

Small-scale environment-friendly tourism on the border of the Danube

Opportunities and chances for the villagers in Romanian Garla Mare



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Table of contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction.....	4
Chapter 1 - Background information	5
1.1 Defining tourism	5
1.2 Climate and nature	6
1.3 Historical context	7
1.4 Social relationships	7
1.5 Religion.....	9
1.6 Government and policies	9
1.7 Related organizations and similar projects	10
1.8 Existing tourism projects	11
1.9 Travel agencies in the Netherlands.....	12
Chapter 2 - Field research	13
2.1 Target group	13
2.2 Facilities.....	13
2.3 Tourism activities	14
2.4 Nearby tourist attractions around Gârla Mare.....	18
2.5 Attitude	214
Conclusion	23
Recommendations	24
References.....	26
Appendix: List of contacts.....	27

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Wageningen, June 2005

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Introduction

The aim of this project is to explore the possibilities for small-scale, environment-friendly tourism in Gârla Mare, which is a small village in the south-west of Romania. The kind of tourism meant by the project team is mentioned in the beginning of the report to indicate a clear and specific orientation.

The task of the project team is to give advice about the tourism possibilities in Gârla Mare to WECF (Women in Europe for a Common Future) in the light of the investigations and research done by the project members. The project is done with the supervision of WECF, which is a network of organisations and individuals working for sustainable development, protection of human health and environment and poverty reduction. The project is carried out by a group of six students from Wageningen University as a part of the course 'Academic Master Cluster'. The project group consists of Tilia Maas Geesteranus as manager, Janine Trumpie as secretary, Andreas Luiten as financial controller, and Rui Zhou, Sandra Lazarte Arauco and Kivilcim Ilhan as project members.

This report contains background information covering the infrastructural situation, environmental features, history of the area and many other aspects for having a good understanding of the possibilities for small-scale, environment-friendly tourism. In addition to the background information gathered through literature research, the project team carried out field research including interviews and observations to have the real and recent image of the village. Meanwhile, the project team obtained some more information and support by making contacts mainly with people who are involved in previous projects about Gârla Mare.

The field work was done in six days by the two project members namely Andreas Luiten and Kivilcim Ilhan. The remaining project members stayed in Netherlands and focused on gathering and analyzing the background information.

In the light of the above mentioned information, the report consists of five chapters including an introduction, background information, findings due to analysis of the field research, conclusion and recommendations which is the final part of the report.

Chapter 1 – Background information

1.1 Defining tourism

Defining tourism is essential in order to understand what kind of tourism the project is aimed to. In the literature several different types of tourism are discerned. This project uses the concept of rural tourism. Rural tourism encompasses amongst other eco-tourism, agro-tourism and farm tourism. The definitions are represented below. From these definitions the project team has distilled the definition suitable for Gârla Mare.

Rural tourism

Rural tourism can be considered as all kinds of tourism in the countryside and rural areas. The characteristics of rural tourism are primarily, rural environment, sports, recreation and rural festivities. Secondly, rural tourism counts with holiday villages in the country side, hotels stay at private homes campsites, places to eat, animation, shops, sign posting information (Boersma 1996).

Agro-tourism

Agro-tourism consists of those tourist activities which are connected with the agricultural environment, agricultural products or agricultural stays.

Agro-tourism refers therefore to the development of activities undertaken by a rural community (whose primary source of income comes from agriculture) to promote tourism in order to create supplementary incomes.

The most prominent of such activities is the supply of tourist accommodation by upgrading and using spare rooms in private houses or by building extensions to such houses to create additional units. Complementary agro-tourism activities may include the establishment and running of communal catering and recreational facilities of tourist, the organization of cultural events, the production and sale of handicrafts, the sale of agrarian products to tourists, etc (Papageorgou 1988).

Farm tourism

Farm tourism is all the activities that are connected with the farm, like stays, meals and recreation on the farm. According to Boersma 1996, farm tourism is characterized by life at the farm, stay at farms, meals and recreation.

Eco-tourism

The International Eco-tourism Society (TIES) defines eco-tourism as: "...*responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.*"¹

Eco-tourism should

- take care of the conservation of biological and cultural diversity;
- promote the sustainable use of biodiversity, by providing jobs to local people;
- share the economic benefits with local communities and indigenous people by having their informed consent and participation in the management of ecotourism enterprises;
- increase of environmental & cultural knowledge and
- minimise the tourism's own environmental impact.

¹ [www.http://ecotourism.org/index2.php?what-is-ecotourism](http://ecotourism.org/index2.php?what-is-ecotourism)

Project definition

Taking into account the previous definitions of rural, agro-tourism and eco-tourism, the project team sees several aspects of these definitions applicable for tourism in Gârla Mare.

Therefore tourism in Gârla Mare can be considered as rural tourism with a mixture of agro-tourism and eco-tourism.

Tourism in Gârla Mare takes place in the rural areas of the Mehedinti district on a small-scale environmental scale. This (agro-)tourism is mainly characterised by tourist activities which are connected with the agricultural environment, agricultural products or agricultural stays. This exactly applies to Gârla Mare as well as the production and sale of handicrafts and agricultural products. The organization of cultural and traditional events is also one of the main aspects of agro-tourism and could be applicable for Gârla Mare.

The agricultural activities can give tourists an inside of the daily work of villagers and the opportunity for villagers to sell agricultural products. Therefore, for a small-scale environment-friendly tourism, tourists will be familiar with conservation, understanding and appreciation of the environment and culture. The latter one fits in the definition of eco-tourism.

