

## A GEOGRAPHICAL–HISTORICAL STUDY ON THE NERA GORGES-BEUȘNIȚA NATIONAL PARK: SPECIAL ANALYSES ON POPULATION AND SETTLEMENTS

**Vasile NEAGU\*, Cosmin CRĂCIUNESCU\*\***

*\* Hydrologist, Banat River Basin Administration Timișoara, Water Management System – Reșița Hydrological Station, Caraș-Severin County, no. 9 Căminelor Street, Reșița, Romania, e-mail: vasneagu@yahoo.com*

*\*\* Săvârșin High School, No. 52, Arad County, Romania, e-mail: craciunescucsm@yahoo.com*

**Abstract.** *A Geo-Historical Study on Nera Gorges-Beușnița National Park. Special Analyses on Population and Settlements.* Some of the settlements bordering Nera Gorges-Beușnița National Park date from the Daco-Roman period. However, most of the settlements have been documented starting with the Habsburg domination in 1718. In this period, German, Austrian and Slovak colonists, as well as Romanians from Oltenia settled here and with the local people reinstated the industrial areas abandoned by the Turks. They also brought their contribution to the militarization of the border areas resulting in the rapid socio-economic growth of the settlements. Oravița and Anina are currently the only urban settlements, both having a glorious industrial past. There are numerous rural settlements, grouped into six communes: Ciclova Română, Sasca Montană, Cărbunari, Șopotu Nou, Lăpușnicu Mare and Bozovici. There are numerous tourist attractions and the settlements network has a huge historical, cultural and ethnographic potential. With the establishment of Nera Gorges-Beușnița National Park (2003), local communities with the support of local authorities and park management personnel should involve more in activities related to the administration, operation and promotion of the protected area (opening of hostels, workshops and crafts stores, creating brand names for the local products etc.).



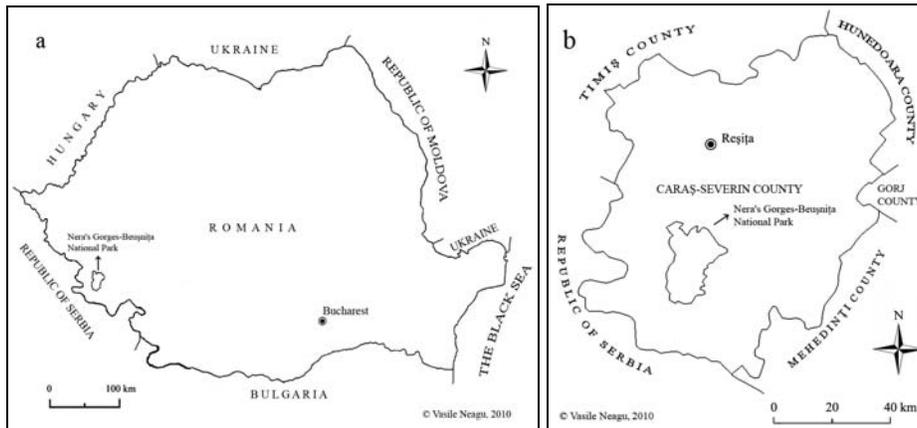
**Rezumat.** *Studiu geografico-istoric asupra Parcului Național Cheile Nerei-Beușnița. O analiză specială asupra populației și așezărilor.* Deși unele dintre așezările care mărginesc Parcul Național Cheile Nerei-Beușnița există din perioada daco-romană, majoritatea acestora au fost atestate documentar începând cu stăpânirea habsburgică, după anul 1718, când se stabilesc aici coloniști germani, austrieci, slovaci etc. și români din Oltenia, care alături de băștinași, repun în exploatare perimetrele industriale părăsite de turci și contribuie la militarizarea zonei de graniță, localitățile prosperând socio-economic într-un ritm accentuat. Oravița și Anina reprezintă în prezent singurele așezări urbane, ambele cu glorios trecut industrial. Așezările rurale sunt numeroase, fiind grupate în șase comune: Ciclova Română, Sasca Montană, Cărbunari, Șopotu Nou, Lăpușnicu Mare și Bozovici. Fondul turistic este bine reprezentat, rețeaua de așezări dispunând de un imens potențial istoric, cultural și etnografic. Odată cu înființarea Parcului Național Cheile Nerei-Beușnița (2003), este necesară implicarea cât mai activă a comunităților locale în activități ce țin de administrarea, funcționarea și promovarea ariei protejate (deschiderea de pensiuni, ateliere meșteșugărești și magazine cu produse artisanale, realizarea unor mărci comerciale pentru produsele locale etc.), bineînțeles cu sprijinul autorităților locale și a celor care conduc parcul național.

