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CULTURAL HERITAGE
IN BUZĂU LAND UNESCO GEOPARK

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Edited by
Anamaria IUGA and Răzvan-Gabriel POPA

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FOREWORD



Inside of an old house in Rătești village.



Stone cross in the woods, Rătești village.

Foreword

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Between 2014 and 2017, as part of the interdisciplinary *GeoSust* project,[1] researchers from the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant explored the Buzău region, alongside the project's other partners. For three years, we—the nine researchers from the museum involved in the project—sought out customs, stories, histories, music, artefacts, items of traditional costumes, craftspeople and much more. Our main goal was to understand the connection between people and a particular place, the relationship between humans and nature, and how the natural and cultural resources of a well-defined territory are exploited.

We looked through dowry chests and delved into the hidden corners of our interviewees' memories. We tasted delicious food, the sort that only the housewives of the Buzău region know how to make. We shared in the joys and sorrows of the people in the villages we visited. We gathered stories about the good and bad places in the village, some so terrifying that just listening to them sent shivers down our spines. We thought about how we could support the work of the local people, so we lent a helping hand in setting up the "Time of Man" [in Romanian: "Timpul omului"] museum, which opened in 2015 in Mânzălești.

After three years, at the end of the project, we said what we had to say in the way we knew best: by organising an exhibition at the museum. This was the exhibition "The Buzău Region: Views, Meanings, Stories" (April–June 2017), which attracted nearly 4,000 visitors during the three months it was open.

We collaborated with the DigiWorld team, coordinated by Iulian Pană, on their documentaries dedicated to the region of the then-future Țintul Buzăului Geopark: the films "Fire," "Wood" and "Stone".[2] We continued to screen these documentaries at other events organised at the museum in subsequent years, to keep alive in our audience's minds everything we had shared about the magical land of Buzău

Towards the end of the project, we began writing the articles that are only now seeing the light of day in electronic form. The story behind these articles is a complicated one: starting with a single chapter written by all the authors together, for an anthology that was due to be published abroad, we ended up dividing the work and expanding on the subject matter in separate chapters. Always left until last amongst the many activities that have overwhelmed us in recent years, the volume has been patiently awaiting the day when it would be taken out of our treasure chest and shown to the world.

And so, here we are in the year of grace 2026, when the volume „Cultural Heritage in Buzău Land UNESCO Geopark" is published as a supplement to *MARTOR, The anthropology journal of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant*. A pearl that had been hidden in a shell for many years, waiting to grow and shine.

We invite you to discover the stories told by the people of Buzău, those told by the objects and buildings their skilful hands have created, and also the stories told by the landscapes that define the region as a Geopark. And, last but not least, let us celebrate together the fact that, so close to us, there is a region where, amidst the turmoil of modern life, traditions are still cherished and kept alive.

I would like, first and foremost, to thank the authors of this volume for their patience. Listed in alphabetical order, the authors of the texts and the photographs illustrating the chapters are: Alexandru ANDRĂȘANU, Magdalena ANDREESCU, Anamaria IUGA, Maria MATEONIU-MICU, Cosmin MANOLACHE, Carmen MIHALACHE, Ana PASCU, and Ciprian VOICILĂ. I would also like to thank Răzvan-Gabriel POPA, co-editor of the volume, for his careful reading and the insightful comments he has made over the years on the texts we have written. I would like to thank those who, mostly as volunteers on the project, have provided photographs to illustrate the book: Bogdan ALTO, Rodica MARINESCU, Lila PASSIMA, Anca-Maria PĂNOIU, Răzvan-Gabriel POPA, Dragoș PÂRCĂLABU and Georgiana VLAHBEI. I would also like to thank my colleagues who helped edit this volume: Sorana-Cristina MAN and Oana RĂDOI. Without all their support, the book would probably have taken several more years to be presented to the public.

A special thought goes out to Alexandru ANDRĂȘANU, who persuaded me to get involved in the project when, back in 2012, he invited me to visit the Buzău region for the first time, whilst I was trying to convince him that Maramureș, my native region, is a place that deserves, too, to have a geopark.[3] As I travelled through the villages of Buzău that year, I finally confessed to him that I felt at home, because here too the people are welcoming, open and have wonderful stories to tell. That is why I must thank our extremely valuable interviewees for their openness, amongst whom a special place is held by: Ciprian CHIRICA, Andrei DRĂGĂNESCU, Rica LEU, Ioana MATEI, Mircea MICU, Amelia PAPAZISSU, Cecilia PETRESCU and Ioan ZOTA.

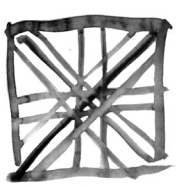
There is much more to be said about Buzău, as we have not been able to fit everything we discovered in the area into these pages, but we are delighted that we are celebrating together and reminiscing about the wonderful time we spent in this fairytale setting: the Buzău Land.

NOTES

1.The project "Applied research for sustainable development and economic growth in accordance with the principles of geoconservation: In support of the UNESCO Buzău Region Geopark initiative. GeoSust", was carried out between 2014 and 2017 by the Institute of Geodynamics of the Romanian Academy (coordinator), the University of Bucharest, the Geoecomar Institute, Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj, the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Telemarksforsking and the Norwegian University of Life Sciences—the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, as well as other partner institutions: Aurland naturverkstad, Gea Norvegica Geopark and the television channel DIGI World). The project was funded by Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, as well as the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, through the EEA Grants programme.

2. Documentaries directed by: Adriana Oprea, Anca Grădinariu and Iulian Pană, DigiWorld, 2017. More information at: https://www.digi-world.tv/documentare/tinutul-buzaului-20037

3. See the UNESCO Geopark candidate: Gutâi-Maramureș, initiated in 2024.





Welcome gesture, Beciu village.



Rocks on the road to Găvanu Monastery, 18th century monument.



Iconostasis of the Găvanu Monastery, 18th century monument.

CHAPTER I



La Grunj – Volcanic tuff (white volcanic ash) – Mânzălești (photo by the author).



The optimum geopark territory.

Geoparks as the Territories of the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Every local culture reflects how people use a given territory, how natural complexity has long structured its human and cultural landscapes, how communities have interacted with one another, and how people value their local resources and history. A UNESCO Global Geopark is a valuable model of cooperation for turning a region's exceptional geological and cultural heritage into an economic, social, and educational resource.

The chapter reconstructs the making of the Buzău Land Geopark from its initiation in 2007 to its UNESCO designation in 2022 and revalidation in 2025. It argues that geoparks are far more than honorific titles; they are active, multi-stakeholder tools for territorial governance. The analysis is structured around five key operational elements: optimum territory, partnerships, governance, networking, and interpretation for education and tourism. Each is documented and validated through multidisciplinary research, community participation, public debate, international cooperation, and know-how transfer in an evolving socio-economic context.

Geoparks are an expression of respect for the past and a promise for the future; they are the new territories of development and resilience in the 21st century, as demonstrated by the continually growing Global Geoparks Network — 241 territories from 51 countries as of 2026 — within the framework of the UNESCO International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme.

From concept to practice

The Global Geopark Concept emerged from the persistent efforts of committed specialists, coupled with innovation and international collaboration over the past 35 years. This innovative approach is based on leveraging local geodiversity and geological heritage—not only as a newly recognized value but also as a fundamental natural asset that enhances biodiversity, plays a pivotal role in shaping the cultural identity of local communities, and contributes to the formation of unique landscapes. In 2000, four territories—the Réserve Géologique de Haute-Provence (France), the Vulkaneifel Geo-Park (Germany), the Lesvos Petrified Forest (Greece), and the Maestrazgo Cultural Park (Spain)—founded the European Geoparks Network (EGN), paving the way for global collaboration and innovation in geopark management. This initiative subsequently led to the creation of the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) in 2004 (Zouros 2004).

Due to the conceptual elements of geoparks and the measurable impact of those belonging to the Global Geoparks Network—which can be transferred across varied economic and

cultural contexts — the need for UNESCO's most recent program, the International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme (IGGP), arose in 2015.[1]

The adoption of the UNESCO program originated at the territorial level—a bottom-up process reflecting the desire of local communities to establish a geopark based on common engagement and partnership, and aligned with their own values, without government intervention. Furthermore, the evaluation and acceptance of a geopark as a UNESCO designation, as well as its continuous revalidation every four years, represent the recognition of this open process, supporting sustainable development and promoting local values at both national and international levels.

At first glance, the term "Geopark" evokes the idea of a natural park that conserves geological features, or even an amusement park—a kind of geological "Disneyland"—where the main attraction is the geology of an area. However, the term "geo" refers to the Earth in the primordial sense of Gaia, the ancient Greek goddess, to whom humanity and our civilization are intrinsically linked. A geopark is essentially, about people, and about the way in which human communities have built their identity by continuously using the natural resources resulting from the billions of years of the Earth's evolution. UNESCO Global Geoparks are territories that invite us to rediscover the connections between humans and the Earth and demonstrates how human history is intrinsically bound to our planet's history. Geopark uncover and narrate the stories of rocks, fossils, lost worlds, changes, natural resources, ancient communities, raw materials, and local cultural heritage (Andrășanu 2017).

An online search for the term "Geopark" yields several hundred thousand results originating from all geographic regions. The vast majority of this information concerns either ongoing geopark and geopark projects or to the general concept, as reflected in dedicated webpages, publications, and events. A geopark is an entrepreneurial strategy for building a brand around a clearly defined administrative, cultural, geographical, and historical territory. It serves as a tool for heritage enhancement, providing a basis for social, economic, and cultural development. As a means of promoting the Earth's billions of years of history and its right to memory, the Geopark has become one of the most dynamic concepts in recent years. As of 2026, there are 241 UNESCO territories from 51 countries, members of the Global Geoparks Network, a number which continues to grow.

An external observer may interpret the designation of a territory as a UNESCO Global Geopark (UGGp) as purely honorific or nominal recognition. However, it is crucial to distinguish between the formal UNESCO application process, which takes nearly three years, and the entire preparatory work that takes place beforehand. International and Romanian experience indicates that substantial work must be completed before the official timeline even begins. This includes a critical reflection on the geological and cultural values of the area, along with conducting feasibility studies, completing scientific inventories of geological sites, establishing a local governance structure and management team, developing a community-based sustainable development plan, national and international cooperation with other geoparks, and very important integrated interpretation of the local heritage for education and tourism.

The making of the Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark

Although one might assume that the Buzău Land Geopark came into existence only at the time of its UNESCO designation (in 2022), the initiative actually began in 2007, fifteen years

prior to that recognition. The effort to create a geopark in the Buzău region was originally set in motion by representatives of the University of Bucharest (Faculty of Geology's Geomedia Centre), acting in partnership with the Buzău County Council.

The Buzău Land is a territory situated at the transition between hills and mountains, characterised by natural and cultural heritage worth of discovery, conservation, and promotion. The Geopark provides access to the rich, symbolic connections between the physical, natural space, and the spiritual, human space, connections that local communities have constructed over generations. It invites visitors to journey through 70 million years of Earth's history, and explore the life and traditions of the local people (Popa et al. 2015).

Buzău Land is located in the Eastern Carpathian fold and thrust belt at the junction of three continental plates: Dacia, Moesia and East Europe. It is composed mainly of sedimentary rock, which records almost entirely the last 40 million years of environmental evolution and climate changes. The area preserves fossils of endemic marine species, as well as terrestrial vegetation, mammals and birds. Active tectonics have produced mud volcanoes, eternal flames, petroleum springs, and salt diapirism. Thus, Buzău Land encapsulates the complex geological history of the Tethys, the subsequent evolution of the Eastern Paratethys, and the formation of the Carpathians.[2]

Geodiversity has profoundly shaped the cultural values of Buzău Land. Salt springs and diapirs supported traditional salt extraction; while clay and stone enabled the development of pottery and vernacular architecture. Mud volcanoes and eternal flames inspired folklore and spiritual beliefs; and the region's geomorphology determined settlement patterns and trade routes. Consequently, the territory's cultural identity is intrinsically linked to its geological foundation.



Colilia – horsetail feather grass (Stipa tirsa) – Mud Volcanoes (photo by the author).



Muntele de Sare – Salt Hill Nature Reserve – Lopătari (photo by the author)

Drawing on the conceptual elements of a geopark, and on the experience gained from the Haţeg Country Geopark and other international geoparks, we consider that while each geopark is unique in terms of its values, its people, and its socio-economic and political context, there are five common and mandatory elements applied in the construction of a geopark in Romania, including the Buzau Land Geopark. These five operational elements are: (1) optimum territory, (2) partnerships, (3) governance, (4) networking, and (5) interpretation for education and tourism.

