

STRATEGIC PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF CARAȘOVA COMMUNE, CARAȘ-SEVERIN COUNTY

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Abstract: The authors of the paper carry out an analysis of the Carașova commune in Caraș-Severin county with the main purpose of identifying some strategic directions for its development in relation to the existing potential. The main research methods used socio-economic diagnosis of the commune, SWOT analysis and content analysis. The socio-economic analysis of the municipality begins with the physical-geographic aspects, followed by the economic and social demographics and ends with the identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks. Based on them, the main strategic directions for the development of the Carașova commune are drawn up.

Key words: strategic proposals, Carașova, development, Caraș-Severin

INTRODUCTION

The rural area comprises an inland or coastal area containing villages and small towns, where most parts of the land are used for: agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and fishing; the economic and cultural activities of the inhabitants of these areas (services, crafts, industry); the development of urban areas for leisure and entertainment; other uses [10].

The authentic rural space is distinguished from all points of view (economic structure, population, occupations, culture, social life) from urban, industrial, mining, port areas [7]. Carașova commune is located in the southwest of the country, in the central part of Caraș

Severin county (the third county in the country in terms of size), approximately 15 kilometers away from the county seat, Reșița, on National Road 58 (Reșița -Annina). Carașova commune has an area of approximately 14,132 ha., and an altitude of approximately 200 m., being formed as an administrative-territorial unit of three villages: Carașova - the communal center, Iabalcea and Nermed. The distances from the component villages are 3.9 km from Nermed and 5.1 km from Iabalcea [11].

Carașova commune borders the following administrative-territorial units:

- Reșița municipality in the northern part;
- Lupac commune in the western part;
- Goruia commune in the southwest part;
- Văliug commune in the eastern part;
- the city of Anina in the southern part. [11].

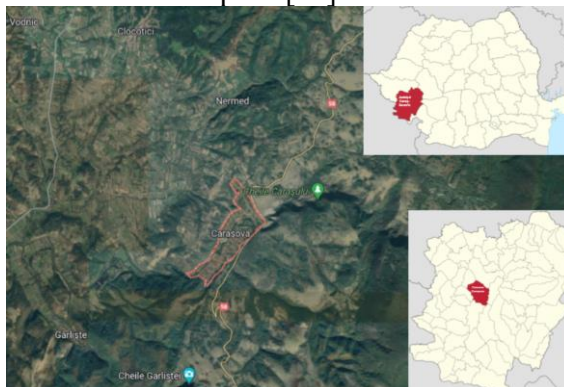


Figure 1. Location of Carașova commune within Caraș-Severin county

Source: own GIS processing

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The main research methods used in this work are: observation, analysis, synthesis, case study, collection of statistical data (provided by the National Institute of Statistics and Tempo online portal), processing, graphic representation and their interpretation.

The research is structured in two directions: a socio-economic analysis of the commune and the identification of the main strategic directions for its development.

The socio-economic analysis of the commune is carried out with the help of the analysis method based on the system of statistical indicators which is usually carried out with the help of seven analysis criteria (physical-geographic, demographic, economic, housing, technical equipment, social, ecological) [5].

The SWOT analysis. it is used, first of all, for the purpose of identifying the current situation of the studied area, which also constitutes the first step in the development of strategic programs.

The name of this analysis comes from the abbreviation in English of the following words: Strengths - strong points; Weaknesses – weak points; Opportunities – possibilities; Threats. In this analysis, the internal specifics of the studied microregion are evaluated first, i.e. the strong and weak points, and then the analysis is focused on the external influences. External effects that have a positive character are considered possibilities, and negative ones are considered dangers, threats. [4]

RESEARCH RESULTS

- **Socio-economic analysis of Caraşova commune**

The natural setting of the Caraşova commune - Relief. Hilly areas, characterized by relatively low altitudes, are predominant in this locality, along with plateaus, meadow areas and lowlands and high plain areas and plateaus. The landforms specific to the commune favored both shepherding and agriculture, both of which were, until a few years ago, the main local economic resources.

