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# Tourist Potential of Târgu Lăpuș Micro-Region, Part of Maramureș

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## ABSTRACT

In the first part of the paper, we focus on the elements that contribute to the attractiveness of the analyzed territory for becoming a tourist attraction pole. The location of this region, along with the natural and human resources highlight the suitability character of this micro-region. In the second part of the paper, we formulate the SWOT analysis, on which basis we propose measures for the revitalization of Târgu Lăpuș micro-region and its integration into national and international tourist circuits.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to emphasize on the tourism potential of Târgu Lăpuș micro-region, which is located in the wide valley of its homonymous river. In this valley, in ancient times, Terra Lapusensis was founded, a land with traditions, habits and organization forms specific to Northern Romania. Due to the predominance of rural features in the micro-region, this area proves to be the most suitable for developing rural tourism, which represents an important financial source both for investors and local budget.

However, rural tourism in Romania as well as tourism in the analyzed area is barely developed currently, and it does not seem to be an easy going process because the unawareness of the stakeholders regarding the importance and potential of this area, therefore investments being low.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

This paper presents the main types of tourism that are suitable to be developed in Târgu Lăpuș micro-region as well as the measures proposed to achieve this

aim. The identification and analysis of these types of tourism were achieved based on field observations, literature and cartographic materials, as well as based on data provided by the local administration of Târgu Lăpuș and Maramureș County Statistics Office.

An important a priori condition for the revitalization and development of Târgu Lăpuș micro-region for its integration into the national and international circuits is the identification of the degree of favourability and dysfunctions in the area.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Due to the diversity of landforms, landscape, and the bioclimatic bio-geographic and climate particularities, as well as judging by its significant water resources, Târgu Lăpuș micro-region identifies itself with a strong competitor for the integration into tourism circuits (at the local, national and even international levels).

The administrative centre along with its constituent villages demonstrate the presence of a great variety of tourist resources (picturesque landscapes, unique morphological forms, architectural monuments).

### 3.1. Natural tourism potential

The natural potential is represented by mountain and hill landforms like Văratec and Secu peaks in Lăpuș Massif, Șatra peak and Breaza Hill, which can represent resources for practicing recreational tourism through activities like hiking, mountaineering, winter sports, and fishing.

Among the attractive tourist areas in Târgu Lăpuș micro-region we mention the volcanic neck of Șatra, the defile of Lăpuș river (carved in limestone), the Preluca massif with numerous Karst forms including Baba Gorges, Cufoaia Gorges (carved in Cufoaia valley) and Inău Gorges.

Due to the importance of some of the aforementioned elements there were established protected areas, among which we point out the most representative: The Landscape and Geological Reserve of the Lăpuș Defile (a length of over 25 km), The Fossil and Geological Reserve of the Baba Gorges (an area of 15 ha) and The Dobricu Forest Reserve (an area of 67 ha).

The hydrographical potential is represented by surface and underground water resources. Rivers and lakes are sources of tourist attraction. However, lakes have a higher potential of attraction, also providing facilities for recreation, leisure, fishing, grazing and water supply system (i.e. the lakes of Lighet, Rohia, Dămăcușeni, and Dobricel).

Therefore, hydrographical network becomes both a location for practicing swimming, but also for leisure and recreation (Lăpuș River, Suci, Dobric, Libotin, Rohia).

Thermal waters act like magnets for tourists due to their use in the curative treatment of a variety of diseases. The mineral springs from Stoiceni are also very well known (mineral water containing bicarbonate, sodium chloride, calcium, carbon, and magnesium), Borcut (sparkling mineral water), and Rogoz (sparkling mineral water).

So as to improve and increase the overall number of tourists in Târgu Lăpuș area, water resources must be fully exploited and administered. Consequently, a new balneal resort could be established at Stoiceni, while the Gorges of Lăpuș might be taken into consideration for practicing water sports.

Bioclimatic and bio-geographic potential specifically refers to forest landscape consisting of oak, beech and mixed oak-beech forests, sessile oak with acidophilus shrubs, sessile oak with mull flora, regular sessile oak with mull flora, beech hills on rendzina soils, beech with acidophilus flora, beech hills with Fetușca drymeia, Beech-hornbeam with Carex Pilosa, Faget hills on rocky soils, hill forests on mull flora soils. In this region, we notice a few areas suitable for forest recreation and leisure function (Rohia, Stoiceni, Borcut). Moreover, fauna is very rich, including valuable hunting funds. Such funds are representative and include: rabbits (*Lepus euopeus*), wild boars (*Sus scrofa scrofa*), roe deers (*Capreolus capreolus*), bears (*Ursus arctos*), foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*), and wolves (*Canis lupus*). Thus, the whole hunting production area is of 14 433 ha (Valea Mare) and of 6850 ha (Coroieni). The Association of Hunters and Anglers of Maramureș County strives to populate the hunting fund bringing pheasants and rabbits, but they are destroyed by foxes.

