

OANA-RAMONA  
ILOVAN  
ZOLTAN MAROȘI

## Transylvanian Cultural Landscapes Promoting Rural Development

---

*“Cultural landscapes contribute through their originality to local and regional identity and reflect the history and interaction of mankind and nature.”*

---

**Oana-Ramona Ilovan,**  
Associate professor at the Faculty of Geography, Department of Regional Geography and Territorial Planning, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca.

**Zoltan Maroși**  
Ph.D. candidate at the Faculty of Geography, Babeș-Bolyai University, and member of the Research Center on Settlements and Urbanism, Cluj-Napoca.

### Introduction and Theoretical Background

**W**E PRESENT here some of the research results of an international project (2014–2015), which brought together two research teams from Romania and Austria: one from the Faculty of Geography of Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, and the other one from the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Urban and Regional Re-

The research presented in this paper for the Romanian case study was funded by the Romanian National Council of Scientific Research in Higher Education (CNCS-UEFISCDI) and the Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (OEAD), as part of the bilateral research project PN-II-CT-RO-AT-2013—1 “Contemporary Trends in Regional Economy and Community Development in the Rural Area of Romania and Austria,” 2014–2015.

The authors contributed equally to this work.

search, Vienna. The aim of the project was to identify sustainable development strategies in the rural areas of both countries. The project research team reported on its results also in previous papers.<sup>1</sup>

In this study, we focus on the results of the field trips done in Romania, to Rimetea (Torockó, Eisenmarkt) (Alba County) and Viscri (Deutschweißkirch, Fehéregyháza) (Braşov County), and on the relation between successful tourism strategies and cultural assets in the form of architectural heritage protection and commodification. The hypothesis was that local identity expressed through vernacular architectural heritage was one of the main resources supporting future sustainable development in the researched settlements.

As the purpose during the field trips undertaken within the research project was to identify viable development models for rural areas in Transylvania, the original architectural elements of this region were deemed important components of the local cultural landscape, because they were durable, standing the test of time. Traditional houses and their architecture are a result of combining different geographical elements, both physical and human, and they represent unique and original local identity features. For example, harsh winters with plenty of snow lead to houses with steeped roofs, while the locally available resources lead to the use of different building materials and techniques. Therefore, traditional houses contain a brief summary of the local geography and provide the answer to many problems of sustainable development.

At the international level, researchers have approached the preservation of the past (as reflected in spatial features) within the field of the geographies of memory.<sup>2</sup> Practices in residential historic preservation were related with nostalgia and therefore integrated within geographies of memory and past geographies,<sup>3</sup> where memory is considered “socially constitutive, something that is both socially situated and an agent of lived experience.”<sup>4</sup> In this theoretical framework, researchers explored historic sensibilities, subjectivities, and their relation to places, the attentiveness to what is near,<sup>5</sup> and the “everyday aesthetic of pastness, an embodied ethics of care rather than strict adherence to historic preservation codes and guidelines.”<sup>6</sup>

The built heritage, which is a historical proof of development, conveys to both inhabitants and tourists a sense of history, a “historic enchantment,”<sup>7</sup> reflecting the creation of places. By perceiving the landscape of settlements in light of one of their main assets (i.e., architecture), the respective landscape “is positioned within its historical, geographical and socio-cultural context.”<sup>8</sup> The architectural heritage (mainly the houses, in our case studies) presents a meaning which is part of the collective popular memory and of the cultural identity of the place.

Therefore, our research could be partly included in the field of the geographies of memory and it also draws on an architectural geography, indicating that

“both as a practice and a product architecture is performative in the sense that it involves ongoing social practices through which space is continually shaped and inhabited,”<sup>9</sup> promoting an “active and embodied engagement with the lived building.”<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, besides being products of their history, these iconographic landscapes were also seen as places of “resistance to urban speculation and economic globalization.”<sup>11</sup> Other studies testify about a land-use conflict in the rural area: “agriculture is no longer the sole or principal activity in many hitherto rural areas, resulting in a redefinition of rural spaces which involves multiple actors and multiple variables, ranging from agriculture to tourism, forestry, nature conservation, landscape and heritage.”<sup>12</sup>

Another study underlines what is relevant for creating and understanding “collective community ownership” and “the creation of a sense of solidarity and self-worth,”<sup>13</sup> advocating for aesthetic activism and community empowerment, which are all vital for a sustainable development of our research areas as viable tourist destinations, providing plenty of benefits for their residents. The beneficial influences that the aesthetic of landscape improvements have on the citizens’ cultural and artistic education have been documented.<sup>14</sup> In addition, researchers also advocate the need to preserve certain “conditions under which more sustainable and locally governed rural livelihoods and landscapes might be built.”<sup>15</sup>

At the European level, local development and heritage (material or immaterial) in the rural area are discussed together from diverse perspectives, among which the following two are the most common: the approach regarding tourism<sup>16</sup> and the one concerning the social capital,<sup>17</sup> both closely related to the notions of competitiveness and sustainability.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, R. During points out that spatial identity is more than a commodity (the other two types being the resistance identity and the social one) and it is formed by landscape, cityscape, region and political territory and, in this context, the tangible and intangible cultural heritage is a vector of identity, it underlies peoples’ identity because heritage is imbued with value and meaning, being a proof of their creativity.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, in the *European Spatial Development Perspective* (1999), the originality of cultural landscapes is underlined in relation to identity and human-nature interaction: “Cultural landscapes contribute through their originality to local and regional identity and reflect the history and interaction of mankind and nature.”<sup>20</sup>

In Romania, recent research on territorial identity has focused on its relation with the impact of historical factors on the shaping of a community, especially on the local folkloric identities of the peasant communities in Transylvania during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>21</sup> on revival initiatives in certain villages, among which Viscri was a case study on several occasions,<sup>22</sup> with Rimetea following

suit,<sup>23</sup> on methodological insights in the framework of interethnic relationships,<sup>24</sup> and also on its relation to vernacular architecture.<sup>25</sup>

In the context of territorial identity, the concept of *cultural landscape* was explored, underlining the need to make the local as well as the general population aware of the need to preserve and capitalize on the built heritage in a sustainable manner,<sup>26</sup> with a special interest in the rural area of Romania.<sup>27</sup> Many of these studies indicate that the community identifies itself through its built heritage. The architecture of the local dwellings is representative for their evolution; it is geographically, historically, socially and economically structured, and thus it is proof and symbolic of a certain way of life, it is an identity marker.

