

THE PROSPECTION OF LOCAL SPECIFICITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT. CASE STUDY: SASCA ROMÂNĂ, SASCA MONTANĂ COMMUNE, CARAŞ-SEVERIN COUNTY

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to reveal the specificity of the rural one selected village in Romanian Mountainous Banat. The central premise is that the specificity is a central element for nowadays rural tourism in the context of globalization. The methodology consisted in qualitative evaluation of the following elements: rural landscape, village functionality and peasant households. The major conclusion is that the specificity of this village is well preserved and could constitute one important premise for rural tourism development.

Key words: rural space, development, prospective approach, local identity
Romanian Banat

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1. INTRODUCTION

Defined as being organized by the local rural communities, in tight correlation with the natural and human environment (Miu, F., 2008), rural tourism is praised for its values: offer variety, diffusion into the territory, adaptability, fair prices, varied services (Ciangă, N., 2006).

Rural tourism represents a field of great interest in Romania, both for researchers and local communities because of several specific premises (Coccean, P., 2004, Petrea, R., 2004, Ciangă, N., 2006, Miu, F., 2008):

- 90 % of the national territory and 50 % of the population are rural, being relatively away from modernity;
- the growing demand in urban areas for proximity trips, in an unpolluted and uncrowded natural area, for recreation and complementary activities;
- the reorientation of parts of the tourists towards national offers, in the context of the present crisis;
- the image of rural tourism as an important alternative for development.

The experience of European countries (Bran, F. et al, 1997, Miu, F., 2008) and of Romania as well, beginning with the 1990's (Ciangă, N., 2006, Miu, F., 2008) show the fact

that, in order to be an alternative or complementary domain of rural functioning, rural tourism must be conceived from the durability perspective (Dinu, M., 2006).

The outlining of conditions that are to assure the durability of rural tourism development has been correlated with the reflection upon another important issue of today – globalisation – and the context it defines (Ilieş, Al. et al, 2009, Ilieş, M., 2009).

Thus, from the durability point of view as well as assuring the ongoing of local, regional, and national identity in the context of globalisation, authenticity/specificity imposes itself as a major element.

Therefore, the prospection of local specificity is an obligatory step, assuring the correct assesment of its elements and making possible their putting to good use through one of the many types of tourism that can be found in rural areas: cultural, pleasure and resting, treatment, sports, week-end, agrotourism, or secondary residence tourism.

2. THE LABORATORY SPACE AND THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analyzed space is Sasca Română village (the commune of Sasca Montană, Caraş-Severin county) a village which was, still the 2002 census, entirely Romanian.

It has been chosen because of the important premises it holds towards the development of rural tourism: geographical position, natural atractivity, the keeping of rural functionality and the complexity of tourism resources in the area.

The village is localized in the South-West of Romania, in Banat Region, at 140 km from the main regional emitter for the rural tourism – Timișoara – (307,347 inhabitants) and at 86 km from the capital of Caraş Severin county – Reșița (84,678 inhabitants). Other 5 towns are situated at less than one hour distance-time: Oravița (13,154 inhabitants) – at 32 km, Moldova Nouă (13,687 inhabitants) – at 26 km, Anina (9,046 inhabitants) – at 54 km, but also Vrșac (Vârșet) (36,623 inhabitants) and Bela Crkva (Biserica Albă) (10,623 inhabitants), in Serbia (figure 1).

Sasca Română is situated on a piedmont glacis, at the contact of the West Hills (Oraviței Hills) with the Locvei Mountains, at the exit of the Nera river from the gorge sector, at a distance of 3 km from Sasca Montană, the commune residence (figure 1).

