CHAPTER II



"Piatra îngăurită", The hollowed stone. Bozioru, 2025.



The cell where Dionisie Torcătorul [Dionisie the Weaver], a local heremit, is believed to have lived in the 14th century. Bozioru, 2025.

Making Sense of Cultural Landscapes

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is based on the premise that there is a close interdependence between the environment and the people living in a given area. Firstly, the environment directly influences human societies by providing the resources necessary for survival; at the same time, however, people also influence nature and the landscape, altering and transforming them in their efforts to secure the resources necessary for their livelihood. These actions are reflected in the practices that give rise to specific human activities, which people learn and pass on through the cultural transmission of local community values, that is, through local heritage. This chapter, which also explores the complex relationship between the individual and the community, illustrates how cultural values are linked to a territory and how they also contribute to ensuring social cohesion amongst community members. By focusing on the methodologies used in the study of landscape, the chapter has shown that it is best studied from an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspective. This joint approach would help us best understand the factors underlying the creation of the landscape, linking the natural landscape to the culture of local communities, as well as their historical, economic and political contexts.



Introduction

Every human community resides within a territory shaped by a particular environment and landscape, which directly impacts their way of life. In mountainous areas, for instance, livestock rearing typically serves as the primary livelihood due to lower land productivity, rendering agriculture a secondary focus. For centuries, community members have used the landscape's resources for survival, gradually creating a cultural heritage (both material and intangible) that reflects their values, and that is passed on through generations, by means of traditions. This captures, in a straightforward manner, the resilient and deeply rooted bond linking the environment (landscape) with culture, which manifests as the cultural heritage generated by local communities.

But how can communities and researchers work together to make sense of the landscape, identify the local values cherished by the people inhabiting it, and put these values to use for local sustainable development? How can cultural heritage and landscapes be approached, studied and analysed as research topics? The interdisciplinary work of the researchers from the "GeoSust" project is a good example of how cultural heritage and landscape can be used for the benefit of a thriving community.

To answer these questions, this chapter discusses the methodological and theoretical approaches employed in the anthropological study of the landscape conducted by the nine researchers from the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant in a clearly defined area: the Buzău Land UNESCO Geopark in Romania, between 2014 and 2017. The documentation for this interdisciplinary project involved the study of the natural components of a landscape (geological, geographical, and biological), alongside the study of local cultural heritage. Researchers from the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant were involved in the latter. Ultimately, a strategy and a management plan for the Geopark was created, which aimed at finding the right balance between the socio-economic, cultural and natural development in the designated region. This included making the most of the region's natural and cultural (material and intangible) heritage, for the benefit of the local communities, raising awareness of their heritage values, opening several local museums and visitor points, that would involve more the locals, and make the tourists aware of the local traditions.

Natural and cultural heritage

The distinction between "nature" (biological, physical world) and "culture" (human customs, laws, language, and so on) is one of the oldest debates that crosses philosophy, literature, social sciences and environmental sciences. From Antiquity to the 21st century, philosophical schools of thought have favoured one or the other, or, as it occurs lately, has been regarded as interlinked. Aristotle, for example, gave precedence to reason over nature, as he stated that humans are the only "rational animals" (see Mesaroș 2014). During the Enlightenment, the age of Humanism, nature was perceived as chaotic, and therefore it was up to humans to dominate it (see Ingold 2026): culture and political order were necessary to tame the natural human impulses. On the other hand, in the 18th century, Jean-Jaques Rousseau pleaded the opposite: people's return to nature. Rousseau was praising the natural ("savage") state of the humans, and blamed the progress made in time, as it brought inequality and decay (Rousseau 2017). In the mid-20th century, Claude Lévi-Strauss places the nature/culture divide at the heart of his anthropological thinking (see Lévi-Strauss 1995). He argues that humans transform the natural (raw) into the cultural (cooked) by appealing to the symbolic, such as language, culture, and social rules.