Moreover, in the Strategy for the National Cultural Heritage of Romania, landscapes are defined as “the link between the history of the past and that of the present, a history of identity,”<sup>28</sup> while the recommended direction for action is to make the Romanian citizens at all levels (national, regional, and local) aware of the role that this heritage has in preserving the national and local cultural identity and also social cohesion.<sup>29</sup> Again, in the Sectorial Strategy for Culture and National Heritage, preserving heritage as a cultural and social value and as an identity symbol is considered one of citizens’ legitimate needs,<sup>30</sup> while maintaining their cultural identity and local specificity.<sup>31</sup>

From a methodological standpoint, certain studies gave evidence of the importance of using visual material and methodology, for identifying and depicting the genius loci and for preserving its genuine features, or in searching for architectural authenticity.<sup>32</sup>

## Problem Statement

**T**AKING INTO account previously documented examples of negligence and malpractice in restoring vernacular architecture in Romania, we consider as a problem the local authorities’ bad decisions in preserving and capitalizing on the architectural heritage and cultural landscapes in general.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, one of the problems we noticed in the field was the discrepancy between the protected area requirements (the protection rules recommended by various organizations) and the local people’s needs (during interviews, the locals, underlined that they wanted the comfort of the present century, not of the 18<sup>th</sup>). Moreover, a major problem they mentioned was that the current agricultural practices, involving intensive exploitation, generated conflicts between the locals, who were no longer encouraged to practice the agricultural activities that led to the cultural landscapes we researched and which their villages were famous for.

## Research Questions

**P**LACE IDENTITY is reflected by traditional architecture, as the latter is based on local needs, the availability of construction materials, and illustrative of local traditions. Traditional architecture reflects the environmental, cultural, social, economic, and historical context in which it exists (it is heavily influenced by it and thus it is an expression of the influence of climate, geomorphology and geology, economy and technology, culture and history, and of demography and social features).

Considering this, our research questions were the following: How can local architecture be a source of revenue? What is the role of the local administration and of the NGOs in promoting and protecting the built heritage/cultural landscape? What can be done in the future for Transylvanian rural development (in terms of transferring knowledge and examples of good practice to other villages)?

## Purpose of the Study

**B**Y ANALYZING the answers to these questions, the aim of this contribution is to provide decision-makers in the public administration in Romania (at all levels) and researchers in the field of geography, history, architecture, etc. with relevant information regarding the ways of improving the sustainable protection and capitalization of the vernacular architecture of other settlements, while considering the two case studies as development models having as the main resource the architectural heritage. A secondary purpose is to make the local inhabitants (from other settlements than the researched ones, but having a similar heritage) aware of the heritage they use for their present livelihood and to support them in using it in a sustainable way, while also preserving it, for their own benefit.

## Research Material and Methods

**T**HE EMPIRICAL part, which took place in July 2014, is based on case study evidence and qualitative methods (observation, interviews, and focus groups). The respondents in the interviews and focus groups were the local people (entrepreneurs, farmers, public administration representatives, etc.) and representatives of associations or NGOs (from within or without the two villages).

*The research material* includes the sketches realized and photos taken by the co-author of this paper, interviews and focus group material, and relevant sci-

entific literature from the fields of geography (especially cultural geography), architecture, and history. In addition, we analyzed our field trip impressions about the development of the respective villages.

*Procedures.* An original part of our research has to do with the fact that observation on the architectural heritage was processed and interpreted using drawings and was analyzed in relation to the findings resulted from interviews and focus groups, as well as to the relevant information from the literature. Therefore, the collection and analysis of data included the methods of observation, discourse analysis, and also visual ones (for images).

## Results and Discussions

**T**HE SOCIAL and economic reality after 1989 required that many rural communities in Romania find rapid solutions for their survival. The triggering factors of development for Rimetea (Alba County) were the free movement across borders and tourism (due to the new mobility), industrial redundancy, structural changes in agriculture (and therefore the need for economic growth), the built heritage, traditions (as a result of the new interest in the endangered culture and heritage), and a need for awareness raising.<sup>34</sup> The last two factors were also true for Viscri (Braşov County), as the new freedom of movement after 1989 generated the exodus of the Saxon population.<sup>35</sup>

### On the Identity of Rimetea

**R**IMETEA (TOROCKÓ, Eisenmarkt) (Alba County) is a Transylvanian commune with two villages (Rimetea and Colţeşti/Torockószentgyörgy, with about 600 inhabitants at the 2011 census), on the eastern fringe of the Western Carpathians. The village of Rimetea has an ethnic Hungarian majority (their ancestors being Austrian miners and Szekler border guards), with an economic background in mining, being close to Cluj-Napoca (Klausenburg, Kolozsvár) and Alba Iulia (Weißenburg, Gyulafehérvár) on the main thoroughfare between these two large cities.

The impressive and beautiful villagescape exists due to the protection of the vernacular architecture, and this made Rimetea one of the best promoted villages of Transylvania. Rimetea is famous for the traditional architectural ensemble in its main square. Initiated by a founder and former vice-president of ICOMOS,<sup>36</sup> the restoration of the traditional houses (more than 180) has been done under the supervision of Transylvania Trust,<sup>37</sup> since 1996, through a yearly conserva-



tion grant and with a sustained financial effort of the locals themselves. Nowadays a Conservation Area, as declared by the Romanian Ministry of Culture in 2000, the village also enjoys international recognition (it received the Europa Nostra<sup>38</sup> Medal international award even earlier, in 1999).

The landscape, with a massive mountain and beautiful cliffs in the eastern part of the village, called by the villagers Szekler's Rock, indicates the presence of a large Szekler population. The beautiful natural landscape combined with the great cultural heritage are the pillars of the new tourist activity.