The touristic resources in the neighbouring areas are varied and valuable (Olaru, 2000). Near the village there are protected areas: Nerei Gorge, Beușnița, Susara Gorge, all of them integrated in the Nerei Gorge – Beușnița National Park. There are also anthropic resources:

- the Theater in Oravița (the oldest in Romania, 1897);
- the romanian orthodox churches from Sasca Montană, Slatina-Nera (monument), Potoc, Bogodint;
- the Monastery of Slatina-Nera;
- the roman-catholic churches in Anina and Oravita;
- elements of industrial archeology (mining techniques at Anina, Oravița, Ciclova Montană);
- the roman road and ottoman bridge at Camenita and the roman vestiges from Cărbunari;
- the first mountain railroad in Romania and south-eastern Europe: Oravița-Anina (1848-1864), 34 km in length, 14 tunnels and 10 viaducts, the first curved viaduct in Romania.

The methodology of prospecting the local specificity of the Sasca Română village has taken into consideration the following aspects:

- the analysis of the rural landscape components (village hearth and estate), as a synthesis of the complex interrelations between the components of the space and population and their evolution;
- the analysis of the village functionality (including the tourism functionality) at present and in an evolution perspective;

- the analysis of the viability of the local community from the point of view of actor in the development of rural tourism;
- the exhaustive analysis of peasant households, because they are a „frame of the material and spiritual values” of the village (Ilieș, G., 2007, p. 145), defining elements of local and regional identity, with a role in forming the image of the analyzed space. The analysis chart had into view: household characteristics: form, components, layout, construction materials, dominating colors, the form of the buildings, ornamentation, the inside layout of the houses, architectural elements (Ilieș, G., 2009).