1.2 Climate and nature

Climate Romania

Because of its position on the south-eastern portion of the European continent, Romania has a climate that is transitional between temperate and continental. Climatic conditions are somewhat modified by the country's varied relief. The Carpathians serve as a barrier to Atlantic air masses, restricting their oceanic influences to the west and centre of the country, where they make for milder winters and heavier rainfall. The mountains also block the continental influences of the vast plain to the north in the Soviet Union, which bring frosty winters and less rain to the south and southeast. In the extreme southeast, Mediterranean influences offer a milder, maritime climate. The average annual temperature is 11°C in the south and 8°C in the north. In Bucharest, the temperature ranges from -29°C in January to 29°C in July, with average temperatures of -3°C in January and 23°C in July. Rainfall, although adequate throughout the country, decreases from west to east and from mountains to plains. Some mountainous areas receive more than 1,010 millimetres of precipitation each year. Annual precipitation averages about 635 millimetres in central Transylvania, 521 millimetres at Iasi in Moldavia, and only 381 millimetres at Constanta on the Black Sea². Average annual rainfall in Gârla Mare itself is 490 mm³.

The Danube

The Danube is by far Romania's most important river, not only for transportation, but also for the production of hydroelectric power. One of Europe's largest hydroelectric stations is located at the Iron Gate, where the Danube surges through the Carpathian gorges. The Danube is an important water route for domestic shipping, as well as international trade. It is navigable for river vessels along its entire Romanian course and for seagoing ships as far as the port of Braila. An obvious problem with the use of the Danube for inland transportation is its remoteness from most of the major industrial centres. Moreover, marshy banks and perennial flooding impede navigation in some areas⁴.

² <http://country-studies.com/romania/climate.html>

³ http://www.wecf.de/cms/download/romania_main_rep.doc

⁴ <http://country-studies.com/romania/topography.html>

The Black Sea's amount of nutrients multiplied ten times in the years between 1960 and 1992. This pollution stems mainly from the Danube⁵. The main substance is nitrogen⁶. It causes an explosive growth of algae in the spring⁷.

From a water-quality point of view, swimming is possible in about 80 percent of the 2,857-kilometer (1,775-mile) -long river, said Igor Liska, the project manager for the survey about the water quality of the Danube. "The Danube itself in principle has good or acceptable water quality," he said. Several experts said that it is well possible to swim in the Danube, without large health risks⁸.

1.3 Historical context

Ceausescu ruled Romania from 1971 until 1989. He did not do much to improve the situation of the people. The time is now known as the 'time of fear, hunger and coldness. He was a communist, and his time as president resulted in many anti-communism thoughts and actions. At the end of December 1989, there were massive riots, and the army chose the side of the people, which resulted in the execution of Ceausescu and his wife. The revolution started in Timisoara⁹. Romania was the only country in which the fall of communism came with violence.¹⁰

Because of this history, the majority of the people have learned to reject communism and fear it, but they were not ready for capitalism either. There were large gaps between the rich and the poor. Distrust was present everywhere.¹¹ After the revolution, the new government had to deal with the food and energy shortages. There was a fear for radical changes, so the government chose to change gradually. On a macro-economic level, Romania was very instable. Unemployment grew and inflation rates were high. Since 1994, the situation has become more stable. Privatisation is still at a very low level.¹² Thus, Romania has made little progress in becoming a market-economy.¹³

During the period of communism, the people were not allowed to decide much for them. Government interference was very common, in almost every area of life. This made the people very passive. The current government on the other hand is more modern, and in general waits for the people to come with good ideas and initiatives. There is a gap between these two attitudes, resulting in the fact that nobody starts a development initiative.¹⁴

Another influence of the revolution lies in the area of religion. During communism, Christians were being prosecuted. The revolution gave new life to the religion.¹⁵

1.4 Social relationships

Romania counts around 22 million inhabitants, of whom 89% is Romanian and 11% ethnic minorities (mainly Hungarians). According to official figures, there are around 400,000 'gypsies' (called Roma or Romani). However, unofficial figures estimate this at one to two million.

⁵ <http://reports.nl.eea.eu.int/92-9167-087-1/nl/page014.html>

⁶ http://www.eep.org/miniguides/MINI_NEE/EAU_NEE/ne_ea_01-32.pdf

⁷ <http://www.kennislink.nl/web/show?id=29721&vensterid=811&cat=60571>

⁸ <http://www.waterconserve.info/articles/reader.asp?linkid=15729>

⁹ <http://www.landenvm.com/geschiedenis.cfm?LandID=166&ROEMENIË>

¹⁰ <http://www.nrc.nl/W2/Lab/Profiel/Communisme/tekenen.html>

¹¹ <http://www.oostwestthijsbest.nl/pages/artikelvoorbeeld2.html>

¹² <http://www.jeroenvm.dds.nl/romscri1.htm#2.3>

¹³ <http://www.nrc.nl/W2/Lab/Profiel/Communisme/coeuropa.html#roemenie>

¹⁴ personal interview with Jan te Kloeze

¹⁵ http://www.oecumene.nl/vieren/zondag%20oosterse%20kerken/zondag%20oosterse%20kerken%202003/zondag_voor_de_oosterse_kerken_2003.htm

There is no such thing as 'the' Roma community. Spread all over Europe, they have developed their own subcultures of traditions, beliefs and customs. The same counts for their religion. Originally the Roma are said to come from northwest India. They have a history of migration and eventually, in the 14th and 15th centuries, arrived in Europe.¹⁶

The village of Gârla Mare consists of both Romanian as well as Roma inhabitants. Therefore, what follows is an elaboration on their relationship in general in order to give some background information and understanding. This aims to help to analyze and understand the situation in Gârla Mare more.

In general the relation between Romanian and Roma people is not bad per se, or continuously, but it is said to be easily triggered and results amongst others in fights and fire rising. Actually, Roma people are increasingly being victimised, especially in Czech Republic and Slovakia, by extreme-rightist groups¹⁷.

This idea or feature about the Roma has become more widespread after the revolution of 1989. In general, the Roma were one of the first within society losing their jobs. In addition, the fall of communism has led to decreasing social and economic security. The Roma are not legally recognised as an ethnic minority.¹⁸

Facts show that Roma, especially in Romania, most frequently, compared to others in society, have informal jobs. Also, Roma unemployment rates for Romania are estimated at 24%. This amongst others shows that they are not part of the official jobs or services network, and do not pay taxes. They often do have state support however; 16% of the Roma families are primarily reliant for their basic survival.¹⁹

This, and the fact that they are working on the edge (according to people judging them, it is an easy step to criminal activities), often leads to anger many Romanian.

