



Rural Tourism Development in the Basin of Drăgan River

Helena Maria SABO¹

¹ Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Psychology and Science of Education, Cluj-Napoca, ROMANIA

E-mail: maria.sabo@gmx.net

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a description of the tourism potential in the region of Drăgan Valley Basin. The motivation in choosing this theme is given by the variety of tourism resources that is found in the picturesque Valley of Drăgan River and the attractiveness of this type of tourism that has recently developed in Romania, rural tourism, and particularly the prospects of development in the context of European context. Drăgan river basin is a major tourist attraction located in the mountainous area in the Northwestern region of Cluj County. The region stands out due to its various and attractive landscape: barren Peaks, snowbound Alpine heights in dense forests, Mountain meadows with millions of flowers, the impressive vertical scale is enriched by the presence of unique natural phenomena: waterfalls, springs, caves. The natural tourism potential in the region is completed by the major cultural, historical and religious attractions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Drăgan River crosses Vlădeasa Mountains from south to north giving them the shape of a horseshoe with an opening to the north.

Vlădeasa Mountains are located in the northern side of the Bihor Massif; they are limited in the west by Crişul Negru river and Iadului Valley, in the east by the Henţului Valley, in the south by the Someşul Cald and Bihor Mountains and in the north by the of Crişul Repede Valley.

The entire basin of Drăgan river is situated in the mountains of Vlădeasa, which are extremely divided, penetrating deeply into the mountains with a dendritic network. Drăgan River has two sources, first of Fântâna Rece peak at an altitude of 1652 m and second in Culmea Cumpănăţelului at an altitude of 1400 m. In the first 40 km of Drăgan water course, the river receives more than 30 tributaries in a landscape of a rare beauty; finally, the river flows into the Crişul Repede River near Valea Drăganului village and so it is formed the axis of symmetry that divides Vlădeasa

Mountains into two branches: east branch and west branch [8]. Most of Drăgan river basin is located in Cluj County. The Western boundary of this basin is the border between Cluj and Bihor counties by the massif of Piatra Calului. Drăgan River has its springs in the county of Cluj, and then it flows on the territory of Bihor County where it collects several small tributaries to the confluence with the Crăciun creek.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. Natural tourist resources

Vlădeasa Mountains' sights are an outcome of the geological constitution. Thus, in the Vlădeasa Mountains we can observe upper Mesozoic age rocks and even Neozoic. However, it is not formed from metamorphosed or sedimentary rocks, but from volcanic rocks. These rocks are the result of powerful volcanic eruption which gave rise to the lava flows that alternate with layers of ash and blocks torn from the foundation.

Volcanic products range is very widespread in Vlădeasa Mountains, covering nearly 500 sq miles.

The lower parts of the massif, where erosion has deeply penetrated the surface subcrustal eruptive bodies appear. The same are the Budureasa granodiorite or the Pietroasa ones.

In some parts of the mountain, like Stăna de Vale or the origin area of Răchitele Valley, erosion has removed the pile of lava, which appears below the limestone foundation, like rocks in northern Bihor Mountains.

The relief is important for tourism, primarily due to the multitude of forms it submits, individually or associated landscape diversity that attracts the tourists and also, of great importance in tourist activities [4].

Vlădeasa Mountains have a similar relief to that of Biharia massif: unwieldy forms, massive slope inclined but uniform.

The Apuseni Mountains were completely leveled in the geological past, when they were positioned at sea level, as a great erosion platform. At the beginning, they have been the surge of Quaternary earth movements and brought up to the current height. Therefore, the old platform is now at the altitude of 1600-1800 m, which appears as an unexpectedly large, flat plain, despite the great heights. The altitude Platform of the Apuseni Mountains has the largest development in Gilău Mountains and in Vlădeasa Mountains. The latter platform is much better preserved and therefore the large peaks, the flat terrain give the dominant nature of the relief. They are bordered by large valleys, strong grooves, whose slopes are inclined. Steep slopes, with enormous scree, characterize the hard rock, volcanic, and slope breaks in the riverbed, which generates numerous waterfalls.