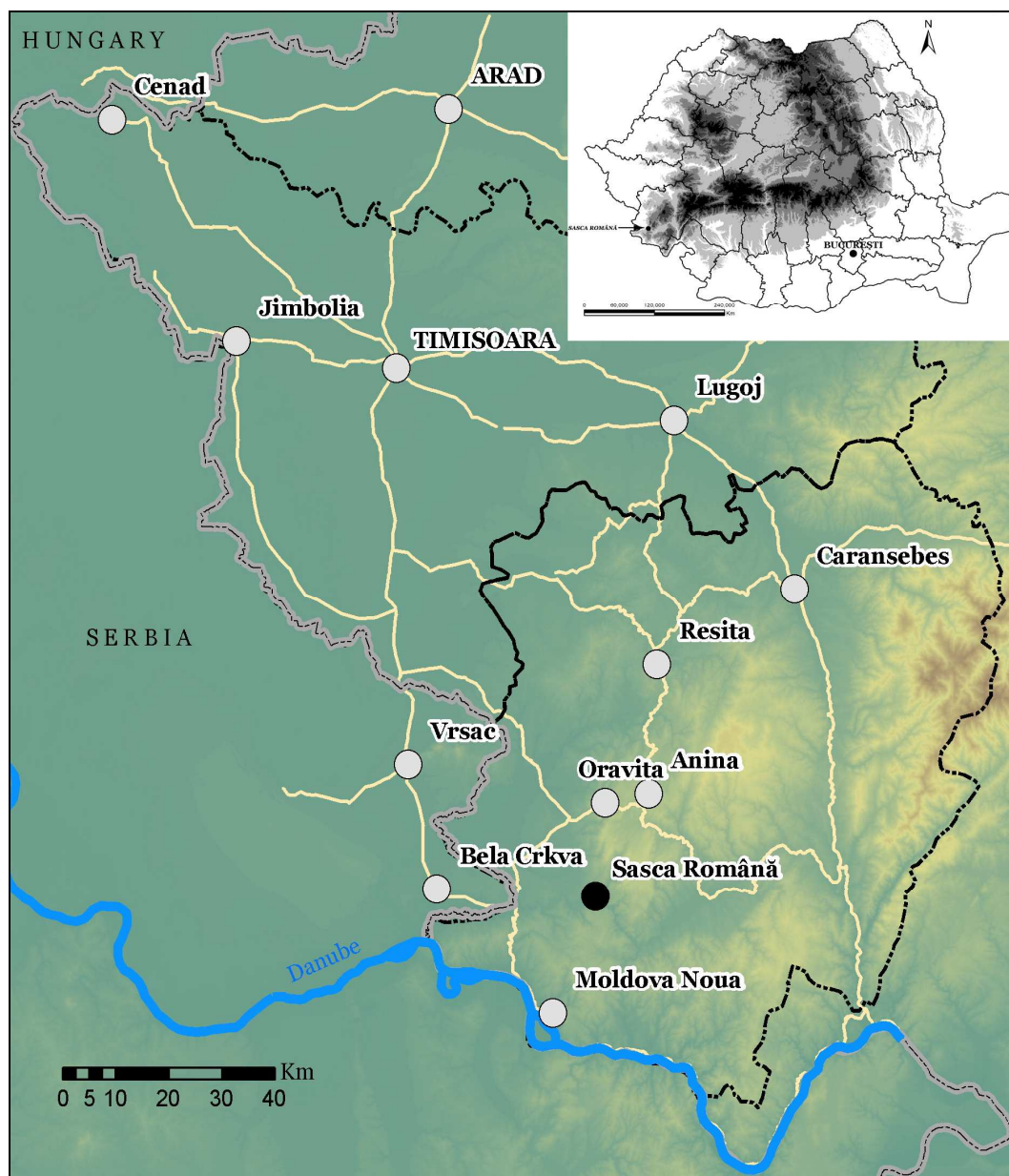


Figure 1. Geographical position of Sasca Română village

3. MAIN RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1. Rural landscape characteristics

Sasca Română is a small village, it has a hearth that is adapted to the topography, the houses are close to each other and the road texture is irregular. One can distinguish groups of 2-3 streets that converge to a small square, but the biggest space with the role of central place and convergence point of streets is the area with the Culture House and the Touristic Infocentre. The estate of the village has many drinking water springs that are constant throughout the year, originating in the glaxis. Population density inside the village is 179 persons/km², and househol density is 65/km², the occupation percent is between 15-30 % (in the central area) (cf. The General Urban Plan). The estate surrounds the hearth, it extends a lot towards the Aninei and Locvei Mountains and has may points of observation and includes forests and cultivated lands. The arable lands are situated close to the village hearth, on both sides of the Nera river, they are cultivated with corn and vegetables. Most of the estate is occupied by orchards of plum, apple and pear trees and hay fileds.

3.2. Functionality and viability characteristics of the local community

From the functional point of view, the Sasca Română village had an evolution directly linked to the industrial complex of the Banatului Mountains. The main professional groups that succeeded in time were: the *"stanjenari"* – which exploited the wood for supplying charcoal to the ore foundries in Oravița and Anina – and the *miners*.

Other jobs or activities were in relation with the geoeconomic potential of the local envirnoment and the needs of the local and neighbouring communities: stone carvers, wheel makers (3), blacksmiths (7), carpenters (5), furriers (3), bakers (1) and around 15 families of potters that made utility ceramics for the households and the people that were working the land; they used to go to the plains and The Danube Gorges where they would trade wood for agricultural products, especially wheat (Lazăr-Pârjol, M., 2007).

Even if Sasca Română is an extinct pottery centre now, the craft of pottery is worth a special mentioning, because of the specificity elements that stood out:

- building the pottery oven near the house entry;
- setting up the pottery wheel near the house entry as well;
- a particular technique, "different from all other pottery centres, that involved braking the soil lumps with a stone cylinder – *volt* – on a wooden floor, sifting, manual kneading and decorating the pottery with anthtropolological motives, in relief" (Bucur, C., 2007, p. 299);
- the specific oven, with an oval shape, constructed from bricks;
- a specific type of house, the last potter house from Sasca Română being exhibited in the Museum of Civilization and People Technique Dumbrava Sibiului, in Sibiu (Bucur, C., 2007).

The production was mixed, traditional ceramic, with no enamel and ceramic with enamel.

