

**Sustainable Transport and Tourism
along the Danube**
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**WP3: TRANSPORT & TOURISM SYSTEM ANALYSIS
STATUS-QUO / STATE OF THE ART CARAS SEVERIN COUNTY, ROMANIA
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



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Action 3.2.

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11/06/2013



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Caras-Severin County, known as the “Mountainous Banat”, is located in the South-Western part of the country, with a surface area of 8,520 sq km, representing 3.6% of the national territory. The Danube River realizes the South and South-West border with Republic of Serbia. The Danube point of entry in Romania is Baziaş village.

In Caras - Severin there are five areas with remarkable **tourism potential**:

- Semenic Mountain area is well known for winter sports, situated at the altitude of 1,400 m and 35 km distance from Reşiţa town. The area includes Trei Ape mountain resort.
- Cerna river valley- which is part of the National Park Domogled – Cerna Valley. It includes Băile Herculane spa resort, internationally recognized for its natural healing properties;
- Anina Mountains area;
- Iron Gates area includes the longest part of the defile – Danube Gorges;
- Muntele Mic area includes the ski resort Muntele Mic and the micro zone of Poiana Mărului resort.

In the hot spot area there are **52 protected areas** of which 51 of national interest, covering a surface of 173.881,8 ha (1800.2 sq km).

- 4 national parks: Nerei Keys – Beuşniţa, Semenic – Caraşului Keys, Domogled – Cerna Valley with areas in Mehedinţi and Gorj counties, Retezat (with areas in Hunedoara county).
- 1 natural park – Iron Gates (with a total area of 1156.55 sq km, of which in Caraş-Severin County 747.74 sq km, and the rest in Mehedinţi County);
- 47 natural reserves - 22 natural reserves located inside the national parks and 25 outside (botanical, zoological, paleontological, geological, mixed-forests, scientific, wetlands).

TRANSPORT SYSTEM

Caras Severin County has a strategic geographic location, as the crossroads of commercial paths, connecting Central Europe to the South Mediterranean countries and offering economic and social opportunities for development. The county is an important transportation node and has two cross-border points with the Republic of Serbia, respectively at Naidăş and Moldova Nouă. The county is situated at the junction of major roads and fluvial communication routes.

The public road network has a length of 1,944 km, with an average density of 22.8 km/sq km. The distribution of the public road network is the following: 560 km – national roads; 883 km –county roads; 501 km – communal / village roads.

However, transportation infrastructure registers significant deficiencies, mainly related to the lack of motorways, low number of intermodal connection, low carrying capacity of existing roads, unequal distribution of rail and road across the county. These malfunctions limit the development of tourism sector, as the access in the tourist areas is difficult for both domestic and foreign tourists. A permanent concern of Caras Severin County Council is to identify opportunities for financing the rehabilitation of road infrastructure.

The highest **density of road network** is concentrated in the North and North-West part of the county, while the South is poor developed. The main malfunctions concern the following aspects:

- Lack of motorways inducing the traffic intensification on roads, which puts pressure on the inter-regional and international transportation;
- Lack of ring-roads for most towns in the county and consequently the internal traffic is very difficult and increases the duration of travel;
- Low carrying capacity of existing roads, generating effects of accelerated degradation, and the high

- percentage of out-dated district roads, which leads to decrease in the possibilities to easily access the sightseeing spots in the territory;
- Improperly lighting and marking, leading to decrease of driving speed, increased travel time and high consumption of fuel.



Figure 1: Transport nodes for the Iron Gates Natural Park (Source: realized by the authors)

The accessibility between rural localities, major cities and main tourist attractions can be realized using regular **bus and minibus transport system**. The region is very well served by a number of regional buses with a good frequency. Often, fewer busses run on winter time or weekends. Generally, the main bus services operators are private companies, which ensure international connections to big cities in Europe and regional transport inside the county. Trains and busses timetables are not properly correlated with negative results in transfer times. The busses have no bicycle carriage.

The region does not have a **bicycle path network** which can provide connections to the main area or intermodal nodes. The only existing bicycle path is between Moldova Nouă and Moldova Veche on a length of 5 km. It is not well equipped and no point for bike rental or storage facilities is available.

In Caras Severin County, **the railway network** has a length of 344 km, which represents 18% of total length of the network in the West Development Region. The region can not be directly reached using train services. In the Western and North - Western part of the county, there are six railway lines which facilitate the connection with main area and provides important intermodal nodes. These trains, except for the route Orșova – Caransebeș, offer a medium level of quality.

The main railway which crosses Caras Severin County is 900 Line: București – Craiova – Caransebeș - Timișoara which has on the county territory a length of 110 km (Orșova – Caransebeș). This railway line crosses the most important tourist area in the county—Băile Herculane spa resort. In the Western part of the county, Oravița railway node liaises with Republic of Serbia.