Vlădeasa Mountains have a horseshoe shape opening to the north. "Mountain slopes have become major tourist attractions in tourist's psychology by exhibiting vertical slopes, their majesty and grandeur. They cut short a natural continuation of the landscape; rising as a barrier in the way of steps and view [3].



Fig. 1. Pietrele Albe [White Stones] [9].

The west branch of Vlădeasa Mountains is bounded on the east and west of Drăganului Valley and the tributary valleys of the Crișul Negru and Iadului Valley. It extends over a length of 50 km. It varies in length from the east branch because it is more sinuously due to its depart from a north-south line. It also differs from the east branch in other points of view such as height and morphology. I only want to mention an important element of this tourist area, namely Iadului Valley. Its sources gather in a small, almost flat depression which is located at Stăna de Vale resort, surrounded by dense forests of spruce and beech. Drăganului Valley falls below the wild gorges and cuts deep into the volcanic rock.

The "gorges" are a significant tourist attraction, representing the "first step, the wildest valleys of this type" [4]. The slopes are pitched here, and both Iadului valley and its tributary valleys carved waterfalls that can be easily visited: Săritoarea Ieduțului (a tributary on the left), Vălul Miresei (a tributary on the right) and beautiful waterfall Iadolina (Hell even on the valley).

I think it is very restrictive to speak about the tourism potential within the geographical limits. Since the attractive tourist resources are the objective of economic transition, we are free to include the surrounding attractions that may be complementary to leisure and tourism programs.

Thus, I should mention several surrounding attractions of paramount importance in attracting tourist flows. Thus, on Iadului Valley, there are a large number of objectives such as ridges, steep, gorges, swallets and caves; these constitute the landmark of the Iadului Valley because of their large number and wealth of speleothems in karstic systems assets (Bulz Water Cave, Fața Apei Cave, and Water Cave from Leșului Valley etc.) [6].

On the Stanciului Valley, there are two caves that have to be mentioned: Vârfurașu Cave and Lespezi Cave. Within the basin of Someșul Cald there are numerous caves, such as: Rădeasa Cave, Moloh Cave, Honu Cave, Pepi Cave, Alunul Cave, Ponor Cave, Izbuc Cave, Humpleu Cave and Onceasa Cave.

Other important sights of the abovementioned rivers are the gorges. Therefore, remember Someșul Cald Gorges (situated in the upper basin of the Someșul Cald Valley, near to the Rădeasa, Moloh and Honu caves), Stanciului Valley Gorges (near to Lespezi Cave).

"Along the relief, the hydrography establishes the main source of attraction belonging to the landscape. Picturesque river elements have attributes stored in their organizational, physical and chemical features or size of water reservoirs" [4].

The major tourist attractions are the waterfalls located in valleys nearby. Along the Iadului Valley, these are numerous. Water stream is puzzled by the huge blocks fallen from the slopes, creating rapids and

waterfalls. Iadolina waterfall is the very beautiful one, located at about 1 km upstream the last bridge, where you can admire the noise of water; the fall is under the road. Above these, along a tributary on the right, we can admire another waterfall – Vălul Miresei. Along Stanciului Valley, we can observe a very beautiful waterfall called Răchițele, which is formed from 2 steps of 30 m high, the water digging a marl of over ten feet deep.

The climate of Vlădeasa Mountains is a typical mountain climate, generally wet and cold at high altitude, with gradual attenuation at lower regions. Vertical ratios occur in all climate determinants. However with a harsh and capricious climate, Vlădeasa Mountains offer good times for visiting tourists. The entire May month offers a high clarity of the atmosphere, although the risk of sudden spring storms exists. June is usually rainy, with rain continuing to hamper visit. The weather is nice in July, often in the second half of the month. The good time is usually maintained throughout August and the first half of September. In addition, there are beautiful but rainy periods, which last 3 to 5 days. Autumn offers beautiful days, with great clarity and vision. Usually by mid-September a cold period of about two weeks starts to install when snow may fall.