Raising cattle has also been a permanent component of the functional profile of the village, fact demonstrated by the large number of characteristic dwellings – *huts* – still visible in the village estate. These can be the basis for creating complementary accomodation units.

The destructuring of traditional industrial capacities of Mountainous Banat during the transition from centralised economy to a market economy has generated negative evolutions both socially and economically in the Sasca Română village as well.

The population number has grown smaller in these conditions and a general aging process stepped in. At present the ratio between retired persons and active persons is 1.6, which affects the human resources of local development.

The present functional profile is represented by subsistence agriculture, which is less than the agricultural potential. Since there are no structures like associations, the average size of agricultural exploitations is 5 ha and the use of machines is very little.

There is only one initiative in the field of tourism, a two margaret board and lodging house. It has 12 accomodation places, restaurant services and also offers leisure and extreme sports activities. The index of room occupation is 60 %, proving the existence of a real potential in this field (Ancuța, Olaru, 2007). Another boarding house will be opened in 2010.

The diminuation of village functionality in comparison with the period before 1989 has led to the disappearance of local fairs and markets, the villagers participating only in those held in the commune residence village.

There is only one festival, called „ruga” which is held on the 8th of September, when the orthodox christians celebrate the birth of the Virgin Mary.

This existence and functioning of weak integration in larger social and economic flows, together with the difficulties and costs of the transition period, has led to a defensive mentality, a passive attitude, correlated with a certain fear or anxiety of change or outsiders (Ancuța, 2007).

The village offers good living conditions, the connections with the outside, water supplies and waste management are at optimal conditions.

The social and cultural institutions, that have recently been reconditioned, as well as the two churches (orthodox and neoprotestant) respond to the specific needs of the people.

3.3. The analysis of households

The living area of the village is composed of 235 houses, of which 16 are secondary residences, 75 % of their owners being from the regional pole of Timisoara, the others from Caraș-Severin county. Only 3 houses have been built in the last 20 years.

This area has a compact structure, developed around a tentacular street network that sums 4.9 km in length.

The lots have fronts that range between 10-20 m at the street and are 70-300 m long from the street, depending on the terrain configuration; the fronts are generally continuous, with no interruptions.

The houses are built at the street, and the street side is massive, while the other structures are situated towards the inside (courtyard).

Traditionally the houses were built from limestone and the binding material was clay. The walls are thick (~60 cm) with a bi or tricellular layout, with entry and living quarters, no floors, gable roof, fireplace, oven inside the entry, (tronepiramidal) chimney constructed in the attic.

At present, most of the houses are built from rock and brick, with roofs made from tile or asbestos plates. The oldest houses, that are in ruin have roofs covered with shingle and wooden roof frameworks, gable roof. The houses have only one ground level.

The old, traditional house has two forms: house with entry or open corridor with pillars (figure 2) and house with no entry way, the entrance being made through the room where the bread was baked (the room with the „light hearth”). The houses spread in length towards the courtyard, having two windows towards the street (figure 3).

The positive economic status before 1989, assured by the complex functionality of the village and it's inhabitants – which associated work in the mining industry with an agriculture free of communist collectivisation – has stimulated repeated modifications of the traditional household, starting with the years 1960-1970.

The first type of modifications was the extension of the house along the street and making a gate in the middle or on the side (figure 4), or a lateral gate and a door at the middle of the house (figure 5).



