

IMPLICATIONS OF THE TOURISM ACTIVITY ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF NIȚCHIDORF, TIMIS COUNTY

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Abstract: *This study examines the untapped tourism potential of Nitchidorf, a rural village in Timiș county, Romania, emphasizing its rich cultural and natural heritage. A three-pillar approach to sustainable rural development is proposed, considering endogenous potential, social capital, and local participation. Challenges and opportunities in rural tourism are discussed, recognizing the impact of factors such as education, transportation, and local administration interest. The paper highlights the ecological significance of the protected natural area, Lunca Pogănișului, and Nitchidorf's recognition for its rich intangible heritage aligns with the regional tourism development strategy.*

Key words: *cultural heritage, rural tourism, sustainable development, customs and traditions*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest growing economic sectors globally and has a significant impact on the socio-economic development of a region. In this paper, we aim to make an analysis of the tourism potential of Nitchidorf, located in Timiș county, Romania.

Nitchidorf, as a small rural village, has a rich cultural and natural heritage, which has the potential to attract tourists interested in authentic experiences and in exploring authentic places. However, Nitchidorf has so far not been sufficiently promoted as a tourist destination, which is why this paper focuses on assessing its tourism potential and identifying possibilities for developing this sector.

Rural towns with tourism potential are an important source of economic and social development in many regions. Assessing and exploiting the tourism potential of these towns can contribute to increasing local incomes, creating jobs, preserving cultural and natural heritage and improving the quality of life of local communities. In this context, this research focuses on the assessment and valorisation of the tourism potential of Nitchidorf.

Nitchidorf is located in the south-eastern part of Timiș County, bordering with Caraș-Severin County, south-east of Timișoara municipality, in the Gătaia Plain, a subunit of the Banat Plain. The average altitude of the village is 124 m. Nițchidorf covers an area of 64.13 km², of which 2.6% is a protected natural area, which reveals tourist resources for ecological and scientific tourism.

Among the elements of the natural setting, two - relief and climate - are the most important, as they give the landscape its defining features and functionality. These are major, fundamental elements that are found in both the essence and the external aspects of each landscape; the other natural elements - water (hydrography), vegetation, fauna and soils - although they play a special role in defining the landscape, are 'consequences' of the first two.

The territory of the village comprises landforms that belong to a subunit of the Banat Plain. In Banat and Crișana the forests are in the form of continuous strips of Timișului Plain to the Careilor Plain [4]. After many years of struggle, change and improvement, the landscape of the area is not yet stable. Sedimentation stimulates erosion, and renews the landscape. However, each individual unit has some defining characteristics. Situated in the southern and western parts of Romania, the plains are one of the most representative geographical units and at the same time territories of paradox [4].

Rural tourism is seen as a means of diversifying the rural economy, as it has a great potential for economic change in rural societies [3], promoting rural vitality and sustainability. The links between tourism, agriculture and other sectors of economic activity are increasingly important, involving different actors.

It should be taken into consideration that the impact of rural tourism initiatives varies according to the tourism potential of each area and EU rural development programmes depend on the tourism vocation of each targeted rural area [8]. Tolon-Becerra, Lastra-Bravo and Galdeano-Gomez [1] propose a three-pillar approach to sustainable rural development: harnessing endogenous potential, developing social capital (endogenous units, local actors/local residents and non-endogenous units) and promoting local participation.

Challenges and opportunities for local communities need to be anticipated as a local development plan is drawn up to improve rural tourism. Many rural communities have the potential resources, the capacity to attract and the opportunity to exploit the growing tourism industry. Long distances from urban or major roads are an impediment to heritage development, due to trends of gentrification and depopulation [7]. Barbu states that the main factors determining the development of rural tourism are the level of education, the quality of transport and communications, the financial possibilities of tourists, the interest in health maintenance, the interest of local administrations, the development of telecommunications [2].

In the context of multi-functionality, rural tourism is increasingly asserting itself, as it allows to satisfy the growing interest in natural and cultural heritage by modern society, which, with the advent of new technologies and hectic lifestyles, is deprived of these values. This helps to reduce the exodus of people from rural areas and create employment opportunities, promoting the socio-economic development of rural areas [6].