The general idea held by Romanian people about Roma can be quite negative. They amongst others assume that the Roma are poor, lazy, unwilling to educate themselves or their children, are unhygienic, are alcoholics, and others. These assumptions can be regarded as interpretations of existing features.

For example, many Roma are indeed illiterate and the percentage of Roma children who attend school is much lower than the national averages, and the number is decreasing. In addition, Roma children are often sent to 'special schools' for mentally disabled because they often have a retardation in their language and general knowledge development (OSCE Report). This gives them further delay. Few Roma eventually attend secondary school or further. This of course influences their employment possibilities. Eventually, and again, '...poverty and its consequences are among the major systemic causes of exclusion and segregation'²⁰.

Also, access to health care is often insufficient and gives rise to health related problems. Again, children are easy victims.

Roma people themselves show some other features than the standard biases that people hold. About the topic of political participation for example, most people will think that Roma are uninterested or too lazy to participate in a more national (thus: broader than their own community) political movement. Indeed, according to Spolu, a Dutch NGO aiming to improve the socio-economic position of Roma communities in Central and Eastern Europe, most Roma have withdrawn from political life altogether.

According to studies done by the UNDP²¹, "The survey data also suggest that, contrary to initial expectations, Roma are willing to interact directly with central government structures,

¹⁶ www.religioustolerance.org/Roma.htm

¹⁷ www.spolu.nl

¹⁸ www.spolu.nl

¹⁹ <http://Roma.undp.sk/>

²⁰ <http://Roma.undp.sk>

²¹ <http://Roma.undp.sk>

and, if granted the opportunity, are willing to bear the associated responsibilities.” This does not directly mean that they already do, and indeed, political participation on national level is low. “Few Roma leaders are willing to become active in national politics, because of the high degree of corruption and bureaucracy at higher levels²²”. They feel their interests are better represented by local government however, particularly for issues important for overall daily survival. Increasingly, Roma become more active in organising themselves and fight for their rights. As mentioned in the OSCE report (2000), “...a rising generation of highly educated Roma is committed to improving the educational prospects of Romani youth in a fashion that honours, reclaims and revives Romani identities”. However, it is said to be difficult fighting for and keeping ones rights and traditions, and at the same time doing so within the bureaucratic and corrupt government world without being absorbed by it.

Finally, the general impression and actual behaviour of Roma about this topic is that often they do not want to change, and therefore in a certain way fear education because they think this will influence and change their traditional knowledge and behaviour.

1.5 Religion

In general, Romanian people are orthodox Christians (in contrast to their catholic neighbouring countries). In addition, about 6% of Romanian people are catholic (Roman or Greek).²³

As mentioned before, the Roma are widespread all over Europe. This has implications for their traditional culture, but also for their religion. One of these is that their original religion has partly or mainly changed over the centuries, depending on the region where they travelled or settled down.

Originally, their religion is based on Hinduism, or, in general, on Indian ideology. Kali (a Hindu goddess) used to be the Roma’s main goddess. By now, most Roma have converted to the religions of their host countries, such as Christianity and Islam. Still, this is a combination of their own tradition or belief and that of their host country.²⁴

Even more so, according to the information gathered during the research, many people are not actively practicing religion. This counts for both Romanian and Roma.

1.6 Government and Policies

Romania has a Ministry of Transports, Constructions and Tourism. The ministry is the state authority in the field of transports, constructions and tourism²⁵.

Contact with the ministry has shown that there is no complete policy system on local level. E-mail contact furthermore revealed that it was not possible to subsidise tourism projects in Gârla Mare. Nonetheless it is important to get in touch with the ministry. The ministry is dealing with several issues in the field of tourism. The ministry:

- Organizes and achieves the promotion activity of Romania in the tourism field both within the country and abroad, through specific activities of the tourist promotion offices.
- Organizes conferences, discussions, symposiums and other similar activities in the tourism field, in the country and abroad.
- Authorizes the economical agents and staff from the tourism field, respectively the issuing of licenses for the tourism agencies, classifying the tourist accommodation structures, giving licenses for the specialized staff.
- Performs the control of the quality of services from the tourism field.

²² www.spolu.nl

²³ www.landenweb.com/roemenie

²⁴ www.religioustolerance.org/Roma.htm

²⁵ <http://www.mtromania.ro>

- Supports the promotion on the international markets of the interests of the local economical agents from its fields of activity
- Establishes, together with the authorities of the local and central administration with competence in the field, measures for the protection of the areas having historical, architectural and landscape value, as well as for their integration within the modernization actions of the afferent localities and areas

1.7 Related organizations and similar projects

ECEAT

The European Centre for Eco Agro Tourism (ECEAT), established in 1991, is an Amsterdam based NGO focused on rural development, sustainable land use, and the environment in relation to sustainable tourism. Their assumption is that tourism often has negative impact on both the environment as well as on the tourist business as a result of that, especially with tourists' increasing interest for unspoiled nature and culture. Sustainable tourism safeguards the interests of tourists, local communities and the environment simultaneously.

ECEAT works with people who have (individual) initiatives for accommodation. The criteria for their members are based on basic comfort criteria and sustainability criteria. Their international criteria are summarized in ten statements, which are as follows:

1. Environment-friendly agriculture
2. Efficient water and energy use
3. Minimum waste
4. Green building
5. Information and awareness raising to clients
6. Soft mobility and public transport
7. Biodiversity and landscape protection
8. Cultural heritage
9. Support of local economy
10. Improvement policy (including management criteria)

The list of criteria stated here aims to give an insight in international regulated and understood practices of environmental friendly or sustainable tourism. That is interesting for this particular project in Gârla Mare, because it tries to set-up a similar initiative and is struggling to find ways to do so. These should be practical for the inhabitants of Gârla Mare, as well as interesting for tourists.