**Key words:** *industrial areas, local communities, Nera Gorges-Beușnița National.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *perimetre industriale, comunități locale, Parcul Național Cheile Nerei-Beușnița.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nera Gorges-Beușnița National Park is located in the south-west of Romania (Figure 1a), in Caraș-Severin County (Figure 1b) covering the southern part of Aninei Mountains and the north-eastern part of Locvei Mountains (Figure 2).



**Figure 1:** *The location of Nera Gorges-Beușnița National Park in Romania (a) and in Caraș-Severin County (b) (Neagu, 2010)*

It covers an area of 36.758 ha in the administrative units of the following localities: Anina, Oraviţa, Ciclova Română, Sasca Montană, Cărbunari, Şopotu Nou, Lăpuşnicu Mare and Bozovici.

## 2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE APPEARANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN COMMUNITIES

The oldest evidences of the humanization process in the area of Nera Gorges-Beuşniţa National Park date from the **Paleolithic** (35.000-40.000 B.C.), as attested by archaeological discoveries on the current localities territory Anina (Peştera cu Oase<sup>1</sup> in Miniş Valley) and Lăpuşnicu Mare.

The **Neolithic** and the **Metal Age** are attested by a great number of archaeological discoveries, excavations revealing housing complexes and archaeological material (pottery, stone and bone tools, knife blades etc.) (Jurjica and al., 1981) at Anina, Oraviţa, Sasca Montană, Şopotu Nou, Cărbunari and Ilidia. The settlements had large hearths, buldings were piled or scattered, built of straw and earth (Vert, 2001) and their residents were involved in agriculture, livestock breeding, fishing and pottery.

The presence and settlement of the *Dacians* and later *Daco-Romans* in these areas is certified by other archaeological discoveries, like those from Sasca Montană, Bozovici and Cărbunari (iron ore exploitation and processing facilities dating from the I millennium A.D.). After the *Aurelian withdrawal* in 271 A.D., the archaeological discoveries (coins and tools) show that the Romanization of the population continued at least until the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century by maintaining continuous relations with the Roman Empire, then Byzantium and the Romanized population situated south of the Danube. In the *early feudal* period, Romanians's presence (as farmers, livestock breeders, blacksmiths and potters) in these regions is attested by the archaeological discoveries from Cărbunari and Ilidia. In the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries, the current territory of the protected area was part of the Principalities of Glad and Ahtum, both vehemently opposing to the Hungarian expansion and barbarian invasions. At the same time, Romanian ethnics remained predominant.

Under the *Hungarian domination* (11<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries), the settlements multiply and the documents mention the *Ilidia district from Banat*, mainly populated by free peasants, who formed a community able to resist both the raids and the organized Turkish attacks (Vert, 2001).

From the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, Banat was owned by *Ottoman Empire* for almost two hundred years. In that period, significant socio-economic changes took place, such as the abolition of class privileges and the disappearance of the Romanian and Hungarian nobility and, therefore, the improvement of the social situation of the peasantry. In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Turks strengthen their position by drawing the Christian population from the neighbouring Ottoman provinces of Banat (Oltenia) through a series of economic incentives such as free indulgence to encourage ore extraction and purchase of extracted ore (Vert, 2001).

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, (following the Peace of Passarowitz (1718), Banat passed under the *Habsburgs' Empire suzerainty*. Romanian ethnics were present throughout the

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<sup>1</sup> Cave with Bones.

province while the main activities were agriculture, livestock breeding, beekeeping and hunting.