Vegetation. As elsewhere in the Carpathian Mountains, the Vlădeasa Mountains vegetation is distributed vertically, with a top-down sequence: subalpine goals, spruce forests, beech forests, mixed forests of beech and oak. There are deviations in the general framework due to local disturbances and reversal of the subsoil, climate and topography, which is actually a feature of the Apuseni Mountains as a whole. Another feature is the great variety of flora components. Here the Nordic elements, the southern Mediterranean, the southern Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe elements shake hands. The mixture reflects a complicated history of vegetation; some of the present elements are relics of some long extinct climates, hot from the tertiary period or cold from ice ages.

2.2. Protected areas of Vlădeasa Mountains

Drăgan Accumulation. Drăgan Lake is located in the Vlădeasa Mountains in the upper basin of the Drăgan valley. Drăgan Valley benefits from two spectacular natural areas, one located upstream Traniș, with columns of rock that stand in the woods that cover the valley slopes, and the second area represented by Ciripa Spring and Moara Dracului (Devil's Mill) waterfall situated on a tributary descending from the summit Buteasa.

Varfurașu cave. The cave is also called the Cave with Banks. It is located in Vlădeasa Mountain, Stanciului Valley Basin, at an altitude of 1236 m in the municipality of Săcuieu. The cave is in custody of Cluj Speleological Amateur Club; it is over 2 km long, and is

placed under protection as a natural monument not open for tourists.

Vlădeasa Mountains. Vlădeasa cottage area can become a resort for winter sports of great importance. At 1836 m altitude, on Vlădeasa peak, there is a weather station. There are good opportunities in the area to practice mountain biking and paragliding. The area offers wonderful views over the surrounding valleys as well as special inducements for hiking practitioners.

Pietrele Albe (the White Stones) partly cover the administrative area of Săcuieu and Mărgău municipalities. It is a good place to practice climbing. There is a very spectacular steep limestone of Piatra Grăitoare Mountain (1557 m) from the eastern side of Vlădeasa Massif, to the left side of the Făgețel valley. The verticality of a great white is the window of caves arches, and chimneys. Many rare plants grow in the area and there are many open ravines.

Bănișorului stone. It is an interesting group of rocks which rise isolated from Bănișorului meadow grass in the Vlădeasa Massif near to Vișag village (Săcuieu). It is a geological reserve.

Apuseni National Park, with an area of 76,064 hectares, is the northern limit line joining the following mountain peaks: Bohodei Peak (1653.8 m) Fântâna Rece (Cold Fountain) Peak (1652.4 m) Cărligatele Peak (1694.3 m), the rate of 1650.3 m, Coasta Brăieșei Peak (1692.4 m), Briței Peak (1758.6 m) Piatra Tâlarului ridge, Micău Peak (1639.9 m) and Nimăiaș Peak (1588.9 m). From Nimăiaș Peak the limit switch on to the interfluvium between Stanciului Valley and Crăciun creek by the Nimăiaș (1612.0 m), 1584.0 m share Vârfurașu peak (1687.8 m) and continue to North-East, with saddle between mountains until Dealu Păltinișului Peak (1785 m). All these points are part of the western part of the National Park being protected natural areas.

Răchițele Waterfall and Stanciului Valley Gorges represent protected areas easily accessible from the Răchițele village.

Sequoia forest reserve is located on Domnulul Hill near to Săcuieu village; it is estimated to be about 100 years old, therefore giving an exotic distinctiveness to this area.

2.2.1. Cultural and historical attractions

Any tourist who arrives in Valea Drăganului can easily visit some famous historical buildings such as the citadel and camp of Bologa or cultural as the long celebration of the museum and memorial house, situated near the Poieni village in localities of Bologa and Ciucea, on the European Road E 60 [2].

