

GÂRNIC – THE SPECIFICITY OF A CZECH COMMUNITY IN ROMANIA

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Abstract. The paper aims at rendering the physical-geographical and social-economic features of a Czech settlement from our country. Gârnici village is located in the South-West of Romania, in the South of Banat, within the area of the Locva Mountains. It is one of the seventh communities with compact Czech population that still preserves the ethno-cultural and linguistic peculiarities very well. There are analysed the natural landscape that favoured inhabitation, the population's history, the demographic and economic potential, as well as certain ethnographical features (traditional ways of using water, national costumes, specific customs and traditions).

Key words: Gârnici village, the specific of the community, socio-economic features

1. GÂRNIC – ETYMOLOGY

The name of the place has a Slavic origin, coming from “*gârlo*” which means *pond*. The initial name *Gernik* was Germanized – *Wietzenried* (wietzen= crops, ried= field) or Magyarized *Szorenybuzas*- buza = crops. For a short period of time it had an obvious Slavic resonance – *Vacerov*.

2. GEOGRAPHIC LAYOUT, LIMITS AND SURFACE

The Gârnici village is situated in the South-West of Romania, in the South of the Caraş-Severin County, having as mathematic coordinates the 44°78'64" North parallel and the 21°79'44" East meridian. Its boundaries are Cărbunari and Sopotu Nou in the North, Sichevița in the South and South-East, the town Moldova Noua in the West and South-West. (Fig. no 1)

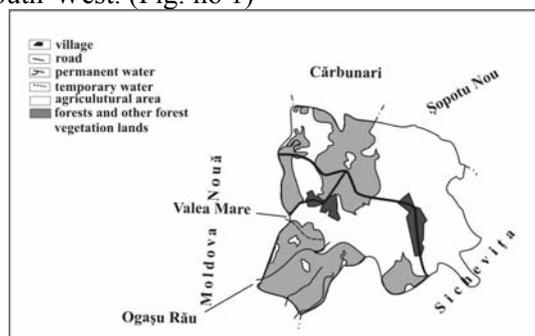


Fig. no 1. Gârnici – Geographic layout, limits

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Between these limits the Gârnic Village has a surface of 2,359 ha (which represents 64 percent of the commune's surface). The Gârnic Village is 4 km away from the neighboring places Padina Matei (North-West), 7 km from Sichevita (South) and Moldovița (North), 14 km from Sfânta Elena (West), 15 km from Ravensca (Est), 18 km from Cărbunari (North) and Moldova Noua (North-Wes). The nearest railway station is Oravița at a 70 km distance. It is also situated at 165 km from Reșița, 140 km from Orșova, and 205 km from Timișoara.

3. THE SPECIFICITY OF THE GEOGRAPHIC ENVIRONMENT

The Gârnic village is located in the *Locva Mountains*, in an area where the altitudes oscillate between 600-700 m. The presence of limestone determined the existence of calcareous relief and Karst.

The calcareous relief is the result of the fragmentation process of the limestone massifs and blocks, as well as their surfacing.