According to the website of ECEAT, and after having had email contact with them and their contact person in Romania, Zoltan Hajdu of the NGO FOCUS Eco-Center, it became clear that Romania as a country is not yet a member of ECEAT. They (FOCUS Eco-Center to begin with) are interested in that, but the problem with Romania in this case is that, until now, there is no national organisation offering eco-accommodation. This is a requirement to become a member of ECEAT. In how far FOCUS Eco-Center is working on becoming a member has not become clear yet. By now, Romania is placed under the region name of Transylvania which is one of Romania's best known districts.

ECEAT might be of use to Gârla Mare when a national organisation, FOCUS Eco-Center for example, will become a member of ECEAT. In this case, FOCUS Eco-Center will fulfil ECEAT's requirements. Gârla Mare supposedly will only have to fulfil certain of these requirements because it has a limited range to offer. In this case it becomes more practically achievable for Gârla Mare to join an organisation that promotes and stimulates environment-friendly tourism.

PHARE

Phare is an instrument, financed by the EU, to assist the applicant countries in their preparations for joining the EU. This includes Romania.

Phare's objectives are:

- Strengthening public administrations and institutions to function effectively inside the European Union.
- Promoting convergence with the European Union's extensive legislation (the *acquis communautaire*) and reduce the need for transition periods.
- Promoting Economic and Social Cohesion.

These orientations were further refined in 1999 with the creation of SAPARD and ISPA, which took over rural and agricultural development (SAPARD) and infrastructural projects in the environmental and transport fields (ISPA) allowing Phare to focus on its key priorities that were not covered by these fields²⁶.

Sapard stands for Special Accession Program for Agriculture & Rural Development. Its main aim is the development and diversification of economic activities, multiple activities and alternative income²⁷. It is a tool of the EU and it can make funds available to work on these goals in several countries, of which Romania is one²⁸. It falls under the responsibility of the Directorate-General for Agriculture. The idea is to help the applicant countries with the structural adjustments in agriculture, and the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)²⁹.

1.8 Existing tourism projects

Dorin and Maria Paraschiv have set-up tourist accommodation and provide a lot of additional information to visiting tourists. Their village Starchiojd lies in the province of Prahova, in the district of Muntenia. This lies next to the district of Oltenia of which Gârla Mare is part.

The information they provide is very detailed and focuses both on the accommodation itself as well as on the activities to be done in the area. These are for example visiting sheepshed, monasteries, salt mines, etc. Also, they focus attention on the regions' nature, culture and hospitable population. In addition, they suggest helping the tourists to find their best type of holiday. This implies walking, cycling, tours by horse cart, or other, with a guide if required. They have even arranged accommodation possibilities with families in the village in case large groups are visiting the place.

Altogether, the initiative seems very well organised and attractive to tourists. Also, it is very well affordable. Their website offers up to date and full information, in six different languages.³⁰

There are many more initiatives and organisations in Romania that promote and facilitate eco-tourism. There is for example Antrec (National Association of Rural, Ecological, and Cultural Tourism), based in Bucharest. Their website informs about many guesthouses throughout the country, tourist activities, tariffs, and more. They seem to be a rather large organisation (it operates a network of over 600 farm and rural stays), but are interesting for the idea that they promote and the way they achieve this. It could be of help to Gârla Mare in order to get more ideas for tourism activities, accommodation and other.³¹

²⁶ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/pas/phare/index.htm>

²⁷ http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/external/enlarge/countries/romania/plan/ann3_en.pdf

²⁸ http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/index_en.html

²⁹ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/pas/sapard.htm>

³⁰ <http://www.vacance-roumanie.com>

³¹ <http://www.Antrec.ro>

Other projects and organisations of potential relevance are the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority³², Center for Ecological Consultancy³³ and Romanian Environmental Partnership Foundation³⁴.

1.9 Travel agencies in the Netherlands

Several travel agencies in Wageningen (located in the Hoogstraat) have been visited. They are Reisburo Nijenhuis and Y'or Reiswinkel. They did not have much demand for trips to Romania. If people did it was a flight only, and not an organised tour. Nijenhuis used to have Romanian destinations in their travel catalogue, but not anymore.

Information found on the Internet, searching travel agencies and travel organisations, gives a slightly broader offer. Globe for example offers a 17-days bus tour. Kras offers three tours, of which one is a boat cruise over the Donau visiting several countries. The other two are bus tours again.

³² <http://www.ddbra.ro>

³³ <http://www.cceg.roa>. This website is a source for current ecological projects in the Danube Delta and elsewhere in Romania.

³⁴ <http://www.epce.ro>. Has on-going projects in eco-tourism and eco-business.

Chapter 2 Field research

2.1 Target group

The project is expected to be beneficial for the people living in Gârla Mare. For this, we have taken into account two types of beneficiaries, the direct beneficiaries and the indirect beneficiaries.

Direct beneficiaries

As the aim of the project is to investigate and propose possibilities for small-scale environment-friendly tourism in Gârla Mare and the main focus of the project is to improve the villagers' living standards, our direct beneficiaries are people living in Gârla Mare region. The project team believes that with the recommendations of the possibilities in small-scale environment-friendly tourism, the inhabitants from Gârla Mare will have opportunities to start working towards its realization. Thus, the project will reach its aim that is, offering another source of income, in this case small-scale tourism, besides their already existing sources of income that people in Gârla Mare have.

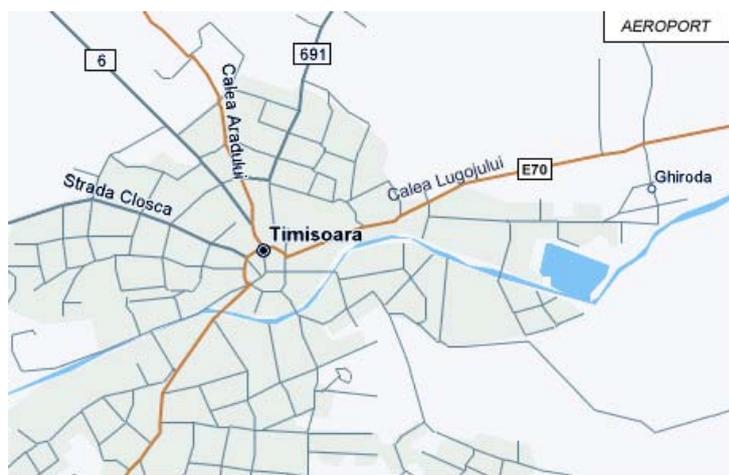
Indirect beneficiaries

The indirect beneficiaries are considered to be the tourists going to Gârla Mare. We consider that tourists are going to be indirectly benefited because Gârla Mare offers a different kind of tourism to the conventional mass-scale tourism that other villages offer. Thus, people that are looking to experiment with small-scale environment friendly tourism will have another place to choose for, besides the already existing ones in and outside Romania.