The custody of the protected natural area Lunca Pogănişului was held by the University of Life Sciences "King Mihai I" from Timisoara, according to the custody agreement no. 303/12.12.2011, concluded between it and the Ministry of Environment and Forests. According to the consolidated list of protected natural areas in Romania's administrative units resulting from the superposition of the areas of protected natural areas as they are presented on the official website of the central public authorities on environmental protection in relation to the boundaries of territorial administrative units as published by ANCPI in July 2018 RONPA 0753 Lunca Pogănişului has a total area of 562.55 ha with the following distribution 338.75 ha - Tormac commune, 57.47 ha Sacoşu Turcesc village and 166.33 ha Niţchidorf [16,10].

Niţchidorf is one of the localities with a rich intangible heritage represented by outstanding personalities, popular traditions and community celebrations, but also: sites, churches, commemorative monuments, rural architectural ensemble, cultural-administrative and economic objectives. It is also included in the sectoral tourism development strategy of Timis County 2018-2028 [9]. In terms of tourism potential, each of these categories may be of interest. In terms of its cultural significance, however, the personality of the writer Herta Müller can be seen as the element that gives Nietzsche Dorf its image.

Herta Müller, a German writer - winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2009, was born in Nietschidorf on 17 August 1953 and graduated from Nietschidorf School. Herta Müller is one of the greatest German-language writers of all time [13].

The Kirchweih

The Kirchweih is an annual celebration marking the feast day of the Roman Catholic Church and was brought to the Banat in the 18th century by the settlers of the

Sabbath. According to the tradition, the participants are boys and must have a female partner (neighbour, girlfriend or cousin, etc.) The boys are in charge of organising the music and buying the wine to be consumed by the participants during the celebration which lasts several days. The girls are responsible for decorating and setting up the main venue. The Kirchweih involves many specific activities and traditions, and the programme can vary from region to region. [11]



Figure 1. The Kirchweih

Source: <https://renasterea.ro/dupa-ruga-vine-kirchweih-ul/> [15]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The objectives of this paper are to identify and analyse the tourist attractions of Nitchidorf. We will explore historical and cultural monuments, natural landscapes, traditional events and other elements that can attract tourists to the area. To assess the existing tourist infrastructure and the capacity to welcome tourists in Nitchidorf. We will examine the accommodation facilities, restaurants, transport and other tourist services available in the locality. To identify opportunities and challenges in the development of tourism in Nitchidorf. We will analyse factors that may influence the success of tourism development, such as accessibility, promotion, local community involvement and other relevant factors.

By investigating these aspects, this research will provide a comprehensive assessment of the tourism potential of Nitchidorf and propose specific recommendations for tourism development in the area.

The methodology used in carrying out this analysis will consist of documentation from bibliographic sources, official statistics and relevant databases, direct field observations to assess the tourism potential and infrastructure of the locality, and collaboration with local authorities to obtain up-to-date data.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Valuable precisely because they repeat things that happened in the past, customs give rhythm to social life, giving it meaning and value. Local customs and traditions are closely linked to the religious calendar and specific occupations.

The commune of Nițchidorf has great potential for the development and installation of specific leisure facilities, thanks to its natural resources. However, the facts indicate an insufficient presence of existing recreational opportunities. A greater diversity of these structures would help to increase the time spent at the destination and attract a greater number of tourists.

Hiking trails

- Unmarked hiking trails - frequently used for nature walks and for visiting the protected area Lunca Pogănişului.

- Cycling trails - Buziaş- Niţchidorf -Buziaş

The Niţchidorf commune offers a lot of potential for cycling, which led to its inclusion in the 9 county trails, promoted by various public structures or associations. Mapping and digitization, physical marking of the routes and integrated promotion of cycle routes are a priority for the development of the offer of outdoor activities [12].

The analysis of natural landscapes, protected areas and the importance of cultural heritage highlights the arguments for the development of the following forms of tourism in Niţchidorf:

Cultural tourism is underpinned by the uniqueness of intangible cultural heritage defined by: multiculturalism; the living nature of certain traditions and customs; the spectacular and attractive nature of a significant part of these practices of interest to the tourist who, by definition, has to "see" certain things in order to orient himself towards a particular destination.

Leisure and recreational tourism - is supported by the natural setting, which creates particularly favourable conditions for recreational activities (cycling on the network of farm roads leading to the lake areas, hiking on the paths in the Poganis meadow). During springtime in the Poganis meadow grows the spotted tulip (*meleagris frittilaria*), a monument of nature. It covers an area of about 75,5 ha [14].