The first question to be asked is "How did the villagers manage to keep the original aspect of the houses?" and "Why does Rimetea have such a big tourist appeal?" To these questions, we received the answers below.

The discussion with the local deputy mayor offered the first details about the village and the number of protected houses—more than 180 houses are under protection from any kind of modernization. More important is the fact that the inhabitants accept these restrictions (a quite rare case). There were cases in which the lower part of the houses was covered with stone slabs, but all the wrong changes to the original design were removed. Now, the inhabitants are competing for the beauty of their homes and proudly preserve the local architecture and history. The houses themselves have become a tourist attraction and the owners have learned to promote their homes by using old painted furniture in their guesthouses. One of the locals explained how much the tourists enjoyed to hear that they had slept in a 150 years-old bed. The mining and agricultural tools are successfully used in decorating the yards. From the yards of most houses one can see the wild landscape of the mountains. In addition, the water from private wells is used for consumption, as in the past. The region is rich in limestone and that is why one finds here the best fresh water sources.

Another important element is the number of guesthouses. Rimetea has more than 60, some of them with restaurants and other facilities. Even if the guesthouses are family businesses, a part of the local workforce is employed in this tourist activity, official data indicating that more than 50% of the villagers are now employed or working in tourism. One of the most important issues related to these guesthouses are the taxes, which are collected by the county council, not by the local council. Only a little part of the taxes are given back to the local council, and this slows down the administration in implementing their projects. Fortunately, the population is not strictly dependent on tourism.

Agriculture completes the other economic activities, as each house has a small vegetable garden and some families are keeping cows and goats for milk. The milk is collected in special places and sold to cheese producers. Animal breeding is in full revival, as an old traditional activity. Guesthouses use local agricultural products and that is why agriculture and tourism support each other as clean

sources of income. More important is the fact that the village produces enough flowers to export to Hungary.

Nevertheless, the village has some problems, like demographic aging, which are threatening the fragile ethnic structure (an enclave in this part of Transylvania), and also tourism itself, which is dependent on the Hungarian tourist market.

## On the Vernacular Architectural Heritage of Rimetea

**T**HERE ARE several original features of the local architecture and space organization (e. g. the metal ornaments upon the housetops in the shape of a chestnut, and the multifunctional fountain placed in the middle of the village square). The fountain indicates that in the village there is a large number of animals, among which the horses are indispensable, frequently used for traction. This was a typical landscape for the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Transylvania.

Near the market, a Baroque tower rises between old trees, belonging to the Unitarian Church built in 1670 (with expansions and renovations in 1780 and 1804, as the old inscriptions on the entrance wall testify). This is sufficient to indicate the ethnic structure of the population, in which the Szeklers hold a special place. A second obvious feature is the grouping of houses depending on the owners' social status: the first row in the western part of the market, with beautiful mountain views and rich decorations for the wealthy families (Fig. 1),

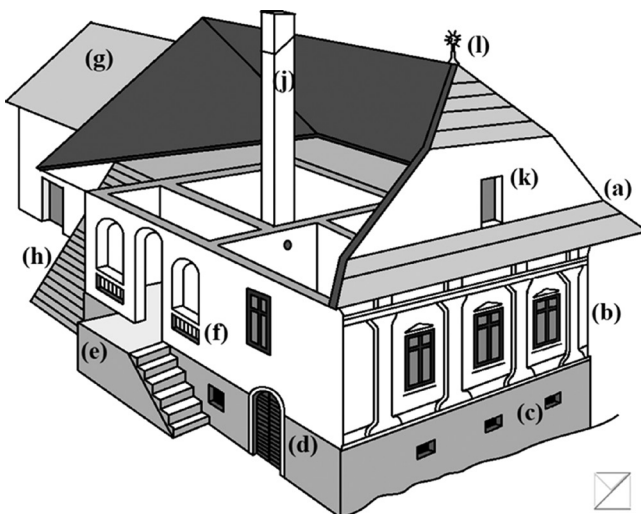


FIG 1. TYPICAL HOUSE IN RIMETEA, FROM THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY (HOUSE OF A WEALTHY FAMILY) (drawing by ZOLTAN MAROȘI)

(a) Pent roof protecting the facade; (b) Pilasters and other ornaments on the main facade; (c) Raised house on brick basement; (d) Entrance to the basement; (e) Entrance stairs; (f) Entrance ornaments; (g) Summer kitchen and other annexes; (h) Stairs to the attic; (j) Chimney; (k) Vent windows; (l) Chestnut shaped roof ornament.



and the other row, with smaller but still beautiful houses, for the middle class families (Fig. 2). The fact that all the houses are similar and date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century indicated that there was a reconstruction of the center after the Great Fire of 1870. All the houses were rebuilt in the newly adopted style, with some elements inherited from the previous houses, but also with some new unique features.

The villagers developed a thriving economy based on mining and agriculture. A regular family had revenues from the sale of iron objects and also from agricultural produce, which greatly increased the quality of life. This is to be easily identified in the architecture of the houses, with rich ornamentations (luxury items for that period). Thus, this place became unique, with original architectural features. Traditional shutters painted in green, the iron art lanterns (m), the entrances to the basement and other details, such as the ornaments with religious and cultural significance, suggest the development of a community operating as an enclave, separated from the rest of Transylvania. To sum up, a detailed investigation of the architecture reveals strong connections with nature and other socio-economic aspects.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE ARCHITECTURE (FIG. 1 AND FIG. 2)

THE ROOF, in this typical architecture given by its shape, slopes and structure (a), is a legacy of the wooden roofs built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with four slopes at the base and two slopes above, which were easier to build and much cheaper. This part of the pent roof (a) was preserved on the brick houses not just for aesthetic reasons, but also in order to protect the richly decorated house facade from