The relief of the Caraşova commune is part of the Anina mountains, which in turn are part of the great unity of the Banat mountains and fall into the Caraşova Depression. (Caraşova Town Hall, Caraşova Commune Development Strategy 2014-2020, [6,11])

The commune of Caraşova is located at an altitude of 300-350 meters, completely occupying the depression which is surrounded on all sides by steep slopes, which rise up to 100-150 m above the hearth and with an aspect dictated by the geological composition of the area.



Figure 2. Caraşova village literally "fills" the Caraşova Depression

Source: [15]

Due to the relief, morphology, geology, flora and fauna, on the territory of Caraş-Severin county, the need to protect some exceptional areas was imposed by establishing 3 national

parcs, 1 natural park, 50 reserves, as well as the current proposal of new objectives. Semenic-Cheile Carașului National Park is located in the central part of Caraș-Severin county, occupying an area of 36,364.8ha which includes 10 declared reserves (14,420.8 ha) and 8 proposed reserves.[6,9] Its western limit is in right of Carașova locality, which means that over 60% of the area of the commune is included in the National Park, considering the buffer zones. The importance of the presence of this National Park for the local community can be found both in the environmental conservation aspects and in the considerations related to the monitored economic activities, considering the restrictions. Of the 10 reserves of the Semenic-Cheile Carașului National Park, 2 are under the administration of the Carașova municipality (the Comarnic Cave and Popovaț Cave speleological reserves [1]).

Climate. The inclusion in the climatic ensemble of the territory of Romania defines the area as being part of the moderate sub-Mediterranean continental climate area, with the predominance of the frequency of warm years over cool ones. [16].

Hydrography. The Carașova area is part of the reception basin of the Caraș River, which as a whole is presented under the shape of a slightly arched rectangle.

The population of Carasova commune is one of the smallest in Romania [2]. From a historical perspective, the Carașova commune has always been one with a small population, but it was also influenced by the political and historical events in the region [8]. In 1992, the Carașova commune had a population of 3,810 inhabitants.

In 2005, Carașova commune had a population of 3,254 inhabitants, indicating a decrease in population compared to 1992. In 2010, Carașova had a population of 2,959 inhabitants, this figure still indicating a decrease in population compared to previous years, and statistical data emphasized the fact that this decrease was more pronounced in the case of the young population.

The emigration trend continues both according to the statistics from 2015, where the population includes 2,696 inhabitants, and the statistics from 2022, which show us a number of inhabitants of 2,268, due to the fact that young people are always looking for work opportunities and of development in other areas of the country or from abroad.

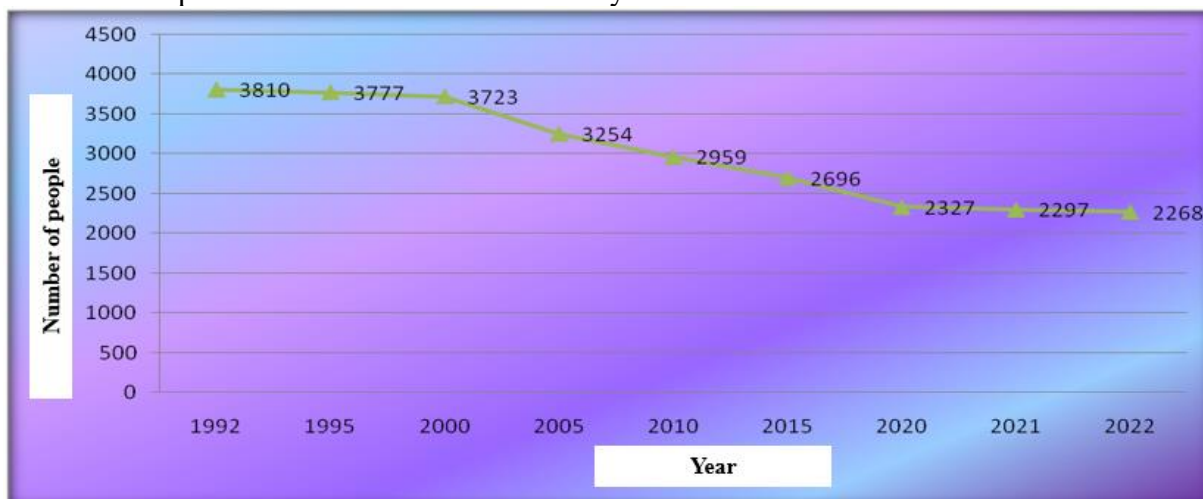


Figure 3. Numerical evolution of population in Carașova commune 1992-2022

Source: Prelucrare proprie conform [12]