Figure 2. House with open corridor
(Olaru, 2009)



Figure 3. Traditional house with two windows
towards the street (Olaru, 2009)



Figure 4. Modified house with lateral gate
(Olaru, 2009)



Figure 5. Modified house with lateral gate
and a door in the middle (Olaru, 2009)



Figure 6. House ornamented with
multicoloured faience (Olaru, 2009)

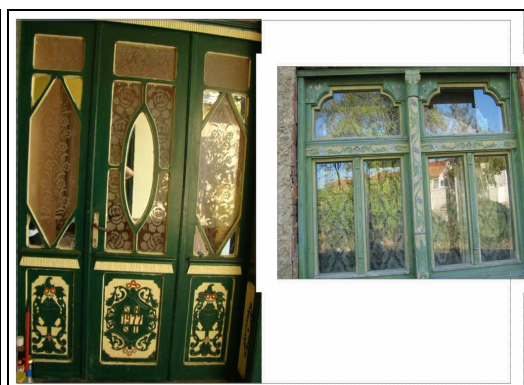


Figure 7. Window and interior doors
ornamentations (Olaru, 2009)

The second type of modification, refers to ornamenting the house with multicoloured faience, but with traditional motives – for example the rhombus, which represents the sun (figure 6), or the base of the house with mosaic. The need to make the house beautiful, but also to affirm one's economic status, materialised also in the decorations present inside the house that are kept until today. There are window and

interior doors ornaments (figure 7), made by carpenters from neighbouring villages – Socolari, Ilidia, Ciuchici, Ciclova and Forotic – which are only found in a few other villages south and north of Oravița.

The most recent transformations, with a higher visual impact on the constructed landscape, represent the plastering with concrete and painting the houses in bright colours (figure 8).



Figure 8. Renovated house painted in bright colour (Olaru, 2009)



Figure 9. Secondary residence preserving the traditional aspect (Olaru, 2009)

Most of the secondary residences are old houses, of which:

- some have been raised one level, and the interior altered, but the exterior aspect has been kept traditional, including the annexes with elements of specificity (figure 9, annex with the pottery oven);
- others have been rebuilt, keeping the resistance structure and putting to good use the building materials of the old house or other houses from the village (figure 10).

The new secondary residences stand out through trying to use at least elements that coincide with the natural environment and the traditional architecture – rock, wood (figures 11).



Figure 10. Secondary residence preserving local specific material (Olaru, 2009)

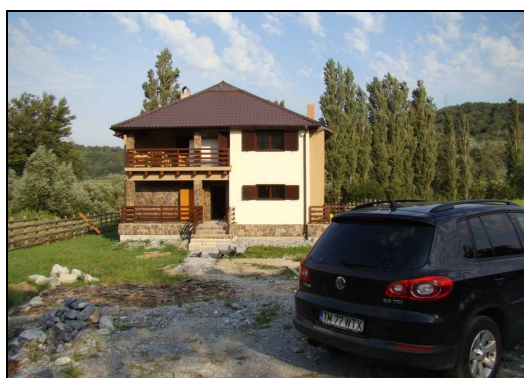


Figure 11. Secondary residence - new building (Olaru, 2009)

The analysis of all the 235 houses taking into consideration the elements of specificity as mentioned above (2 infra), shows the fact that the households in Sasca Romana preserve in proportion of 94 % the features of local specificity (figure 12).