Danube shipping and cruises are relatively low developed. Only one harbour for passengers and freight – Moldova Nouă (fluvial crossing-border point with Republic of Serbia) exists for a length of over 64 km (the South

border of Caraş Severin County). In Moldova Nouă town a ferry provides border-crossing with Republic of Serbia.

Caras Severin County benefits in a limited extend from Danube shipping opportunity because of improper road and rail connections. The bridge connection with Eastern Serbia is through Drobeta Turnu Severin (Mehedinti County). Few local operators offer trips along the Danube and most of them are private operators (Hercules Tour, S.C. Hercule S.A., S.C. Manea S.A). In general, these are one day-trips are short, the vessels used are small (10-20 places) with a limited number of included services.



Figure 2: Transport nodes in the hot spot area of Caras - Severin County (Source: realized by the authors)

The only **county airport** in Caransebeş city, initially designed for internal flights, is not currently functional. However, it maintains its potential of being used for internal and external passenger traffic, especially for tourism purposes. The county’s residents and tourists appeal to Timișoara International Airport services “Traian Vuia” (112 km distance from Reșița municipality).

The current shortcomings in road infrastructure reduce the possibilities of economic development, the proper connection localities to domestic and international markets and economic exchanges. The weak points of the infrastructure overcome its strong points, while de opportunities are prevailing.

INFORMATION SYSTEMS

In the analysed area, there are three information points, one information and promotion centre of tourism, four information-documentation centres, three information centres and three information and sociologic education centres inside seven national or natural parks. Various websites offer information about tourist attractions in Romania, including those in Caras Severin County. County Council of Caras Severin developed Internet platforms comprising information about tourist tracks, tourism forms, accommodation, maps, photos all the date being available in three languages Romanian, English and Deutsch on <http://turism.cjcs.ro>.

One of the factors that dissatisfy tourists is the poor tourist informing – signs, panels, tourist marks. Unfortunately, the quality of the experience and training of employees in the tourist information centres with

reference to the communication techniques and specific tourist information techniques is not so high. Despite all these, during the last years progress has been done in this field, along with the creation of some tourist information centres/points managed by the local councils or the protected area administrations in the region.

TOURISM SECTOR (DESTINATIONS, INDUSTRY, DEMAND, ETC.)

Caras Severin County benefits from important natural and cultural resources supporting the development of tourism sector. The unique landscape of Iron Gate of the Danube, connecting Romania and Serbia, offer beautiful attractions as river-flow, cliffs and woodland, archaeological sites. The county represents one important point of concentration of the tourism activity along the Danube, and the most important in the Western and Southern Danube counties, providing accommodation, food & beverage facilities, mineral waters, recreational facilities. The most important tourist resort in the area is Baile Herculane resort.

In Caraş-Severin County, 166 classified **accommodation units** are registered, with 6,275 bed-places¹. In **Băile Herculane tourist resort** are situated 64 accommodation units and 3890 bed-places (62% of the county total). An important contribution to the county accommodation offer is represented by the **Semenic** (21 units and 538 accommodation places) and **Muntele Mic** (16 units and 398 bed-places) mountain areas and the **Caransebeş** (18 units and 487 bed-places) and **Reşiţa** (12 units and 327 bed-places) urban centres.

In 2011, **the number of tourists** arrived in the Caraş-Severin County was 104,956 persons, representing 1.5% of the total tourist flows registered in Romania and 16.5% of the total tourists registered in the West development region. This indicator had a changing evolution during 2007 - 2011 period. After a slight rise in 2007-2008 (+3.5%), the number of tourists decreased during the recession period by -11%. Still, an important rise in the number of total arrivals of 13.1% was registered in the last analysed year. In 2011, the structure of the tourists accommodated in Caraş-Severin County indicated that Romanian tourists represented 94.1% and foreign tourists 5.9%.²

RELEVANT FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS (ORGANIZATIONAL, LEGAL, FINANCIAL)

The National public authorities and agencies experienced in the field of sustainable mobility and tourism are: The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MECC) and Environmental Fund Administration; The Ministry of SMEs, Business Environment and Tourism together with the National Authority in Tourism; The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration; The Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure

The Local Authorities will have an important role in sustaining tourism development at local level, promoting the Danube tourism, by getting involved in the creation of the specific infrastructure, in setting up tourist programmes, creating local brands or attracting the interested factors into the creation of tourism development associations. Local authorities play a strategic part in this matter.