Following the annexation to the Habsburg Empire, the Austrian authorities began colonizing the province with Germans, Hungarians, Serbs, Czechs, Slovaks etc. for military, economic and religious reasons. Thus, Oravița – Ciclova and Potoc – Sasca areas were colonized with workers from Tirol, Styria, Saxony, Bohemia, Zips (Slovakia) etc. The newcomers re-opened and modernized the mining perimeters abandoned by the Turks.

A strong current of emigration of the population from Oltenia to Banat incurred because of the unfavourable socio-economic and political conditions in Oltenia as well as some social advantages offered by the Austrian authorities. The newly arrived settled both in the mountains, where they established – with the Germans – the localities of Oravița Montană, Ciclova Montană, Sasca Montană, Cărbunari and Știnăpări, and in the border localities – Bozovici, Lăpușnicu Mare, Șopotu Nou and Moceriș – to increase the number of men fit for military service. Because they conducted their work in the mining areas in the middle of the woods (including at night), having a similar life to that of the owls, the local population called them “bufeni” (by deriving the word “bufniță”, “owl”) and even today they are known under this name.

Serfdom is abolished permanently in Banat after the *Revolution of 1848* and individual ownership of land and means of production is sanctioned by law. The strengthening of the capitalist system, by developing industry, transport and trade, gradually leads to the socio-economic and political decline of landowners, culminating in the departure or sale of the estates to the peasants (Vert, 2001).

On the *1<sup>st</sup> of December 1918*, the Habsburg Empire’s suzerainty over Banat comes to an end and the region joins permanently to Romania.

### 3. POPULATION AND SETTLEMENTS

The degree of humanization is low within the borders of Nera Gorges-Beușnița National Park. The population is estimated to approximately 450 inhabitants, resulting in a *very low population density* of only 1 inhabitant/kmp. But if we take into account the total population of the administrative territories within the national park stretches, then the population exceeds 30.000 inhabitants. The population density reaches about 82 inhabitants/kmp. The highest population densities are in the *western and north-western areas* bordering the national park: Anina – Oravița (75 inhabitants/kmp) and Ciclova – Sasca.

*Romanians* form the main ethnic group, surpassing 90% of the total population of almost all localities. The second largest ethnic group are the *Germans*, who are well represented in Anina (8,3%) and Oravița. *Roma* ethnics are scattered in all localities, but especially in Ciclova Română (5,3%), Oravița, Bozovici and Lăpușnicu Mare. *Hungarians* have the highest percentage in the total population of Oravița and Anina towns. Other ethnic groups (Czechs, Serbs, Slovaks etc.) are insignificant as a share of the total population of the national park area.

Local populations have practised *agriculture, fruit growing, livestock breeding, hunting, fishing, beekeeping* etc. from time immemorial. *Logging* and other occupations – partially forgotten today – such as *pottery, furrier's trade, spinning, weaving, blacksmithing and woodcarving* have been added later. Under the Habsburg Empire domination, most of

the population was engaged in *mining* and *metallurgy* in Oraviţa, Ciclova Montană, Sasca Montană and Steierdorf-Anina. *Agroturism* has been developed recently in Potoc, Sasca Montană, Sasca Română or Cărbunari. The establishment of Nera Gorges-Beuşniţa National Park may represent the necessary stimulus for reviving the entire mountainous area from the south-west of Banat in the following years.

Most settlements are located in areas bordering the national park. Oraviţa and Anina are the only **towns** in the area (Figure 2), both having a glorious industrial past.

**Oraviţa**, located along the valley with the same name and north-west of the national park, was documentary attested in 1690. It has a population of 10.220 inhabitants, without the adjoining localities. The name of the town comes from the Slavic word “ohra” meaning “nut” while “oravetz” means “the grove of nuts”.

Although the settlement had existed from the Daco-Roman period, Oraviţa became a real industrial and commercial centre with the development of mining and metallurgy under the Habsburg rule. Thus, *the first blast furnace on the present territory of the country* was built by the Austrians in Oraviţa in 1718. *The first mining school on the current territory of Romania* was opened in 1929. In 1733, Lacul Mare and Lacul Mic (two reservoirs) were created on the Oraviţa Valley to retain water for the water supply and industrial needs of the town. The two lakes were considered by Birou (1962) *the first valley dammed reservoirs on the present territory of Romania*. Oraviţa became the main mining and metallurgical centre in Banat with the establishment of the “Direction of Mines Banat”, *the oldest institution of its kind on the current territory of the country*.