(1) *The optimum territory* for the Buzău Land Geopark was established following one year of multidisciplinary research studies initially conducted across 36 mayoralties. The final territory, comprising of 18 mayoralties, was then defined based on the following five criteria:

1. A relevant network of significant and valuable geological, biological, and cultural sites, with a balanced distribution, worthy of preservation;
2. A sufficiently large territory to foster sustainable socio-economic development. A territory that is too small lacks natural, and financial resources, while a territory that is too large is difficult to manage sustainably and may generate conflicts;
3. Cultural value as a distinct place of interaction between nature and people, and as a locus of local identity expressed through tangible and intangible heritage;
4. Strong cultural, social, and economic affinities among associated communities, supported by continuous consultation to guarantee effective conservation and the adoption of territorial policies for sustainable development;
5. Borders that overlap the administrative boundaries of associated mayoralties, enabling organisational arrangements involving public authorities, local communities, private interests, and research and educational bodies in partnership projects covering the entire geopark territory.

Located at the crossroads of cultural and historical influences mainly from Transylvania, Muntenia, and Moldavia, the Buzău Land Geopark area required a careful approach to territorial definition. Through multidisciplinary analysis, communities that were heterogeneous and strongly culturally influenced by neighboring regions were excluded from the optimum territory. Therefore, Buzău Land Geopark is not only a valid UNESCO Global Geopark but also a prime example of the successful application of the theoretical concept of an "optimum territory," particularly within the specific economic, social, and cultural context of South East Europe (Andrăşanu 2010). The selection process proved to be correct. Over time, the geopark has overcome different crises, and has been fully integrated into county development strategies, becoming a pillar for regional projects.

(2) *Partnerships* form the cornerstone of the Buzău Land Geopark. Starting with the initial partners, the University of Bucharest and the Buzău County Council, the network has grown to encompass the Buzău Land Intercommunity Association, the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, the Grigore Antipa Natural History Museum, the Geological Museum of Romania, the Buzău County Museum, the GeoEcoMar Research Institute, the Buzău Land Association, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), ANTREC, Slow Food Buzău Association, schools, tourism operators, and community associations. This multi-stakeholder network ensures shared ownership and effective management, supporting the development of numerous research, education and tourism projects.

(3) *Governance* in Buzău Land Geopark refers to a participatory management system involving key stakeholders: the Buzău County Council, the University of Bucharest, and the Buzău Land Association (which signed a Partnership agreement in 2020). The Buzau Land Association created the management structure and has played an important role in the management and recognition of the Geopark through multiple projects. The ideal governance structure comprises: a coordination partnership consisting of the County Council, the University of Bucharest, the Buzău Land Association, and the Buzău Land Intercommunity Association, a management team, a Scientific Council, and a Consultative Council. Private companies are involved as consultants in the Geopark's strategy and management plan. This approach ensures that the Geopark is managed collaboratively, reflecting the needs and aspirations of the local area and inhabitants. The process is still under development.

(4) *Networking* is compulsory for Buzău Land Geopark and refers to the systematic process of establishing, maintaining, and leveraging connections with other geoparks, international organisations, academic institutions, and professional networks at local, regional, national, European, and global levels.

(5) *Interpretation* in Buzău Land means telling the story of the territory's values in an accessible and engaging manner. It transforms science into an experience, educates visitors and the local community, promotes the area and develops sustainable tourism. The visitor experience is shaped by the Geopark's essence: the link between geology and local mythology. These connections, identified through interdisciplinary research carried out in partnership with the the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, reveal Buzău Land as a place where tangible elements generate the intangible, giving rise to mythological stories of ogres, dragons, heroes, giants and living water and dead water. The Geopark invites visitors to explore seven symbolic geological features: the mud volcanoes, amber, salt, eternal flames, sulphur and petroleum springs, trovants, and the Grunj (a rock formation consisting of volcanic tuff and marl). Together, they tell the story of a territory shaped by the forces of nature and by human hands. Here, rock has become a hermitage, salt has flavored the local cuisine, and amber has been transformed into adornment. Every place has its legend, every spring its purpose, and each landform its interpretation. Visitors are invited to explore a land where the tangible and the intangible meet, and where the stories are written both in stones and in the memory of the people.

Tracing the geopark's evolution from 2007 to 2026, after its revalidation by UNESCO, reveals the great efforts required by the community and the geopark partnership to achieve internationally recognised status. A very brief overview of key milestones and projects could help to clarify this:

2007–2010—Multidisciplinary studies, educational and cultural projects. The main results included: defining the optimum territory and the geopark name; establishing a database of geological, geographical, biological, and cultural values; developing local, regional, and national partnerships and working groups; creating the Buzău Land Intercommunity Association and "Prietenii Ținutului Buzău Grup" [Friends of Buzău Land Group]. The geopark was presented at national and international conferences and events. It became an official area of research and field application for undergraduate and master's students of the University of Bucharest, as well as a site for international field applications. An AFCN [National Cultural Fund Administration] project resulted in four simultaneous and complementary

exhibitions, which were opened at the Grigore Antipa National Museum of Natural Sciences, the Geological Museum of Romania, the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, and the Buzău County Museum, under the brand "Ținuturile României—Ținutul Buzăului" [The Lands of Romania— Buzău Land]. The Geopark Strategy was developed and adopted by the Buzău County Council through an official decision (Andrășanu 2008).

2010–2013—Promotion and visitors infrastructure strategy. The geopark was promoted through official meetings with the local administration, tourism groups, and schools. A tourism infrastructure plan was developed, along with events and publications on local cultural heritage, in partnership with ANTREC Buzău and the County Council. A second AFCN project produced the "Seven Stories for Seven Places" exhibition (in partnership with the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant and ANTREC), and the "Book of Places" was published (Apachiței and Palcu 2012). The Geo-Team management group was established to oversee the management of the Geopark and its projects.

2014–2020—The "GeoSust" project was a key EEA-funded interdisciplinary applied research project that supported research, cooperation and infrastructure development, as well as the definition of the geopark management structure and strategy. Key partners included five Romanian institutions (the Institute of Geodynamics of the Romanian Academy, the University of Bucharest, GeoEcoMar, Babeș-Bolyai University, and the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant) and three Norwegian institutions (the Telemark Research Institute, the Norwegian University of Life Sciences and the Gea Norvegica UGGp). The project generated further projects, boosted management activities, and established two visiting centres: "The Time of Man" Museum" (in Mânzălești) and "Seven Stories for Seven Places" (in Lopătari). The first educational site Educație de Senzatie [Sensational Education] was established in Manzalesti.[3] In 2017, the Peasant Museum organized an exhibition within the GeoSust framework titled "Ținutul Buzăului. Privelişti, rosturi, povești."[4]

The Buzău Land Association was established in 2017 to support the management of the Geopark. In 2020, an official agreement was signed by the main partners: Buzău County Council, University of Bucharest, and Buzău Land Association. They aim to continue developing geopark activities and preparing the UNESCO application dossier.

2021–2026—The Geopark's governing body established a management team and developed a strategy and an operational plan to build the visitor infrastructure, including the Geo Gate (in Berca), the Trovants Museum (in Bozioru), visitor trails, numerous publications, conferences and an events calendar. Following an evaluation visit in 2021 and the UNESCO Council re commendation, Buzău Land was officially designated as a UNESCO Global Geopark in April 2022, joining the Global Geoparks Network and the European Geoparks Network. Since 2024, it became a member of the Romanian Geoparks Network, and co-signatory of the Romanian Geopark Charter in 2025, actively promoting UNESCO programs and designations. The geopark has developed local and international projects, and prepared a new strategy. However, as our contributors demonstrate, this designation is not an endpoint, but a beginning. UNESCO Global Geopark status is performance-based and subject to a rigorous revalidation process every four years.



Master students field application—Slănic Valley (photo by Dan Palcu).



Rumanit / Piatra Soarelui (Lapis Solis) / Amber / Sunstone (photo by Gabriela Leonida).



Searching for fossils—Slănic Valley (photo by the author).



Mud Volcanoes – Pâclele Mici (photo by the author).



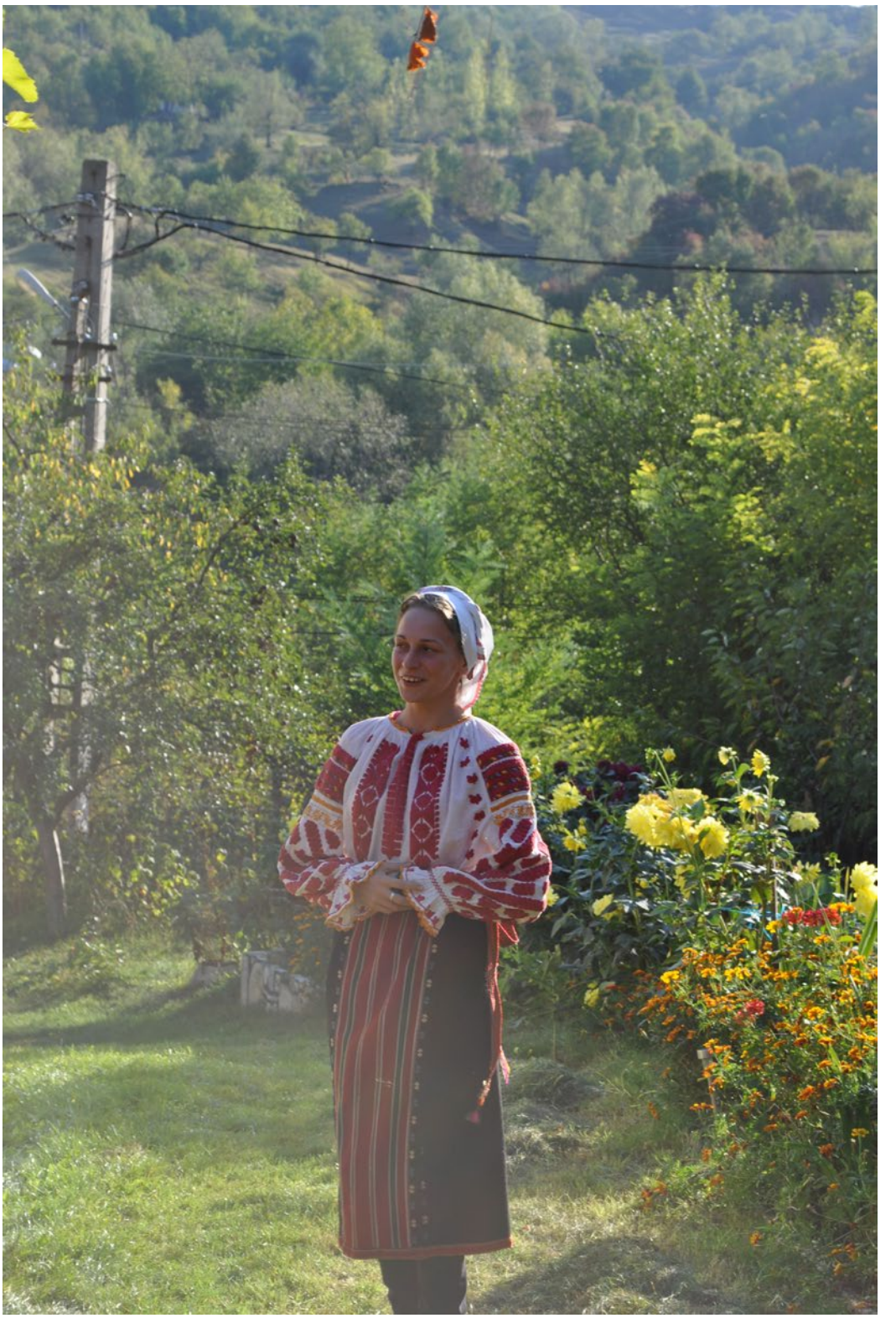
Slănic Valley—geology field research (foto Dan Palcu).



Ethnographic documentation – Mânzălești (photo by the author).



Anthropology field research (photo by Ioana Daia).



Traditional Slănic Valley costume (photo by the author).



Buzau gastronomy (photo by the author).



Multidisciplinary field studies (photo by the author).

Conclusions

The Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark designation is not just a label, but a dynamic, multi-scalar governance tool that imposes binding performance criteria in exchange for international prestige. Its history shows that the UNESCO label validates a long-term process of community building and sustained commitment, rather than providing a shortcut. The "green card" revalidation in 2025 demonstrates that the label merely provides entry to a perpetual process of sustainable development. For heritage, tourism, and regional planning scholars, Buzău Land offers a critical lesson: designation marks the start of the work, not the end. Mistaking it for a simple label would be to misunderstand the political economy of global heritage management and the decades of local investment that underpin it.

Geoparks—Buzău Land being a prime example—represent the territories of the 21st century. They embody a new development model, that is participatory, multi-stakeholder, performance-based, and globally connected, while remaining locally grounded (Martini, 2009). They are also committed to integrating natural heritage with cultural identity and economic sustainability. They replace static protection with dynamic governance, top-down mandates with bottom-up initiatives, and the isolation of exemplar with public engagement. Within the UNESCO system, as demonstrated by Buzău Land, the Geopark designation is not the culmination of efforts, but rather the commencement of an ongoing process of sustainable development. Understanding geoparks is key to comprehending the future of territorial management.