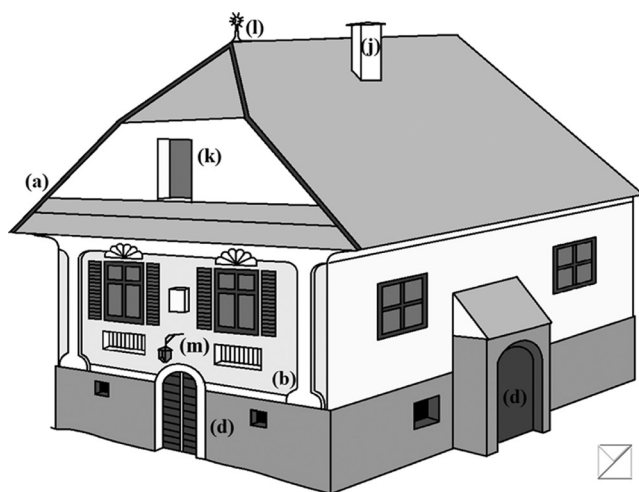


FIG. 2. TYPICAL HOUSE IN RIMETEA, FROM THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY (HOUSE OF A MODERATELY WEALTHY FAMILY) (drawing by ZOLTAN MAROȘI)

(a) Pent roof protecting the facade; (b) Pilasters and other ornaments on the main facade; (d) Entrance to the basement; (j) Chimney; (k) Vent windows; (l) Chestnut shaped roof ornament; (m) Oil lamp.

heavy precipitations. The front wall above the facade has several important functions: it provides extra support to the roof burdened with heavy roof tiles (and also with snow in the winter) and enlarges the space required for storage under the roof. Vent windows are very common (*k*) and can be opened in summer and closed in winter. The chestnut shaped ornament of the roof (*l*) has several symbolic meanings and it is similar to those of the church, and it indicates that the family belongs to the same confession. The chimneys are characteristic only of the 19<sup>th</sup> century houses (*j*), while the characteristic entrance to the basement (*d*) was a change brought by the miners in the area who needed easier access to the basement, for loading and unloading heavy materials. These entrances imitate the entrances to the mines and are unique features. Often, above these parts of the basement entries there are inscriptions (“Ahol szeretet, jóság + ott az Isten,” in translation, “Where there is love and kindness + there is God”). The basement is an important part of the house, fitted with small ventilation windows (*e*), and it raises the house, so the stairs to the entrance are another characteristic feature (*e*). The wealthy homes have on the main entrance rich ornaments and sculptures (*f*). The ornaments of the main facade of the house (*b*) are carved in wood and are placed directly on the masonry and covered with whitewashed plaster, creating specific patterns (a technique taken from the houses constructed with wooden beams in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and whitewashed up to the level of the windows). The main building has annexes such as the summer kitchen (*g*).

## On the Identity of Viscri

**V**ISCRI (DEUTSCHWEIßKIRCH, Fehéregyháza) (Braşov County) is a small village (about 450 inhabitants), located in Southern Transylvania, in a rural remote hilly area, near Sighişoara (Schäßburg, Segesvár) city, quite close to the main road between Sighişoara and Braşov (Kronstadt, Brassó). This village is renowned in Romania for its Transylvanian Saxon architectural heritage and authentic village landscape, transformed over the last 800 years, dominated by the UNESCO listed fortified church, still preserved, although it has lost almost all its former population, and for the numerous projects that the locals initiated and implemented, often assisted by NGOs (the Mihai Eminescu Trust for the built cultural heritage and training in diverse sectors related to heritage preservation and tourism, and ADEPT Transylvania Foundation focusing on the natural environment).

Viscrist is considered a model for preserving the historical built cultural heritage in the context of the “Whole Village Project” rural development strategy (there are recent studies about Viscrist and the “Whole Village Project” of the Mihai Eminescu Trust in Romania).<sup>39</sup>

The results were better living conditions, diversified sources of income (the main source of income in the village is subsidized agriculture; besides, the tourist potential is exploited through soft tourism), a strong social capital and a sense of pride of the present population (since the early 1990s, mainly Roma and Romanians).

Viscri has advantages such as natural pastures and meadows, extraordinarily rich in flowers, that increase the quality of the natural landscape. It has a strong image promoted at the European level, associated with the name of Prince Charles, it has a cultural heritage unaffected by modernization, and tourists are constantly coming and contribute to the wellbeing of the village.

### On the Vernacular Architectural Heritage of Viscri

ON THE way to Viscri, the landscape changes to mark the entry into a specific area, which, at first glance, is defined by numerous monuments, fortified churches with towers and a diverse built heritage visible from the road, such as the fortified church of Saschiz (Keisd, Szászkézd) (Fig. 3) and the abandoned fortress with the same name that commands the whole village.

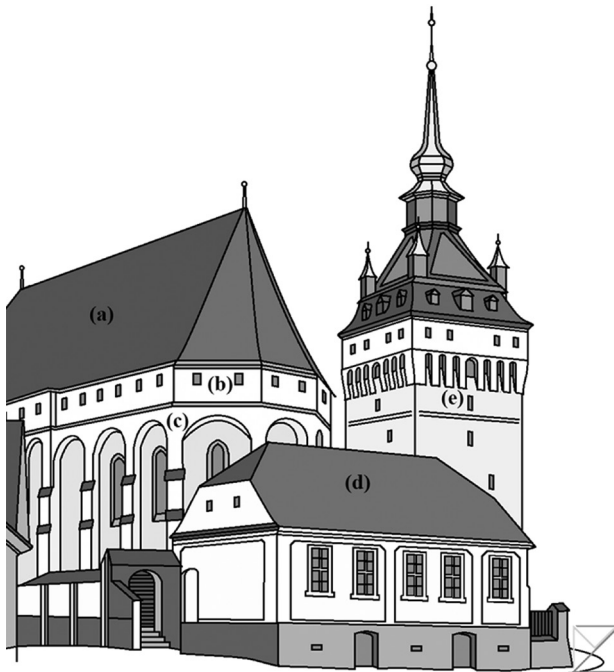


FIG 3. THE FORTIFIED CHURCH OF SASCHIZ, ON THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE LIST (drawing by ZOLTAN MAROȘI)

- (a) The massive church;
- (b) Defensive level above the main hall;
- (c) Buttresses and arches hiding the machicolations;
- (d) The parochial house;
- (e) The massive defensive tower turned into a belfry in 1677.