However, since the end of the 20th century, an increasing number of scholars have been working to dismantle this dualism, and rethink the way humans relate to nature. In this regard, a relevant reference is Arne Naess, who, in 1973, put forward the holistic concept of "deep ecology." The core principle of this concept is that living beings have the right to exist, regardless of their utility to human needs. Therefore, Naess introduces a new philosophical trend: "an ecosophical ontology" (Naess 2001, 38), which asserts the interconnectedness of all levels of nature. Therefore, our own identity is closely linked to nature, which is perceived as an "extension of humanity" (2001, 17). Another turning point is Donna Haraway's (2007) introduction of the concept of "naturecultures" (combining the two words into one). She insists that nature and culture are inextricably linked, shaping one another at every level. Haraway argues that there is no such thing as "untouched nature" (see also Emanuelsson 2009) existing outside of human influence. At the same time, there is no such thing as "pure human culture" that is detached from the ecosystem (or the landscape—terminology used for the sake of this chapter's main interest) in which it resides. The anthropologist makes an

argument that all environments should be understood as the result of the interaction of a variety of human and non-human actors.

I consider Philippe Descola's theory of the six different types of relational modes and identification to be relevant to the argument. These modes play "a preponderant role in the connections that humans establish between one another, and also with non-human elements in their environment" (Descola 2012, 448), that is, the natural. Descola's relational modes are: exchange, predation, gift, production, protection and transmission. The anthropologist divides these forms of attachment into two groups: the potentially reversible relations (the first three); and univocal relations (the last three). As Descola suggests, some plants and animals (especially those that humans depend on for sustenance) require human assistance for their reproduction, nurturing and survival. Thus, the humans commit themselves to taking care of them (i.e. the protection as relational model), thereby acknowledging the interdependence and co-dependency between humans and non-humans. Several other scholars argue that a community comprises both humans, and non-humans (see Ingold 2011; 2022). Important members of the society, for example, are considered to be the animals (mainly domestic animals): they are part of the local cultures (see Serpell 2017; Pavel 2021), and interact with the humans ritually (Kõiva 2016, Pavel 2021).

By highlighting these perspectives, we emphasise David Abram's assertion that "we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human" (Abram 1996, ix). In fact, Abram coined the concept of "more-than-human", stressing that human life is sustained by, intertwined with and accountable to a much larger living world (see also the multispecies approach used in anthropology: Haraway 2016; Dooren, Kierksey and Münster 2016; Lowenhaupt Tsing 2024, and others). As Niels Bubandt, Astrid Oberborbeck Andersen, and Rachel Cypher (2022) argue, natural ecosystems and human sociocultural worlds can no longer be studied in isolation. The landscape itself has a more-than-human reality that must be examined, as it is reflected in the human communities that inhabit a region.

There is a long list of scholars who acknowledge the changing nature of the landscape, due to the complex relationship that the environment and the beings who are populating it (including humans) have. As Provenza et al. state,

> Landscapes are complex creative systems that are endlessly emerging, transforming, and vanishing as a result of ever-changing relationships among organisms and environments – soil, plants, herbivores, and human beings. In the process, all organisms are actively participating in creating environments; they aren't merely adapting to them. (Provenza et al. 2013, 6)

The landscape itself becomes a "total social fact" (Bubandt, Andersen, and Cypher 2022, 20), which is best studied from an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspective. This joint approach would enable us, as researchers, to best understand the drivers behind landscape creation, connecting natural scenery with the culture of local communities, and their historical, economic and political contexts.

Taking all these approaches to landscape into account, we empirically and phenomenologically (see Tilley 1997; Ingold 1993) approach the Buzău landscape in the present volume. Our studies focus on how human experience is embodied in the landscape and how people feel and talk about their feeling of place, as they feel part of it and are constantly shaping it through movement, use, the body, the senses and stories.





Old church on Slănic Valley. 2014.



The salt bank. Mânzălești, 2015.

Landscapes and UNESCO

The interdependence of nature and culture is recognised at many levels within the natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences, including the methodological, conceptual, and practical levels, as well as the legislative level. For instance, UNESCO has issued several normative acts to acknowledge the cultural, aesthetic, scientific or spiritual values of cultural and natural heritage. The first of these is the "UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage," which was released in 1972. What is intriguing about this definition of cultural heritage set out in the Convention is that it includes works of art or heritage sites that are the result of the joint action of humans and natural phenomena. This acknowledges that nature and culture are not separate, but mutually dependent. Apart from this interdependency, however, natural heritage is also defined separately, focusing on sites (such as natural monuments, habitats and areas, or natural sites within protected areas) that have developed over time without human involvement. The international community has reacted positively to UNESCO'sconvention.