Romania was at the forefront of the geoparks movement. The first geopark project, coordinated by the University of Bucharest—the only national institution with expertise in this area—began in 2000. It combined scientific research, local initiative, and international collaboration. After five years of work involving multi-stakeholders, the Hațeg Country UNESCO Global Geopark was validated as a member of the European and Global Geoparks Networks in 2005, and has been revalidated in 2008, 2010, 2014, 2018, 2022 and 2026. Its innovative approaches to education, interpretation, geotourism, and adaptive management adopted by Hațeg Geopark have made it a model and inspiration for new geopark projects. As for 2026, there are six geoparks in the Romanian Geopark Notwork, each in a different stage of evolution: two UNESCO Global Geoparks (Hateg Country and Buzău Land), two aspiring territories (Oltenia de sub Munte and Carpaterra) and two geopark projects (Gutâi-Maramureș and Cimmerian Dobruja).

The expansion of the UNESCO Geopark Programme in Romania is not just about adding new designations; it is a strategic investment in a 21st-century territorial model that leverages the intrinsic link between geodiversity and cultural diversity to foster sustainable development, community empowerment, interdisciplinary education, and geotourism This approach also ensures the conservation of natural, tangible, and intangible heritage for future generations. Taking into consideration the country's high geodiversity and its deep connection with cultural diversity, Romania has the potential to develop at least 12 UNESCO Global Geoparks. Imagine the potential of a national network of this kind in terms of conservation, research, education, intelligent tourism, and the global promotion of Romanian heritage and values.

NOTES

1. See https://www.unesco.org/en/iggp/geoparks/about, last accessed: 03.06.2026.

2. See https://tinutulbuzaului.org/, last accessed: 03.06.2026.

3. See https://tinutulbuzaului.org/proiecte-si-noutati/geosust-tinutul-buzaului-si-dezvoltarea-durabila/, last accessed: 03.06.2026.

4. See https://sitevechi.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/acasa/tinutul-buzaului-privelisti-rosturi-povesti-ro.html, last accessed: 03.06.2026.



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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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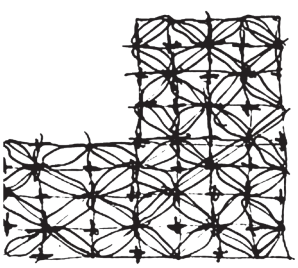
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CHAPTER III



Detail of an adobe wall.



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

Socio-cultural Context of Buzău Land

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ABSTRACT

Every local culture reflects how people use a given territory, how communities have interacted with one another, and how people value their local history. This chapter focuses on the sociocultural context of the Buzău Region, located in the northern part of Buzău County, southeast of the Carpathian Mountains. This context emphasizes the region's unique character, as reflected in its local cultural history. The chapter presents a brief history of how human settlements have developed over time, analysing not only historical events but also the region's demographics and political influence.

Introduction

Any territory inhabited by people, including Geoparks, use local knowledge[1] in order to benefit from the natural resources provided by the landscape. This knowledge is included in the intangible heritage that a community shares. It has been created and transmitted over generations, by means of cultural transmission, providing for a specific social and cultural context. It is interesting to note that the need to differentiate between social groups is very important. This is achieved both through distinct material culture and through the unique intangible heritage that each community possesses and shares among its members. This heritage includes aspects that make each community different from the others, and at the same time, it includes common elements—a shared heritage specific to a region, or an "ethnographic region," as researchers in Romania (see Butură 1978) refer to such areas with a shared heritage.[2] In recent years, this type of heritage has been impacted by rapid societal changes: some of this heritage has already been abandoned, many rituals are no longer practiced, and many traditional objects—and, consequently, the material culture—have been transformed and replaced by more modern ones. And, of course, some of this knowledge is no longer put to use.

Hence, it is necessary to involve specialists (from within or outside the community) to recover this endangered heritage and put it back to use in the region, bringing cultural—and, why not, economic—benefits to the local residents. In this way, when these specialists envision using intangible heritage for the region's sustainable development, they have to consider the

local communities as well, particularly by researching and analysing how local traditions and heritage have evolved over time. That is, they must take into account the historical, social, economic, and cultural contexts specific to a community. This can only be done by actively involving the local communities as well, and creating a participatory dialogue with them. In this way, the connection between people, natural heritage, and cultural heritage can serve as a valuable resource, capable of both showcasing local heritage to visitors to the region and, at the same time, contributing significantly to strengthening group cohesion. One of the secondary outcomes, from an economic perspective, may be an improvement in the quality of life for residents at the regional level and, perhaps, convincing people who have migrated for various reasons (usually labour migration) to consider returning to their home villages or towns.

This being said, any development strategy that either local authorities, or experts should consider must be tailored to the specific area and the specific sociocultural context in which it will be implemented. Consequently, in this chapter we will briefly present the sociocultural context of Buzău Land Geopark, which will help us understand the local history, and, perhaps, even the *genius loci.*

Over time, several communities have flourished within the Buzău Geopark, maintaining constant contact with one another as well as with neighboring regions, thereby fostering economic and cultural exchanges. It is important to note here that, from a geopolitical perspective, the region was situated at the border of three distinct historical regions: Wallachia (the southern part of Romania), Transylvania, and Moldavia—three of the regions that would go on to form the modern Romanian state after World War I. There is a long history attesting to the ties that the communities in the Buzău area established with one another, proving that these rural communities were not as isolated and immovable as we might believe today. Despite the rudimentary roads, people travelled extensively, even over long distances, for various economic reasons, such as the exchange of products, or even agricultural production itself. As early as the Middle Ages, the Buzău area developed into a distinct region with its own history and traditions.

The unique character of the geopark region—which was established to encompass the territory of 18 communes in northern Buzău County—lies in the important geological heritage sites located there: mud volcanoes, sandstone concretions, eternal flames, amber, salt mountains, the so-called "living" water springs (which contain sulphur; used in rural households) and "dead" water springs (which contain petroleum) as well as many others. But the Buzău Region Geopark is also a repository of cultural values and heritage that members of local communities have inherited and passed down to the present day. These include practical knowledge and skills regarding the use of natural resources, community-specific household management practices, as well as beliefs and rituals that add special cultural value to practical knowledge.

To understand what exactly gives the local culture its distinctive character, it is necessary to provide an overview of several events in the region's history that have directly contributed to its development. This will include an analysis of the land tenure system as recorded in medieval documents, as well as of the major land reforms that had a direct impact on the communities. Such an approach is particularly relevant, given that the villages in Buzău County are largely "communities of memory" (Nora 1998), where oral cultural transmission is still alive. Nevertheless, these communities have been transformed and shaped by significant historical events. Last but not least, the chapter analyses the area's demographic data, providing an overview of statistical data on population dynamics in recent years—an analysis that can reveal contemporary macrosocial phenomena specific

to a community (Rotaru 2009). The population, considered as a "system," intersects with and directly influences the other "systems" studied by the social and natural sciences—namely, society, the economy, the environment, the habitat, and local culture (Trebici and Ghinoiu 1986).

Thus, in this chapter we will explore the impact that socioeconomic changes, which have occurred over the centuries, have on collective memory and local cultural heritage. We will focus on how collective memory contributes to the preservation and promotion of cultural assets shared by community members, as well as on the role it plays in defining local identity in the Buzău area.

Founding of the rural communities

The villages in the Buzău area are built mainly in river valleys, such as those of the Buzău, Slănic, and Bălăneasa rivers. These settlements are sedentary in nature, with residents identifying with a well-defined territory that has been established and delimited since ancient times. The identity of rural communities has its origins in the founding of villages (most often during the Middle Ages), following land grants made to boyars (nobles) or free peasants by the Wallachian rulers (from southern Romania) of the time (in Romanian: "voievod"), as evidenced by ancient documents (see Djuvara 1995). From an administrative standpoint, the territory of Buzău County was established in successive stages, with the distinction between villages being extremely important based on the property regime between "moşneni" (free landowners) and "clăcaşi" (servants/serfs).[3]

Owning land as one's own was a sign of belonging to the "moşneni" social group. The land was either owned by the community, and it was cultivated by all its members together ("în devălmăşie"[4] system, see Stahl 1998), or it was owned by individuals, although the cadastral registration of properties started only with the modern age. Distinctively, the "clăcaşi" had no land of their own, apart from the one around the house. For this reason, they had to work on the land owned by the local nobles (boyars), or on the land of the monasteries.

The freeholder peasants had a very strong connection with the land. This was reflected in their social status: owning land would not only provide for livelihood, but also secured freedom of movement and social ascent. Land played an equally important part in each person's inheritance, as it was passed down within the family.

Since they did not own any land and, therefore, could not grow crops on their own land, serfs worked the land belonging to the local nobility or monasteries, dividing the harvest into three parts: one for the peasant labourers, and the other two for the landowner. As the locals explained (for example, Ioana L., age 80, 2015, Cojanu), this was how the system operated even at the beginning of the 20th century on the estate of the boyars Georgescu and Atena Fotescu in the village of Cojanu, in accordance with the old organizational system, which remained in effect even after the Agrarian Reform (see also Nacu 2015).

Oral tradition played an important part in the process of transmitting and demarcating landowners' properties, since the cadastral registration of land is a relatively modern practice. As far back as the Middle Ages, land ownership was based on the community's collective memory: oral tradition was used to establish property boundaries. In this regard, each family claimed a specific lineage to justify its right to the estate. In Beceni community, for example, the main landowners were members of Becean family (from whom the village

takes its name), the Beldimănescu, Enăchescu, Enculescu, Mărgăriți and Potlogea families, each with its own ancestor (Iorgulescu 1892). Even after 1989, when the communist regime fell, this type of memory helped recreate the ownership of the land in the villages, proving its practical character. During the communist era, most private land was confiscated by the state to establish collective farms. After 1989, this land was returned to its rightful owners, and the restoration of property rights was carried out not only on the basis of archival documents but also by drawing on the memories of the community's oldest members.

This memory is still kept alive in the villages from Buzău region. Sometimes, it separates the villages of the freeholders from the ones of the former servants. A representative example is the legends talking about the founding of Nucu [Walnut] village. It is believed that the village is the result of the union of two separate villages: a "moşneni" village, and a "clăcaşi" [serfs] village, the border between the two being signalled by an old walnut tree. "The border was the walnut, but afterward, the village became one and incorporated the walnut, hence the name of the village, Nucu" (Andrei D., 56, 2014, Bozioru).

Landownership was so important that, at times, places' names were chosen based on the name of former, or current owners. For example, in the village of Muscelu Cărămănești (Colți commune), the territory is divided into distinct areas, named according to the nicknames of the various families: Cârcegi, Lăcșor, Popești, Dimineşti, Greci, or Camburu (Dumitru R., nicknamed Cârcegi, 84, 2014, Muscelu Cărămănești).

The distribution of the villages and households can be strikingly different. There are villages very close to the water source, with houses clustered close together, sheltered from the wind and frost, such as those on hilltops and mountains. Such villages are those built along the watercourses of large valleys, like the Slănic Valley: the villages of Gura Teghii, Lopătari, Mânzăleşti, Vintila Vodă, Niculeşti, Gura Dimienii, Beceni. Unlike these "valley villages," there are also scattered villages, such as those in the commune of Bisoca, which have a different type of structure, with houses being scattered throughout the landscape. The average distance between the houses is 200 metres; some houses are as close as 50 metres apart, while others are as far as 1 kilometre apart. For example, Bisoca commune consists of 1.200 households spread over 7.200 hectares. As for a village like Bozioru, mainly located in the valley bottom, the area is smaller, approximately 3.600 hectares.

Another important criterion for the location of villages is the orientation of the land in relation to the sun's path. Since the climate is harsh in winter, sunlight is essential, which is why the houses face south. "We sought the midday sun. Since ancient times, villages have been oriented toward the sun. Also, in Aluniş or Scăieni, wherever you go, the houses face the rising sun" (Dumitru R., nicknamed Cârcegi, 84, 2014, Muscelu Cărămănești).

Roads and communication routes are another important aspect taken into account when founding a village. Since the Middle Ages, the most important route that crossed the region was known as "Buzău road" and was connecting Transylvania (mainly the city of Braşov) to the Danube, especially Brăila's port (Petrescu-Sava 1973). The traders who used this route came from the city of Braşov and, as early as the 15th century, possessed written documents that guaranteed them free passage through the territory of Wallachia. In this way, merchandise was transferred to the Danube on the "Buzău road", as well (Bogdan 1905). In the city of Buzău, where the administrative and customs offices were located, this road intersected with another that connected the seat of government of Wallachia (located at the fortress of Târgovişte) with the seat of government of Moldavia (located at the fortress of Suceava). This second road was referred to in documents as "Bogdan's Road" (after the name of the ruling family of Moldavia) and passed through the town of Râmnicu Sărat, which in turn became a border town with a customs office responsible for transit trade (Petrescu-Sava 1973).

It wasn't just merchants who used the old medieval roads, but also shepherds during the transhumance season. As a result, different communities maintained close ties with one another, both economically and culturally. Between winter and spring, shepherds from the mountainous regions of Transylvania, as well as from the Buzău area, would drive their flocks of sheep to the plains of Ialomița, Brăila, or Dobrogea. As transhumance became increasingly difficult to practice due to restrictions (of an administrative nature, such as crossing land owned by others), many shepherds chose to establish new settlements on the plains and settle there. As a result, the "mountain people" (in Romanian: "munteni") founded villages bearing names traditionally used to designate sheep pens (e.g. Târla, Târlii).