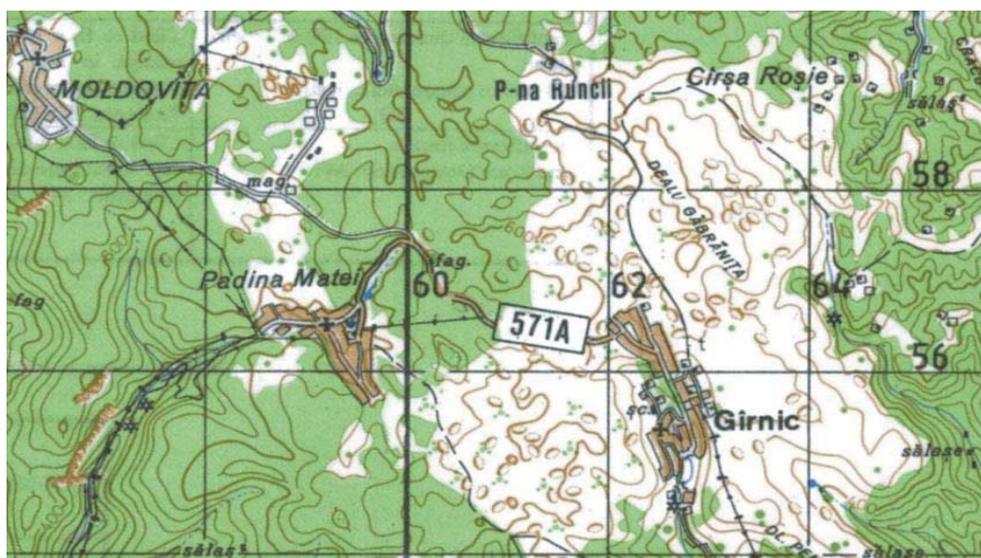


Fig. no 2. The location of the village within Gârnic calcareous plateau

The plateau on which the Gârnic village is settled (Fig. no 2) is molded on the surface of a limestone massif and has an almost tabular aspect, being riddled with dolinas, uvalas and caves. It is delimited by the Siborajdea, the Radimna, the Valea Mare, and the Valea Bicii valleys. On the head race of these water gorges, there appear specific valleys with very narrow transverse profile, with steep escarpments, bulged in some places and with pot-holes. The surface karst develops on the uncovered by soil or vegetation limestone. The most widespread landforms are the lapis, the dolinas, and the uvalas, more frequent on the right side of the Camenița valley, in the North of the Gârnic village. The deep karst is represented by the Grota Haiduceasca cave, the Pestera cu Lacuri cave, and the Pestera lui Filip cave.

The sculptural fluvio-denudation relief is present through the valleys and interfluves system. The Camenița valley or the Gârnic valley is the most representative, and from the point of view of the habitat potential of the relief, it forms a favorable area where the hearth of the studied village lays out. From the point of view of the geographical location, Gârnic is a bottom valley and slope village, located at the origin of the Camenița River.

The climate is temperate continental moderated with sub-Mediterranean influences; the average monthly temperatures oscillate between -10°C in January and 28°C in July; the average annual rainfall exceeds 650 mm; the dry south wind and Koshava wind are the dominating winds.

The main axis of the *river system* is represented by the Camenița River (Gârnic), which springs North of the village, under the Gabranita hill. It has some small tributaries with irregular flow and a torrential character: the Valea Mare, the Valea Bicii, the Valea Cheii, the Valea Rea, the Mudavita Seaca etc. The Gramensca River is only four kilometers eastward of the Gârnic village. Named by the locals Petru Iedu, it is a river with a high discharge, on which watermills were built.

The ground waters are discontinuous. They have been taken in the north-western part of the village, where the drinking water supply system was delivered from.

The vegetation consists of beech, where the *Fagus sylvatica* dominates together with the *Fagus orientalis*, a Pontic relict tree. At the lower part of this level, mingled species of ash tree, linden tree, and hornbeam tree appear. As for the shrubs, the hazelnut tree, the cornel tree, the bloody twig, hawthorn, and the common elder have a higher frequency. The sub-Mediterranean climatic influences are revealed in the presence of xerothermophilous shrubs of lily, flowering ash and wig tree. The meadows of spear grass appeared where beech forest used to be, and they are formed of mesophyllum species and fodder graminaceae. The meadows of hair grass are mainly made up of xerophyllum species and they are spread out in the upper basin of the Camenița River.

The fauna is rich; it consists of a diversity of species and it belongs to the forest and meadow vegetation areas: the wolf, the fox, the wild boar, the wild cat, the badger, the hare etc. The water fauna is varied, from this point of view, the Gramensca River being distinguished for the native trout and the miller's thumb.

The soil cover is made up of argillic brown rendzinic soil developed on limestone where it is associated to rendsine, Terra rossa and luvic brown soil. The argillic brown soil and the luvic brown soil represent the base of pastures, crops and potatoes cultures.

4. BRIEF HISTORY

The origin of the Gârnic village is linked to the colonization made by the Habsburg Imperial authorities starting with the first part of the 19th century, on economic and social grounds: deforestation in order to obtain timber and the enlargement of agricultural fields, the repopulation of the area after the Turks' forays and the reinforcement of the border watch. We can add to these causes the difficult situation in Bohemia that generated "a favorable emigration trend", the

oppressions of those that did not belong to the Romano-catholic religion, as well as the facilities offered to the colons. The colonization in the South of Banat occurred during three stages (1823-1824, 1826-1828, 1856-1865) when many villages were established. Some of them disappeared either for lack of drinking water during the summer, or because of the inhabitants' departure.