2.2 Facilities

Air transport

There exists one airport close to Gârla Mare. It is in Timisoara and is named the International Airport of Timisoara (Trian Vuia). The Timisoara International Airport is located 12 km east from Timisoara centre. It is also the main air gate of entrance to the Western part of Romania, being located in the North East part of Timisoara. Tourists can also have access to the airport by the main European road E70³⁵.



Map of Timisoara city and principal roads

³⁵ For further information a visitor can go to the webpage of the Airport: www.aerotim.ro/en/index.php

Car rental

There are seven companies who offer services to rent a car who are located in the airport of Timisoara. Those companies are Avis, Budget, Europcar, Hertz, Sixt, Thrifty and City Car.

Railway

There is a train station in Turnu Severin. Tourists can find daily connections to Romania's main cities, even Hungary, Austria and Czech Republic.

Public transport

In the city of Gârla Mare itself, there is a bus going to Turnu Severin every hour from six o' clock in the morning until one o' clock in the afternoon, and after half past one all buses will pass by every two hours until four o' clock in the afternoon.

Shops and pubs

In Gârla Mare, there are about five mini-markets and they are open between eight o' clock in the morning and eight o' clock in the evening. But they only can offer services if there is special demand from the villagers. The pubs only offer drinks but if there is demand from the tourists they can offer food immediately. There is a construction material shop and a car material shop. There is also a petrol station; and we can find some silos as well.

Road condition

The main roads are under the responsibility of the government in Turnu Severin and the municipality provides the maintenance of the secondary road. The quality of the main road is pretty good. The roads hardly have bumps and holes and even large part are asphalted, although the quality is minimal when compared with e.g. roads in the Netherlands. On the other hand, the quality of the secondary roads, which are primarily constituted by sand, is less compared to those with asphalt. These roads are characterized by having more holes and bumps. When it is raining, these roads will get a little muddy, although it does not show much problem for the transport.

Health facilities

In the village of Gârla Mare there are three doctors, who offer consultations and medicines, one dispensary, which is used for the use of the doctors. If tourists have medical insurance they can make the use of the medical centre for free. There are also six nurses, one pharmacy and one dentist. The nearest hospital is fifteen kilometres away and in case of emergency they have ambulances. Usually the doctors offer consult service, and medical assistance in the daytime, and also in the night.

2.3 Tourism activities

As the project recommends that Gârla Mare works towards small-scale environment-friendly tourism, the types of tourists that are expected are looking for direct contact with nature and people. This means that tourists would be living with families of the community or houses provided for them, with simple accommodation opposite to luxurious hotels. Tourists are also expected to look for peaceful contact with nature, opposite to for example rain forest adventure. They would enjoy the simple landscape with agricultural fields and some simple activities like fishing in the river, walking, horse wagon tour, seeing the wine production, etc. Tourist are also going to be people that enjoy knowing or participating of festivities, celebrations and special days of Gârla Mare. Finally tourist would be people with concern about nature preservation. This means that they will not represent a negative impact to the nature surrounding Gârla Mare.

Gârla Mare is able to offer a broad range of activities towards potential tourists. These activities are mainly focused on landscape, farming and culture. These activities are elaborated below.

Fishing

The abundant presence of various kinds of fishes in the Danube makes fishing worthwhile for tourists. Fishes such as carpe, pike, catfish, perch and sometime even some sturgeons can be found. Also the various lakes surrounding Gârla Mare provide the opportunity to fish. According to the villagers, tourists are able to join the fishing boats when going out fishing. Gârla Mare also has a fishery farm, which is open for everyone.

Horse wagon

Many villagers own one or more horses. They use them for agricultural and transport purposes. Many villagers indicated that they are willing to offer a guided tour to tourists with their horse wagon. Possible tours are the fields and direct surroundings of Gârla Mare.



Excursions

Gârla Mare is known for the beautiful scenery. The landscape and environment offer many attractions for the tourists. This can be visited either by the tourists alone or under guidance of the villagers.

The river Danube, together with the island, is one of the major attractions. Gârla Mare is in a special position regarding the river, because the Danube is close to the village. The neighbouring villages are located further away from the river. Many shepherds herd their flocks alongside the river and the wetlands.

Tourist can visit the island situated in the middle of the Danube. This island is rich of several kinds of species of (rare) birds, plants and other vegetation.

Other possible excursions are trips to the (agricultural) fields, the wine yards of the villagers and other nature areas in the neighbourhood of Gârla Mare. Tourist can observe and actively take part in doing agricultural activities like weeding, harvesting of the crops and grapes and shearing the sheep.

Local wine production

In the months September and October the grapes are harvested by the villagers. During the research it appeared that every villager has his own wine yard. After harvesting the villagers start processing the grapes in order to make wine and alcoholic drinks. The process of making wine and (of course) tasting the wine can be very interesting for tourists. It offers the possibility to get insight in the practices of daily life of the villagers.



Traditional handcraft

Traditional handcrafts are the making of carpets, woollen socks and hats. This is mainly done in wintertime.

Bird watching

According to the interviewed former biology teacher of the secondary school, and through email contact with a biologist, Gârla Mare provides the opportunity to do bird watching. Important places are (the shore of) the river, the flooding area of the Danube and the lakes, and the patches of forests and bushes.



Swimming and sailing

The river Danube offers nice opportunities to swim and lying on the shore. Other activities which can be done are sailing and canoeing.