Monastic communities in the Late Middle Ages

The Buzău region experienced significant development between the 16th and 17th centuries, when the local boyars distinguished themselves politically and even fought for the throne of Wallachia. One of Wallachia's rulers, Vlad Vintilă Vodă (who reigned from 1532 to 1535), was born in the village that bears his name today (Vintilă Vodă). As a result, economic and cultural development surged in the region, and trade flourished (as mentioned above, the Buzău area was located on the trade route connecting Brașov to Brăila).

A turning point was the decision of Prince Radu Vodă (1496–1508) to institutionalize the Orthodox Church, which he would go on to strengthen through generous donations. It was he who appointed Nifon (between 1503 and 1505), the former Patriarch of Constantinople, to lead ecclesiastical affairs. Nifon advised the prince to establish two new bishoprics in Wallachia, one in Râmnic and one in Buzău (Iorgulescu 1892).

During the same period, the Diocese of Buzău was established, and numerous monasteries, hermitages, and churches were built. Before long, the diocese came to own extensive agricultural lands surrounding the monasteries and hermitages. All of these properties were transferred to state ownership following the secularization of the monasteries in 1864.[5]

However, the large number of churches and places of worship dating from this period is one of the reasons why the residents of Buzău are proud of their area. This region is home to the largest number of religious settlements in medieval Wallachia. Among the ancient churches and monasteries that have survived to this day are the monasteries at Poiana Mărului, Găvanu, Rătești, and Ciolanu, as well as the churches in Gura Dimienii, Vintilă Vodă, Berca, Cârnu, Bălănești, Bozioru, Brăești, Ruginoasa, and Pinu.

Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Buzău's villages still have a strong spiritual and economic connection to the church as the land belonging to monasteries and boyars was cultivated by the „clăcași" peasants, in a shared crop system.





The wooden church from the Monsatery Poiana Mărului, 18th century monument, Bisoca commune.





Fragment of the iconostas of the Găvanu Monastery,
18th century monument, Mânzălești commune.

The wooden church from Găvanu Monastery,
18th century monument, Mânzălești commune.



Sideroad cross in Scăieni village.



Sideroad cross in Dogari village.



Wooden fence and roadside cross in Bozioru village.

Modern Age and possessions laws

The land reforms involving the distribution of property from 1864 to 1921 played an essential role in the relationship between the inhabitants of Buzău and the territory. Following Alexandru Ioan Cuza's[6] reform in 1864, the peasants were given land from the boyars' estates, monasteries and the Buzău Episcopate. The land reform was accompanied by the secularisation of the monasteries' properties, as mentioned above.

Much of the land owned by the Buzău Episcopate is distributed to peasants. To commemorate this event, the people of Bisoca still perform the „Pluguşorul" tradition on the first day of the New Year. This custom is intended to ensure the health and prosperity of the households in which it is performed. This tradition is performed in many regions, but what makes it unique in Bisoca is that it is known as „Cuza's Pluguşor" (Constantin M., 56, Bisoca, 2016), which reminds us of the significant role that the secularisation of monastery lands played in the lives of local peasants.

Locals also received land as a result of their participation in the First World War, but these plots were located far away in the plains of Buzău County or in the south-eastern regions near Buzău, in the counties of Ialomiţa and Brăila. The advantage of the plain crop land is that it is more productive from an agricultural point of view, complementing the hilly and mountainous areas where the villages were situated. Thus, the main crops (wheat, corn, rye, etc.) were planted there.

The constant movement between the mountain households and the plains is one of the characteristics of the collective identity of the Buzău peasants. Villagers would spend much of their time working seasonally in the plains: in spring to plough and sow, in summer to weed the corn or reap the wheat, and in autumn to harvest. Only some family members would go to work in the plains: usually the men and older children. The women would stay at home with the younger children and elderly grandparents. They took care of the household and were in charge of animal husbandry and other typical activities (Stelian D., 84, 2015, Ulmu).

To reach the plain, the Colţi peasants travelled in an ox-drawn carriage for six days and six nights (Stelică V., 81, Colţi, 2014). They travelled in groups, with several families coming together to follow the Colţi – Pătârlagele – Ciuta – Pârscov – Măgura route. When the animals were getting tired, the convoy stopped and the people rested. „They cooked near the wheel of the wagon" to avoid being attacked by thieves, which is why they travelled together. They took turns to stay on guard at night. Sometimes, they changed the route to avoid the Ciuta forest, which was considered the most dangerous place for thieves to attack during the period between the two world wars (Filofteea B., 72, 2014, Colţi).

As previously mentioned, shepherds would settle in the plains, and sometimes peasants from the Buzău mountain region would also settle there, founding new villages. One spectacular example is the village of Munteni Buzău in the Ialomiţa department, which was founded in 1882 by new landowners born in the north-western part of the Buzău area. They brought not only their personal belongings from their native mountain village, but also wood from their former churches to build a new place of worship in their new settlement. The church's patron saints are the archangels Michael and Gabriel. The stone used for construction was also brought from the Buzău area (Stoian 2016).

This oscillation between the mountains and the plains continued until the establishment of collective farms by the communist state between 1949 and 1962, when inhabitants of Buzău villages were forcibly displaced from the land they owned in plains villages.

Old house in Pănătău village.



Old house in Cojanu village.



Restored old house in Bozioru village.



Old barn in Valea Salciei village.



Old house in Odăile village.



Window from inside an old house.

Wooden gate in Pănătău village.



Communist regime and pre-emption of properties

Starting from the communist period, peasants in the Buzău area were left without a significant portion of their property. Their land was taken by the state and forcibly incorporated into "Gospodării agricole de producție" [Agricultural Production Establishments]. First, the peasants lost the land in the plains, and then the land they owned in the mountains, mainly forests, which became state property managed by Forestry Administrations (see Buzea-Abagiu 2009). The first years of "collectivisation," as the process is known, were extremely dramatic. To make the peasants give up their agricultural possessions, the state forced them to accept the state quota system, meaning they had to give part of all their produce, such as fruit, animal products, various crops and hay, to the state. The wealthier a family was, the more quotas they had to give to the state on all their products. The wealthier peasants were therefore subjected to greater hardship, as they were considered by the local administration and politicians to be part of the "chiaburi" [rich] category and to have exploited the other peasants. Not only did these people lose their land, but they were sometimes arrested and their families were pushed to the margins of society.

Gheorghe Ganea from Pârscov was part of such a family. It is said that the family became wealthy by finding a treasure containing several kilos of gold. True or not, Gheorghe Ganea was a renowned fruit tree cultivator. He produced brandy which he transported himself to Constanța harbour. Even before the Second World War, Pârscov was a well-known village for its brandy trade. Alongside the brandy, Ganea would also transport sheep pastrami to Constanța. It was for this, and for the 800 hectares of land he owned in the plain region, that the communist regime imprisoned him. Above all, Gheorghe Ganea was a fabulous character, even for the wealthy peasants of the time. It should also be noted that anyone who owned fewer than 3–4 hectares of land, a few more animals, or simply a brandy boiler could have been included in this social group of "chiaburi," or affluent peasants.

The political regime installed in 1945 violated private property rights and radically changed people's lifestyles. However, it did not succeed in completely replacing the rural economy, which was based on subsistence farming and working from home. From the 1950s onwards, the lack of land forced men to seek employment in industries such as petroleum exploitation, construction and local manufacturing. The establishment of small industries in villages transformed them into small urban communities, as is the case with the Berca commune, which is now a small city. During the communist era, there was a fruit processing factory and a local construction materials processing industry.

Although men commuted to work, this did not significantly alter village life or the way households were sustained. Even between the two world wars, men worked away from home for months at a time, either in the fields or as shepherds in the plains, or in the forests. Women were responsible for running the household, a role they continued to fulfil when the communist regime was established. The peasant household proved strong enough and the state started exploiting this by imposing strict quotas and regulations on the acquisition of agricultural products. Each household had to pay the state in products, such as a certain number of animals or a certain quantity of milk or eggs. In return, they would receive sugar or oil. Each village had a consumer cooperative where people could purchase these goods in exchange for the produce they themselves had grown or reared. To prevent goods, particularly young animals, from being hidden, censuses of household goods were organised frequently, even unannounced.

Although the communist regime made an important contribution to the modernisation of the villages, this modernisation was relatively approximate. Some roads were paved, but not as many as would have been necessary. Villages situated higher up in the mountains still have poor road access, which is difficult even today. Connections between villages and big cities were usually by bus, with one leaving in the morning and returning in the evening, mainly for men working in industries. In Bisoca, for example, car transport only appeared in 1972; until then, people used chariots pulled by two oxen.

> Until 1982, no family had fewer than a pair of oxen, a cow, a heifer and at least ten sheep and two or three pigs. To provide for a pair of oxen in winter, hay from two hectares was needed, and this had to be cut, gathered, transported and placed in barns. In total, one would need around six hectares of land for all the animals. (Costică H., 68, 2014, Bisoca)

Changes after 1989

Following the collapse of the communist regime in December 1989, life changed across the country. For peasants in the Buzău region, this meant recovering the land that had been taken from them by the state for collective farms. Although there were immediate attempts to address the injustices of the communist period, such as the passing of the Land Law No. 18/1991, it was not until 2000 that a law was enacted (Law No. 1/2000) to specify how the restitution of agricultural land taken by the communist regime should be managed. The land was returned to its rightful owners, but this process encountered numerous difficulties due to legislative gaps and the area's specific property regime. The local memory played an important part in setting out the boundaries of ownership: these were still remembered by the elderly population. Currently, most of the land in the plain region is owned by small local associations that use the land for crops and repay the owners in products and money. This is because the local population is ageing and no longer has an interest in working the land themselves.

For this reason, it is important to consider the region's current demographic situation, given that it is under threat from population decline and rapid ageing. In this respect, the statistical data from the last three censuses is relevant. For example, while the 18 communes had 53,971 inhabitants in 2002 (Census 2002), the same territory had 48,277 inhabitants in 2011 (Census 2011), a decline of 10% in just 9 years.[7] The Census in 2021 was even more dramatic, with a considerable decrease in population of more than 18% since 2011. The figures speak for themselves: in 2021, the population was 39,439 (Census 2021). In fact, in 2014, one of the years in which we conducted research in the area, only one birth was recorded in the village of Colți by October, as one of our interlocutor (Ștefan F., 65) observed.

This depopulation process is due to the fact that, over the past 20 years, more and more people have sought work in other areas, especially in nearby cities, but also in other countries. This has led to a migration strategy (see Sandu 2000). One of the cities in Romania that people choose to move to is Bucharest, which is situated less than 120 km away. There is a significant community of people from Buzău here. At the end of the GeoSust project in April–June 2017, an exhibition was organised at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant to present the results of the research conducted in the area. This exhibition attracted a large number of visitors and brought together a community of researchers from various institutions who had

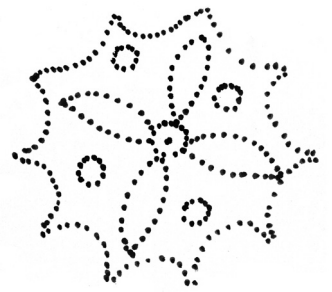
been conducting fieldwork in the Buzău area. It also brought together people from the region who were proud to see the wonders of their region exhibited to a wider public. Although migration is one of the major triggers of change in the contemporary period, people still keep the memories of their native villages alive and feel part of these communities, even when they are far away.

Meanwhile, those staying at home must deal with being separated from their loved ones and, above all, keeping the group's memories alive. This has a positive impact on people's sense of belonging to the community and is important for social cohesion, although it faces several challenges brought about by new socio-cultural phenomena, such as migration.

Conclusions

Buzău Land is a rich cultural area. Although the local economy and traditional culture have undergone dramatic changes in the past hundred years, the people here still know how to use local resources to meet their needs. These communities have evolved in close connection with their territory for centuries. Even during the communist regime, when they suffered losses of land and people who commuted to the city or moved away from the villages, they managed to preserve a significant proportion of the skills and knowledge of local crafts, passed on intergenerationally. There are still people here who know the history of the sites and can recount stories that breathe life into the landscape. They commemorate their ancestors or recall particular events that occurred in the area. They also participate in rituals that define community life. The people of the area have an active memory of social and political events that have influenced community life over the past century.

Many cultural elements that can be used to promote local values and contribute to the sustainable development of the territory are still kept alive in the collective memory of the communities in the Buzău Land Geopark. Situated at the crossroads of different historical provinces, the Buzău area is currently facing cultural challenges. Local intellectuals and cultural workers from outside the communities are collaborating to raise awareness of the area's cultural richness among the locals, thereby strengthening their identity.