The natural demographic balance. The natural population balance is the difference between the number of births and the number of deaths in a certain period of time. The natural demographic balance of the Carașova commune is negative, due to the fact that the number of deaths is higher than the number of births, a fact which, in turn, is due to the increased percentage of the aging population of the commune, as well as the rather intense migration of young people, in search of improving the quality of living [13, 14].

Table 1.

The natural demographic balance of the Carașova commune

Year	Birth Rate (%)	Mortality Rate (%)	Natural Demographic Balance (%)
1992	11,1	16,4	-5,3
1995	8	17,5	-9,5
2000	9,9	16,8	-6,9
2005	6,1	16,9	-10,8
2010	7,6	12	-4,4
2015	6,7	15,7	-9
2020	3,8	13,9	-10,1

Source: Own processing according to [12]

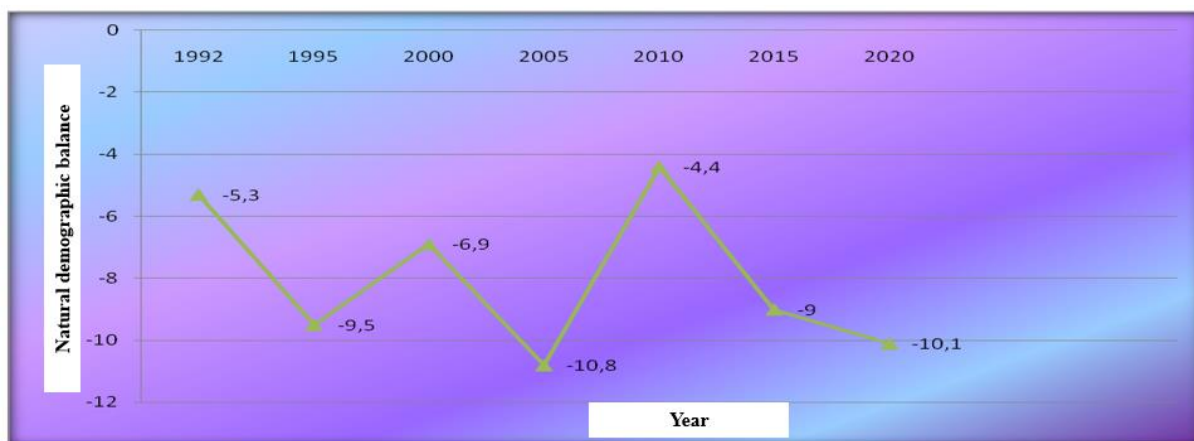


Figure 4. Natural demographic balance of Carașova commune

Source: Own processing according to [12]

Age group structure. From the point of view of the population structure by age groups, around 48.88% of the total population of Carașova was, on January 1, 2021, under 45 years of age, followed by the group between 45-49 years (8,46%) and the 30-34 year old (8,04%). The next age groups are 40-44 years old (8,01%) and 65-69 years old (7,87%).

The economy of Carașova commune. Like most towns in the countryside, the basic activity in Carașova commune is agriculture, which plays an important role in the local economy, because the area is characterized by fertile soils and favorable conditions for growing plants and raising animals. The commune has a total area of approximately 14,132 hectares, of which approximately 7,021 hectares (48.7%) are agricultural land, and 7,111 (50.3%) are non-agricultural land.