Table 1. The structure of the hunting area (ha).

Forest administration office	Hunting fund	Use	Water areas	Forest (ha)	Arable, hayfields, orchards (ha)	Pastures (ha)	Total (ha)	Hunting unproductively (ha)
Târgu Lăpuș	Târgu Lăpuș	GVS	0	4,110	5,300	2,900	12,310	1,240

### 3.2. The anthropogenic tourist potential

It includes a series of attraction sites (cultural institutions, museums, libraries, historical and art monuments, wooden churches, monasteries), traditional crafts (dancing, egg painting, and wood carving), and historical artefacts.

The spirit of human community is reflected by the local architecture, including attractions of anthropogenic nature constituting a genuine tourist heritage.

Bronze deposits, vestiges of settlements, funerary discoveries have been reported in Târgu Lăpuș micro-region (at Eghereș) Dămăcușeni (at Obreja) and Dobric. The major sights are represented by wooden

churches built by local craftsmen, who practice these activities (wood processing and carving) for centuries.

Within the administrative area of Târgu Lăpuș cultural sites such as: wooden churches, monasteries and cathedrals are distributed in many villages such as: Boiereni, Răzoare, Libotin, Rogoz ("Sfinții Arhangheli" Church, "Cuvioasa Paraschiva" Church at Rogoz, "Sfinții Arhangheli" Church at Cupșeni and "Intrarea în biserică" Church at Dobric).

Among the cultural sites of Târgu Lăpuș we consider that is worth mentioning the Reformed Church (with the highest tower in Lăpuș Land), the church of „Înălțarea Sfintei Cruci” (Roman-Catholic), the Cathedral of „Sf. Arhangheli Gavril și Mihail” (Orthodox) and the Reformed Church (18<sup>th</sup> century) at

Dămăcușeni, the only village that has remained predominantly Hungarian.

These spiritual core areas attest the religious faith of population, faith that has dominated for centuries (the immeasurable belief of the inhabitants of Maramureș is a known fact). Another important tourist attraction is the monastery of "Sfânta Ana" in Rohia, a privileged place for the spiritual seekers of peace and comfort. Other monasteries we can find in Dumbrava Village (Șatra Monastery) and in Boiereni village (Rohița Monastery).

These cultural attractions represent a home of religious faith, whereas people who visit them find the spiritual nourishment and comfort their souls need.



Fig. 1. Monastery of Sfânta Ana, Rohia Village.

Cultural institutions in Târgu Lăpuș area are represented by the buildings of the libraries, the House of Culture, the Ethnographic Museum (which presents collections of sculpture, costumes and ceramics, household tools, paintings, church icons), the museum next to „the House of the Poet” (Rohia Monastery), the museum inside the students Club in Târgu Lăpuș, the cultural centres (in villages of Borcut, Dămăcușeni, Fântânele, Răzoare, Rogoz).

Lăpuș area is one of the most specific ethnographic regions that have kept traditions and crafts in their original form until today. Thus, rural architecture, household organization, folk, music, crafts and traditional folk dance offer various attractions to tourists from all over the country and abroad (England, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany).

Although the capacity as well as the natural and anthropogenic potential of Târgu Lăpuș region is suitable for a more complex tourism industry, the intensity of tourist flow is rather low due to the tourist services that are not developed up to the international standards, and the lack of tourism promotion and the lack of interest in any opportunity to exploit the available resources.

### 3.3. Tourist facilities

The current tourist facilities do not reflect the highest tourism management of the tourist supply (both natural and anthropogenic). There are too few accommodation units as compared to the region's tourism potential. Planning tourism in the region should be viewed as a continuous process of designing new tourist facilities, and of modernizing the old ones.

Private guesthouses can usually provide from 10 to 20 accommodation places each. These units are generally named after the holder's name (e.g. Hotel Maria) fact that makes it difficult to monitor and integrate all these units. Each establishment provides different accommodation conditions, starting from facilities in the rooms and continuing with a diverse culinary offer.

Rohia Monastery offers people a number of 72 accommodation places inside the parish complex. Peace and serenity reign over the buildings and the hearts of people spending time in this corner of paradise.