Before the Czech colonization, the area between Orșova and Moldova Noua was scarcely populated. There were only a few Romanian villages, the surroundings being dominated by forests and scattered sheepfolds here and there. The entire region was the property of the Frontier Guard Post (which functioned between 1522 and 1873), more precisely of the Romanian Regiment from Banat, which had its headquarters in Caransebeș. The first wave of colons came during the years 1823 and 1824 from South-West Bohemia (about 600-700 persons) at Magyarly's initiative, a rich wood exploiter from Oravița. During this period, Elisabethfeld and Svata Helena appeared. The former disappeared a few decades later. The second wave of the colonization of South Banat was much more intense in terms of number of individuals (8000-9000 persons). This is due to the agreement between the regional Bohemian authorities and the Romanian- Illirical Regiment Head Quarters, who thus wanted to reinforce the South border of the empire. The Czech settled in the villages that they occupy until today, Gârnic included. It is the larger village with a dense Czech population in our country. The colons that established in the studied village came from the West of Bohemia (Plzen) and from the surroundings of Prague (Ramovite). The origin of the first inhabitants is highlighted by toponymy, the name of the main street (the large/big street – velkastrana) being Plzeneti, meaning, those from Plzen. After the colonization, the inhabitants entered under the administration of the 13th Regiment of Frontier Guard from Caransebeș. Their common duty was to secure for four years the watch of the South borders. The official language was German, but the religious service and the education were done in Czech. In 1867, the Habsburg Empire becomes the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which will have a negative impact on the Czech colons. The Czech settlements entered under the direct Hungarian government, which had direct negative consequences, for example the Education Law from 1868, which intensified the Magyar tendencies in schools. According to this law, starting with 1882, teachers couldn't teach if they did not know Magyar. After 1900, new laws forebode to pupils to study in their mother tongue. Moreover, the Magyar language is imposed in administration, church and school. Even the name of the village is Magyarized – Szarenybuzas and that of its inhabitants too. The introduction of Magyar language caused a certain cultural stagnation, but it favored the appearance of bilingualism. After the Romanian Constitutional State formation, the situation of native Czechs improves. On the basis of the International Agreement in 1920, the Romanian Government approved the practice of the teachers that came from the Czech Republic, which was favorably reflected on a cultural and economic level.

From a territorial administrative point of view, Gârnic became a commune on the basis of the Administrative Unification Law from the 13th of June 1925,

being included in Moldova Noua district, the Caraş County. According to the Law number 5 from September 1950, the Gârnic Commune belonged to Severin region, Moldova Nouă department. The subsequent/ latter territorial reorganizations changed only the name of the region, which became Timișoara (in 1956), and Banat (in 1960). Starting with 1968, no more territorial administrative changes were carried out, the Gârnic Commune being formed of the homonym village and Padina-Matei (certified in 1775 as an Oltenian human settlement).

5. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

From a demographic size point of view, the Gârnic village has been considered until the last census the biggest Czech village in our country. If in 1830 it had 469 inhabitants, in 1900 it reaches 1139 inhabitants, the average annual growth being of 1.3 percent. In the 20th century, the number of the Czech ethnics dropped from 1,048 persons/ individuals in 1910 to 773 individuals in 1966 and 870 individuals in 1992. At the census in 2002, 512 Czechs were registered, the annual decrease rate since the previous census being of 5.1 percent. The decreasing number of this community continued during the following years at an average annual rate of 5.8 percent. Therefore, at the end of 2007, the official data registered only 380 individuals of Czech.

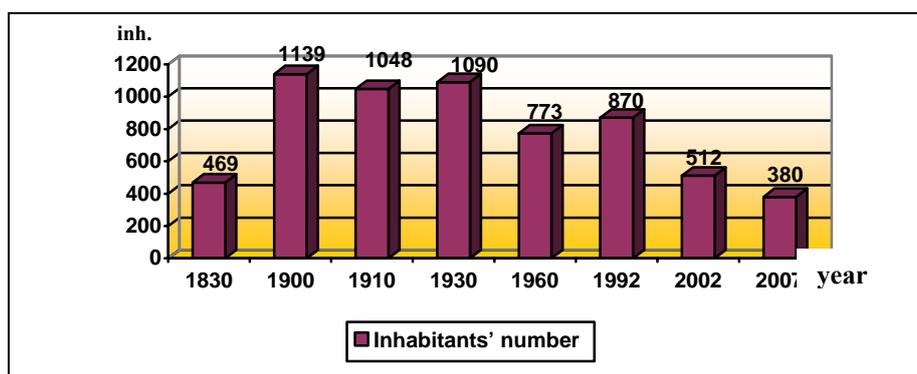


Fig. no. 3. Numeric evolution of population (1830-2007)

