

Rural and Historic Tourism Potential of Seceani from Timis County, Banat Region

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Abstract

This paper intends to underline the unknown natural and historical resources of Seceani, one of the smallest and until recently isolated villages in Timiș County, Orțișoara Commune, Banat, Romania. Two are the objectives with great natural tourism potential in the commune: the resource of geothermal water and the muddy volcanoes. Their exploitation would ensure the economical development of the area, as well as the experimentation of alternative tourism, such as ecotourism and therapeutic tourism. Besides this, there is also the vicinity of the biggest Bronze Age Fortification from Cornești and a medieval fortress just in the centre of the village. The promotion of a rural and historic tourism in Seceani will enhance the progress of the area and also will increase the image of Banat, as a tourism destination not only in Romania, but in all Europe and even further. Its purpose may be to educate the traveler, to provide funds for ecological conservation, to directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of this local community, or to foster respect for the authentic Banat culture and mentality.

Keywords: economical development, historical tourism, rural tourism

Introduction

Expressions of rural tourism, agro tourism and village tourism are used many times as synonyms by experts and developers [1-5]. This fact can be explained with the diverse activities of the area. Countryside hospitality is more or less connected to the agribusiness and this marketing product consists of accommodation services, catering and leisure time services. Rural tourism can be defined as a tourism product, whose approach accentuates the importance of supply management and marketing activities [6-10]. On the other side, archaeological sites and historic places are major tourist attractions worldwide. In the last few years, visits to historic sites have ranked third, after dining in restaurants and shopping, among activities undertaken by the Europeans traveling abroad [11-13]. But the number of people that visit archaeological sites rises every year and the

increase in traffic can result in damage to sites. In extreme cases, sites have been closed to the public to prevent further damage [14-16].

Results and discussion

a) General data

Seceani is a small village in Timiș county, Orțișoara Commune, Banat, Romania. Lies about 35 km North of Timișoara, at the Northern limit of the Timiș and Arad counties, halfway between Timișoara and Arad, on the national road DN69, Orțișoara. It is bordered to the East with Fibiș, to the South with Murani, Orțișoara to the West and Vinga to the Northwest. In 2011 it was opened the highway Timișoara-Arad, with output towards Orțișoara and Seceani.

b) Natural and socio-geographic potential

Seceani is situated on the morphological boundary of Vinga plateau and the plains of Lipova Hills and occupies a prominent line from the Zorilor Valley and Ron Valley springs (from their junction results Viilor Valley brook, left affluent of Apa Mare brook).

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Two are the objectives with great natural tourism potential in the commune: the resource of geothermal water and the muddy volcanoes.

Geothermal water is ground water that is heated by the earth's energy. The term geothermal comes from two Greek words: geo, which means earth, and therme, which means heat. By harnessing the physical properties of steam and heat, geothermal water can be used to generate electricity. If the water is hot enough, it can be pumped straight into radiators and used as space heating, besides being bottled and sold as drinking and curative water. Reservoirs of geothermal water are found in locations where the earth's heat is near enough to the surface so that water or steam can reach the top. There are two types of geothermal water reservoirs: low temperature reservoirs and high temperature reservoirs. Low temperature reservoirs hold water that is less than 302° F (150° C). High temperature reservoirs hold water that is greater than 302°F (150°C). The deeper the reservoir is located in the earth, the hotter the water it holds will be. In Seceani low temperature reservoirs are found, with therapeutic properties similar to the ones from Calacea and Lipova.

Different types of power plants can be created in order to convert geothermal water into electricity. Dry steam power plants use steam as it comes from the ground to turn blades in the power plants turbine. Flash steam power plants use high pressure piping to bring the hot water to the surface. Once at the surface, the water is then converted to steam and used to generate electricity. A binary cycle power plant uses lower temperature water to vaporize a separate fluid which is then used to produce electricity. Geothermal water reaches the surface in a variety of ways. Hot springs are produced when the reservoir is connected to the surface by faults. Geysers are periodic eruptions of steam that can shoot up to 200 feet (60.96 m) into the air. A fumarole is an opening in the earth that emits a mixture of steam and gases. These geothermal features are usually formed around volcanic activity which is present in Timiș county area, even if not at the surface, but inside the scientists proved that it still exists latent volcanic activity. The resource of geothermal water from Seceani has been valorized during several generations only through the balneoclimaterical resort of Calacea, which works at encouraging parameters.

In Seceani we can also find muddy volcanoes or mudpots which are a type of either a hot spring or a fumarole. Mudpots are pools of bubbling mud rather than water. If the reservoir does not have much water, that little water which reaches the surface is mixed with soil filled with volcanic ash, clay and other components. This produces mud that is usually white or gray in color. When the mud is multicolored, it is called a paint pot. Thus, concerning the muddy volcanoes from Seceani, they came lately in the study programs of some geologists, who investigate them annually, but without giving yet any verdict on how this natural resource can be put into value. Another problematic issue is that the access at this geological miracle from Seceani is restricted, being located on private land, whose status cannot be revalued without solid professional documentation.