Visit old houses and archaeological remainders

Gârla Mare has a couple of interesting buildings like the church and the kindergarten. Along the Danube some archaeological remainders of ancient times can be found, although most discovered items are exhibited in the museum in Turnu Severin.



Festivities related activities

Several festivities take place during the year. This ranges from church celebrations, like Christmas and Eastern, to the national and local feasts. Three main festivities take place on the 24th of January (foundation day of great Romania), the 9th of June (national celebration) and the 8th of September (gypsy's celebration). In general these feasts are accompanied by traditional music, dance, barbecues and other happenings. Tourists are encouraged to participate in all these festivities.

2.4 Nearby tourist attractions around Gârla Mare

In this part, a description of the nearby towns which can be attractive to tourists is given. It is clear that there are many possibilities. As Gârla Mare is close to these sites, Gârla Mare could be a good starting point for tourists who want to explore the south-western part of Romania. Most of these cities are interesting for cultural tourism, and some also for environmental or even health tourism.

The closest large city that could be attractive to tourists is Calafat. It is about 40 kilometers away and borders Bulgaria. It is a very ancient city with old buildings and a museum. This makes the city a very interesting site for cultural tourism. It is a big city with 25.000 inhabitants. There are ferries crossing the Danube frontier to Vidin.

Vidin is an ancient Bulgarian city which was built around a famous castle. Vidin has a historical importance as it was subjected to several wars and peace agreements among the neighbouring countries of the past especially with the Ottoman Empire. It is said that the effects of different cultures can be seen in the architecture. It is located on the other side of the border, opposite to Calafat.

Maglavit is another attraction for the tourists because it has a monastery in the centre. Saint Peter, a famous shepherd, was born in this town. He is known for receiving visions and afterwards being able to perform miracles.

Cetate is another city worthwhile to visit, with amongst others a castle and an old army construction from the Ottomans.

Portie de fier II (means Iron Gate 2) is interesting because it has a hydroelectric power plant where Danube water is coming down from the mountains.

If the tourists want to visit a real big city, Turnu Severin is the best option. It is the capital of Mehedinti's county, the district in which Gârla Mare is situated.

It has a museum of Iron Gate and a former Ottoman castle. It is an old city dating back 4000 years. There are ruins of a strategic military complex and an old important military and economic centre. Turnu Severin has a theatre and every year in the autumn, a folkloric festival takes place. The 7th to the 9th of May are well known as the city days, on which several (traditional) festivities take place. Other attractions of Turnu Severin are the Danube cruises which are offered by several tourism agencies and its nightlife and shopping possibilities. Turnu Severin can be considered as the only city within the region that offers the latter.

Targu Jiu is the city where the famous sculptor Constantin Braneusi lived. His masterpieces are exhibited in the city. His most famous sculpture 'Kissing Gate' is placed in a well-known park. In this park, the monument of the historical hero

Vladimirescu and the one of Katherina Theoduru who is known as the first women soldier in WW I are also placed. The city is also interesting for its typical Roman architecture.

Baia de Arama can also attract health tourism, because it has fountains with good and healthy waters.

Tismana is attractive because of its famous monastery in the mountains. It can also attract tourists who come for the environment, because many waterfalls can be seen there.

Băile Herculane already attracts a lot of tourists, especially with its natural waters containing sulphur which is beneficial for curing health problems. There are several luxurious hotels, restaurants and cafes in the city. There are also tourist complexes along the river. Another worthwhile spot to visit here is the natural park which contains protected species. The environment of Herculane is beautiful, full of hills and steep rocks. A river is flowing through these mountains.

Orsova can be very attractive to tourists with a special interest in nature. It has a famous monastery on top of a hill, which provides a splendid view on the surrounding nature. It also has beaches alongside the river, which provide some possibilities to enjoy water sports. Canoeing and making tours with small boats along the Danube River are two of these possibilities.