2.2.2. Religious objects

The most important Orthodox Church from Drăganului Valley Basin is located in the village with

the same name, on a high hill, called Pod (Bridge), isolated of the village households, and in the same place where the cemetery is. Here the church can be seen even though far away, and bells heard from any part of the village. In the evening, the church is well lit, making it visible even from the European road E60. From here, the church seems to watch over all believers from the village in the valley.

Of a great value is the Wooden Church from Ciucea. In 1941, Veturia Goga, Octavian Goga's wife, brings the Gălpaia church from Sălaj - church monument dating from 1575 - and builds it on the property of Goga family near the "monastery" building. In some places, there are still fragments of paintings on canvas that were dusted inside the church. Unfortunately, during communism the paint was almost completely taken off the walls.



Fig. 2. Wooden Church (foto: Nemeş Loredana Mihaela, 2007).

2.3. Ethnographic objectives

These resources hold a distinct place in the sights of anthropogenic origin, primarily due to their specificity, knowing that each ethnicity has its own heritage, spiritual and material, resulted from the evolution of its consciousness in time and population spread space (...). Some of the most important attractive ethnographic elements are crafts and occupations. Their attractiveness lies in their practice, the tools used, how natural changes as the result of human activity. Their attractive dowry becomes more significant when the occupations and crafts are other manifestations ethnographic assertion, particularly customs, games and folk songs [1].

Among these occupations and crafts we can mention: farming, animal husbandry, hunting, wood exploitation and processing, masons work, weaving etc.

Potato is the basic plant cultivated here. Corn and spring wheat are less cultivated. Among the basic occupations of the people here, past and present, is breeding. Currently, the peasants are breeding buffaloes, cattle, horses, sheep, goats, pigs, chickens and bees. They also practice hunting, stone mining, wood exploitation etc.

Weaving is one of the occupations of household women in Valea Drăganului area. In the past, this was an important occupation for women, but today only a few older women still do this.

2.4. Habits

Among the traditional celebrations first to be mentioned are the Winter Holidays: Christmas and New Year ("Sorcova", "Pluguşorul"). Then there are those related to family traditions: marriage, birth and baptism ceremony, funerals etc. Other traditional customs are Crack spinning, Hoba, etc.

2.5. Popular costume

The old costume of residents from Valea Drăganului Basin used to be entirely hand-worked by women from the village.

Currently costumes are no longer manufactured and therefore only some of them are worn at some on major holidays. The women used to wear skirts of homespun berry that was sewn into a braid usually red, with wide sleeves. The men had large canvas trousers (Slack), white linen shirt with black buttons with no other colors. During winter they wore a hat of lamb, wool coat and pants (trousers). In the summer they wore Clopas on their head and opinci (a type of sandals) instead of shoes and their feet were wrapped in cloth wraps [5].

2.6. The main tourist sites in the area

Within the hydrographic basin of Drăgan Valley the following locations can be found: Drăgan Valley, Tranişu and Lunca Vişagului.

These villages belong to Poieni commune, located west of Cluj County, at a distance of 65 km from Cluj-Napoca, on E60. Poieni village is located on the riverside of Crişul Repede River, with an area of 19,003 hectares. Within its territory, we can observe the confluence of Drăgan River with Crişul Repede River.

Apart from the villages from the basin of Drăgan Valley, we have to mention the villages of Bologa, Morlaca, and Cerbeşti. The houses in these villages sometimes are located at great heights (1200-1300m), which give the typical scattered characteristic of the Apuseni Mountains village. These villages are

located in the basins of rivers Drăgan, Henț and Călata. Poieni commune and its villages maintain as a great tourist attraction not only because of their natural and cultural history, but also because of customs and traditions preserved here or Romanian traditional costumes. On the eastern branch of Vlădeasa Mountains there is Săcuieu village including the settlements of Săcuieu, Rigojel and Vișagu.

