ THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN FUNDS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM IN THE BANAT REGION”

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**Abstract**: *European funds play a significant role in modernizing rural infrastructure, enhancing territorial connectivity and creating new opportunities for sustainable tourism development. This paper examines the contribution of European-funded cycling infrastructure projects to the economic and tourism development of rural communities in the Banat region, Romania. The research focuses on the regional cycling network initiated by Timiș County Council and investments promoted by rural municipalities. Using documentary analysis and comparative evaluation of investment projects, the study explores the potential of cycling infrastructure to improve accessibility, connect rural communities with tourist attractions, stimulate local entrepreneurship and diversify tourism activities. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of these investments in promoting local heritage, supporting small businesses, attracting visitors and encouraging environmentally sustainable mobility. The research highlights the importance of integrated cycling networks as strategic instruments for strengthening rural competitiveness, increasing tourism attractiveness and supporting long-term sustainable development.*

## • Introduction

European funds play an important role in developing rural infrastructure and promoting sustainable tourism. In the Banat region, investments in cycling paths and routes contribute to improving connectivity between communities, promoting natural and cultural heritage, and diversifying tourism activities. Projects initiated by the Timiș County Council and local authorities create opportunities for cycling tourism, local entrepreneurship, and increased rural attractiveness. This study examines the contribution of European funding to cycling infrastructure development and its potential to support economic growth and sustainable rural tourism.





## • Material and method

The research is based on documentary analysis and comparative methods, using information on European-funded cycling infrastructure projects in the Banat region, with a focus on Timiș County. Data sources include official documents from the Timiș County Council, regional development strategies, and project documentation provided by local authorities. The analysis examines funding sources, investment values, route lengths, connectivity between communities, and tourism development potential. The qualitative assessment highlights the potential contribution of these investments to rural tourism development, local economic growth, and sustainable mobility.







## • Results and discussions

The analysis of cycling infrastructure projects in Timiș County highlights the role of European funding in improving rural connectivity and promoting sustainable tourism. A strategic investment is the “Cycling through Western Romania” project, financed through the NRRP, which proposes a regional cycling network of approximately 1,856 km across Timiș, Arad, Caraș-Severin, and Hunedoara counties.

At the local level, the research examines investments in Nițchidorf, Dumbrava, Boldur, Giarmata, and Tormac. Four projects with identified investment values represent approximately RON 23.16 million. The Nițchidorf Phase II project, valued at RON 10.80 million, includes 27.14 km of planned cycling infrastructure, while the projects in Boldur and Dumbrava cover approximately 6.3 km and 3.25 km, respectively.

These investments offer opportunities to improve access to natural and cultural attractions, particularly the Lunca Pogănișului nature reserve near Nițchidorf and recreational areas in Tormac. The integration of local cycling routes into the regional network could stimulate rural entrepreneurship, accommodation services, local gastronomy, and the promotion of traditional products.

The findings suggest that European-funded cycling infrastructure has significant potential to diversify rural economies, increase tourism attractiveness, and encourage sustainable mobility. However, long-term benefits depend on network connectivity, cycling safety, and the availability of complementary tourism services.

## • Conclusions

European investments in cycling infrastructure represent a strategic opportunity for the economic and tourism development of rural communities in the Banat region. The analyzed projects improve accessibility and create favorable conditions for agritourism, sustainable tourism, and the promotion of natural and cultural heritage. The expansion of cycling tourism routes can encourage the establishment of agritourism guesthouses, the development of accommodation and local gastronomy services, the promotion of traditional products, and authentic rural tourism experiences. Furthermore, these investments can generate new entrepreneurial opportunities, employment, and additional income for rural populations. Integrating local cycling routes into a regional network can contribute to rural economic diversification, reduced tourism seasonality, and strengthening Banat's position as a destination for active, environmentally friendly, and sustainable tourism.