NOTES

1. Local knowledge concerning land management has been referred to as "traditional ecological knowledge" (TEK) in recent years, particularly under the influence of the natural sciences. It is considered a cumulative body of knowledge, practices and beliefs about the relationships between living beings and their environment, which has evolved through adaptive processes (see Berkes et al., 2000). This definition has many similarities with the definition of intangible cultural heritage (see Article 2 of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted in Romania by Law No. 410/2005), so we will refer to it as such.

2. Valer Butură (1978) identifies 49 ethnographic regions in Romania.

3. In old Wallachia, the "moșneni" were free peasants ("moșnean" being derived from "moș," meaning "common ancestor"), while the "clăcași" were dependent peasants who shared the harvest with the boyars or monasteries (those who worked took one part of the harvest, while the owner took two). The villages of Pinu, Lopătari, Colți, Odăile and Robești, for example, were owned by "moșneni," while Valea Salciei, Cojani and Pârscov were owned by former "clăcași."

4. "Devălmășie" is a specific form of land ownership and use, whereby all members of the community own and use the plot with no specific quotas for each owner. How the land is used is decided by the community according to each member's needs. In Romania, this was common in the south of the country (Wallachia) and in Moldova (see Stahl, 1998).

5. The secularisation of land belonging to monasteries was a process initiated in 1864 during the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza as ruler of Romania (Moldavia and Wallachia combined between 1862 and 1866). Consequently, ecclesiastical institutions owned a quarter of the agricultural land rather than the newly formed Romanian state, which had unified the regions of Moldavia and Wallachia.

6. Elected ruler of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859, Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1820–1873) united the two Romanian historical regions. He was the first Romanian ruler to introduce land reform, abolishing feudal and monastic properties and conferring ownership to peasants.

7. There are in fact abandoned or almost abandoned settlements: Examples include Mățara (in the Colți commune), Grabicina de Sus (in the Scorțoasa commune), and Țâțârligu (in the Berca commune).

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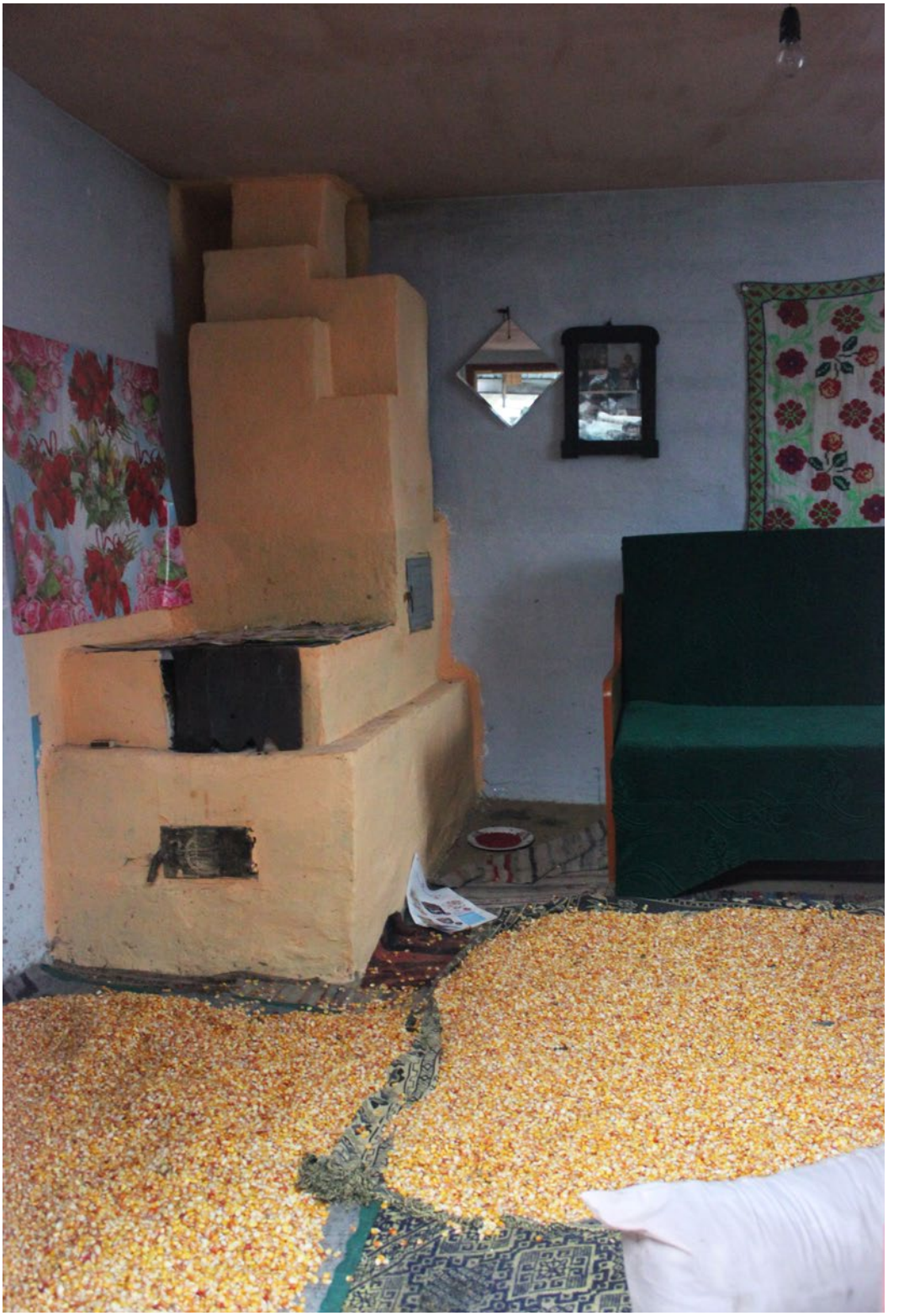
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CHAPTER IV



On the street, in Bozioru village.



Adobe stove inside an old house, Scăieni village.

Landscape Practices and Habitation in Buzău Land

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors discuss three different but interconnected aspects of the cultural landscape of the Buzău Land: natural resources, traditional activities and livelihood, starting from concrete, practical elements as well as from cultural symbols and meanings.
The local natural resources (wood, salt, stone, mineral waters, mineral oil springs, amber, plants) have enabled the local people to survive for hundreds of years without great prosperity, but at low cost and with the preservation of biodiversity. Traditional activities have always been organically adapted to these resources. The houses are built using archaic techniques, taking care of the environment, but at the same time according to a vision of life that transcends the material realm. The house, seen as the "centre of the world," reflects the inhabitants' conceptions of earth and sky, life and death.



Introduction

Landscape is a dynamic entity, contained within a temporal framework, that speaks of past, present and future together (M. Gravari-Barbas 2014), as well as an inflection point between the material and the immaterial and between the cultural and the natural.

The environment has a direct impact on human societies, providing the resources necessary for survival and persistence, while humans in turn act on the environment, transforming it in a variety of ways in their endeavour to appropriate the resources they need. Human action on the environment is, however, culturally conditioned: people "interpret" nature and use it on the basis, for example, of their traditional knowledge[1] passed down from generation to generation and continuously adapted to new social and economic conditions.

Habitats provide a good illustration of the dynamic relationship between nature and culture, between external and internal, social and religious environments. Humans construct and interpret their space as conditioned by the objective data of the natural environment, while at the same time taking into account their own cultural coordinates. Within this topic, Amos Rapoport (1990) rightly places inhabitation at the intersection between culture and the natural environment, with all the related meanings: to possess a space, to construct and improve it. When experimenting with the environment, people consider beliefs about the world and life, heaven and earth, the divine and humanity (Rapoport 1990).



On the road towards Bisoca village.

Marked by a variety of living units, the landscape of Buzău is seen as a consequence of the practical use of natural resources, while giving the impression of an archaic way of thinking, based on the existence of a "centre" around which the world gravitates and functions. The empirical field data that we have gathered during our research prove the importance of perceiving local heritage as a complex entity, made up of tangible, material elements as well as intangible, immaterial elements. Any attempt to preserve local heritage should not be limited to the preservation of the material traces left in the landscape, such as vernacular architecture, for example, but should also include the study of intangible cultural heritage. These include customs and representations relevant to an area-specific way of thinking.

Local activities in the specific socio-historical context

Until the 20th century, Buzău Land's communities had low requirements. The communities relied on the principles of subsistence economy, a moral economy (see Scott 1976), which ensured their survival in exchange for a minimum of prosperity. As a result, the inhabitants of this area did not make full use of the resources available, which means that Buzău Land preserves exceptional biodiversity, varied geological resources and a relatively stable balance between human communities and the environment, while many regions in the world are facing resources over-exploitation.



Building a haystack, Bisoca village.

Within the aspiring geopark there are many tradition-bound rural communities with a rural economy based partly on self-reliance and subsistence. This means providing for the needs of the family first. Excess products are redirected towards ever larger concentric circles: the extended family, neighbours and cohabitants and only then, in the next stage, is the excess of products launched on the free market. This has meant that, to a large extent, kinship and neighbourly relations have underpinned economic relations from production to the point of sale. Mutually supportive relationships were also maintained as a result of the use of old, traditional, low-productivity techniques in all productive areas: agriculture, animal husbandry, exploitation of natural resources (salt, stone, wood, mineral oil springs). The reasons for the maintenance of traditional techniques generally involve external factors: technological progress was slow to reach the villages, only reaching them towards the end of the 19th century, and at prohibitively high prices. But there were also internal causes: adapted to local conditions, traditional techniques proved their effectiveness over time and, although they did not bring high profits, there were no significant costs either.

The main economic resource of rural communities in this area was the land itself. It determined the traditional activities of the inhabitants. Animal husbandry was the primary activity due to the limited arable land in a mountainous region. In general, men looked after the animals, particularly during winter. Children were responsible for caring for the animals in the pastures, during summer. Women tended the animals, tended the field and vegetable gardens, raised the children and worked for half a year (in winter) to process textile fibres (flax, cotton, wool, hemp, raw silk) into clothes, clothing fabrics, carpets, blankets and decorative fabrics.

It is easy to comprehend why this had an impact on the social institution of the family. Normally, men received as dowry the land and grounds of the house, the forest, animals and agricultural implements, while women primarily brought the objects and fabrics that were needed in the house, as well as the animals. But if the woman also had a piece of land, it was easier to marry. After the agrarian reform after the First World War, the inhabitants of many mountain villages were given land in the plain region (Romanian Plain), and used to go to these settlements, to work their land, with an ox-cart (Ion C., 80, 2014, Colţi; Iacob N., 56, 2016, Trestioara; Stelică V., 81, 2014, Colţi). Those whose land was not favourable for growing maize obtained it through barter or trade.

Peasants practiced a system of adapting their occupations to the available land. For example, they raised as many animals as they could afford to feed with the hay they cultivated (calculated as follows: two hectares of hay for a pair of oxen; 5 sheep for a cart of hay; a cow meant 5 sheep - inherited system - Dobra D., 63, 2015, Valea Salciei). On average, they had 7-10 sheep, a pair of bulls for transport and a cow or two to provide milk and cheese for the family, 2 or 3 pigs. During the summer, shepherds tended peasants' flocks in the mountain pastures. Under these conditions, although there was not much profit, the losses were not critical and the family's material situation was balanced.

Today, however, only a few people still keep as many animals as they did before the Second World War, because farming is no longer the most important source of income. Cows and bulls are still kept for labour, but the number of sheep has fallen dramatically, meaning that only a few sheep owners in the village produce milk and cheese, mostly for personal consumption and little for trade. In the weekly village markets, the cheese that is sold mostly comes from shepherds in Covasna, the neighbouring region over the mountains (direct observation at a Sunday market in Lopătari on 27th of November 2016). Even so, there have been some cases of sheep farming development in recent years, due to new initiatives of younger sheep owners (Bisoca, Valea Salciei, Lopătari).

In the 20th century, lack of profitability led to labour migration. Men left for many years to work in the oil fields or as shepherds, but returned regularly. For example, animal breeders from Buzău became famous on the other side of the mountains, in Covasna region, Transylvania. Women had to carry the difficult household tasks alone. In the inter-war period, companies such as "Columbia," "Romanian-Belgian Oil," "Steaua Română," engaged in oil exploitations; natural gas was extracted in Beceni, Beciu, Niculeşti and Policiori; a lignite mine was in Ojasca; "Bahna" and "Aluniş" amber mines in Colţi; a gypsum mine in Odăile; and there were spas of local interest in Meledic and Fişici, containing sodium chloride, iodide and bromine waters and chalybeate waters. All of these employ local labour.[2]

Nowadays, oil exploitation still takes place in Beceni, Berca and Scorţoasa. During the communist period, men also worked in logging and turned to secondary occupations, such as resin collectors – people who collect the resin formed on trees in the summer and hand it over to the local forestry administration in the autumn, were receiving in return a large amount of money and/or products, such as corn, wood, etc. (Constantin M., 56, 2014, Bisoca). They also found other solutions to increase their income, by engaging in economic exchanges with the lowland villages (until the middle of the 20th century); or work during the communist period in factories that were built nearby (glass, furniture). Some of the families have moved to the cities and, in the last decades, people have been migrating abroad, in search for work.