Although in the past Viscri and Saschiz were not part of the same administrative unit, Saschiz currently plays an important role for the entire region, being the seat of the ADEPT Transylvania Foundation, which supports and promotes the natural landscape and especially trains farmers in more efficient and less invasive agricultural techniques.

Besides Saschiz, along the road, there are historical monuments representative for the region, the attention being drawn mainly by the church towers, which, in a natural way, compete in beauty and have been the pride of local (disappeared) communities, such as those of Criț (Kreuzdorf, Szászkeresztúr), Bunești (Bodendorf, Szászbudă) and many other villages hidden among the neighboring hills.

In the case of Viscri, the challenge was preservation rather than development. Compared to Rimetea, Viscri is a special situation of development, with a great story involving the drama of a large Saxon population leaving Transylvania, their home for the last eight centuries. After the Revolution of 1989, Viscri gradually lost the population that had shaped the village in the current form. This great and sudden change drove the village to poverty. But ten years later, the return of a Saxon family gradually managed to revive the village. Prolonged poverty and remoteness led to the preservation of the cultural heritage. In 2006, Prince Charles bought a house in Viscri and brought the village to the attention of the foundation he supported, the Mihai Eminescu Trust, a moment in which a new “Golden Age” really began, characterized by tourism and landscape conservation. From an invisible village, Viscri became a gem of Transylvania, a wonderful place. Agriculture was the source of income for the majority of the Saxon families and also the source of cultural heritage development in the last centuries.

## On the Fortified Church of Viscri

**A**CCORDING TO the archaeological excavations at Viscri, on the site of the present church there was once a small rectangular chapel built in white limestone by the Szekler community that originally lived there and relocated after the Saxons colonization.<sup>40</sup> At the time of the colonization, the Saxons found the chapel and used it, giving the name Deutschweißkirch (weiß = white and Kirche = church) to the small village. Later, the chapel was integrated by the Saxons in a single nave Romanesque chapel.<sup>41</sup>

The present church has a unique architecture, well-preserved and valorized. The evolution of the fortified church followed the same steps as the village economy. Each growth period led to the addition of new features. At first, in the 13<sup>th</sup>

century, the Romanesque chapel was taken over by a noble family which built a tower dwelling (Fig. 4.k) for their purpose and an oval mantle crenelated wall that surrounded an old cemetery. This first stage of fortification was caused by the Great Mongol Invasion (1241–1243) that devastated Transylvania and triggered the defensive reconstruction of the whole Kingdom of Hungary. After the death of the lord's family, the chapel returned to the community and a lot of new changes were made.<sup>42</sup> In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a trapezium-plan choir was added (Fig. 4.i) to the existing building, supported by seven buttresses. The choir was surrounded by another row of buttresses, connected on their upper extremities, meant to support a defensive floor above them (like in Saschiz, Fig. 3.b). It was an architectural mistake: because of this new type of vaulting, the great outward forces caused the Gothic ceiling to crack. That is why the Gothic ceiling was replaced with a coffered ceiling in the nave.<sup>43</sup> The inscription on the arch acknowledges the meticulous demolition of the defensive floor above the nave. Still, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the mantle wall (Fig. 4.l) was reinforced and two towers next to the main entrance were built on the southeastern side (Fig. 4.d).

The Northern Tower (Fig. 4.g) was built in 1630 by architect Johan Hartmann, as it is attested in an inscription which also features the words *In pace de bello et in bello de pace cogitas* [“In times of peace I ponder war and in times of war I ponder peace”]. In that century, the Western Tower (Fig. 4.f) was also built, which provided protected lodging for the priest in case of siege.



FIG. 4. THE FORTIFIED CHURCH OF VISCRI, ON THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE LIST (drawing by ZOLTAN MAROȘI, based on sketches by RADU OLTEAN<sup>3</sup>)

(a) The Gate Tower; (b) Main entrance; (c) Pedestrian entrance; (d) The Southern Tower; (e) The Southern Bastion; (f) The Western Tower; (g) The Northern Tower; (h) The Eastern Bastion; (i) The Church; (j) The Church entrance; (k) The Main Tower; (l) Defensive walls originally with passages, now with storage rooms; (m) Fragment of the outer curtain wall.

a. Agrigoroaei, Sălăgeanu, Zamora, Jiga Iliescu, and Gruia; Avram, 45.

Finally, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a second outer curtain wall (Fig. 4.m) was added to the fortification, of which some parts have survived to the present day and several new cereal storage rooms have been added along the inner mantle wall, replacing the old defensive passage.<sup>44</sup>

Since then, the fortification has been preserved in the initial form and only repairs following some storms or because of the building's old age have been made. The most important renovation was in the 1970s.<sup>45</sup> Later, the Mihai Eminescu Trust did many renovation activities, especially of the houses in Viscri, including the church, using only traditional and local techniques.<sup>46</sup>

One of the early features of Saxon villages, which made the inhabitants feel secure, is the compact and linear way in which the houses are placed next to each other, each house separated from the next only by the massive gate, as tall as the house. In this manner, the facades of the houses form a continuous alignment, like a colorful and ornamented defensive wall. Generally, the houses have an elevated ground floor (*c*), because of the basement and of the hilly terrain (which is predominant in the regions populated in the past by Saxons). Therefore, the access to the main entrance is by means of the stairs (*e*), creating the impression of a massive building.

The entrance to the basement is from the courtyard of the house, through a reinforced wooden door (*d*), and there food is preserved at constant and low temperatures. The facade of the house is richly ornamented (*b*), often with various colorful floral motifs (Fig. 6) and with large traditional windows with wooden frames, fitted with painted wooden shutters. The facade also includes, besides the ornaments, details about the construction of the house or about the people living in that house (e.g. the year of construction, of renovation, or even the name of the owners may be written in the plaster; in some cases, inscriptions or signs which show the religious confession of the family may appear either on the facade or on the roof of the house). Some houses may have a long porch (*f*) which offers access to all the elongated rooms of the house; sometimes this structure is made of wood.