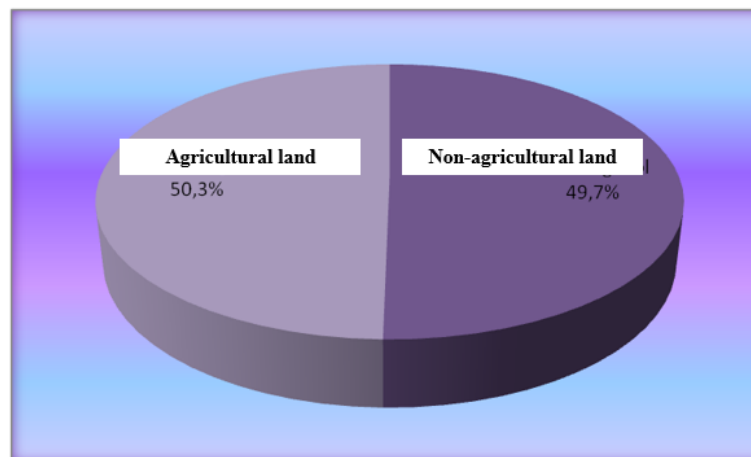


Figure 5. The structure of the total area of the Carașova commune

Source: Own processing according to [12]

The total area of 14,132 hectares of Carașova commune is constituted by a percentage of 46.3% forests (6543 ha), 20.3% pastures (2869 ha), 18.6% hay (2622 ha), 10.3% of arable land (1460 ha), 1.6% of roads and railways (226 ha), 1.5% of degradable and unproductive land (212 ha), 0.6% of buildings (86 ha), 0.5% of orchards (70 ha) and 0.3% of waters and ponds (44 ha).

The main agricultural crops cultivated in Carașova are the maize crop, which covers approximately 861 hectares, the wheat and rye crop with 150 hectares, the potato crop with 60 hectares and the vegetable and fruit crop, which occupies 15 hectares. There is also a significant production of honey and bee products.

As for the livestock of the households in the Carașova commune, poultry are predominant in the percentage of 59.16% (10,000 heads). They are joined by sheep - 5617 heads, pigs - 350 heads and cattle - 936 heads. All breeds of animals raised on the territory of the commune are resistant breeds, adapted to the environmental conditions, available food and small holdings. From this point of view, the opportunity that the inhabitants have to create small or medium-sized farms for meat, milk or eggs could contribute to the development of the commune's economy, offering a good exploitation of the pastures [12].

Industry. Although in Carașova commune the main economic source is represented by agriculture, it can be observed that industry has also developed recently. It consists of companies whose field of activity is wood processing - sawmills, specialized in cutting and planing wood or the manufacture of other carpentry and carpentry elements, construction companies and a company that produces pastry and bakery products.

According to the information obtained from the National Institute of Statistics, of the total economic agents, approximately 95.5% are from Carașova, the rest are from the towns of Iabalcea and Nermed, which underlines the fact that the town where the commune resides is also home to the largest number of employees (about 88% of the total), most of the total turnover and most of the total profit. It can be emphasized that in the Carașova commune, although the agricultural economy predominates, the industry is in a continuous favorable development [12].

Services. The commune of Carasova offers a wide range of services for its residents. Of course, trade, both food and non-food, is the main activity of this sector. This is joined by medical services – in the commune there is a medical dispensary that offers consultation, diagnosis and treatment services, as well as a pharmacy; educational services – the commune has a kindergarten, primary school, gymnasium and high school, which offers quality education for children in the area; transport services - there is a company whose business is to transport people from the center of the commune to Reșita, the nearest town in the vicinity, which is also the county seat of Caras-Severin county; food services – in the commune there are several restaurants and bars that offer food and drinks for residents and tourists visiting the area, and last but not least ATV and electric bike rental services – there is an ATV and electric bike rental company in the commune, which offers tourists the opportunity to explore the surroundings [3].

Regarding the number of unemployed people in the commune, since 2010 there has been a significant decrease in them. If in 2010 the number of unemployed people was 26, in 2022 it decreased to 6.