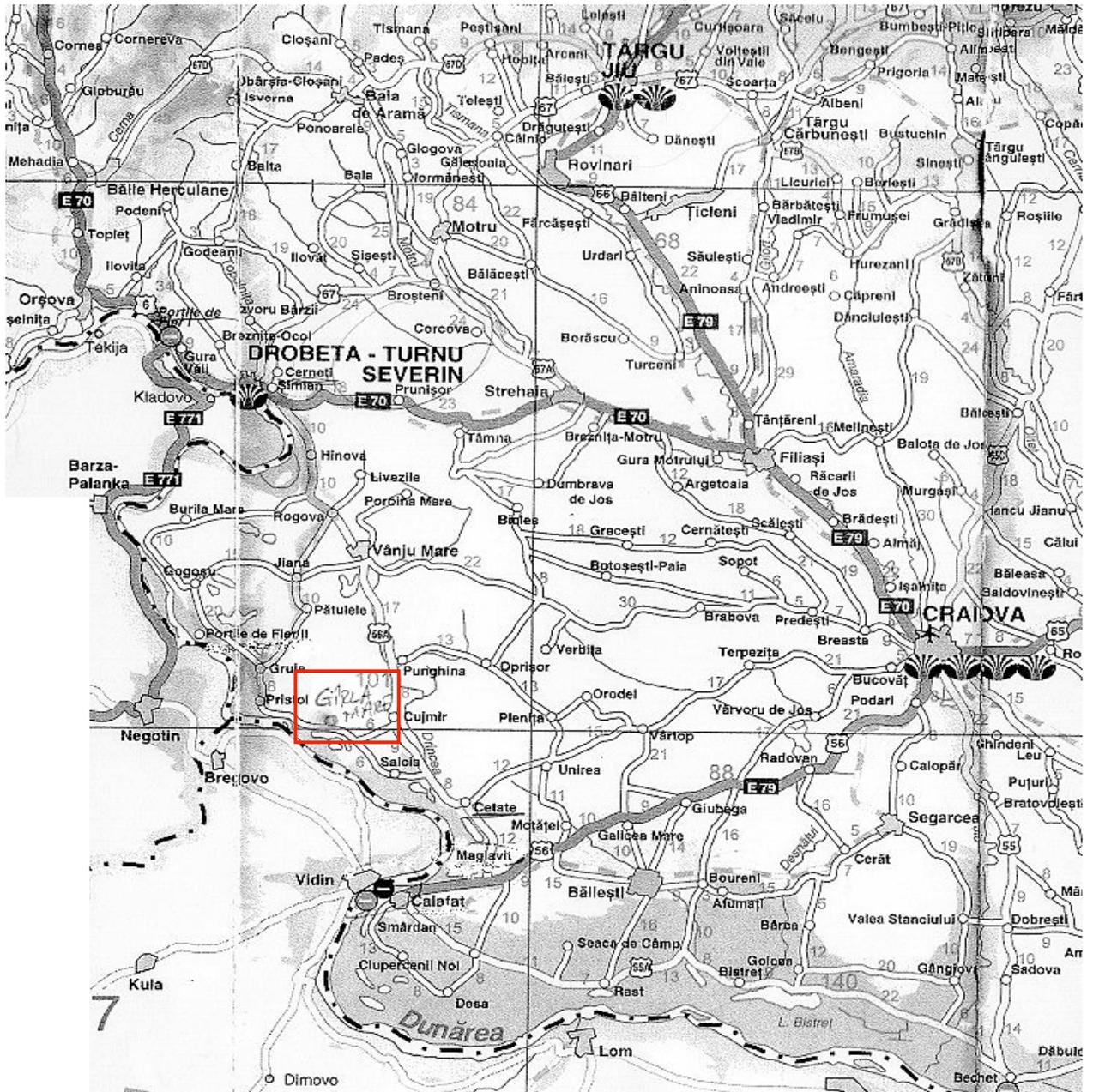
Surroundings of Băile Herculane



View on the scenery from the monastery of Orsova

Two cities which are located closely together are Closani and Pades. Closani has underground caves and aisles in an area of 20 square kilometres which are very impressive. It is also a good site for bird watching. Pades offers a variety of restaurants and bars to tourists. A curiosity is the monument for Vladimirescu. In general, this region is full of forests and mountains, which makes it attractive to environmental tourism.

Map of Garla and surrounding possible tourist attractions



2.5 Attitude

The attitude of the people in Gârla Mare towards tourist activities is diverse, but it can be stated that most of the people living in the village are open to cooperate with tourist activities. One of the main reasons to consider tourism for the people in Gârla Mare is that tourism is an opportunity to show how beautiful their village is, the way they live and the hospitality by which they are characterized. People in Gârla Mare give importance to their traditions and their traditional way of living and they are open to show them to outsiders as they are proud of keeping and practicing those traditions.

Most of the people in Gârla Mare belong to the Orthodox religion, although they don't practice it very often, except when going to the church in the special days. They consider the religious festivities such as Easter and Christmas as a part of their tradition and they are willing to share these festivities with tourists as attracting activities. People from Gârla Mare are proud of showing how they live, they also are open to show their lands, agricultural activities and gardening activities to tourists. Thus, their daily practices can also be used as another tourist attraction.

In addition, another important reason why they are open to tourists is their economic situation. Most of the people are satisfied about their lives but also mention that they prefer to have an additional income. Some also see the tourism as another source of income as they see that their children could work on it. However, it is mentionable that some of the villagers are not planning to be involved in tourist activities although they are also in the favour of tourism in Gârla Mare. The lack of interest in the future tourism activities for some people are mainly because of lack of time, because of being old or sometimes because of being ill.

Nevertheless, some of the villagers are highly optimistic about the possibilities of tourism in Gârla Mare and they think that outsiders will be interested in the nature and their way of life. They consider their village as special for outsiders while there are some people who are aware of the lack of some prerequisites for tourism in Gârla Mare. They see the lack of sanitation and lack of running water as the main two obstacles and they believe that these should be solved before tourists start coming. In the light of the interviews made, it was shown that people don't know much about how to deal with tourism such as promoting techniques and managing the tourist sites and complexes. As one of the respondents stated, "There is a good place for tourism and we have much to offer but people first have to know about how to manage tourism and how to use the resources they have for tourism. Without learning that, nothing can be done". However, we find that to develop skills to manage tourism is a process of learning by doing for the villagers of Gârla Mare.

Another reason why the villagers are in favour of tourism is the opportunity to be able to get in touch with other cultures and to learn about other cultures, customs and traditions. This, for most of the people from Gârla Mare do not have so much chances to travel outside the region around Gârla Mare. As the mayor of Gârla Mare stated, tourism can also be seen as an initiation for wider development as tourism goes hand in hand with regional development. Although he recognized that tourism in Gârla Mare might foster a feeling of competition from other villages in the region, he saw this as positive because Gârla Mare would be forced to develop more and interesting attractions for the outsiders than the other villages.

In the light of the short observations and interviews, it could be perceived that the Roma people were seen as people in cooperation with the Romanians. There is no visible problem between the two cultures that could threaten the possible tourist activities. It must be mentioned that there are some Romanian people who are highly prejudiced about the Roma's and they don't trust them and exclude them. In spite of these families, the majority of the Romanians do not consider the Roma's as a serious problem for the village and they are willing to cooperate for tourist activities.

Roma leaders mentioned that tourism would bring development to the region. As the leaders have a high influence on the whole gipsy society, they might make the gypsies work in coordination with the Romanian majority of the village. Also, there are some Roma's who are enthusiastic about offering accommodation and showing the gipsy traditions to outsiders, which they find highly attractive. In addition, the gipsy leaders have fears about the young generations to loose their identity and they think if the gipsy culture would be promoted to tourists, the youngsters might have more reasons to feel more attached to their gipsy identity. According to them their culture would be given more value by the outsiders as a result of the outsiders' perception of the gypsies as something new. Thus, the youngsters of Roma might take more care of their traditions and customs.

As a result the Roma's stressed their willingness to cooperate with the Romanians in terms of tourism. They were also quite hospitable towards the research group during the investigations in the field. Based on our observations, the attitude of the gypsies about cooperation varies depending on what kind of a gipsy family people deal with. There are gypsies who are totally in coordination with the Romanians but there are also others who are having problems with the Romanian local authorities and Romanians as we heard from some other Romanian people. It is worthwhile mentioning that we didn't have chance to speak with many Roma families.