The theatre opened in 1817 was *the first theatrical institution on the current territory of Romania*. Between 1817 and 1820, Ion Konstantiny edited a weekly newspaper to inform the population of the mountainous region. It was *the first Romanian magazine in Banat and one of the first publications on the current territory of Romania*.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the transport by convoys of carts is replaced by rail with the inauguration of the railway lines Oraviţa – Baziaş (1854), *the first railway on the current territory of Romania and south-eastern Europe*, and Oraviţa – Anina (1863), *the first mountainous railway on the nowadays territory of Romania*. Both railways were built to transport coal and ore to the Danube and from there by ship to Vienna.

In 1869, the local industrial and commercial authorities opened *the first industrial and commercial exhibition of mining products on the current territory of Romania and south-east Europe*. The exhibition had over 200 exhibitors and over 1.000 objects on display.

Oraviţa has many *interesting sights*, such as: *The Orthodox Church Adormirea Maicii Domnului* (monument of architecture and painting), *The Roman Catholic Church Înălţarea Sfiintei Cruci*, “*Mihai Eminescu*” Theatre (historical and architectural monument), which has been housing *The History Museum of the theatre and of the town* since 1968, and *Knoblauch Pharmacy, the oldest pharmacy in mountainous Banat*, documentary attested in 1763 and which became the *Museum of the History of Mining Pharmacy* in 1994.

**Anina** is located north of the national park, in a depression which stretches along the Gârlişte, Steier and Ponor rivers. It was documentary attested in 1773. Currently it has a population of 9.167 inhabitants. The name of the town comes from the Romanian noun “anin” (“alder-tree”), a species of the *Alnus* genus.

The establishment and development of Anina was related to the vast forests (that had covered the current territory of the town) and the coal deposits. The locality was founded in the second half of the eighteenth century, when the first Austrian colonists (who

came from the Austrian province of Styria) settled in the southern part of the current territory of the town. The wood and charcoal provided by the settlers were burnt in the copper processing plants in Oravița, which was a thriving mining centre in that period.

In the spring of 1895, the resort *Aurora Banatului* (Sommerfrische) was opened near Anina. At the time, it was compared to the mountain resorts from Switzerland and Austria. In 1904, Lake Buhui was created upstream the valley with the same name in order to provide water for industrial activities. It was *the country's first reservoir located exclusively on limestone*.

In the south-eastern part of the city is a cemetery, whose graves are reminiscent of the days when safety regulations have completely been missing in the mining industry. Therefore, mine gas ignition caused accidents, like the one in 1920, *the worst mining accident in the mining industry up then, and at that time, in the history of the entire Europe*.

The *sights* worth visiting in the town are the *The Orthodox Church Sfinții Împărați Constantin și Elena* and the Roman Catholic churches: *Preafânta Inimă a lui Isus* and *Duminica Preasfintei Treimi*.

The **rural settlements** are of the clustered, diffused and scattered type, all with a network of roads where a main road stands out. Most rural settlements are located in the territories neighbouring the national park, except for four villages: Stăncilova, Urcu, Driștie (belonging to the commune of Șopotu Nou ) and Valea Minișului (belonging to the commune of Bozovici).

**Marila** locality (the town of Oravița) is situated near the north-western part of the national park, on the interfluvium that separates Oravița and Jitin river basins. It was documentary attested in 1909 and currently it has a population of 70 inhabitants. It contains the vilas of the former *Marila* resort (opened in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century) and the nursing house with the same name. The name of the locality comes from the Romanian anthroponym “Marila/Mărilă” (Frățilă and al., 1989).

**Ciclova Montana** locality (the town of Oravița) is situated near the north-western boundary of the national park. It was documentary attested in 1437 and currently it has a population of 636 inhabitants. The name of the locality comes either from the anthroponym “Cicla/Ciclea/Ciclu” (Romanian form), or “Čiklo” (Slavic form) (Goicu & Suflețel, 1985), or from the Romanian noun “ciclău” (slightly rounded top of a hill or mountain) (Ioniță, 1972).