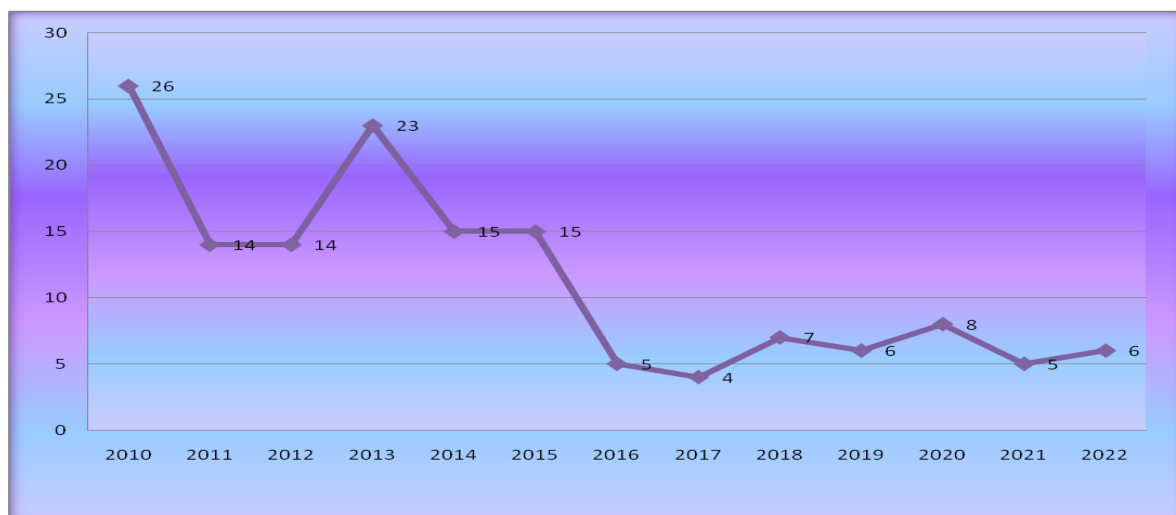


Figure 6. The situation of the unemployed in Carașova commune

Source: Own processing according to [12]

Tourism. The commune of Carasova is characterized by impressive mountain landscapes, dense forests and a rich cultural history. Tourism in Carașova commune is in continuous development, as tourists discover the natural and cultural beauty of the area, offering a wide range of activities for them. Among the most popular activities are hiking, cycling and fishing. The commune is also known for its culinary traditions, which include pork dishes and local cheeses, and for the very special folk port specific to the area.

The natural tourist attractions are Semenic National Park-Carașului Gorges, Carașului Gorges, Gârliștei Gorges, Comarnic Cave, Cave after Cârșa and Văleaga Cave, Bats Cave, Cave under citadel II, Ţolosu Cave, Cuptoru Ciumei Cave, Cuptorul Porcului Cave, Racovița Cave, Popovaț Cave, and the built tourist attractions are the Carașova Citadel also called the Turk's Citadel, the Roman Catholic Church from the beginning of the century. XVIII from the town of Carașova declared a historical monument, Calvaria Chapel, Pilgrimage place dedicated to the apparition of the Holy Virgin at Lourdes, the traditional Mill with the Viaduct. Infrastructura comunei Carașova.

From the point of view of the access infrastructure of Carașova commune, we can state that 90% of the locality's roads are asphalted and allow access to the main road arteries. The roads that cross the commune are the National Road DN 58: Caransebeș (DN 6) - Reșița - Carașova - Anina (DN 58 B); Communal Road DC 140: between the town of Carașova and the intersection with DJ 581: Reșița-Oravița; County road DJ 582 C: between Văliug - Carașova (Iabalcea village - Comarnic Cave) - Jervani-Anina; Communal roads DC 75: Carașova (DN 58)-Valea Nermed-Clocotici, with extension DC 76 Valea Nermed-DN 58 and Communal Road DC 97: DN 58-Iabalcea-Comarnic Cave.

In terms of telecommunications, the commune is well developed, its residents have access to fixed and mobile telephone services, the Internet and cable and fiber optic television.

Water supply and sewage service are also present, and there is also a sewage treatment plant; most of the local residents of the commune are connected to the water and sewer system.