Overall, the accommodation capacity for tourists in the region of Târgu Lăpuș is at a very precarious level as compared to the similar data registered in Western Europe. In terms of utilities and facilities this region is not yet able to receive foreign tourists.

### 3.4. SWOT analysis

The SWOT analysis of Târgu Lăpuș micro-region turns out to be a useful tool for developing tourism strategies in accordance with its natural potential and easily can bring out reasons for confirming our goals. This analysis represents a system of the strategic management, being the process through which any effects may be achieved along with the development and growth of strengths. Therefore a strategy is consolidated, developed, implemented and monitored so as to achieve the competitive advantage.

### 3.5. Proposals and measures for the revitalization of Târgu Lăpuș micro-region

Due to the great resources Târgu Lăpuș micro-region holds, the study focuses on justifying the development of several types of tourism: curative tourism (balneal), rural tourism, hunting tourism, as well as recreational tourism.

Our proposals aim to the development and modernization of accommodation facilities to the European standards with high quality amenities, which will result in attracting a large number of tourists.

The modernization of road infrastructure will thus allow establishing more facile communication links between the major sights.

One of the most significant problems is how to promote tourism in the region. The proposals consist in

new tourism offers and products based on facilities and tourist sights so as to attract new population segments. Much more, promotional materials, brochures, mass media advertisements, and a travel guide will be the

most used promotion items. The foreseen success of such campaigns will be effective once it is proved that certain categories of tourists became loyal.

Table 1. The SWOT analysis of Târgu Lăpuș micro-region.

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ various landforms (floodplains, lowlands, hills, mountains) that ensures eco-geologic diversity;</li> <li>✓ valuable mountain land in terms of landscape (volcanic relief in Șatra Mountains, sedimentary-volcanic in Țibleș-Lăpuș, crystalline in Preluca Massif);</li> <li>✓ transitional temperate continental climate;</li> <li>✓ water resources that provide for long-term needs;</li> <li>✓ hydro-mineral deposits with curative values (at Stoiceni, Borcut, Rogoz);</li> <li>✓ groundwater deposits in the strata in the mountainous area (Lăpuș Massif, Țibleș and Preluca);</li> <li>✓ surface water resources (lake areas, spectacular gorges, streams); deep and unpolluted soil (89%);</li> <li>✓ various land fund of average fertility;</li> <li>✓ areas with deciduous and coniferous forest;</li> <li>✓ forest areas with compelling attributes (recreation, hunting);</li> <li>✓ fresh air;</li> <li>✓ rich underground resources;</li> <li>✓ lack of pollution and major natural hazards;</li> <li>✓ the presence of Lăpuș Defile (natural protected area);</li> <li>✓ tourist natural and anthropogenic resources of great value (attractive landforms, mineral waters, hunting and fishing fund, forest reserves, and valuable religious, cultural, ethnographic attractions);</li> <li>✓ the development of hunting tourism;</li> <li>✓ the preservation of traditional, spiritual and material culture;</li> <li>✓ craft tradition;</li> <li>✓ a large range of housing facilities;</li> <li>✓ positive demographic balance;</li> <li>✓ diverse ethnic structure generating interference and multiculturalism;</li> <li>✓ infrastructure that provides a satisfactory level of accessibility to tourist attractions;</li> <li>✓ optimum conditions for weekend, religious and curative tourism.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ areas presenting geomorphologic risk (landslides);</li> <li>✓ areas subject to flooding and sinking;</li> <li>✓ poor management of water resources;</li> <li>✓ lack of water supply and sanitation;</li> <li>✓ insufficient management of mineral water resources;</li> <li>✓ thermal inversions;</li> <li>✓ lack of a management strategy of attractive tourist resources;</li> <li>✓ lack of financial resources necessary for the conservation and enhancement of tourist sights;</li> <li>✓ lack of environmental education;</li> <li>✓ poor public utilities in rural areas;</li> <li>✓ lack of socio-economic facilities in rural areas;</li> <li>✓ low level of road modernization;</li> <li>✓ poor diversification of accommodation facilities (no. of beds is reduced for satisfying the domestic demand and especially the international one);</li> <li>✓ the lack of highly equipped ski slopes;</li> <li>✓ low level of training and employment in tourism;</li> <li>✓ the quality-price disparity for the services provided;</li> <li>✓ insufficient promotion of tourism.</li> </ul>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>RISKS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ possibility of accessing funds such SAPARD, ISPA, EAFRD for various development projects;</li> <li>✓ funds available for the preservation of traditional elements;</li> <li>✓ accessing funds for environmental protection;</li> <li>✓ partnerships between local authorities and stakeholders;</li> <li>✓ available national resources for the modernization of infrastructure (roads for road paving);</li> <li>✓ using EU funds for the development of infrastructure;</li> <li>✓ available funds for the development of tourism infrastructure;</li> <li>✓ preservation and protection of degraded areas by assisted tourism;</li> <li>✓ increasing hunting and fishing tourism due to rich available resources;</li> <li>✓ management of mineral water resources with curative value (at Stoiceni, Borcut);</li> <li>✓ management of winter sports (skiing, climbing, rafting);</li> <li>✓ management of ethnographic values.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ decreasing water quality;</li> <li>✓ degradation of living conditions;</li> <li>✓ reducing green areas due to negative human impact;</li> <li>✓ pollution and lack of adequate environmental control;</li> <li>✓ qualitative and quantitative degradation of natural resources;</li> <li>✓ inadequate exploitation of forests that could lead to the formation of landslides and long-term loss of valuable resources;</li> <li>✓ the loss of human resources active in traditional crafts (pottery, fabrics, wood);</li> <li>✓ the loss of tourist attraction through degradation;</li> <li>✓ loss of personality by adopting other architectural styles;</li> <li>✓ creating a negative image of tourism through unsatisfactory supply.</li> </ul>