A brewery was opened in Ciclova Montană between 1727-1728. It was *the second oldest brewery on the current territory of Romania*, after the one in Timișoara (1718). Its cellars were later declared *monuments of industrial art technique*. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a mint manufacturing *coins marked with the letter O from Oravița* (Birou, 1962) was operating in locality. The mineral “ciclovait”, named after the name of the locality, was also discovered in 1948 (Sencu, 1983).

The *tourist attractions* of the village and its surroundings are *The Orthodox Church Adormirea Maicii Domnului* (a historical monument), *The Roman Catholic Church Sfânta Maria* and *Călugara Orthodox Monastery*. The last two have been built according to local people beliefs in holy places, both becoming important places of pilgrimage.

**Ciclova Română** locality is situated west of the national park, on Ciclova Valley. It was documentary attested in 1828 and it has a population of 1.348 inhabitants. The *sights* worth visiting in the village are the two orthodox churches. The old church is one of *the oldest churches in mountainous Banat* (17<sup>th</sup> century) and the new church is one of *the largest parish churches* in Banat (1859).

**Ilidia** locality (the commune of Ciclova Română) is situated west of the national park. It is one of the oldest documentary attested localities (1223). It had a population of 282 inhabitants in 2002. It seems that the name of the locality has its origins in the Hungarian anthroponym “Ilie/Elie” or “Ilia/Elia”, later transformed in Ilidia by the integration in the Romanian language (Frăţilă and al., 1986).

The archaeological discoveries from Obliţa and Cetate Sites confirm the age of the locality and the fact that it was an important political-administrative centre in the past. Thus, a medieval castle (which later became the *centre of the privileged Ilidia area*) from the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries has been discovered in the surrounding area of Ilidia. Under Ottoman rule, the castle had been the residence of a “bei”<sup>2</sup>, and later, under the Habsburg Empire domination, a garrison was founded in the castle.

The *sights* worth visiting are *The Orthodox Church Pogorârea Sfântului Duh* (1795-1797), a historical monument, and *the rock paintings* (13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries), a landmark of the medieval monastic life in these regions.

**Socolari** locality (the commune of Ciclova Română) is situated west of the Nera Gorges-Beuşniţa National Park on the Râţul Mare Valley. It was documentary attested in 1363, currently having a population of 182 inhabitants. The name of the locality probably derives from the Serbo-Croatian “Sokolar” anthroponym, “soko/sokol” meaning “hawk” (Ioniţă, 1972; 1982).

**Potoc** locality (the commune of Sasca Montană) is situated west of the national park, on the Râţul Mic Valley. It was documentary attested in 1367 and currently it has a population of 301 inhabitants. A mining settlement in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Potoc was later recognized as a centre of ceramics in Banat. The name of the locality probably derives from the Slavic language, in which “patak” means “brook” (Ioniţă, 1972).

**Sasca Montană** locality is situated near the south-western boundary of the national park on Şuşara Valley. It was documentary attested in 1717 and currently it has a population of 594 inhabitants. The name of the locality has its origins in the word “săsoaică” (“Saxon” – “person of German ethnicity”) (Ioniţă, 1972).

With the arrival of the Habsburgs (1718), mining and metallurgy have significantly developed in Sasca Montană and a *mining office* has been established. A *mining school* was opened in Sasca Montană in 1741. *Şuşara* resort, near the locality with the same name, was opened in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The “sascait” mineral (named after the name of the village) was discovered in 1928 (Sencu, 1983).

In the village one can visit *The Orthodox Church Sfinţii Apostoli Petru şi Pavel* (1770-1771) and *The Roman Catholic Sfântul Francisc de Assisi* (1750-1751). Agrotourism has significantly developed in recent years.

**Sasca Română** locality (the commune of Sasca Montană) is situated downstream the gorges, near the south-western boundary of the national park. It was documentary attested in 1690 and currently it has a population of 451 inhabitants. The locality was a *pottery centre* in Banat until a few decades ago. Currently agrotourism has significantly developed in the area. Thus, *The Tourist Information and Environmental Education Centre* was opened in 2009. *The Orthodox Church Naşterea Maicii Domnului* (1770-1771), located at the heart of the village, can be visited by tourists.