Natural and economic resources

Buzău Land has a wide variety of natural resources that have been exploited by local people since ancient times, mainly for personal use and very little for trade. These resources are summarised below:

Water. It has been used for both human and animal consumption. People learnt to identify water sources and dug many springs. Water was the driving force behind water mills and baize (textiles used for cutting the "cioareci"—traditional tight-fitting white woollen trousers and for winter clothes) mills, which are now abandoned and replaced by small grain mills powered by electricity. In natural and man-made ponds, they raised fish and crabs for consumption, but they also made a pond for melting hemp to obtain textile fibres (fish cannot live in water in which hemp melts).

An old legend says that in the water of a brook in the village of Bisoca, in the 19th century, gold was mined from the sand using sheep wool (Gheorghe B., 52, 2014, Bisoca; Constantin M., 56, 2014, Bisoca), but geologists say that there is no possibility of gold ores in the area. This legend can be heard in many mountainous parts of Romania, and the writer Vasile Voiculescu, a native of the Buzău region, mentions it in his novel Dragoste magică [Magical Love] (published posthumously in 1966).

Mineral water. Some mineral waters with curative properties exist in several places. At the beginning of the 20th century, some ferruginous waters from Meledic were commercialised and even sold abroad (Mânzălești 2013, 62-63; Valer B., 55, 2014, Mânzălești; Gheorghe S., 65, 2016, Trestioara). At the same time, the inhabitants knew some sulphurous water springs that they used for bathing as an anti-rheumatic treatment (Dobra D., 63, 2015, Valea Salciei).

Stone. It was widely used for construction and roads, but only locally. People used to dig it from rivers, from places they had known for generations. The availability of a stone with the right roughness led to the development of cross carving and the emergence of professional stonemasons. Crosses were sold locally or in other, more distant villages (Ion B., 70, 2015, Ciuta). Near the geopark area there is the stone pit of Măgura, exploited extensively by professional stonemasons from Ciuta village.

Clay. It is used in construction, for houses (less nowadays) and outbuildings. It is extracted from certain sites in the area of each village. When the clay pit is situated on a piece of private land, the person who takes the clay pays or offers products in exchange (Costică H., 68, 2014, Bisoca). Clay is also used in the production of pottery vessels, and there is a famous pottery centre in Mânzălești (the collection of the Romanian Peasant Museum holds 154 ceramic pieces from Mânzălești).

Chalkstone. A lot of villages had chalk pits where chalk was fired, for local use, but also for trade. Today, most of the chalk pits are abandoned, as people prefer to buy building materials commercially.

Salt. There are numerous salt pits throughout the Buzău Mountains, which can be exploited from the surface. Salt has been mined from known sites for generations for both domestic and commercial exchanges. The salt extracted from the salt marshes of Luncile (Lopătari village) and Sările (Bisoca village) was the most appreciated (Ioan Z., 59, 2016, Lopătari; Constantin B., 72, 2016, Lopătari; Costel M., 58, 2016, Bisoca). However, salt exploitation is sporadic. There have not been massive exploitations, due to the lack of infrastructure and, currently, investors. However, the inhabitants exploit the salt water springs for domestic use, to preserve food during winter and to cook local recipes that are adapted to the different salt concentrations of the springs.

Mineral oil springs. Many inhabitants exploited the mineral oil (petroleum) that floated on the surface of the springs. It was used for domestic use, for oiling ironware, for treating pig slag and for trade. It is known that, in the 19th century, some people were able to extract lamp oil from this water-petroleum mixture using rudimentary equipment. They sold it in lowland villages or used it for lighting (Gheorghe B., 52, 2014, Bisoca; Constantin M., 56, 2014, Bisoca).

Amber. Amber was exploited in Colți, but without much economic value for the inhabitants. Even so, they still work amber locally as an alternative source of occasional income. Apart from that, amber is a symbolic product, being used in some customs (at baptism, as explained by Dumitru N., 75, 2014, Colți), or symbolic local gestures (welcoming new family members after the wedding, as mentioned by Ciprian C., 37, 2016, Colți).

Forests. Feudal villages owned land in condominiums. The descendants of those leaving the condominium, becoming owners, had a small number of hectares of forest, but rationally exploited them for personal buildings and firewood. After World War II, the communist regime confiscated all the forests, and after 1989 many owners, being too old, sold them to large companies that cut the trees irrationally (Ioan Z., 58, 2015, Lopătari). But there are also situations where the forest has been carefully tended (in Bisoca). Oak ("gârneața"), and conifers were exploited for construction. Conifer wood was used to make roofing shingles. Very old willows with trunks up to two metres in diameter can be found on the farmlands. They were planted by people to mark property boundaries, shade animal shelters or exploit their flexible branches. They used to make chains for fences, posts, gates for animal shelters (Constantin M., 56, 2014, Bisoca). A species of Fraxinus ("mojdrean," "manna ash") was used to give the "țuica" (local brandy) a golden colour. Maple was used for tanning. The Roma communities living in some villages (such as Brătilești, and Brăești) had no ownership over land, but are famous for making wooden spoons, wood carvings, pans, pots, eyelets, and corn baskets made of softwood (willow, or lime), which they sell in neighbouring villages. Their wide area of use suggests the deep knowledge the inhabitants had of the properties of the trees in their environment.

Sea buckthorn. It is a halophiles plant and therefore grows in abundance in Buzău area. This shrub with medicinal properties, which grows wild, was not appreciated until the 1970s and 1980s (Gheorghe B., 52, 2014, Bisoca). The locals did not know about its properties, although foresters forced them to collect sea buckthorn fruits for export. They learnt about his properties in 1990, when the information became accessible. In recent years, it has been intensively harvested and sold in the country by small businesses or companies that export it to Germany.

Local plant and animal varieties. Isolation has helped some old plant varieties to resist or even adapt to new varieties over time. Local plum varieties, "Grasă," "Vânătă de Buzău," "Roșie de Buzău," 'Țigănești" are all suitable for pickling and for keeping dried, smoked or in sweets. Green plums are often pickled in Lopătari (Maria B., 69, 2016). There is also a local variety of maize called "Dintele Caprei" [Goat's-Tooth].

Nowadays, there is an inherent tension between local communities in the search for ways to increase living standards, including the efficient export of local resources and the desire to preserve local traditions, as well as traditional economic practices and traditional occupations. However, in the Buzău area, the tendency of local communities is to practice and pass on inherited practices and knowledge to younger generations. These are proven solutions for efficient use of local resources and building bridges between generations.



Label from the beginning of the 20th century about the mineral water exploited in Meledic village.



Stone wall, Lopătari village.



The wooden church in Ruginoasa village, 19th century monument, Brăești comune.



Sea buckthorn plant, close to Bisoca village.



The salty bank, Meledic village.



Old fence in Pănătău village.

Living in Buzău Land

Housing is one of the essential features of the Buzău landscape. Both older and newer building techniques, as well as the significance of the different residential buildings, contribute to the area's unique character and its tangible and intangible heritage.

The traditional houses in the Buzău region were built using ancient techniques specific to the area, the work being carried out by local craftsmen skilled in carving and shaping stone and woodworking. Although building a house was mainly a task for members of the extended family, there were always skilled craftsmen around. These stone and timber builders have left a legacy built on their techniques and skills, learnt and practiced from father to son, from one generation to the next.

There are houses with wooden and strut walls, which are the most common type in mountain villages far from urban centres, but also handmade brick houses in more accessible villages influenced by the urban way of building. In addition to old (traditional) architecture, which emphasises natural materials, in recent years many houses have been built using urban construction materials and techniques that bear no resemblance to rural vernacular architecture. Nevertheless, they complement the local architectural landscape, which is characterised by the diversity of its historical development and, by extension, by the transition from traditional peasant civilisation to modern rural society. Despite all these changes, a number of ancient building techniques are still practiced today. Relatively isolated, with an infrastructure that remains inadequate and roads that are sometimes impassable, the communities still preserve housing construction techniques and knowledge inherited from their ancestors.



Cells at the Monastery Poiana Mărului, Bisoca commune.



Cells at the Rătești Monastery, Rătești village.

In mountainous areas, houses are built mainly on land, avoiding riverbeds, as can be seen in localities such as Lopătari, Valea Salciei, Bozioru and Brăiești. The terrain is quite hilly and has a tendency to slip, so that the construction of houses requires a good knowledge of the sites and favourable soils. "Living places" are chosen on the basis of older constructions that have stood the test of time, and "until they reach the stone, [the villagers of Lopătari] don't build" (Ioan Z., 58, 2015, Lopătari). Once the right place is found, the perimeter of the house is established and the foundation is started, built with stone taken from the riverbed. This is quite a difficult operation because of the uneven terrain, so the stones are brought only by carts, as is still done today in Bisoca (Costică H., 68, 2014, Bisoca). That is why houses were quite often built "on the surface", not "at the root, deep in the ground," with a foundation of stone mixed with earth (Costică H., 68, 2014, Bisoca).

The next stage of construction is the erection of the wooden house structure. The wooden floor joists and posts are connected to the stone foundation. These were connected with two rows of "spiders" or "beams" made of hazel branches. At the upper level, these were tied together into a "belt." Not just any kind of wood was used to build the frame of the house, but only hardwood, usually oak. The wood was prepared at least a year in advance. The trees to be cut and used in the construction were carefully selected according to their size and thickness. They were cut in winter, not in full growth. The wood was cut as needed and left to dry, sheltered from rain and damp. Only after it had dried was it used in construction. After assembling the wooden frame of the house, the next stage was to finish the walls. A mixture of earth, and either straw or manure, was prepared and placed between the "beams" or "slats." The walls were then plastered with the same mixture. Sometimes goat's hair mixed with dung and earth was used for plastering (e.g. in the village of Bozioru). The best manure was horse dung, as it was rich in fibre. However, the peasants of Buzău did not usually have it, due to the scarcity of horses in the area (the rugged terrain meant that oxen, which were more resistant and adapted to the morphology of the area, were needed for transport).



Old house in Florești village.



Wooden house in Brăești village.



Chicken yard in Pănătău village.



Old house from Dogari village.

Old house in Brăești village.



Finally, the beams and roofs were joined together. The houses were mostly covered with fir shingle. Installing the shingles also required special techniques, which were not mastered by most of the inhabitants. This stage required the skills of specialised craftsmen. To make it easier to cut, wooden shingle was cut along the "ribs" of the wood. To ensure durability, the shingle was coated with oil or tar, preferably taken directly from a local natural source. Once the shingle was laid, the house was nearly finished. The next steps were to fill in the walls with lime or white stone, install the sills and frames, the doors, the windows and, finally, the floors.



Wooden roof in Florești village.

The structure of the "old house" in the mountain villages of Buzau is very simple. The houses always had a wooden porch, initially open but later closed with windows. From the porch one entered a hallway that connected the two rooms of the house. To the left was always the living room, where the whole family lived. On the right was the clean guest room, where the most valuable possessions of the house were displayed: the dowry of the girls to be married or the dowry brought by the mistress of the house at her marriage. At the back of the house there was usually a pantry, and on the right-hand side an enclosure where the animals were kept over the winter. To the left, a room was used as a storeroom for provisions in winter and as a summer kitchen in warmer seasons.

The timber-framed houses were not very durable. They were houses built for a generation, two generations at most, which underwent alterations or even total reconstructions over time. However, they had the advantage of maintaining optimal temperatures: warm in winter and cool in summer. The houses were flexible and extremely resistant to earthquakes. Gradually the wood used for garden fences was replaced by wire mesh, which was cheaper and easier to install. Very small houses were extended, walls were raised and windows enlarged. In many cases, pantries were converted into living rooms. The place for receiving guests and chatting became the kitchen or the inner courtyard (a recent invention, which tends to spread in rural areas of Buzău).

The households are equipped with a variety of household outbuildings, animal shelters and household annexes. The bakery for bread, wafers and cakes was made of either brick or stone. It was built under a shed, which was used as a "summer kitchen," and was equipped with a hob that could be used for cooking.

The cottages are enclosed by a variety of fences, from wooden planks to wicker or garden plots.

There is an interesting element that can usually be found around households and villages.

The fences of the houses were usually low in height, allowing for neighbours to engage in conversations, thus fostering closeness and good relations. In fact, almost all houses had benches at their entrances, which had the same function of strengthening neighbourly ties, family bonds, and friendship among the villagers.

There are also stone and wooden crosses near the houses and enclosures, which will always catch your eye when you visit the Buzău countryside (see Passima, Manolache and Voicilă 2010). Their number is impressive, being present in the most unexpected places: crosses found near crossroads, crosses found on the outskirts of villages, crosses by the roadside and in front of houses. There are two types of crosses: those intended to commemorate the dead, and those used for votive and religious purposes. By putting up these crosses, the space was sanctified: the sacred entered the profane, everyday world. Crosses are extensions of the ecclesiastical space, the boundary between our world and the world beyond. Crosses "belong" to those who build or sponsor them, as well as to those who worship them, and are meant to help both the sponsor and the worshipper or traveller. These crosses are a sign of stability and a sign of passage, of eternal remembrance here on earth, as well as of faith in the afterlife.