As a result, twenty years later, in 1992, the first cultural landscapes were included in the World Heritage list, which in 2026 has reached the number of 240 such protected natural sites.[1] Later, in 2010, UNESCO issued the Declaration on Biocultural Diversity which used the concept of "biocultural heritage," coined in 2005, and referring to the protection of traditional knowledge and the rights of local communities (see Swiderska 2006). These UNESCO initiatives show the great interest that nations worldwide have for both cultural and natural heritage, perceived as a whole.

In what concerns European cultural area, a pivotal moment was the year 2000, when the Council of Europe adopted the European Landscape Convention. This Convention elevates the status of landscapes to continental policy (see David 2015, 28) and establishes them as a priority for member states. From our perspective, it is significant that the Convention states that landscapes are the result of actions and interactions between nature and people. This reflects the concerns of specialists in natural and cultural sciences, who perceive landscapes as both natural and cultural, as we have seen above.

Delimitating areas by culture

Among others, researchers have focused on demonstrating how landscapes can bring communities together[2] by reflecting their values, social identities, and local pride (see Basso 1996). In this regard, the contributions of Romanian geographers who also became famous ethnologists in the field of ethnography are relevant. These include Simion Mehedinți (1868–1962), George Vâlsan (1885–1935), Romulus Vuia (1887–1963), Valer Butură (1910–1989) and Ion Ghinoiu (born 1941). Since the first half of the 20th century, they have recognised the importance of studying cultural heritage in an integrated manner, paying careful attention to the culture and peculiar geography and landscape of each region studied (see, for a chronology of their contribution, David 2015, 32-39). Actually, Valer Butură (1978) introduces the term "ethnographic landscape," which refers to a landscape where human intervention is evident. This concept endorses the idea that a landscape is formed alongside the communities inhabiting it. This terminology is gaining ground in Romania, but elsewhere, the term "cultural landscape" is used.

Landscape from Bozioru, 2015.



Wooden church from Aluniș, 2025.

Butură goes even further, and discusses the importance of a territory for the cultural heritage, delimiting 49 "ethnographical areas" [in Romanian: *zone etnografice*] in Romania (1978, 41-44). These are regions that differ from each other (although they are neighbours), both territorially and, most importantly, culturally, in terms of material culture, such as settlements, buildings (see Zaharia 2019; Mihuț 2019), installations, tools, traditional clothing, textiles; as well as intangible culture, such as customs, habits, rituals and so on. The researcher discusses the sub-zones that divide each ethnographic area into several distinct regions with particular cultural traits. The Buzău area is one of these ethnographic regions, and one of its sub-areas is the "Slănic Valley," which is one of the main parts of the Buzău Land Geopark.

As mentioned above, we consider phenomenology to be a useful approach for studying landscapes as heritage sites. From this perspective, landscape is considered a natural and cultural resource (see Tilley 1997). Consequently, space acts as a medium and contributes to the formation of local identity. Human actions occurring in particular places become symbols of that space, filling it with memories. These memories are transmitted through generations in the form of narratives (Tilley 1997; Ingold 1993). Space is experienced and lived by the human communities in a socio-cultural manner, defined by people's interactions with each other, and with the natural environment. Therefore, landscapes cannot be understood outside of local practices, such as the ways in which people work the land. Communities make use of local resources through local knowledge or "traditional ecological knowledge" (TEK)[3] (Berkes *et al.* 2000). TEK is transmitted over time and is the result of the communities' interactions with their environment. As well as providing basic knowledge of the natural cycles, this traditional knowledge also includes cultural practices,[4] shifting the focus of the discussion towards how people think about places.

Landscape, community, and memory

During our research in the Buzău area, we studied the landscape, the communities that inhabit it and the heritage they have created over generations. Our focus was on how people perceive and use space. Our main focus was intangible heritage: the natural materials used for building and crafts typical of the communities; the stories told about various places; and how the space is used and appropriated by humans. In short, we examined how the landscape is inhabited and managed, and how it can be transformed into heritage. To this end, we spoke to several community members, seeking insight into their unique approaches to understanding and making use of nature and the culture in which they live.