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<sup>2</sup> Turkish title of nobility attributed to the governor of a province or a city in the former Ottoman Empire or which was under the Sultan’s suzerainty (from the Turkish word “bey/beg”) (Ioniţă, 1972, Frăţilă and al., 1984).

**Știnăpări** locality (the commune of Cărbunari) is situated atop Mount George, near the south-western boundary of the national park. It had a population of 458 inhabitants. It was founded in 1755 by Romanians from Oltenia (who came to work as loggers for the industrial facilities in Sasca Montană) and some German families. The name of the locality reflects the main occupation of its inhabitants in the past – logging and shaping wood.

**Cărbunari** locality is situated near the south-western boundary of the national park, atop Mount George. It was founded by workers from Oltenia in 1775 and currently it has a population of 824 inhabitants. The name of the locality comes from the Romanian noun “cărbunar” (a person whose job is to produce charcoal by burning wood) and reflects the main occupation of its inhabitants in the past: the preparation of coal for the smelters in Sasca Montană. *The Ecology and Tourism Promotion Centre* is opened in the village. *The Orthodox Church Pogorârea Sfântului Duh* (1810-1835), located in the centre of the village, can be visited by tourists.

**Stăncilova** locality (the commune of Șopotu Nou) is situated on a limestone plateau, in the southern part of the national park. The locality has existed since 1829 and it has a population of 402 inhabitants. The name of the locality derives from the Romanian anthroponym “Stanciu” (Ioniță, 1972).

**Urcu** locality (the commune of Șopotu Nou) is situated on the south-eastern boundary of Nera Gorges-Beușnița National Park. It was documentary attested in 1954. It had a population of 43 inhabitants in 2002. The name of the locality is quite interesting, being derived from the Romanian noun “hurc” meaning “hunting with beaters” (Ioniță, 1982).

**Șopotu Nou** locality is situated near the south-eastern boundary of the national park, right at the confluence of the Buceaua river with the Nera river. It was founded in 1828, when, with the approval of the Austrian Imperial War Council, 56 families from Șopotu Vechi settled in the present territory. The settlement had 334 inhabitants in 2002. Its name probably comes from the Romanian noun “șopot/șipot” meaning “spring of water which flows out of a bank in a trough” (Ioniță, 1972). The village was heavily affected by the flooding from the Nera in 1910, its inhabitants retreating to the higher neighbouring areas where they founded new settlements. The sight worth visiting is *Sfântul Apostol Toma Orthodox Church* (1850-1853).

**Driște** locality (the commune of Șopotu Nou) is situated in the south-eastern part of the national park. It was documentary attested in 1913 and currently it has a population of 22 inhabitants. The name of the locality comes from the Romanian noun “dârstă” meaning “traditional installation for manufacturing wool clothing” (Goicu & Suflețel, 1986).

**Moceris** locality (the commune of Lăpușnicu Mare) is situated east of the national park, on the valley with the same name. It was documentary attested in 1439 and currently it has a population of 704 inhabitants. The name of the village comes from the Serbo-Croatian “močar” or the Hungarian “mocsár”, both meaning “marsh, swamp, swampy place”. One can visit *The Orthodox Church Sfântul Mare Mucenic Gheorghe* (1802).

**Lăpușnicu Mare** locality is situated east of the national park, on Lăpușnicului Valley. It was documentary attested in 1540, currently having 1.282 inhabitants. The name of the locality comes from Slavic word “lapušnik/lapușniku” (Frățilă and al., 1987), meaning “burr” (*Petasites officinalis*), a herbaceous plant with large leaves and purple flowers, which probably grew abundantly in the village surroundings in the past. The settlement was systematised and militarized during the Habsburg rule (1773), when it was part of the border region (Smeu, 1977). The sight worth visiting is *The Orthodox Church*

*Pogorârea Sfântului Duh* (1770-1773), a historical and architectural monument. It is *the oldest church in "Almaj Land"* and in its yard is *the oldest stone cross in "Almaj Land"* (1800).