Conclusion

Considering all former information, the project team is convinced that tourism is possible in Gârla Mare. In this conclusion, the team will elaborate on what kind of tourism is considered possible, for what reasons, and under which conditions. In the next part, the recommendations, an advice will be given on how to achieve the development of tourism in Gârla Mare.

In the proposal, it was already stated that the main focus would be small-scale, environment-friendly tourism. Now that the research is done, this is indeed the kind of tourism that is considered possible for Gârla Mare. Gârla Mare has some strength which fit well into this type of tourism. As is shown in the paragraph about the definitions of varying types of tourism, nature and the local culture play an important role in this kind of tourism.

Small-scale, environment-friendly tourism is considered possible for two reasons. The first is that Gârla Mare can be very attractive to tourists. It is located on the border of the Danube, which is unique for the region. Together with the island, this gives a pretty sight and recreation possibilities. On top of that, the surroundings of Gârla Mare are beautiful and provide some nice views, for example to the hills of Bulgaria, the shepherds with their flocks, the river, the fields and wetlands. Also the traditional way of living which takes place in the village is very nice to observe and participate in. This provides the tourists with a feeling of really being out of every-day life and therefore gives them plenty of opportunities to relax. All these aspects give possibilities to organize activities to tourists. It is well possible to make use of the surroundings and the traditional activities to attract tourists. The tourists will like to see it and also participate if this is possible. Examples of activities are mentioned in the former chapter.

The second reason why tourism is considered possible is because of the attitude of the local people. In the field research, it became clear that most people in Gârla Mare are in favour of the development of tourism and are willing to actively participate in it. The people are very hospitable, to Romanians as well as to foreigners. This is considered to be a basic need to develop tourism, and is thus provided. It implies a small-scale approach, taking into consideration the size of Gârla Mare and its current potential to receive tourists.

Tourism can only be developed if certain conditions are met. For example there have to be good accommodations and the road to Gârla Mare has to be well signed out. For further conditions, we refer to our next section with the recommendations.

Recommendations

As this report concludes, tourism is considered as possible in Gârla Mare. This section provides an overview of recommendations concerning the implementation of small-scale environment-friendly tourism.

General

- Tourism in Gârla Mare should start small because Gârla Mare is not (yet) capable to receive a lot of tourists. In the course of the years tourism possibilities can be extended, based on the experience.
- Gârla Mare should cherish its traditional ways of living. Tourists should have an insight in the daily (agricultural) life of the village.
- Look at similar projects in order to get more ideas and speed-up tourist development.

Organisation

- A local committee should be established in order to arrange tourist activities centrally. This committee consists of preferably 10-15 villagers. This committee should reflect all different kind people of Gârla Mare. Romanian and Roma, men and women should equally take part in the committee to get a fruitful cooperation. The committee should compose a tourist program encompassing all existing traditional activities. Guided tours to these traditional and agricultural activities within and outside the village should be organised. A description of these activities is given earlier in this report.
- In order to promote tourism in Gârla Mare a website could be arranged. This website should provide potential tourists with information of Gârla Mare, all kind of tourism possibilities and the offered facilities.
- The number of villagers who speak English should be increased by the help of the English teachers from the schools and people who can already speak English. This can be done voluntarily by people from in and outside the village.

Accommodation

- Tourists should be enabled to reside in Gârla Mare. Appropriate houses have to be allocated to accommodate tourists. Research has shown that many local villagers are willing to provide rooms or houses for tourists. These houses have to have proper sanitation facilities and water supply. It is suggested to start with accommodating tourists in appropriate existing houses because it will not take much extra investment costs for the village. Moreover tourists will be more involved in the family life.
- The shore of the Danube provides unique possibilities to camp. On the grass tourists can pitch their tents with a beautiful view on Gârla Mare, the river and Bulgaria on the opposite side. In order to enable tourists to camp, some sanitation facilities have to be arranged, like water supply, toilets and showers.

Social relations

- Cooperation between travel agencies in Turnu Severin, other places and Gârla Mare should be arranged. The travel agencies should be informed about the tourism opportunities in Gârla Mare. Subsequently these agencies should provide and disseminate information of Gârla Mare to the tourists, for example in the form of leaflets and brochures.
- To extend the possibility of funding it is recommended to make a connection with the regional and local government representatives. Also international ways of applying for

tourism financings should be considered, as for example the SAPARD program of the EU, or ECEAT. This is discussed earlier in this report.

- It is recommended to make use of the familiarity of villagers with the WECF. The WECF has gained trust among the villagers. The WECF therefore should participate in the (eco-) tourism project.

Facilities

- Hygienic conditions are to be improved such as developing a waste management system, which will include the collection of garbage, sorting out ways to decrease the amount of wastes, employing people to keep the streets clean and to collect the wastes on the streets, providing the houses with hot showers.
- Bars or cafes should be extended into restaurants by providing food to the tourists if necessary.
- The city hall, as the central place in Gârla Mare, should be used as a meeting point for tourists for all kind of inquiries. Also internet possibilities should be available in the city hall for tourists.
- It is recommended to make the way to Gârla Mare easy for tourists by putting traffic signs on the main roads. It is also recommended to put signs in Gârla Mare to direct tourists towards places to eat or to sleep.

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- www.religioustolerance.org/Roma.htm
- <http://Roma.undp.sk/>
- www.spolu.nl
- www.vacance-roumanie.com

Email contact

Menno Houtstra from ECEAT

Zoltan Hajdu from the Romanian NGO FOCUS Eco-Center

Appendix: List of contacts

For information about tourist and travel agencies close to Gârla Mare, see:

<http://romania-on-line.net/general/turistag.htm>

<http://www.romaniatourism.com/>

<http://www.colibri.ro/>

<http://www.adtour.ro/>

<http://www.online.ro/veramir/>

<http://www.recreation.ro/>

<http://www.romturism.ro/>

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