Other competent institution in the field of sustainable mobility with tangential implication also in tourism are Club Metropolitan, Asociatia pentru Tranzitia Urbana / Association for Urban Transition, Organizatia pentru Promovarea Transportului Alternativ in Romania (OPTAR) / Organization for Promoting alternative transport in Romania, Asociatia Industriei Feroviare din Romania / Romania Railway Industry Association, Club Feroviar, Federatia Biciclistilor din Romania / Romanian Cyclists' Federation, Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) Romania, Association "Bate Sausa sa Priceapa Iapa" which developed several initiatives in promoting sustainable mobility projects and alternative transport solutions in urban areas. In some projects and activities, these institutions worked together and/or in cooperation with national authorities in regional development, environment, transportation, tourism field.

At regional level, several associations are involved in promoting sustainable tourism and sustainable mobility

¹ Database with accommodation units classified by the Tourism National Authority

² Source: INS, Frecventarea structurilor de primire turistică cu funcțiuni de cazare 2011

(i.e. Grupul ecologic de colaborare Nera Oravita / Ecological Group of cooperation Nera Oravita, Asociatia de turism "Prietenii Muntilor" Resita / Tourism association "Friends of the Mountaina" Resita, Association Bike Attack Resita). Still, the initiatives are rather spread out, concentrating mainly on promoting particular types of soft transportation such as bicycle.

The **development plans in transportation and tourism** are rather general, establishing a broad framework of development. Specific objectives and activities for sustainable mobility in tourism are isolated, especially referring to cycling tourism, active tourism and cruises tourism and not being developed in an integrated perspective.

The strategies are missing concrete activities for development of sustainable mobility with special regards to tourism. Lack of concrete strategies for supporting tourism development and soft mobility in tourism will result in loss of tourism potential values, investing in projects that affect the sustainability of landscape or natural environment.

Tourism comprises a wide variety of products and destinations and involves many different stakeholders, both public and private, with very de-centralized areas of competences, often at regional and local levels. The success of tourism development in the Danube area depends on the support of the stakeholders involved and their cooperation.

The joint actions of the stakeholders are needed to come up with specific activities to rise the tourism competitiveness. The stakeholders should point out the main impediments identified in this sector that prevented them from developing their activity properly.

In the field of sustainable mobility in tourism, the involvement of stakeholders is very low, mostly concentrated on supporting principles of sustainable mobility at national and local level or promoting soft tourism forms such as cycling tourism. The efforts of the authorities are isolated and no single cooperation could be identified in the field of "sustainable mobility in tourism" as a distinctive topic between public authorities, tourism organizations and public transport operators.

The Danube River has an extraordinary tourist and economic potential, which, unfortunately is exploited in a very small extent in Romania. The public authorities are aware of this matter and that is why they are planning to bust the tourism activity by creating new Danube ports in the near future. The ports represent one of the main elements of cohesion in Europe, due to the development of the cruise industry which has turned some ports into tourism centres for whole regions and cities.

Conclusions

Private operator's involvement could be increased if the public sector recognizes, through strategies, plans, funding schemes etc., the importance of soft mobility transportation for local/regional/national development and rise awareness of their benefits and offers grants for their development. The success of tourism development in the Danube area depends on the **involvement, support and cooperation of the stakeholders** in tourism and transportation sectors;

It is necessary to support inter-sectoral and inter-ministry cooperation transport - tourism in order to identify the shortcomings of tourism development generated by poor infrastructure, poor transport connections, and lack of intermodal transportation.

As the local soft mobility infrastructure is still low-developed or in the early stage of development, the feasibility studies should be carried out in order to identify the most suitable area for the development of cycling routes, intermodal connection, connections ships – road – train and to avoid latter-on traffic congestion, generated by improper calibration of the means and routes of transportation.

The marketing strategies further developed in the project should have a common vision and general objectives as an umbrella guideline for the local strategic initiatives in supporting sustainable transport offers in tourism. The tourism marketing strategies should be elaborated on a regional scale, having specified a clear implementation horizon, moreover to include concrete actions supporting sustainable mobility offers and sustainable mobility with special regards to tourism. The coordinating institution implementing the marketing strategies should be the local authorities, in partnership with local NGO's which should have a more focused on the final, measurable results in terms of outputs.

The central and local authorities are planning to boost the tourism activity by creating new Danube harbours in the near future. The ports represent one of the main elements of cohesion in Europe, due to the development of the cruise industry. Intensification of cross border cooperation supporting the development of all type of infrastructure through Cross-border Cooperation Programmes with Serbia and Bulgaria is very necessary.

Visiting Centres and Information Points (VC&IP) have a limited uniformity of the services offered and a limited working program with the public. Still, new visiting centres and information locations could be set up as well as centres that already functioning, through European funds, already mentioned in the management plans of the national and natural parks which do not have such facilities yet.