The commune is supplied with electricity through the National Energy System. This is the main supplier both for domestic consumers and for wood processing units, service workshops, trade units or buildings belonging to public administration, education, culture, and cults. Two high-voltage mains - LEA 400 kV, which connects Reșița and Anina and LEA 110 kV, which interconnects the southern part of the county, including the Danube Gorge with the energy points from Reșița, Anina and Oravița, cross the administrative territory of the commune.

Carașova commune is not connected to the natural gas supply network, although the Reșita-Anina supply main is nearby.

Regarding the public lighting system, all streets in the commune are illuminated, the system being modernized in 2020.

The commune also benefits from a household waste collection system, which ensures their proper management.

Analysis of the socio-cultural resources of the Carașova commune. In the Carașova commune, **education and training** are provided within a single school unit, the Romanian-Croatian Bilingual Theoretical High School, teaching is done in both Romanian and Croatian, the latter being the mother tongue. The Romanian-Croat Bilingual Theoretical High School in Carașova presents itself as a general culture high school with a theoretical track; this including the human profile, with a specialization in philology.

The High School in Carașova is a school unit with legal personality and has the following structures: Kindergarten with Normal Program Carașova, with sections with teaching in Croatian and Romanian, Kindergarten with Normal Program Nermed, with teaching in Croatian and Nermed Primary School with teaching in Croatian . The high school consists of primary education with teaching in Croatian and Romanian, secondary education with teaching in Croatian, and high school education is in Croatian and Romanian, with a percentage of 80% in Croatian and 20% in Romanian.

A total of 166 students are enrolled in the Romanian-Croat Bilingual Theoretical High School; 36 are enrolled in kindergarten, 43 in primary education, 50 in secondary education, and 37 in high school. The number of teaching staff is 24. I confirm to the National Institute of Statistics, the teaching activity is carried out in 17 classrooms, 1 biology laboratory, a computer science laboratory. Students benefit from 50 PCs and IT equipment and a school workshop.

The health system in Carașova commune consists of a dispensary, a dental office and a pharmacy. Both the medical and dental offices are in the same building, in the center of the town, opposite the church.

Regarding the health infrastructure, the building that houses the two offices is renovated, especially inside, they also benefit from modern equipment, and the pharmacy as well.

From the point of view of the medical staff, the commune benefits from only one family doctor, two nurses and two dentists.

Other public services of the commune are the Post Office, the Police unit, a public library and the church [3].

Following the socio-economic analysis of the Carașova commune, the authors made a SWOT analysis.

Table 2.

S.W.O.T analysis of the Carașova commune

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Great natural setting, mountain area with very beautiful landscapes and clean air. - The presence of a multitude of very rich natural resources; - Geographical positioning extremely favorable for the development of rural tourism and agritourism; - Drinking water supply, the presence of sewage and the treatment plant; - The existence of jobs due to the regional industry and the decrease in the number of unemployed; - Hospitality residents, a fact that makes possible the development of agritourism in the area; - Preservation over time of customs, traditions and traditional crafts; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relatively weak tourism promotion, considering the enormous unexploited potential; - Decrease in population, increase in mortality and decrease in birth rate; - The permanent or temporary departure of young inhabitants from the commune in search of a job in the country or abroad; - Lack of a methane gas supply system in the commune; - Lack of direct access to transport railway; - Lack of a strategy to stimulate, preserve and promote traditional culture; - Decrease in the school population; - The proper arrangement of many tourist attractions leaves much to be desired;

- The existence of the high school, the medical offices and the pharmacy.	-Lack of a department specialized in functional project management, with qualified and dedicated staff within the Local Public Administration.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The possibility of accessing European funds to increase the quality of living in Carașova commune; - The possibility of organizing more activities and events to promote local culture; - Access to both European and governmental funds in order to develop the educational system in the commune; - The possibility of registering and promoting a local brand for traditional products and their ecological certification; - Creation of small or medium processing units of agricultural products (meat, dairy, eggs, furs); - The establishment of an Association of Pension Owners from the commune, which will contribute to increasing the quality of tourist services and to a better promotion of tourism in Carașova. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continued demographic decline; - Increasing the degree of wear and tear of the infrastructure and equipment; - The non-existence of an urban planning regulation to protect traditional architecture; - Reduced financial resources allocated to the financing and co-financing of development projects; - The aging population; - The gradual loss of local traditions, along with the change of generations and the departure of young people; - The limited material base of medical offices can negatively affect the possibility of providing quality medical care for certain more complex cases; - Lack of informing and educating residents in the entrepreneurial field.