Almost all houses have annexes, among which the most important ones are: the summer kitchen, where there might be an oven, the summer rooms where the owners live, the stables and the massive barn (sometimes taller than the house), for the storage of hay. The bigger houses have the annexes set parallel to each other (i.e. the big house on the left and the small house on the right, separated by the massive gate). Usually, the yard is paved with rolling stones and it hosts structures that support a grape vine, which, in certain cases, may cover the whole yard, providing shade in summer. Among the most underrated elements of the Saxon house is the bench near the gate, which in the past provided people



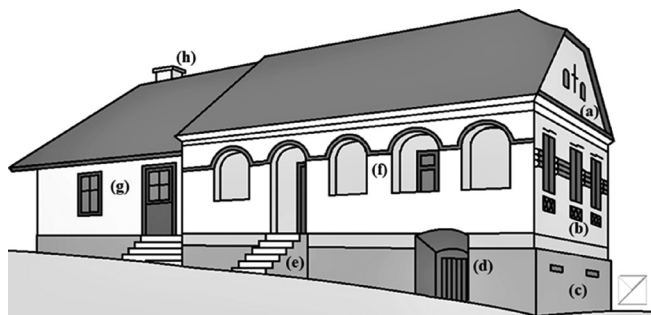


FIG. 5. SAXON HOUSE  
(drawing by ZOLTAN MAROȘI)  
(a) Pent roof protecting the facade; (b) The house facade with ornaments and lively painted shutters; (c) Elevated ground floor and basement; (d) Entrance to the basement; (e) Stairs to the main entrance; (f) Main entrance porch and hallway; (g) Summer kitchen and summer rooms; (h) Chimney.



FIG. 6. THE FACADE  
OF A SAXON HOUSE  
(drawing by ZOLTAN MAROȘI)

with a place to rest after a day's work and especially with a place for socializing, where the news spread from.

Given the aesthetic value and their utility, the Saxon houses are unique, being a strict model for organizing the household according to the people's activities.

## Recommendations and Conclusions

**I**N THIS part of our paper, besides the conclusions, we formulated a series of recommendations (or solutions) for enabling a sustainable future development of the rural settlements researched or elsewhere (at least in Romania, but also transferrable to other rural peripheries in the European Union), based on preserving and turning to good account their built heritage.

In Romania, because of the serious damage suffered by the material and immaterial patrimony (e.g. the crafts) in the rural area, more attention should be paid to restoration and to observing authenticity during this process (a conservative approach is recommended, observing the characteristic local features).<sup>47</sup>

A first possible solution could involve promoting the architectural heritage of these communities, and where possible, introducing the area on the UNESCO World Heritage list, or obtaining another kind of recognition and thus leading to a specific form of intervention.

Secondly, the offer of these rural settlements is part of the experience economy, a theory introduced by Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore: “Goods and services are no longer enough to foster economic growth, create new jobs and maintain economic prosperity. To realize revenue growth and increased employment, the staging of experiences must be pursued as a distinct form of economic output.”<sup>48</sup> This was discussed in detail for the “land”-type units of Romania<sup>49</sup> and can be easily transferred to such traditional communities like Rimetea and Viscri, thus making it easier to understand their present development and envision a sustainable future one. The only significant difference that one may find between the offer of the experience economy and the one of the two villages is that of the prices, which are rather low in the latter case, something that was invoked by the local entrepreneurs as a serious hindrance (i.e. tourism is not profitable enough to ensure their livelihood). On the other hand, through their tourist offer, such settlements may represent weekend retreats for the urban population and this could be one solution for decreasing urban sprawl.

Thirdly, a successful heritage preservation is heavily influenced by local attitudes towards that and towards its benefits for their wellbeing and for tourism-based development. This attitude can be reflected in their activities and in building a strong social capital (relationships among the locals, based on a strong local identity and trust, and on the creation of co-operation networks), and it is an advantage for preserving and at the same time promoting, by way of various economic activities, their cultural and natural landscapes and heritage.

For our two researched settlements, we underline that the work of the NGOs had a significant impact on the inhabitants’ cultural and civic education (reflected in their care for preserving their built heritage and its aesthetic value) and also on their moral and psychological wellbeing. The local administration had a rather passive role.

In this historical process of place-making and of the present place-led development, the benefits of great places that such settlements offer are the following: promoting a sense of comfort (visually pleasing, generally stimulating, a sense of belonging), nurturing and defining a sense of community (sense of

pride and volunteerism, perpetuation of integrity and values, greater community organization, self-reliance—less need for public administration control), social interaction (improving sociability, more cultural exposure, interaction, drawing in a diverse population, more women, elderly people and children, encouraging community creativity), building and supporting the local economy (small-scale entrepreneurship, economic development, higher real estate values, local ownership, local value, more desirable jobs, greater tax revenue).<sup>50</sup>

Rimetea and Viscri are vernacular settlements characterized by the harmony between their built heritage and the natural landscape, easily identifiable in the uniformity characterizing the architectural features of the buildings. The protected built environment of Rimetea observes a series of rules meant for the preservation of an assembly of original buildings of historic value, which have a cultural and identity function for the respective community, inhabiting a vernacular settlement. Their landscape reflects certain livelihoods and the development experienced during a series of historic periods. These villages are good examples of the quality of rural livelihoods and of their sustainability, while social capital use and entrepreneurial activities are good ways to prevent the disappearance of rural localities.

Future development—tourism, at this moment, seems to be their safest solution for development—should make it possible to defend the local traditional architecture (in close relationship with nature and the social, economic and historic conditions), which itself represents the local identity and contributes to the wellbeing of the local population. These two case studies could be considered for knowledge transfer and good practice dissemination.