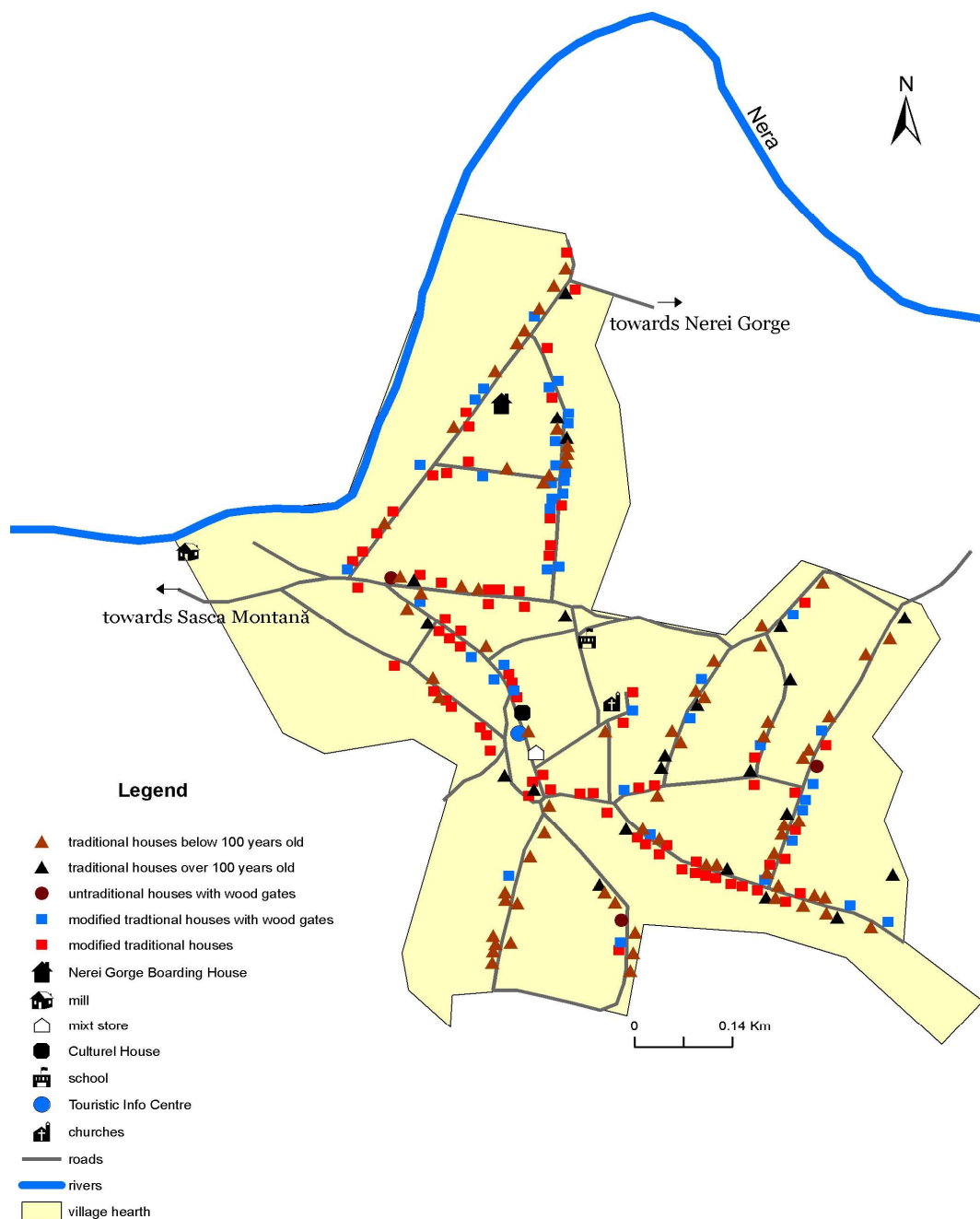


Figure 12. The spread of traditional architecture elements in Sasca Romana village

4. CONCLUSIONS

Sasca Romana holds special conditions for developing rural tourism: it is situated near exceptional touristic resources, good connection to potential emitting areas, unaltered natural landscape.

The analysis on local specificity shows the existance of important premises for an integrated putting to good use of village's personality. The village is functional and viable,

well administrated and holds an authentic and coherent architectural patrimony.

Tourism is already a domain in which the authorities have put thought and action, materialised in the *Strategy for developing and promoting tourism in the Cheile Nerei-Beusnita National Park area*.

It is important that the actions undertaken take into consideration the advantages offered by the preservation of the local specificity and not only focus on quality of the services, as in numerous examples of rural tourism development in Romania.

Through an integrated putting to good use of the advantages linked with tourism, traditional village, agricultural functionality, an integrated system of rural development can be defined, with a triple dimension – economic, social and cultural.

The power of positive examples, as well as the implication of the authorities, can assure the overtaking of the actual social depression and initiate the synergy that is necessary to attract capital and transform the premises into durable realities.

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