**Bozovici** locality is situated east of the national park, upstream the confluence of the Miniş river with Nera river. It was documentary attested in 1484 during the reign of King Matthias Corvinus. Currently it has a population of 2.408 inhabitants. The name of the locality seems to be derived from the name of a plant. Thus, Ioniţă (1972) considered that the name of the locality came from the Slavic word "büzü" meaning "dwarf elder" (*Sambucus ebulus*), a herbaceous plant with odour having white flowers and black fruit which grew abundantly in the area in the past. The settlement was militarized under the Habsburg rule (when there existed barracks), being directly ruled by the Court of Vienna. Alluvial gold mining was done in the perimeter of the village and in the beds of the Nera river and its tributaries in the past. Sencu (1983) argued that a 18 kg gold nugget had been discovered at the confluence of the Miniş river with the Nera river in 1870. One can visit *The Orthodox Church Înălţarea Domnului* (1798-1803) and *The Roman Catholic Church Duminica Preaşfintei Treimi* (1820).

**Poneasca** locality (the commune of Bozovici) is situated near the north-eastern boundary of the national park, at the confluence of Poneasca river with the Miniş river. The settlement was documentary attested in 1909 and currently it has a population of 78 inhabitants. The name of the locality is derived from the Romanian anthroponym "Pone" (Ioniţă, 1972). A few kilometres upstream the village, *Poneasca* resort existed in the past, but it was closed a few decades ago to create a reservoir.

**Miniş Valley** locality (the commune of Bozovici) is situated in the northern part of the national park in a basin of the Miniş Gorges. It was documentary attested in 1956 and currently it has a population of only 6 inhabitants. The name of the locality comes from the Romanian anthroponym "Miniş/Minea" (Frăţilă and al., 1989). There is a camp for children in the village.

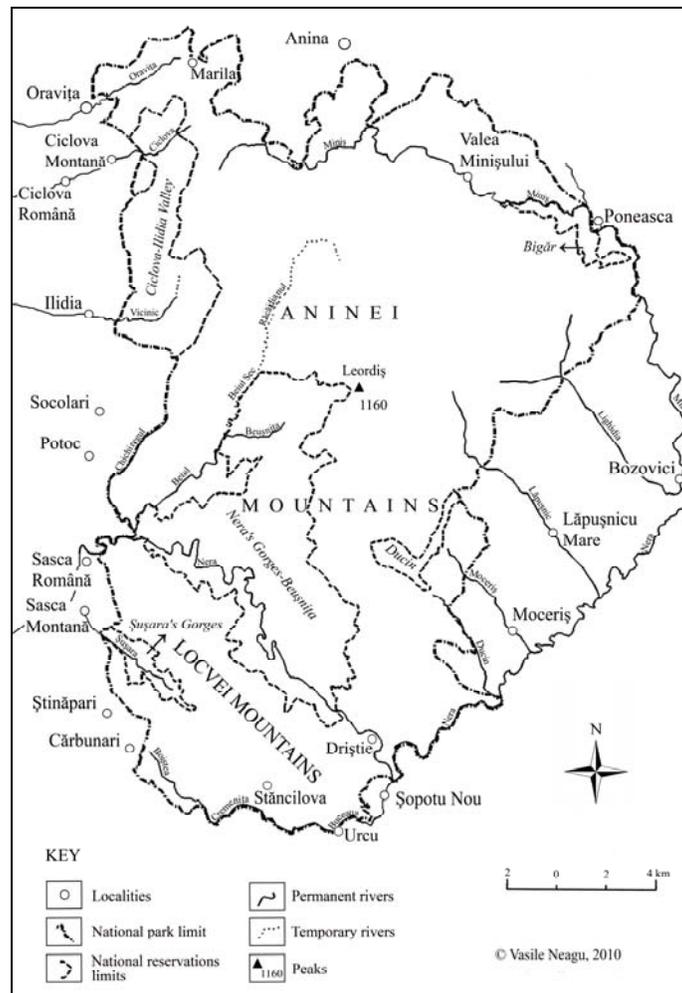
To sum up, we can mention that "*sălaşele*" are widely spread within the national park. These are traditional buildings in mountainous Banat, being used both for temporary housing and especially for harnessing the resources of the mountainous area.