The birth rate registered high figures of 19.7‰ in 1966 and 19.5‰ in 1977. After this year, the birth rate decreased continuously: 15.0‰ in 1992, 10.5‰ in 2002, and 8.0‰ in 2007.

The mortality rate rose from 9.2‰ in 1966 to 12.0‰ in 1977, 13.0‰ in 1992, 14.7‰ in 2002, and 14.9‰ in 2007.

The natural population balance diminished from 10,5‰ in 1966 to 7,5‰ in 1977, 2,0‰ in 1992, -4,2‰ in 2002 and -6,9‰ in 2007.

The spatial mobility of the population during 1966-2007 was characterized by the high number of departures, which intensified after 1997, reaching more than 400 persons, who left until the end of the analyzed period. The majority of the population left settled near Plzen, in the place called Skalna, where the Czechs from Gârnic

emigrated after the German retreat from the Czech Republic. The population density reduced to a half in the last four decades. If in 1966 it was 32.7 inh./sq km, in 1992 it dropped to 21.7 inh./sq km, and in 2007 it reached 16.1 inh./sq km.

As for the population's sex structure, it can be observed a predominance of the feminine population whose share was of 50.4 percent in 1966, 50.7 percent in 1992, 55.1 percent in 2002, and 59.0 percent in 2007. The high values during the last period are a consequence to the migration of the masculine population to the Czech Republic and the higher mortality among men.

The population structure by age-groups registered an evolution that is similar to that of the national trend. The share of youngsters (0-14 years old) dropped from 24.0 percent in 1966 to 18.0 percent in 2007. The adult age group held 62.0 percent in 1966 and in 2007 it dropped to 37.0 percent. The population of 60 years old and over 60 registered a constant upward trend, its proportion being of 14 percent in 1966 and of 45 percent in 2007, which indicates the population's degree of demographic ageing. (Fig. no 4)

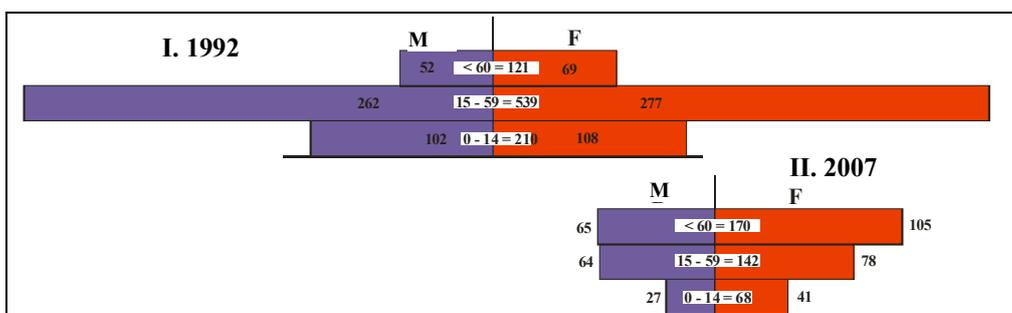


Fig. no. 4. Population structure by large age and sex groups. I. 1992; II. 2007

The share of the economically-active population grew from 45.6 percent in 1966 to 57.55 in 1977, after which it diminished to 48.9 percent in 1992, 46.2 percent in 2002, and 39.8 percent in 2007. The analysis of the share of the economically-active population on economic sectors highlights the changes undergone in the socio-economic development of the place and of the neighboring area. During the period taken into consideration, the majority of the economically-active population worked in agriculture: 62.1 percent in 1966, 54.1 percent in 1992, 69.5 percent in 2007. The industry gathered 23.0 percent of the economically-active population in 1966, 26.4 percent in 1992, and 14.5 percent in 2007.