## Notes

1. Oana-Ramona Ilovan, Peter Jordan, Kinga-Xénia Havadi-Nagy and Thomas Zametter, "Identity Matters for Development: Austrian and Romanian Experiences," *Transylvanian Review* 25, Suppl. 1 (2016): 261–277; Peter Jordan, Kinga-Xénia Havadi-Nagy, and Zoltan Maroši, "Tourism as a Driving Force in Rural Development? Results of a Comparison of Case Studies in Romania and Austria," *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal* 64, 2 (2016): 203–218; Alexís Sancho Reinoso and Ede Márton Kovács, "A Vision on More Sustainable Eastern European Rural Areas: Some Lessons from Romania," in *New Developments in the Rural Space of Central and South-East Europe: Proceedings of the Meeting of the Working Group on Central Europe, September 30, 2015*, ed. Peter Jordan (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2017), 345–365.

2. Jennifer Kitson and Kevin McHugh, "Historic Enchantments—Materializing Nostalgia," *Cultural Geographies* 22, 3 (2015): 487–508, 487, DOI: 10.1177/1474474014549946.
3. Charles W. J. Withers, "Place, Memory, Monument: Memorializing the Past in Contemporary Highland Scotland," *Ecumene* 3, 3 (1996): 325–344.
4. Ibid., 325.
5. Kitson and McHugh.
6. Ibid., 487.
7. Ibid.
8. Eileen O'Rourke, "Changing Identities, Changing Landscapes: Human-Land Relations in Transition in the Aspre, Roussillon," *Ecumene* 6, 1 (1996): 29–50, 29.
9. Loretta Lees, "Towards a Critical Geography of Architecture: The Case of Ersatz Colosseum," *Ecumene* 8, 1 (2001): 51–86, 51.
10. Ibid.
11. David L. Prytherch, "Elegy to an Iconographic Place: Reconstructing the Regionalism/Landscape Dialectic in L'Horta de València," *Cultural Geographies* 16, 1 (2009): 55–85, 55, DOI: 10.1177/1474474008097980.
12. O'Rourke, 29.
13. Jenny Brown, "ARTZONE: Environmental Rehabilitation, Aesthetic Activism and Community Empowerment," *Cultural Geographies* 9, 4 (2002): 467–471, 467, DOI: 10.1191/1474474002eu253oa.
14. Constanța Carmina Gheorghîță and Mircea Grigorovschi, "The Aesthetic Values of Landscape Design," *Bulletin of University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca: Horticulture* 69, 1 (2012): 152–161.
15. Anthony Bebbington, "Globalized Andes? Livelihoods, Landscapes and Development," *Ecumene* 8, 4 (2001): 414–436, 414.
16. Jacinthe Bessière, "Local Development and Heritage: Traditional Food and Cuisine as Tourist Attractions in Rural Areas," *Sociologia Ruralis* 38 (1998): 21–34; Moya Kneafsey, "Tourism, Place Identities and Social Relations in the European Rural Periphery," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 7, 1 (2000): 35–50.
17. Arnar Arnason, Andrea Nightingale, and Mark Shucksmith, "Networking: Social Capital and Identities in European Rural Development," *Sociologia Ruralis* 45, 4 (2005): 269–283; Kneafsey.
18. Roberto Camagni and Roberta Capello, "Regional Competitiveness and Territorial Capital: A Conceptual Approach and Empirical Evidence from the European Union," *Regional Studies* 47, 9 (2013): 1383–1402.
19. Roel During, *Cultural Heritage and Identity Politics* (Wageningen: Wageningen Academic Publishers, 2011), <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/socialinnovationeurope/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/Cultural%20Heritage%20and%20Identity%20Politics.pdf> (accessed 12 January 2016).
20. European Commission, *ESDP—European Spatial Development Perspective: Towards Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Territory of the European Union*, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, 37, <http://>

ec.europa.eu/regional\_policy/archive/consultation/terco/paper\_terco\_en.pdf (accessed 12 January 2016).

21. Ioan-Aurel Pop and Ioan Bolovan, *Istoria Transilvaniei* (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2013); Sorin Mitu, "Local Identities from Transylvania in the Modern Epoch," *Transylvanian Review* 22, Suppl. 3 (2013): 237–248; Sorin Mitu and Anca Gogâltan, "Aspects of the Saxon Identity in Transylvania in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century," *Transylvanian Review* 22, Suppl. 3 (2013): 291–300; Oana-Ramona Ilovan, Ioana Scridon, Kinga Xénia Havadi-Nagy, and Dănuț Huciu, "Tracing the Military Frontier District of Năsăud: Territorial Identity and Regional Development," *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft* 158 (2016): 215–244.
22. Ilovan, Jordan, Havadi-Nagy, and Zametter; Oana-Ramona Ilovan and Zoltan Maroși, "Leadership and Regeneration of the Transylvanian Villages in the Region of Rupea," in *Semestrare di Studi e Ricerche di Geografia: Rural Development Policy and Local Identities in the European Union*, eds. Tiziana Banini and Fabio Police, 27, 1 (2015): 63–70; Kinga-Xénia Havadi-Nagy, Oana-Ramona Ilovan, Doris Damyanovic, Florian Reinwald, and Mandy Mărginean, "Advocacy for Participatory Rural Development: A Comparison of Two Case Studies from Romania and Austria," in *New Developments in the Rural Space of Central and South-East Europe*, 121–150; Jordan, Havadi-Nagy, and Maroși.
23. Ilovan, Jordan, Havadi-Nagy, and Zametter; Jordan, Havadi-Nagy, and Maroși.
24. Ioana Scridon and Oana-Ramona Ilovan, "The Zipsers' Ethnic Identity in Vișeu de Sus/Oberwischau, Romania, in the Context of Inter-Ethnic Relationships," *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft* 157 (2015): 151–168, DOI: 10.1553/moegg157s151; Ioana Scridon and Oana-Ramona Ilovan, "Approaching the Other in the Zipsers' Community: Identity Issues and Methodological Insights into Geographical Cross-Cultural Research," *Transylvanian Review* 25, 1 (2016): 55–73; Mitu.
25. Mara Popescu, "Vernacular Architecture as a Source for National Architectural Identity: Ion Mincu and Károly Kós," *Transylvanian Review* 24, 2 (2015): 43–48.
26. Oana-Ramona Ilovan, Iulia Doroftei, Roxana-Maria Buș, and Sorin-Alin Kosinszki (2016), "Chapter 1: Territorial Identity, Cultural Landscapes and Values Education: A Brief Approach," in *Territorial Identity and Values in Geographical Education*, eds. Oana-Ramona Ilovan and Maria Eliza Dulamă (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2016), 13–30; Maria Eliza Dulamă, Zoltan Maroși, and Oana-Ramona Ilovan, "Chapter 3: Geography University Education for the Protection and Capitalisation of Cultural Urban Landscapes. A Case Study: The Museum Square, Cluj-Napoca, Romania," in *Territorial Identity and Values in Geographical Education*, 59–119; Zoltan Maroși, "Representations of Local Identity through Landmarks: Rupea Fortress Rehabilitation," *Territorial Identity and Development* 2, 1 (2017): 31–46, DOI: 10.23740/TID120173.
27. Arpad Zach, "Debate on Village as a Cultural Landscape," *Urbanismul. Serie nouă, Satul ca peisaj cultural* 2, 2 (2009): 46–56.
28. *Patrimoniul Cultural Național: Strategie*, 22, <http://www.cultura.ro/uploads/files/StrategiaPCN.pdf> (accessed 16 December 2015).