In fact, "sensing the space" through personal experience and the narratives of the ancestor's actions and experiences (see Basso 1996), is part of shaping individual and community identity. Therefore, when looking at the narratives we recorded in the interviews, it was important for us to consider that space acts as a mirror for practices and beliefs (Le Dû-Blayo 2011). Thus, we examined the "taskscapes," which Tim Ingold (1993) defined as spaces where human activity occurs, encompassing all kinds of "patterns of activities." We also considered the way space is inhabited, as Ingold suggests when talking about "dwelling,"[5] and how this contributes to claiming and to a personalisation of a territory. As part of the cultural continuity, space contains elements of previous generations' lives and work, as Ingold explains. Indeed, dwelling "assigns importance to the forms of consciousness with which individuals perceive and apprehend geographical space" (Basso 1996, 54).

For this reason, we concluded that, in order to understand the landscape, it is necessary to have a good grasp of the values of the communities inhabiting that space. This highlights the importance of understanding the relationship between the individual and the community, and how knowledge reflected in the local cultural heritage (both tangible and intangible) can strengthen local identity and social group cohesion. This reveals the strong connection between cultural values and physical space, as well as the role of the former as a valuable economic resource.

Another important aspect to consider is that any community should be viewed holistically (Gossiau, 1999) as it can only be understood through its social and cultural mechanisms. Therefore, a community is characterised by several socio-cultural features that actively involve collective memory (Halbwachs 2007). Each person living in a community is, first and foremost, part of a homogeneous social structure that is legitimised by the connections created among its members over time, and which is "(re)constructed through ongoing experiences, engagements and relations" (Waterton and Smith 2010, 8). Furthermore, each individual shares common norms and rules with the other members of the community (Agrawal and Gibson 1999), which are expressed in symbolic practices that are passed down through the generations (e.g. rituals, which are considered to be an unwritten law that determines what is permitted and what is prohibited by the social group—see Bot 1980).

When we conducted our research, most of our interlocutors were quite elderly. The villages in the Buzău area have an ageing population. This also means that the living heritage that we still find in the region is fading. Therefore, it is urgent that we save and preserve the knowledge that is still in use, and recognise it as cultural heritage, in order to strengthen the local identity. The loss of traditional knowledge is becoming increasingly common, especially in Europe, and has already attracted the attention of scientists. Ian D. Rotherham (2008; 2015) refers to this phenomenon as "cultural severance." In fact, two of the publications (Iuga 2016; Popa 2017a) published during the project, and intended for the local communities, especially the young people, offer suggestions and examples of measures to raise awareness of the importance of cultural and natural heritage in maintaining social cohesion and managing the local resources.

A relevant concept for our study is that of collective memory (Halbwachs 2007), since it defines a local community. It links generations and plays a significant role in shaping the specificity of communities. Memory is based on the experiences of previous generations, but it is also anchored in the present because it retains only those things from the past that are still relevant or can be remembered by the group (Halbwachs 2007). Collective memory actively contributes to transmitting values and norms, particularly in traditional communities, which are defined, By Pierre Nora (1997) as "memory communities" *par excellence*. In fact, as Sanda Golopenția (2001) argues, these communities fulfil three key criteria that reveal the significance of the "living" memory: all members know each other and engage in both spoken and ritual communication.



Thus, the strength of a community resides in this communication, its unity and social communion experienced by its members everyday, especially on festive occasions (see Golopenția 2001). These traditional societies are dominated by memory and rituals that establish the rules that govern the social group (Bot 1980). There is an inherent complementarity for traditional communities: each individual thinks within the framework of tradition, and hence, is being "thought"—and guided in all his actions—by tradition (see Culianu 1996, *apud* Neagota 2005). Therefore, people express their identity in relation with the community, being directly influenced by their ancestors' experiences preserved in the collective memory. Furthermore, "all the previous experiences seem to be convergent and to deeply influence

what we consider to be a new, fresh experience" (Culianu 1996, 40). This is a good reason for the specialists to be active in documenting and preserving the cultural heritage.

Reasons to conserve and value cultural heritage

There are two main reasons why cultural heritage is given so much attention. Firstly, it represents a shared focal point in people's collective imagination; and second, it defines local specificity, ensuring social cohesion among community members. According to the way it is used, cultural heritage is, has been and will continue to be an influential factor in defining the local identity. This can first be seen in the way cultural potential is enhanced in community activities, such as rituals, gatherings, and so on. Secondly, the importance of cultural heritage can be understood by examining cultural interventions and activities that address heritage, and are initiated from within, or from outside the community (such as: exhibitions, cultural centres, and so on).