From the ethnic and religious point of view, the population is characterized by a high degree of homogeneity: the share of the Czechs varied between minimum 97.7 percent in 2002 and 99.1 percent in 2007. All the population is Romano-catholic.

In 2007, the population over 12 years old represented 85.3 percent of the total population. From this social category 2 persons have higher education, 10 persons graduated from a high school, 34 persons graduated from a vocational school, 265 have graduated from a gymnasium and 13 graduated from a primary school.

Economically speaking it is interesting to point out the fact that none of the Czech villages has a well defined closed agricultural economy. At over 700 m altitude corn, potatoes, wheat, and oat are cultivated. The potato is the main crop.

The landed estate stock totaled in 2007 a 2,359 ha surface, occupied mostly by agricultural fields (72.2 percent), followed by forests (24.2 percent), and the difference of 3.6 percent represents buildings, roads, rivers and unproductive areas.

In comparison with the year 1950, significant changes can be observed on the main categories of the land use, in the way that the agricultural surface expanded with 42 percent (from 1198 ha up to 1703 ha) and the forests diminished by half (from 1076 ha in 1950 to 517 ha in 2007). (Fig. no. 5)

The structure of the agricultural fields registered important changes: on the one hand, the arable land reduced with 41.5 percent, and on the other hand, the grazing fields grew with 210 percent (from 180 ha to 559 ha), and the hayfields grew with 93.1 percent (from 407 ha to 786 ha). (Fig. no. 6)

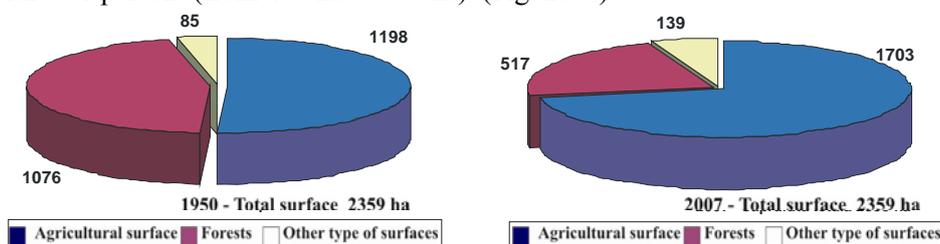


Fig. no 5. Landed estate stock structure

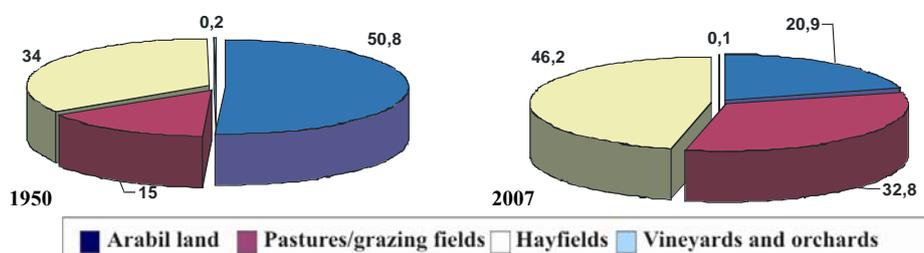


Fig. no 6. Agricultural land structure

Agriculture is practiced for the family's private consumption. At over 650 m altitude, corn (101 ha), oat (93 ha), wheat (83 ha), fodder plants (34.5 ha), potatoes (34 ha), barley and two-row barley (7 ha), rye (2 ha), vegetables and leguminous plants (1ha) are grown. Animal breeding is ensured by fodder resources. Therefore, in 2007 the zootechnic sector had the following structure: 396 bovines, 432 porcines, 200 horses, 45 sheep, 43 goats, 2850 poultry, 45 rabbits, 115 bee families. It is interesting to point out the place horse breeding has in the community's economic activity, the horse breeders from Gárnice being the most well-known in the South Banat.

Lime making is an old activity, determined by the limestone resources in the area. It is burnt in ovens dug in the ground, with a capacity of 5,000-15,000 kg, the

product thus obtained, being sold in the whole region of the Danube's Defile.