Related to rites of passage and homesteading, there is an interesting ritual that we observe in the Buzău Land. It consists in the making of a miniature little house which is given to the soul of a recently deceased person 40 days after the funeral: the "alms house" (see Manolache and Passima 2015). It is made of wood or blankets and contains everything a living person would need: bed, table, chairs, television, stove, lamp, underwear, clothes, food, etc. The cottage, with all the miniature objects inside, is given to a younger or poorer family as a donation. It is dismantled and reassembled (in the case of wooden houses) in the household of the recipients, who are required to honour the person for whom it was offered, by holding a memorial service at the church. The custom is particularly interesting for the communion of faith, transcending the boundaries between our world and the world beyond, but also between young and old, rich and poor. The memory and remembrance of the dead are centred on the notion of home, which is symbolically extended by reducing its physical dimension. The house thus appears as an existential matrix, a bridge between heaven and earth, an extension of the human person on the road from "here" to "the hereafter."



Roadside cross in Brăești village.

Roadside cross close to Bisoca village.



Conclusions

The landscape of the Buzău Land is organic and traditionally sustainable. It is centred on the use of local resources, the perpetuation of old occupations, building and processing techniques, practices and spatial representations. All these elements still remind us of a pre-modern way of thinking, in which people can communicate not only within a natural and social environment, but also within an invisible, intangible, divine world. A good example of the perpetuation of this archaic way of thinking is the dwelling specific to the area. There is the village house. There's the little cottage on the hill, a seasonal dwelling used during periods of field labour. There are country-side houses. There is the church, or the "House of the Lord," but also the "house of grace," a communal house where alms are given. And, of course, there is the alms house (the house of the soul). All these make up a space that evokes transcendence and the link between the seen and the unseen, the physical and the divine.



NOTES

1. "Traditional ecological knowledge", see Berkes et al. (2000).

2. The Project *Interwar Romania*, http://romaniainterbelica.memoria.ro/judete/buzau/ , last accessed 11 June 2025.

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A family in front of their house. 1965. Courtesy of Cecilia Petrescu, Mânzălești.

CHAPTER V



"Fierbătorile" ["At the boilers," that is the mud volcano] from Beciu village.



Balcony of an old house, Beciu.

Intangible Heritage in Buzău Land

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ABSTRACT

In the Buzău region, the landscape surrounding communities is not a neutral space, but rather an active and meaningful one (Tilley 1994), populated by cultural symbols and linked to symbolic references, constituting a cultural construct (Tylor 2008; Ingold 1993). These spaces and their uses are imbued with intangible heritage, reflected in local tales of ogres, dragons, strange apparitions, or giants. This chapter explores how intangible heritage is considered important in local communities in the Buzău area, taking into account local legends and stories that explain and narrate the landscape, as well as experiences people have personally encountered or those passed down through cultural transmission. Another point of interest in this chapter concerns the ritual and symbolic gestures and knowledge that local healers still use to cure people through magical practices and beliefs. Both of these features of intangible heritage are considered important for explaining local communities' attachment to their traditional values and heritage, thus becoming a point of reference for defining local identity.

Introduction

The identity of the members of a given community is determined primarily by their individual personalities, but it is also culturally constructed, as "human persons are imagined to assimilate elements of collective identities into their unique personal identities" (Handler 1994, 28). Essential and, at the same time, constructed, identity is strongly influenced by the socio-cultural context (fluid and multiple, as it is continuously constructed and reconstructed – see Rusu 2009) and, at the same time, by the natural habitat in which people live. As a cultural construct, intangible heritage has an active contribution to shaping and defining collective identity, which, in order to exist, is "produced and reproduced at an individual level" (Rusu 2009, 41). In other words, local identity is largely influenced and determined by people's knowledge, beliefs, customs, language and social status.

The intangible cultural heritage is a key focus for us, as it plays an important role in a region's sustainable development. In addition to possible economic progress, long-term development implies ensuring, as well, a strong sense of continuity and identity for the local population and, consequently, giving them reasons to be proud of their local culture.

However, we recognize that intangible heritage, like the broader concept of cultural heritage, is constantly adapting to new circumstances. It consists of values that have been passed down from one generation to the next within the social group, but which are constantly influenced by changes within societies. Thus, cultural traditions are dynamic: continuity and change coexist and complement each other (see Handler, and Linnekin 1984; Mihăilescu 2004). Just as culture as a whole is not static but is constantly evolving, a community's cultural heritage is subject to change and adaptation to the new values that a community holds dear (see Loulansky 2006). In fact, culture is subject to a process of heritage creation[1] (see Iuga 2022), i.e. a process of selection and re-semantization (see Rus and Neagota 2017), but also a social production that falls within the framework of heritage policies (Mihăilescu 2012).

As part of cultural heritage, intangible heritage helps build bridges between the past, present, and future (Tudorache 2016). Promoting this heritage means empowering local communities and, in turn, contributing to their sustainable development. This requires an active appreciation of ancestral values and beliefs, as well as their transformation into heritage. And, above all, it requires adapting them—as components of heritage—to the present in a creative way and bringing them into resonance with current realities (see Mihăilescu 2017). In this way, intangible heritage would provide the cultural roots that people need today.

The Northern Buzău area is composed of several communities sharing a similar intangible heritage, which are now grouped in the Buzău Land Geopark. We see this as a strength because geoparks need structures, teams and projects that actively contribute to raising public awareness of an area's natural and cultural heritage. Their activities are planned to serve both the general public and local communities. In their programs, the geopark teams are committed to providing and creating a context in which local heritage can be fully valued. In some ways, this is linked to the notion of the "experience economy" (Pine and Gilmore, 1998), which involves placing personal experience at the centre of any resource.

As mentioned above, we value theories regarding the dynamics of traditions. These describe how the intangible heritage of a particular place manages to bring together both the continuity of cultural values and their constant adaptation to contemporary values. We should also note that we consider a community as a homogeneous group with shared cultural values (see Agrawal and Gibson 1999). These cultural values, as they are collectively asserted and internalized, contribute to increasing the level of social cohesion within the group, having a direct impact on shaping local identity (see Wetherell 2006). As it happens everywhere, in the Buzău region, although communities are modern, they are still very attached to ancient values and traditions, giving us, as specialists, a ground for highlighting local heritage values.

Let us present you two examples of intangible heritage (place narratives and incantations) from the Buzău region and tell you in what different ways it can contribute to the sustainable development of the Geopark communities.

Stories in the landscape

We will first discuss the narratives that tell stories about different places within the Buzău Land Geopark. As explained in a previous chapter, from a phenomenological approach, landscape is a cultural asset. People actively interact and connect with it, landscape is not

neutral or passive, but rather active and qualitative (Bernea 1985; Tilley 1994). It is enriched with cultural meanings and is closely linked to people's activities (Tilley 1994; Ingold 1993): geography is shaped by the mental and spiritual maps of the storytellers' home areas (see also Gunnell 2009).

Our analysis will focus on accounts of events that took place in clearly defined places, described at length by our interlocutors. The events involved either the storytellers themselves or their relatives, or ancestors, but were in both cases kept vivid in the collective memory, certifying the symbolic value of the landscape.

In Buzău Land Geopark landscape plays an active role in people's lives not only in the way it is used, but also in the way it is perceived. People in Buzău do not live in a neutral space. Their settlements are not simply surrounded by hills, nor do they simply stretch along the rivers on whose banks they are located. Rather, they inhabit a space rich with meaning, full of cultural significance and symbolic references (Mesnil 2007). Here there are plenty of stories about fantastical creatures, dog-headed chimeras, winged monsters, ogres and beautiful but mischievous goblins. People know very well which places are safe and which are dangerous, and where it is unwise to linger at certain times of the day. The landscape communicates; it is in fact a story, a presence that reveals itself over time through collective memory and references to ancestors, which give it a significant diachronic dimension. "It enfolds the lives and times of predecessors who, over the generations, have moved around in it [the landscape—n.n.] and played their part in its formation" (Ingold 1993, 152). For this reason, social scientists consider that a given landscape, in addition to being a social space, is at the same time "a cultural construct, a mirror of our memories and myths encoded with meanings which can be read and interpreted" (Taylor 2008, 3).

The Buzău Land area is given a personal identity, primarily through local place names. These reflect a subjective appropriation of the space and cause it to be perceived as a unique place with its own identity, rather than as a neutral one (see de Certeau 1990). People living here are born in a space that their ancestors have already enriched with meanings and their own experiences, transmitted in local memory. Place names "are the living memory of the historical landscape. Their meanings may refer to specific land-use systems or practices, important social phenomena, religious or supernatural beliefs, geographical and geological formations, as well as vegetation and other resources and their utilization" (Ivascu and Stanik 2024, 117). Toponyms can confirm the meaning attributed to places.

A quick example from Buzău is the names of geological sites associated with salt, one of the local natural resources. The most important is "Malul cu sare" [Salt Bank], i.e. the Meledic salt plateau, in the commune of Mânzăleşti, a name that speaks of the former sea that existed there, from which only the salt remained, now present in the composition of the "mountain," considered a shore (remains of the sea). There are several salt quarries here, but they are not in operation, only salt water from the springs is used. There are two other villages in the region that have the name "salt" in their name, such as "Săreni" (commune of Lopătari—just across the Salt Bank), where one can also find places with salt in the soil; and "Săruleşti," which is a commune itself, located 15 km from the Salt Bank, where there is another site with salt pits, exploited, at great risks, by the locals. The region is crosscut by the Slănic [Salty] river, which, after a 73 km course, flows into the Buzău River. The local history is closely linked to the region's salt, one of its natural resources, which currently sees little exploitation.



The salty bank, after a rain, seen from Săreni village.



The salty bank, Meledic village.



Two women heading to the salty water spring, Lopătari village.

But what distinguishes the geopark area of the Buzău region is that many places are given an individual identity through people's accounts. These reflect the existence of a value system and a worldview that are passed down in every local memory through oral tradition. Thus, the landscape is shaped by the stories people tell, that is, "a repertoire of legends based on both experience and tradition" (Gunnell 2009, 308), which develops it into a kind of community book or "a map with historical depth" (Gunnell 2008, 15). The narratives, stories and legends associated with places are evidence of local cultural continuity and alone constitute a statement of belonging to a particular community; these stories clearly help to define local values.

The region is home to a wealth of stories associated with specific places. These can be found in two different sources. First, mentioned from the outset because they are the best known, are the folk legends of the region, recorded by early folklorists or modern-day local folklore enthusiasts and subsequently published, sometimes at a time when these legends were still frequently told within the communities. An example of "mixed orality" (Zumthor 1990), that is, an orality that coexists with writing. The second source consists, to a larger extent, of the recordings that we, as researchers, have made, containing legends and narratives (grade I, II and III memorata, or recounted personal experiences, see Benga 2005, and Neagota 2005) that the locals still recount today. We are dealing, in this case, with a "primary and immediate or pure orality" (Zumthor 1990). These narratives are either handed down from generation to generation or created recently, especially if they talk about new experiences. Nevertheless, they are created in a way that ensures they fit within the spirit of local tradition.

Returning to the written sources of local narratives as "lieux de mémoire" (Nora 1997), as we have shown in a previous study (Iuga 2021), there are two types of publications that become a source of what Zumthor (1990) calls "second orality," that is, an orality sometimes recomposed on the basis of written sources. First there are the early writings, published in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. And second, there are the more recent publications that teachers or local cultural representatives have edited, which contain local legends. The question of orality and how literacy interacts with and influences local narratives in Buzău is extensively discussed in Anamaria Iuga's article (2021).

The earliest mentions of legends are those that received a fixed written form in known works published towards the end of the 19th century. An example is the fairy tale "The king's son who had good luck hunting" [in Romanian: Feciorul de împărat cel cu noroc la vânat], recorded by Alexandru Odobescu in 1874 in his *Pseudokineghetikos,* in which reference is made to a legend about the mud volcanoes of Beciu. Beciu is described as the place where "the Wicked One placed his cauldrons of boiling pitch," with the result that "down below, underground, the muddy earth gurgles and boils" (Odobescu 2010, 211). For the locals, in fact, these places are known as "At the boilers" [Fierbători] (Ioana Ș., 66, 2015, Beciu) or "Mud volcanoes" [Vulcanii noroioși/Pâcle] (Nicolae M., 63, 2012, Pâclele), unproductive areas where nothing grows. However, people can obtain healing substances, because mud from some volcanoes is used in mud wraps to treat rheumatism (Arbănași volcanoes—Ioana Ș., 66, 2015, Beciu; or the volcanoes in the Valea Salciei, in the place called "Chira's Eye"—Dobra D., 63, 2015, Valea Salciei).