Increasing the value placed on cultural heritage has positive outcomes for the members of the community, especially young people, as it strengthens local identity. In fact, the very definition of cultural heritage highlights the importance of heritage and the heritage-making-process [*patrimonialisation*—in French], which primarily involves research, selection and capitalisation (see Iuga 2022). Heritage comprises "all inherited resources, identified as such [...] representing proof of and expression of the values, beliefs and constantly evolving traditions" (Law 182/2000, art. 1, point 2). Or, as Ana Pereira Roders, and Ron van Oers assert (2011),

> Cultural heritage encompasses all contemporary demonstrations, when intangible, and past evidences, in the case of tangible artefacts, of human creative activity that are inherited from previous generations and considered by communities, groups or society at large to be of value, and therefore maintained in the present and transmitted to future generations for their benefit (p. 6).

From a social point of view, cultural heritage can emphasise the connection between the individual and their social group. From a functionalist perspective, cultural heritage is seen as an ongoing process oriented towards human values, as mentioned above. While it is the creation of a particular society, its value belongs to all of humanity and is more public than private (see Loulanski 2006). Consequently, institutions involved in the study and promotion of heritage consider it to be a resource that can be utilised not only culturally, but also socially. In this way, cultural heritage contributes to the definition and strengthening of local identity.

One example I can think of is how the Maramureș region in northern Romania has become important from a tourist point of view, because of the cultural heritage it holds, which is reflected in its tradition, material culture and heritage buildings. This was also recognised during the communist period, when the region was considered conservative and its people were seen as the "keepers" of tradition. This was partly because of the traditions they were preserving and partly for political reasons, as they refused to accept the communist regime's imposition of changes such as collectivisation and industrialisation (see in this regard Kligman 1998). After 1989, when the communist regime fell, the region remained a major tourist attraction, with an increasing number of foreign visitors. In 1999, eight wooden churches were listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, which increased the number

of tourists visiting the region. This was an important moment for the local population as well, as they became more aware of the "treasures" sheltered within their community.

Cultural heritage has also a significant economic value (see Kovacs 1994). It is considered an instrument for satisfying the demand for leisure activities, but also the opportunity to create new jobs, and, of course, incomes for the locals. At the same time, it contributes to a positive identification of the local authorities in the community (see Greffe 2010).

One of the most accessible examples that can be given is the way museums have been integrated into communities, from a cultural point of view, but also from an economical one. One of the first museums in the world, Louvre museum in Paris, France (opened for public on 10th of August 1793), is the largest art museum housed in a historic monument. It is a must-see for all tourists visiting Paris, as reflected in the institution's budget: in 2012, for example, the museum generated 58 million euros in ticket sales alone.[6] Another example can be given in relation to intangible heritage. One of the most famous carnivals in the world is the Carnival in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which is celebrated at the start of Lent. The first Carnival took place in 1723 and was quite different from the event we know today. It involved walking in the streets and trowing water, food or mud at people (Tyler 2019). Today, the celebration features brightly coloured, spectacular outfits, music and dancing. Since 1984, the city administration has given the Carnival a new home in the Sambadrome, where tickets can be bought to watch the parade. The Sambadrome can host up to 90.000 spectators.[7]

There are numerous examples of cultural heritage impacting the economy of a region. Local heritage actively contributes to sustainable development (Mucică *et al.* 2013; Pereira Roders and van Oers 2011; Jeannotte 2003) and improves the quality of life in communities. This aspiration is also expressed in the recommendations made by UNESCO (see The Budapest Declaration on World Heritage, 2002, art. 6). Consequently, it is not only the local communities that benefit from using the cultural heritage, but there are benefits applied at regional and national level.

In a well-defined territory, such as the Buzău region, local heritage is an essential tool used for adding value to its specific cultural capital[8] (see also Bourdieu 1986). Research is just one stage of the action plan, followed by capitalizing the cultural specificity of the region (which is more or less unitary, one of the reasons why this area was selected as such), and creating local visiting centres that can present the region's local heritage to visitors and locals alike.