Generations of cold gas emissions, where carbon dioxide gas predominates, the muddy volcanoes from Seceani provide both an insolite sight, especially at times of rain, as well as a picturesque local legend baggage about the mutterings of Gheena Mother (from greek Γαῖα, Gaia, the personification of the Earth and one of the Greek primordial deities) or about a rider who had fallen in and still cries out for help.

c) Historical and archaeological potential

The Clay Fortress from the center of Seceani village is one of the best preserved monuments of this kind in the Banat territory but, nevertheless, historical and archaeological information is missing almost entirely. Documentary evidence of the village sets the beginnings of Seceani since 1256, when it appears in the disputes of inheritance from Csanád County. The subsequent history of the locality is well documented in the sources, but without mentioning this fortress. Habsburg topographic maps do not illustrate the Seceani fortification, although it is very well preserved in the ground until today. In a paper on the research history of Medieval archaeology of the Banat plain, Alexandru Rădulescu mentions the first an archaeologically unexplored and undated clay fortification in Seceani. On the satellite imagery and ortophotoplans, this fortress is observed with great clarity, so that its location field does not raise any difficulty. Based on these data, in September 2006 the members of eGISpat project carried out archaeological research of

Timiș land and set the topographic elevation of the area known by locals as "the fortress".

If Clay Fortress is situated in the middle of the village and the muddy volcanoes from Seceani lie just four kilometres from the highway, the great Bronze Age fortification from Cornești, believed, until recently, to have been built by Attila or Avars - is situated at a distance of about only seven kilometres, being therefore out of reach of those who, tired of the road on the highway, will be tempted to rest for a cultural incursion.

Fortunately, while other important archaeological sites are left to oblivion, the Cornești fortification came under Romanian and foreign specialists attention, systematic campaigns of study putting into evidence recently the fact that here functioned, with more than 3.500 years ago, one of the most important political centre of civilization. The origin of Cornești fortification still remains unknown, though some state that the inhabitants were the thracians of the Northwest. Only in the past three years, together with the Banat Museum specialists, researchers, students, and people from other cultural areas in the USA, United Kingdom, Germany, France and Ukraine scientifically pilgrimaged the Cornești area. The local archaeologists proved however that the fortification was contemporary with the Mycenaean civilization, only the actual explored fortress occupying over 1.700 hectares.

Initiated since the scholar Joachim Miloia, the research program to this objective, to which associated the Archaeological Institute of the Romanian Academy; Dickinson College, USA; Berlin's Museum of Prehistory and the University W. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe from Frankfurt, will stretch on at least 15 years - the period is enough for local authorities, in interaction with the plethora of archaeologists working here, to initiate a program of tourist valorization, striving for the inclusion of Cornești fortification on the list of UNESCO World Heritage.

d) Rural and archaeological tourism

Unfortunately, although Seceani area has a great potential, it remains just an unknown village in the northern part of Timiș County. As I mentioned before, no one knows about the geothermal water resources or the muddy volcanoes of Seceani, besides the scientists who study them annually. Different articles appeared lately, which promote the natural environment potential of Seceani, but more goodwill, ambition and perseverance is

required in order to develop a rural tourism to this location.

Concerning the archaeological potential of Seceani, it has more chances to be developed, taking into account the increasing interest in the Cornești area. Seceani could become a great accommodation unit for those visiting Cornești in the future, although many villagers are hospitable and eager to welcome (and sometimes even host) visitors. In the same time, tourists will be invited to visit also the medieval fortification, very obvious just near the village church, even if at the moment is still unexplored. This could be turned into an advantage to speculate and to weave different stories and myths for attracting more curious people. Moreover, the relief is very diverse, plain and hills, suitable for the tourists willing to know the beauties of Banat by bike, with a great chance to be turned into an ecotourism destination.

Conclusions

From the analysis of the rural and historical potential of Seceani, the following significant aspects have emerged:

1. The rural area of Banat has favourable conditions for developing rural and historical tourism: geographic diversity, unexplored areas with many natural and historical resources waiting to be valorified, hospitable inhabitants willing to receive and host visitors, and the presence of foreign investors which raised lately the local economical power.
2. Seceani holds a great touristic potential, situated in the vicinity of the new inaugurated Timișoara-Arad highway, and only a few kilometres away from the most important Bronze Age fortification from south-eastern Europe, benefitting of an unique resource of geothermal water and muddy volcanoes from western Romania, as well as with a mysterious fortification just in the middle of the village.
3. Inhabitants, although pretty isolated from the rest of Timiș settlements, are very hospitable and willing to participate to the welfare of their community. This can be used for the development of rural tourism, being however, a segment of the urban population that is interested in visiting the rural area and understanding its lifestyle. This segment in the tourism industry has been rapidly

growing in the past decade, the rural tourism becoming not just a good business prospect, but a genuine vacation trend.

Seceani has also a great potential to develop alternative types of tourism, such as ecotourism and therapeutic tourism, due to its position and varied geographical environment, curative waters resources, involving visiting fragile, pristine and relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low-impact and often small scale alternative to standard commercial (mass) tourism. Its purpose may be to educate the traveler, to provide funds for ecological conservation, to directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of this local community, or to foster respect for the authentic Banat culture and mentality.

The promotion of a rural and historic tourism in Seceani will enhance the development of the area and also will increase the image of Banat, as a tourism destination not only in Romania, but in all Europe and even further.

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