Source: Authors' own elaboration

• Strategic proposals for the development of the Carașova commune

After carrying out the socio-economic analysis and based on the S.W.O.T. the authors try to identify the main strategic directions for the development of the Carașova commune in order to improve the quality of life:

- development and modernization of the municipality's infrastructure in all fields (tourism, economy, health, education, industry);
- creating more jobs in order to stop migration;
- diversification and efficiency of the local economy;
- the involvement in a more active and constructive way of local public authorities in supporting and promoting tourism, especially rural tourism and agro-tourism;
- capitalizing and "exploiting" the potential and natural resources, which exist in considerable numbers;
- improving the quality of public management.

A possibility to promote the commune is by highlighting local products and traditions, by organizing festivities specific to the area, but which attract both tourists and a large number of foreign investors, who make them aware of the value of local culture. For example, in the past, in Carașova, the "Lilac Festival" or "Lilac Days" was organized on May 1. This event was known both to tourists, whose number was significant at that time, and to all the residents of the area.

Another method of improving the quality of life of the locals would be to connect the Carașova commune to the methane gas network.

An important aspect to mention is the trout in the commune. Closed about 10 years ago for unknown reasons, it was a significant source of income, employment and a representative symbol of the community. If there was more interest from local public authorities, it could be reopened, attracting impressive funds, given the impressive surface area and the activities that could take place there.

Another extraordinary way, through which the local public authorities would manage to include in a single whole the solution of most of the impediments that stand in the way of the favorable and rapid development, at the same time, of the community would be the creation, within the City Hall, of a specialized department, dedicated to regional development, in which

to activate qualified, dedicated, young and innovative people in order to attract investors, to attract more tourists and at the same time to give them the opportunity to properly inform themselves about everything they need (accommodation possibilities, dining options, proper presentation of the area and its specifics, complete information about all local possibilities and offers for visiting and getting to know the area and spending free time). All these things could take place within the Tourist Information Center, which is located in a building belonging to Carașova City Hall, built a few years ago to European standards, but which is absolutely not used for its original purpose.

Other measures that could be taken in order to develop the commune are:

- arrangement, maintenance and constant cleaning of green spaces;
- modernization and rehabilitation of central areas;
- setting up some parks / play areas for children, these being totally non-existent;
- offering financial support for the opening or development of small local businesses.

CONCLUSIONS

After carrying out the research, it is found that this locality has a lot of strong points, thanks to the extraordinary resources existing in the area, be they natural or anthropogenic. Therefore, after analyzing the natural setting, we consider that the relief is extremely favorable for the development of tourism, but it is not exploited at its real value.

Regarding the hydrographic network, we can see that, although it is not a very rich one, it helps the population enormously, especially during the drought period. The climate of the commune is favorable for the practice of agricultural activities.

The forest fund is also another important resource for the commune. Currently, two sawmills are operating in the commune where wood is exploited and processed.

The positioning of the commune in the proportion of 2/3 of the total territory on the territory of the Semenic Cheile Carașului National Park represents an extremely important pawn in the development of Carașova.

Regarding the demographic analysis, we find that the population of the municipality is aging, the migration of young people is worrying and, compared to other years, the birth rate is in decline, and the natural increase is negative.

After carrying out the analysis of the infrastructure, we noticed that it is at a favorable level of development from most points of view.

From the point of view of socio-cultural resources, it can be stated that the population of the commune benefits from a well-developed education system, qualified teachers, classes equipped with IT equipment, two school laboratories and a workshop. The commune also has a dental practice, a dispensary and a pharmacy.

Following the research, we conclude that, considering the special natural environment that the commune has, the least developed field is tourism, especially rural tourism and agritourism, the promotion of this branch being very weak, almost non-existent.

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