For example, when promoting the Dinosaurs Geopark-Ţara Haţegului,[9] part of UNESCO Global Geoparks, and situated in the central part of Romania, an important part is played by the cultural heritage (tangible and intangible). Alongside the region's geological assets, its cultural heritage is promoted, including local historical monuments and intangible heritage such as local legends. Tourists come from different parts of Romania and other countries. Not only the Geopark administration team benefited to a great extent from this, but also the local community. Small guesthouses have been built to accommodate tourists, and numerous TV shows have promoted the Geopark's tourist attractions. An important aspect of the Dinosaurs Geopark is setting up information points, small exhibitions and activity centres in various locations within the area, ranging from exhibitions in Haţeg and Sânpetru villages to open-air artistic installations in Peştera and Densus villages. This way, tourists can spend more time discovering the region. The local community can only benefit from this, and it is encouraged to organise activities for its members. For example, the Women's Association in Sântămărie Orlea village organises sessions every year where they dye wool using plant-based colours. This technique and knowledge was lost for some generations, but has become popular again in the past few years. This has brought together a small community interested in local traditions and knowledge.



Salt pit. Sările, 2016.



Salt exploitation. Sările, 2016.

In fact, this type of approach to a territory is part of the new "experience economy" concept (see Pine and Gilmore 1998). In this kind of economy, businesses are expected to provide memorable experiences for their clients, in order to create personal memories. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), "experiences have emerged as the next step in what we call the *progression of economic value*" (p. 97—their emphasis). This approach lends itself particularly well to cultural tourism, and the promotion of local heritage could be advantageous in this context, as demonstrated by the example of the Dinosaurs Geopark-Țara Hațegului above.

Methodology

A project focusing on the development and valorisation of a territory based on its natural and cultural heritage, requires an interdisciplinary research team involving specialists in both the natural and social sciences (see Bubandt, Andersen, and Cypher 2022). Since natural and cultural heritage are often interconnected, combining knowledge and expertise from both fields can lead to a more successful outcome than a purely natural or social approach. Geological landmarks are a good example of this: while the rocks naturally tell the story of the Earth, they are also often imbued with cultural significance, due to their prominent position in the landscape (Popa *et al.* 2017b).

An interdisciplinary approach is also important when considering some of the more profound issues facing rural communities today. One such issue is the rapid change in rural communities caused by the outward migration of young people. Depopulation has economic

and social consequences, as well as major cultural effects. For example, there is a threat of "cultural severance," that is the loss of traditional and local knowledge (see Rotherham 2008). At the same time, the cohesion of the community is weakened, which contributes to the fading of local cultural identity. It also affects the local economic prospects, as valuable, young community members with entrepreneurial potential leave.

While some communities fade away, others survive economically by exploiting their resources rather than using them sustainably. This often endangers the preservation of their natural and cultural heritage. In such circumstances, it is a significant challenge for social scientists to identify cultural potential that can ensure local development, consolidate local identity, and strengthen social cohesion. This is why collaborating with specialists from other fields of research can be fruitful.

Social scientists (anthropologists) have an arsenal of qualitative research methods that can be used to record and understand the importance of local heritage both for the individuals and community. These include direct or participant observation (see Spradley 1980), interviews (structured, semi-structures, or unstructured, see Bernard 2006), taking fieldnotes (see Sanjek 1990), and visual anthropology methods (photography, video-recording, see Banks 1995). Through the use of these methods, the researcher becomes a "chronicler" (Augé 1989) of the surveyed communities. The first adaptation is for the mono- or interdisciplinary chroniclers to become transdisciplinary: the researchers must actively involve in their study the people interviewed from the local community. This includes relying on their assistance in the field and constantly rediscovering the local culture together with them.

However, to fully understand the cultural aspects, the researcher should consider the natives' point of view, because, as stated by Clifford Geertz (1983) "societies, similar to lives, contain their own interpretation" (p. 215). The active involvement of the community in the research process should be taken into consideration, bearing in mind that the researcher-interlocutor relation is subject to constant negotiation and renegotiation (see Hastrup 1990). It is not only the interviewee who provides information, the researcher must also share information about him/herself, or the project he/she is working on, to satisfy the curiosity of their dialogue partner. It is acknowledged that first and foremost, the anthropologist is dealing with another person, and must get to know their interlocutor on a personal level in order to better understand the culture they are embedded in. Another important adaptation is for the researcher to become, in turn, actively involved in the community, either by living there, as anthropology methodology requires, or by frequently returning to the community, and participating in local activities.