29. Ibid., 36.
30. Centrul de Cercetare și Consultanță în Domeniul Culturii, *Strategia Sectorială în domeniul Culturii și Patrimoniului Național pentru perioada 2014–2020* (2013), 47, [http://www.cultura.ro/uploads/files/STRATEGIA\\_%20SECTORIALA\\_IN\\_DOMENIUL\\_CULTURII\\_2014-2020.pdf](http://www.cultura.ro/uploads/files/STRATEGIA_%20SECTORIALA_IN_DOMENIUL_CULTURII_2014-2020.pdf) (accessed 12 December 2015).
31. Ibid., 74.
32. Zoltan Maroși, “Redrawing Historical Illustrations in Research of Genuine Urban Features,” *Territorial Identity and Development* 1, 1 (2016): 45–58, DOI: 10.23740/TID120163; Iulia Doroftei, “Photography as a Means of Depicting Genius Loci?” *Territorial Identity and Development* 1, 1 (2016): 59–74, DOI: 10.23740/TID120164; Maroși, “Representations of Local Identity.”
33. Maroși, “Representations of Local Identity.”
34. Ilovan, Jordan, Havadi-Nagy, and Zametter, 267; Jordan, Havadi-Nagy, and Maroși, 203.
35. Havadi-Nagy, Ilovan, Damyanovic, Reinwald, and Mărginean, 136–138.
36. ICOMOS is a non-governmental international organization dedicated to the conservation of the world’s monuments and sites. For further info please see: <http://www.icomos.org/en/>
37. <http://www.transylvaniatrust.ro/>
38. <http://www.europanostra.org/>
39. Havadi-Nagy, Ilovan, Damyanovic, Reinwald, and Mărginean.
40. Maria Borcoman, *Așezări transilvane: Rupea* (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2010), 86.
41. Vladimir Agrigoroaei, Valentin Sălăgeanu, Luiza Zamora, Laura Jiga Iliescu, and Ana Maria Gruia, *Biserici fortificate săsești din Transilvania/Fortified Churches of Transylvania (CD Multimedia) (Romanian–English–German)*, executive producers: Alexandru Popescu, Mihai Dragomir, Voichița Maican, and Dragoș Matei (Bucharest: Tritonic, 2007).
42. Ernst Wagner, *Istoria sașilor ardeleni*, transl. Maria Ianus, foreword by Thomas Nägler (Bucharest: Meronia; Munich: Edition Wort und Welt, 2000), 34–43.
43. Alexandru Avram, “Arhitectura ecleziastică,” in *800 de ani Biserică a Germanilor din Transilvania: Catalogul expoziției*, ed. Thomas Nägler (Thaur bei Innsbruck: Edition Wort und Welt, 1991), 37–49.
44. Agrigoroaei, Sălăgeanu, Zamora, Jiga Iliescu, and Gruia.
45. <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/travel/articol/satul-viscri-o-comoara-transilvana> (accessed 10 February 2017).
46. <https://www.mihaieminescutrust.ro/en/viscri/> (accessed 10 February 2017).
47. Maroși, “Redrawing Historical Illustrations”; id. “Representations of Local Identity.”
48. B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, “The Experience Economy: Past, Present and Future,” in *Handbook on the Experience Economy*, eds. Jon Sundbo and Flemming Sorensen (Cheltenham, UK–Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2013), 21–44, 36.
49. Oana-Ramona Ilovan, “Integrating the ‘Lands’ of Romania in the Experience Economy,” *Romanian Review of Regional Studies* 9, 1 (2013): 91–98.



50. Project for Public Spaces (PPS), *The Benefits of Great Places*, <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/c3/3b/41/c33b41ef1ee0b64c90ffaeb5f8977ff1--project-for-public-spaces-public-square.jpg> (accessed 14 January 2017).

### **Abstract**

#### Transylvanian Cultural Landscapes Promoting Rural Development

We focus on the results of the field trips done in Romania, to Rimetea (Torockó, Eisenmarkt) (Alba County) and Viscri (Deutschweiskirch, Fehéregyháza) (Braşov County), during an international research project, and on the relation between successful tourism strategies and cultural assets in the form of architectural heritage commodification and protection. The hypothesis of our research was that local identity expressed through vernacular architectural heritage is one of the main resources supporting future sustainable development. The empirical part is based on case study evidence and qualitative methods (observation, interviews, and focus groups). An original part of our research is that the observations on the architectural heritage were processed and interpreted using drawings and analyzed in relation to the findings resulted from interviews and focus groups. We concluded that the two case studies could be considered development models for other settlements capitalizing on vernacular architecture.

### **Keywords**

vernacular architectural heritage, cultural landscape, local identity, rural development, Rimetea, Viscri