At present, in the village function *the companies* S.C. Bobinronic S.R.L. which produces electronic devices (coils and transformers/converters), S.C. Ipcal Prod S.R.L. Timișoara, which is a milk gathering/storing point in Gârnic, the milk being processed in Moldova Noua; S.C. Viedecz S.R.L., which makes bread and pastry products (care produce pâine și produse de patiserie)

The **tourism natural and anthropic resources** are numerous and various: *dolinas and dolina valleys* on the calcareous plateau; *karst valleys*: the Valea Mare, the Valea Camenița; *gorges* of the Tisa; *caves*: Peștera lui Filip, Peștera cu lacuri, Grota Haiducească ; *botanical reservation* Valea Mare; *mill system* on the Gramenska River; *national costume, the traditional customs*; way of life; *enduro-tourism* (every year 6,000-8,000 tourists from the Czech Republic and Germany arrive here to practice this sport); *agrotourism*.

Equipment, technical, cultural and sanitary utilities. The accommodation potential of the place is rendered by a number of 244 households, 98.4% of which are private property, about 780 rooms, with a 9850 sq m total living surface. Taking into account young adults' emigration and the high demographic ageing, the number of newly built houses is very small; in the last decade only five houses have been built. Painting the houses in blue and white is a characteristic of Gârnic, in comparison with other Czech villages, where white is matched with green. The households have had electricity and a system of drinking water distribution since 1971. At present, the drinking water system measures 6.5 km and can provide between 100-200 m³ of water daily.

In the civic centre besides the town hall, the police station, the club and the health centre, there is a general school with the first up to the 8th grade, which was renovated and equipped with new furniture and computers by the Czech State, who also provided the machines needed for scavenging. A project that is going on at the moment "Caritas Brna" has the purpose to help looking after single old people.

6. ETHNOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

a. Traditional ways of using water:

- Further away from the village hearth, five *watermills* (Fig. no 7) with horizontal wheel or with well bucket function on the Gramenska River. They are called "Petru Iedu's mills" and are used by the inhabitants of Gârnic and those from the hamlets belonging to the Șopotu Nou Commune. The grinding methods as well as the terminology of the pieces that make up the mill are common. The building system of these mills is Traco-Dacic. It anticipates centuries in advance the building system of Kaplan or Pelton coils. On the Camenița River, in the hearth of the village, there is Atman's mill.
- Two *alembics*, named by the locals "alembics for boiling brandy", are traditional hydraulic installations for distilling plum brandy. They are private property, but they are used by several families, either relatives or neighbors. They are functioning at full capacity in October and November.



Fig. no. 7. Watermills from Gârnici

b. Customs and traditions:

- *Fărșancul* begins at the "Lăsatul secului" and it lasts for three days. It is a procession where people do not wear masks (in all the other communities from the area people wear masks) and they satirize wedding and funeral processions.
- *Negeia (nedeia)* is an old custom of celebrating the Saint of the Church. On the 16th of October, when Saint Barbara is celebrated, people wear masks, small children receive gifts and those that were not obedient are "beaten" with a rod. It's a custom that illustrates the way the inhabitants created the necessary background for keeping their spiritual unity over time. On the 16th of May, Saint John the Nepomuck, the protector of the church is celebrated.
- *The wheat Lent* begins three days after Whitsun and lasts till harvest and it is followed by a community dance party.
- *Marriage has specific rituals* coordinated by the Givaru - the leader of the wedding.
- *Christmas named Jezisek (from Jesus)* is a unique word, the other Check villages using the word Kiskineru. A masked person brings presents, caring the decorated fir tree that the locals call "the tree". Together with Christmas, it is celebrated the Adven, the beginning of the new Christian year.

c. The traditional costumes:

- *women wear* long skirts named "sucne", motley, starched, with two or three layers of underskirts, homemade embroidered shirts and pantyhose of different colours. The elder women wear dark colours, the young women wear white and red. The coif is of light colour. It is worn tight before by the young girls and tight back by the married and elder women.

- *men wear* white shirts, trousers, vests and black hats with very few ornaments. (Fig. no 8)



Fig. no. 8. The traditional costumes

d. The Banat Czech's festival takes place every two years.

As a *conclusion*, it can be said that Gârnic village belongs to the landscape of the Locva Mountains as a distinct settlement the specificity of which has to be protected due to the features of the natural environment where it is located, to the ethno-cultural features, and to the original way of life.

The cultural patrimony of this settlement is an important part of the multiculturalism of Banat and a significant tourist resource that has to be capitalized.

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