*Curative tourism* is based on the underground waters from Stoiceni, Borcut and Rogoz. The most important deposits of mineral waters are located at

Stoiceni, being of great significance both in terms of efficacy (treatment of digestive disorders, certain chronic diseases and blood pressure) and economically.

What enriches this area are the six springs, located at Stoiceni, which contain chloride, sodium, calcium, magnesium, bicarbonate and carbon.

However, these resources are not properly used as the area is completely unequipped. Therefore, it is proposed to become the site for the development of a resort of about 500 accommodation places, which will provide for the local and regional tourism market. Much more, it is planned the existence of a modern camping, equipped with various facilities designed to meet the basic necessities of tourism demand with lower financial possibilities.

It is also possible to develop *rural tourism* in areas with natural or anthropogenic potential like Rohia, and Stoiceni due to the valuable landscape (accessible hiking hilly land, astonishing volcanic relief with important water resources, Lăpuș Gorges).

This type of tourism involves the revival of traditions and folklore, by preserving and promoting the Romanian, Hungarian and other minorities' customs.

They consist in folk festivals, colourful events that testify the Lăpuș Land's beauty of poetry, song and dance: "Horea în grumaz" Festival, at its 9<sup>th</sup> edition, promoting the vocal qualities of local people; Winter Festival with carols and customs, in which we can see participants of the neighbourhood villages and regions, with the oldest carols and church songs of the village; dance and folk festival in the Lăpuș Land, which has been functioning since 1967 each year opening with a folk costume parade and songs about Lăpuș Land.

The strategy will focus on the modernization of accommodation facilities while preserving the traditional and high-impact elements (architecture, the gates of Maramureș, with specific symbols).

*Hunting tourism* is determined by the current hunting fund available in the region. This should be exploited to its maximum capacity and included in the tourism offers (yet, only with expert assistance during legally established periods).

In case of the existing lakes, the strategy proposes a new planning for development purposes so that they become the main attractions for future visitors, as well as the location for the organization of fishing contests in each season.

*Leisure tourism* will be established by competent authorities in specific areas.

The forms of leisure tourism that can be developed in this area are provided and supported by:

- opening of a tourist resort at Dămăcușeni, and it needs to include areas for practicing outdoor sports, as well as hiking trails properly marked;
- new cycling trails in the forests and the organization of regular cycling competitions
- planning a complex for winter tourism in areas favourable in terms of morphology and climate
- equipping the lakes with sailing and swimming facilities.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on literature references and research in the field, several dysfunctions and strengths have been identified, which led to the proposals brought out in the last part of the paper.

These proposals are intended to enhance and maintain Târgu Lăpuș micro-region in the top tourist destination of the north Romania.

Therefore, various forms of tourism should be developed, such as:

- curative (spa) tourism (balneo-therapy) at Stoiceni, Borcut and Rogoz;
- rural tourism in villages that hold valuable cultural heritage;
- hunting tourism (in the surroundings of Lighet and Rohia lakes);
- leisure tourism in all areas that landforms allow the construction of cycling trails, hiking treks and new facilities for practicing winter tourism activities.

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