Educational tourism - the local natural and cultural heritage offers the possibility of both outdoor and indoor educational activities.

Scientific tourism - supported by the existence of the Lunca Pogănişului protected area which covers an area of 166.33 ha on the administrative territory of the locality.

Hunting and sport fishing tourism - the existence of a rich hunting ground (Hunting Fund 43 Blajova) managed by AVPS Timis, allows the organization of hunting parties, in accordance with the law, in a well controlled and organized framework, without affecting the ecological and biological balance of the species.

At present, Niţchidorf commune is included in the cultural tourist route initiated by the Association for the Promotion and Development of Tourism Timişoara - Receaş - Lugoj - Buziaş - Niţchidorf - Timişoara.

Cultural events

❖ **Exhibitions of photographic art** with the participation of some of the best photographers in Banat. The events - "People and places" 2017 and "Niţchidorf seen through the lens 2018", "The world of images of the painter Franz Ferch" have registered a notable success, being noticed at the county level.

❖ **Musical-choreographic performances** performed by the ensembles Laleaua Pestriţă and Kornblumen Nitzkydorf on the stage of the Cultural Center.

Every year in the performance hall of the House of Culture in Niţchidorf, different stages of the Festival - "Lada cu Zestre" Contest are held, organized by the Center for Culture and Art of Timiş County. This year the Faschingsball was organized for the first time after a long time, an event attended by guests from Variaş, Arad, Buzias, Jimbolia, Biled, Iacea Mare and Periam.

❖ **Music concerts**

The events that took place in 2018 and 2019 were organized in the Roman Catholic Church at the restored organ and enjoyed the participation of some famous guests from both the country and Germany.

❖ **Film shows** - during the winter holidays, evenings with film screenings are organized in the Cultural Home.

The first edition of the event "Christmas Movie Nights" took place in 2020 recording considerable appreciation from the local community.

The offer of events in the Nițchidorf commune covers an appreciable range of cultural fields, standing out for its quality. Most of the events are organized by the local and county public administration in partnership with the Bănățeni Swabian Association (HOG) Nitzkydorf.

❖ **Sports events**

During the summer season, the following national, regional or local sports competitions are organized in the commune:

-Sport fishing competition -"Cupa Lacurilor Timișene" is an annual competition (the first edition took place in 2002) which is held in collaboration with the Sports Fishermen's Association and the Timiș County Council;

The participants in this sports event are both the inhabitants of the commune and fishing enthusiasts from other localities of the county. In this competition, the biggest catch, the best angler, the youngest participant and the oldest participant are awarded.

-Mini-football championship is a competition in which teams from the entire Timiș county participate. This competition has reached its 10th edition.

-The minihandball cup is a sports event for junior handball players in which more than 100 children registered with the teams registered in the competition participate. The first edition of the Cup took place in 2019.

CONCLUSIONS

The inclusion of Nițchidorf in the cultural tourist route initiated by the Association for the Promotion and Development of Timiș Tourism is a significant step in promoting the destination and attracting more tourists. It can contribute to the economic development of the commune by increasing the flow of visitors and creating opportunities for local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops and other tourist services. By including this tourist route, tourists will be able to discover and explore the cultural and historical richness of Nițchidorf.

By developing adequate tourist infrastructure and offering quality services, the village can attract even more tourists and contribute to the sustainable growth of tourism in the area. The potential for rural tourism is extremely valuable and diversified, offering unique opportunities to experience and explore authentic rural life and nature in an authentic way. This type of tourism has multiple advantages and can bring significant benefits to both local communities and tourists.

Rural tourism is an invaluable resource for the sustainable development of rural areas, contributing to the preservation of cultural traditions and the natural environment. By offering an authentic and genuine experience, rural tourism attracts tourists eager to escape the urban hustle and connect with nature and the local community. It creates business opportunities for rural dwellers, such as accommodation in traditional guesthouses or farms, production and sale of local products and rural recreational activities.

In conclusion, rural tourism has enormous potential to stimulate the economic and social development of rural areas while preserving and promoting cultural and natural heritage. By enhancing and promoting the authenticity and beauty of the countryside, we can create memorable experiences for tourists and contribute to the sustainability and prosperity of rural communities. Overall, this thesis has made a significant contribution to

the understanding and exploration of the topic under review, consolidating knowledge and providing a solid basis for further development.

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