#### **4. THE APPEARANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF NERA GORGES-BEUŞNIŢA NATIONAL PARK. THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN THE MANAGEMENT AND OPERATION OF THE NATIONAL PARK**

Although Beuşniţa Natural Reservation has existed since 1943, Nera Gorges-Beuşniţa National Park was established in 2003 when its *boundaries* were drawn and its *functional areas* and *natural reservations* were defined, while creating *its own administration*. At the same time, *hunting and fishing* are prohibited, and *grazing, forest harvesting and building regulations* are regulated and monitored. *Any activity in the special areas of conservation is strictly forbidden*.

The establishment of Nera Gorges-Beuşniţa National Park tries to *protect and preserve the karst environment, the elements of flora and fauna, biodiversity and landscape, local traditions of the human communities, as well as to encourage and promote the development of ecological tourism and education*.

*Four functional areas* (area of strict protection, area of full protection, area of sustainable preservation and area of sustainable development of human activities) and *five natural reservations* (Ciclova-Ilidia Valley, Nera Gorges-Beușnița, Șușara's Gorges, Ducin and Bigăr) have been defined within the national park depending on the level of human intervention and scientific research (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Nera Gorges-Beușnița National Park: natural reservations and settlement network (Neagu, 2010)

The accommodation and food facilities are badly represented both within the national park and its surrounding areas, although many guests houses were opened in the last

ten years. *Tourist routes* were created in the 1970s and are badly damaged at present (insufficient marking signs, insufficient or destroyed indicative boards etc.). Tourist attractions are well represented. There are numerous anthropic resources in the areas surrounding the national park, encouraging the existence of numerous types of tourism (transit tourism, sport tourism, cultural tourism, scientific tourism and combined tourism).

The involvement of local communities in activities related to the administration, operation and promotion of Nera Gorges-Beușnița National Park is necessary and can be achieved through various actions. For this, it is necessary to develop partnerships between the national park management and local authorities to involve actively local people in the management and/or care of the land within the protected area and in its promotion by various means, possibly accompanied by financial incentives.

Some of the *actions* that could involve the local communities in the management, operation and promotion of Nera Gorges Beușnița National Park are presented below:

- opening motels, guest houses and/or restaurants to cover the accommodation and food needs of tourist flows and agrotourism;
- the establishment of handicraft workshops to avoid the complete loss of local handicrafts (pottery, furrier's trade, spinning, weaving etc.);
- the opening of small museums and local crafts shops, representative for the rural and urban life within the national park and its surrounding areas;
- the invention of brands for the local products (alcoholic beverages, dairy products, honey, jam etc.) by marking their labels with the name of the national park and the locality of origin;
- maintaining and practicing ancient customs and traditions (wedding, baptism, carols etc.).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Nera Gorges-Beușnița National Park has been inhabited since the Paleolithic, as attested by the archaeological discoveries from the Peștera cu Oase, located near Anina.

Although some settlements have existed since the Daco-Roman period, most of them started being documentary attested under the Habsburg Empire rule (1718), when the local mineral resources began being extracted. Massive colonizations with German, Austrian, Slovak workers, as well as Romanians from Oltenia were made and, therefore, settlements flourished. The new settlers brought their contribution to the development of mining and metallurgy in the mountainous region and to the militarization of the border.

Currently, there is a low population density within the national park and higher population density in the neighbouring northern and western areas. The network of settlements contains two towns (Oravița and Anina) and six communes (Ciclova Română, Sasca Montană, Cărbunari, Șopotu Nou, Lăpușnicu Mare and Bozovici), each with numerous adjoining villages.

The tourist attractions are well represented, all localities having a huge historical, cultural and ethnographic potential for tourism. Although Beușnița Natural Reservation has existed since 1943, Nera Gorges-Beușnița National Park was established in 2003, when its boundaries were defined and its own administration was established. The involvement of local communities in activities related to the administration, operation and promotion of the national park is absolutely necessary and it could be done by such actions as: the opening of

guest houses, handicraft workshops and shops with local crafts, the invention of brands for local products etc. All these should be done with the support of local authorities and the management of the protected area.

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