In terms of sustainable development, it is essential for anthropology researchers to engage with the community: they should play an active role and do more than merely record their interlocutors. At this stage, the researcher becomes a driving force in supporting the conservation and use of local heritage. Therefore, researchers can contribute directly to the process of adding value to the local heritage in the community's everyday life.

In many cases, heritage valorisation occurs within communities, and it is no coincidence that specialists often emphasise the role of communities in this process. They argue that this process actively contributes to the shaping of local identities and the definition of cultural specificity, not only for the community itself, but also for others interested in discovering cultural values (see Waterton and Smith 2010; Crooke 2010). Therefore, it is essential for researchers to identify and capitalise on local initiatives aimed at preserving, using and valorising cultural heritage. The people involved in these activities would also make excellent subjects for research.

Cultural tourism provides an ideal context in which to apply such a methodological approach. It creates an economic framework that encourages the active participation of community members and researchers alike. One possibility is to create tourist attractions that present cultural aspects of daily life and highlight the local heritage, such as museums, interpretation areas and creative workshops. This enables researchers to collaborate actively with community members to discover heritage elements and present them in a meaningful way that is relevant to both the community and visitors.

To achieve this, the local heritage must first be discovered and studied, and a plan must be made to put it to value and present it to the community and a wider public. Other options include promoting and reinterpreting existing local collections and exhibitions, or designing educational programmes dedicated to community members, especially the younger generation (see Crooke 2010). A transdisciplinary team of local and specialist members can organise and promote heritage events outside the specific community. All these actions contribute to social cohesion within the community and, by attracting visitors, to local development (Crooke 2008).

Conclusion

The value of a territory resides in its natural resources, in the people living there, in their cultural values, which are both inherited and constantly updated, as well as the way they interact with their natural environment. Therefore, value can be found not only in the cultural significance and meanings associated with various places, but also in the practical and symbolic activities that take place in a region. A natural-social interdisciplinary approach becomes useful for identifying and connecting all the values of a territory. The documentation can focus both on local natural resources, but also on the knowledge and skills local communities need to use and preserve these resources. It can also explore why some crafts are passed down through the generations and why others disappear. Researchers can focus on the stories of the places, and on rituals that mark the community life. Particular interest lies in the knowledge and lifestyle that has made communities and their landscapes sustainable over generations, as this explains why the territory and communities are shaped the way they are.

It is essential to consider that people living in a territory have an active memory of social and political events that have shaped their community. Their collective memory preserves many cultural elements that can be used to promote local values, in accordance with the principles mentioned in this chapter. The most important of these is taking the community's point of view into account. Thus, documenting local heritage is the best way to explore the collective memory, discover local traditions and sustainable practices, and promote the region and its values.

The type of interdisciplinary research presented above, which is concerned with documenting and valorising the cultural landscape of an area, can be particularly fruitful for sustainable development initiatives, including geoparks. This approach is useful for documenting a territory's specific cultural heritage and identifying its cultural potential for promotion and development. Involving both specialists and community members can strengthen the connection between these groups, encouraging collaboration for the territory's sustainable development.



Drying rasins. Beciu, 2015.

Oxen near a chart. Scăieni, 2016.



NOTES

1. UNESCO World Heritage Centre: https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/

2. But landscapes can be equally contested and separating communities. Such are the territories that two different communities claim (see Amit-Cohen 2009).

3. Traditional ecological knowledge is a "cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment" (Berkes et al. 2000, 1252).

4. Cultural practices, such as rituals, also include strategies to avoid risks and natural disasters that would otherwise hinder the sustainability of household economies, practices that are referring to the ethics of subsistence and the associated morality described by James C. Scott (1976).

5. "Dwelling" as a concept was first mentioned by Heidegger (1971), who is talking about the sense of belonging and the way people use and inhabit space.

6. Information retrieved from the Louvre Museum's website: https://www.louvre.fr/en/missions-projects. Accessed on 18th August 2020.

7. Information retrieved from Rio Carnival website: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sambadrome_Marqu%C3%AAs_de_Sapuca%C3%AD. Accessed on 4 August 2026.

8. The concept of "cultural capital" is analysed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 246-251) and can be found mainly as "embodied state" ("habitus"; cultural capital analysed at individual level), as "objectified state" (cultural expressions transmitted to the others), and as "institutionalized state" (when it is acknowledged by institutions).

9. http://www.hateggeoparc.ro/. Accessed on 4 August 2026.

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