These are located very close to the basin of Drăganului Valley, part of the tourist routes departing from Drăganului Valley.

The village covers an area of 121.14 sq km and the local population is rather small in number: 1640 inhabitants in Săcuieu, Vișagu - 362 inhabitants and Rogojel - 718 inhabitants.

These are typical mountain villages, with farms scattered up to altitudes exceeding 1300 m. The natural potential of the village for tourism is impressive, for which a large part of its territory is proposed to be part of the "Apuseni Mountains" National Park.

In terms of tourism, in addition to beauty and attractive landscapes, Negreni village is known both at the national level and abroad for the organization of two traditional exhibitions: the Scythes Fair held on the second Sunday in June each year and known as the Autumn Fair from Negreni or the Fair in Fechetău village.

3. CONCLUSION

Rural tourism is manifested in two forms: holiday tour and transit tourism. The social evolution and the need for leisure in a much more fun and diverse rural tourism development are prerequisites. The major determinants are:

- the complexity of modern society, which leads to the need for movement and especially spending time outdoors. In these circumstances, agritourism has emerged as an appropriate solution because of its offer: beautiful and unpolluted landscape, and farmhouse accommodation;

- the reduction of weekly working hours and vacations fragmented into 3 - 4 mini-holidays, which has increased the amount of free time and subsequently the diversification of forms and methods of recreation and leisure;

- aiming to find new formulas for holidays in the village occupies an important place, therefore offering holiday accommodation at farms in rural areas and tourist villages;

- rural picturesque settlements characterized by unpolluted environment, preserving tradition and a rich historical past;

- the nostalgia for one's native place.

Rural tourism resources are divided into two categories: natural resources and anthropogenic resources. Rural tourism is a multi-factorial activity, not only a stay on a farm or a farmhouse.

Rural tourism is primarily intended for dynamic people, those who love nature and ecological tourism, taking advantage of every opportunity to practice walking, biking, climbing, "hunting pictures", sports and adventure lovers, hunters and fishermen, and the ones who consider living in such real source of health.

The holidays in the country lead to the greatest, individually benefitting from the condition of movement in an unpolluted environment, offered to an increasingly sedentary urban population, more related to the space enclosed by an artificial climate of an office, continuously exposed to noxious pollutants and urban agglomeration.

In the Western European countries, rural destinations have a growing share of total holiday destinations. The daily stress of city life guides the inhabitants of large cities to seek quiet environment, civilizations still unchanged. Trying to live the experiences of their grandparents and to become acquainted with another country, its traditions and its people, more and more foreign tourists choose Romania as a destination.

Drăgan Valley has high tourism potential, both by the presence of natural tourism resources and through preserving traditions and customs in the area. In my opinion, this potential is insufficiently exploited. That is because of the insufficient accommodation facilities in the area, road infrastructure is degraded and the area is hardly promoted by travel agencies. Thus, the first step towards the development of the region would be to rehabilitate the roads.

Still, the main problem area remains that of accommodation, the only types of accommodation being private in holiday homes around the lake. It would be very important for the environmental regulation to become more visible [7]. It is imperative for the staff serving the guests to be specialized in tourism. Prices should be set according to the level of comfort tourists benefit from. Accommodation facilities in Drăgan Valley could fit in the category of traditional households, reflecting life in the countryside of convincing authenticity. Thus, tourists will be accommodated at farmhouses, renovated and properly equipped.

Tourists should be given the opportunity to practice various activities within households, such as: gardening, feeding, possibly spinning and weaving.

It would be very necessary that a travel agency located in the village to coordinate all tourism activities in the area: to organize tours including all sights in the region: including the Bologa Castle, Ciucea Castle, Valea Drăganului Church, the traditional facilities (whirlpool, mills, etc.) and not least the natural attractions.

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