In his writing, Odobescu also mentions the Dragon's Hill to the left of the Slănic River, which derives its name from the winged monster that tried to get rid of the king's brave son who had good luck in hunting. This hill is located close to the village of Beciu (Odobescu 2010, 210; Gheorghe B., 78, 2012, Pâclele; Nicolae M., 63, 2012, Pâclele). Another traveller who roamed Romania in the late 19th and early 20th century was Alexandru Vlahuță, who



"Fierbătorile" ["At the boilers," that is the mud volcano] from Beciu village.

in 1901 wrote enthusiastically about the amazing places he had visited, including a number of villages in northern Buzău. Vlahuță praises the beauty of these places and names some of them, but he records only one legend, that of the giant's child who finds some people and, intrigued, takes them to his mother to find out what they are: those who will inherit the Earth, the giant explained, as the giants themselves were to disappear (Vlahuță 1972, 123-124). This legend, widespread in Romania (Muşlea, and Bîrlea 2010, 190-191), was also encountered during our research trip, in the village of Scăieni, narrated by Ilie B. (92, 2014).

In addition to the two writers already mentioned, there is also the teacher Dumitru Şerbescu-Lopătari, who in 1937 recorded another legend that explains the toponymy of the Lopătari-Mânzăleşti-Bisoca region. It is the legend of Giurgiu, the shepherds' ruler, and his beautiful daughters Great Muşa [Muşa Mare—"muşa" is an archaism for "frumoasă," meaning "the beautiful one"] and Little Muşa [Muşa Mică], who were attacked by thieves. The legend refers to various toponyms that are still in use today and relates the transformation of legendary characters (both people and animals) into natural elements (rocks, rivers, mountains, etc.) In this legend we also find an explanation for the phenomenon of the "eternal flame," *ignis fatuus* (i.e. will-o'-wisp), in Romanian, "Focul viu." This would have appeared on Mount Smoleanu (a name meaning "extruded from pitch") during the final battle between the heroes of the legend. Şerbescu-Lopătari also mentions the stones called "Bucur's Table," a place that even today is a source of local pride, as it is believed to mark the birthplace of Bucur, the legendary founder of Bucharest (Bucureşti).

In the following example we explain how local legends become a cultural trademark of a village, with the active intervention of village intellectuals, contributing to the solidarity of the group and at the same time actively promoting the intangible heritage of the village. Such is the example of the legend that explains the name of the village of Mânzăleşti. It tells the

story of two brothers, Manea and Mânzală, and their foray into a place forbidden to men, a place where women gathered to dye cloth (Ilina D., 71, 2015, Mânzăleşti; Cecilia P., 65, 2015, Mânzăleşti). It is a legend also mentioned by the teacher D. Cristea from Mânzăleşti, in the 1970s. Based on the legend, he created a theatre play that the children of the school, and later the members of the folklore group created in the village in the late 1970s, performed several times at regional festivals. In 2001 the play was performed in Sibiu at the ASTRA Village Museum. In 2015, at the opening of the local museum, "Time of Man," the play was performed again (see Iuga 2021, 150).

A further important documentary source for the legends of the Buzău region consists of more recent monographs dedicated to specific localities, written with passion and dedication by local history teachers and folklore enthusiasts. These works contain a wealth of beliefs, place names, and other local legends (e.g. Costea 2012; Gâlmeanu 2004; Mânzăleşti 2013).

However, some stories about certain places remain particularly vivid in the memory of locals, who have shown in interviews that such narratives are still important to the community.

Such are the legends involving fantastic beings said to have inhabited the region in time immemorial. The muddy volcanoes and Dragon's Hill, mentioned above, fall into this category, as does the story of Malul Roşu [Red Riverbank] (in the village of Lopătari). In this legend, two girls running away from dog-headed chimeras threw themselves off a cliff and reddened the hill with their blood (Maria D., 70, 2015, Dimiana).

Other accounts (in addition to the legend recorded by Alexandru Vlahuţă) speak of giants, also known locally as "Tatars," and focus in particular on their strength and abilities:

> In ancient times there were Tatars on the Tatar's Hill (...). And it is said that these Tatars were very great, very powerful people and that we (...) were but dwarfs compared to them, and it is said that there, on the Tatar's Hill, a treasure was buried. (...) I remember it was said that the woman... the Tatar woman put one foot here and [one] on the next hill... the other foot on Straja Hill. You know, somewhere on Straja Hill, near Râmnicu Sărat. (Dobra D., 68, 2015, Valea Salciei)

The villages of Buzău Land are also populated by other mythological beings. Many narratives have to do with "Iele" (fairies) or "Rusalii," elemental fairies of air and water (see Muşlea, and Bîrlea 2010, 200-209). What is specific to this region is that narratives about supernatural beings – which are also found in other areas rich in folklore – are most often recounted in the form of *memorata*. In other words, they are presented as personal experiences. The interviewees recount their own observations, which complement the body of collective experiences (Culianu 1996, 40). Sometimes, these experiences overlap completely with those passed down through the community's collective memory, especially when the interviewees talk about events that they themselves and other community members have experienced. They "present specific cases, selected based on their own interests and interpreted according to highly personal criteria" (Hedeşan 2001, 11). Here is an example of a first degree memorata that we recorded in this region, in which the narrator recounts experiences from his own life, giving them the authenticity that is inherent to personal feelings:

> God, it was out of the ordinary. I was taken to work on the ranch for a man who had a barn where that pump house is, there. That master of mine had a barn with 150 sheep there and I was working for him, I was supposed to look after them (...). And one night I left the sheep there and went down there, lower than the stable, to feed the animals, when he was going to leave with the oxen. And I left there in the night, it wasn't like nowadays, when you're afraid of wild animals, and just for a

moment I heard singing above me in the night. And I said to that master of mine, "Mr. Gheorghe, look what's happened," "Well, that's the goblins, that's what." And did you say anything? "Because if you say anything you'll end up dumb." "I didn't say anything, sir!" "Well, if you come across something like that again, be careful not to speak, or you'll be mute." (Dumitru U., 87, 2014, Aluniș)

Other types of narratives (generally third-degree *memorata*) deal with special places where treasures are buried and where flames burn on the night of St. George's Day, a belief found in many parts of Romania (Muşlea, and Bîrlea 2010, 435-436). However, a distinctive feature of these accounts is that the treasure is usually cursed and that those who found it were unable to benefit from it. There is also another interesting phenomenon: the mystical properties of the buried treasure are transferred to human remains. For example, one of the recorded accounts tells us that flames also appear above the bones of those who died a violent death (Pompila P., 86, 2015, Cornet).

A characteristic feature of rural communities is their in-depth knowledge of whether the local surroundings are benevolent or malevolent. Locals know which good places are auspicious and bring prosperity. They know, for example, that sandstone formations—known locally as "gorgons" or "mushrooms" depending on their shape—provide prosperity to any house in front of which they are placed (Andrei D., 56, 2014, Bozioru; Dumitru N., 75, 2014, Colți, etc.).



"Trovant" (sandstone concretions) from Ulmet village.



“Trovant” (sandstone concretions) from Ulmet village.





Wooden bridge crossing the Slănic river, Dogari village.





“Crucea Spătarului” [The Ruler’s Cross], Bozioru village.

In the same way, people also know which are the bad places that should be avoided, especially at certain times of the day. This topic, which has been extensively discussed in a separate article (Iuga, and Andreescu 2016), demonstrates that members of rural communities in Buzău are aware of the various characteristics of their native places and convey this information through narratives recounting concrete experiences. These are considered true because they were lived through by someone and because they fall into the category of collective experiences that are kept alive in the collective memory through local beliefs (see also Eliade 1993).

Other types of narratives evoke historical events. Among the most common are those recalling the invasions of migratory populations, especially the Tatars (Mongol invaders from the Middle Ages). This category includes, for example, narratives about the hill called Podul Mândrei [Beauty's Bridge], where women supposedly took refuge during the invasions (Cecilia P., 66, 2015, Beşlii).

We also have accounts of man-made objects, such as the "Crucea ciumaţilor" [Plague Cross] near the village of Colţi (Filofteea B., 72, 2014, Colţi; Dumitru R., 84, 2014, Muscelul Cărămănesc). Here, the local priest took the Eucharist and placed it in the hollow of a tree, so that the sick who had been driven out of the village could take it as a comfort. Another famous cross is the "Spătarul Cross" [Leader's Cross] or "Agaton's Cross" [Agaton's Cross], a 19th-century monument situated at 980 m, which, according to local legends, mentioned on a panel next to the monument, was erected by a local nobleman who escaped the invaders by finding refuge in that area.

Although they follow the patterns of local tradition, these narratives can diversify and adapt to new situations. They achieve this by lending a legendary atmosphere to recent history, such as events from World War II or even the communist era. These events, kept alive today in the memory of those who lived through them, will find a permanent place in local folklore generations to come. One example is the inter-war story linked to the village of Mânzăleşti, near Grunj, the volcanic tufa that has remained like an island in the middle of the village of Slănic, behind a bridge where the road connecting Mânzăleşti to the Meledic plateau crosses:

> And somewhere over there [near *Grunj*], it was eventually discovered that the legionnaires were keeping communications. Either they pretended that they had gone to catch fish... After all, as it's a rather isolated place, you see... and in the end, precisely because it was such a place, one of them was picked up, because he was visible: "And why is he still hanging around in that area?"—and so on. And they were arrested. (Cecilia P., 66, 2015, Beşlii)

All these memorable places are linked to a story and thus become, as we have shown, active elements in the shaping of local identity: as a "laboratory" or site of practices and uses, the landscape contributes to the definition of local memory (Le Dû-Blayo 2011, 417). For this reason, landscape is considered to include "a subjective element and cannot be understood outside the symbolically constructed life worlds of social actors" (Tilley 1994, 11). This aids the tasks that the geopark aims to accomplish. Namely, to strengthen the cohesion of the locals in the region and to make them cherish old traditions. This should be done while, at the same time, looking to the future and transforming these traditions into cultural heritage, active on different levels, contributing to the strengthening of local identity. This is done with the help of specialists from inside and outside the communities involved in the creation and promotion of the geopark.



The “Grunj” (volcanic tufa), Mânzălești village.

Descântecul [The Incantation]—between religion and magic

The second section of this chapter is dedicated to the role of incantation (*descântat*), a series of archaic magical-religious performances carried out for the purpose of healing. We will analyse how these elements of intangible heritage are perceived by local communities. According to the literature (see Bîrlea 1983), this practice includes the spoken text of the incantation, together with the gestures and facial expression of the woman performing the incantation—the "descântătoare"—and the substances (material support) that she uses in the ritual performance. The defining features of the practice of incantation, the tensions between its magical and religious aspects, and the cohesive role played by the incantation performers within their social communities demonstrate that this tradition continues to be important and significant for the local communities of the Buzău Land. They add value to the area.

We will describe the phenomenon of incantation practitioners, women or men who exert a beneficial effect on other people through the use of symbolic and ritual gestures and spoken formulas. They are known to be healers, curing a range of ailments such as evil eye, sprained joints and diseases caused by fear. We have met many people who still use traditional lore to cure certain ailments. For example, people still know the properties of medicinal plants. However, we have also met people who have expressed confidence in the women who practice chanting in their community.

People continue to believe that ancient healing practices are viable. They have deep roots in the local belief system and are an active part of local identity. The observations that follow are based on interviews with a number of subjects, but the one that stands out is Veta B. (81, 2015, Floreşti village). She is a professional practitioner of incantations. She has twin sons, which is relevant to her status: "I gave birth to twin boys. Only someone who gave birth to twins has healing powers." She learned the art of chanting from her grandmother, and the words of the incantations are deeply ingrained in her memory. Veta B. has an extensive repertoire of incantations, including those used to rid a man or an animal of the evil eye, which is known to most women in the village, both old and young. She also knows of incantations used "for indigestion," for sprains, "for illnesses caused by fear," "for love," to find out who the future husband will be, or to rid a peasant household of mice and rats. The interview with Veta B. aimed to reveal the relationship between her, as a practitioner of the ancient traditional profession of incantation, and the local church, in this case the Romanian Orthodox Church, represented locally by the parish priest of the village of Floreşti. The relationship is an ambivalent one, but this ambiguity is one that dates back a very long time in the archaic mentality of the Romanian peasantry, surprisingly relics of which can still be discovered through modern ethnographic research:

> I explained to the departing priest: I told him I knew how to cast a spell over the cows. "Well, Aunt Veta, it's a sin," he said. "But, he says, will you tell me the incantation?" "Yes." "Well, Aunt Veta, this is a prayer, not an incantation!" the priest said after listening to the incantation. Well, if I say, "Has the Virgin Mary gone?" [Aunt B. wants to say above that it cannot be a sin, because in this incantation spell, the Virgin Mary is invoked – n.n.]. This kind of incantation is very good; it is a prayer, as long as you say: "I woke up in the morning, I made *the sign of the cross*..." (Veta B., 81, 2015, Floreşti village)

Indeed, the enchantment in which the Mother of God is invoked somewhat resembles the "primitive" peasant prayers, without theological pretensions, that Romanians used in other

times. Like this one: "Cruce-n casă/Cruce-n piatră,/Cruce în tus-patru/Cornuri de casă/ Dumnezeu cu noi la masă,/ Maica Precistă la fereastra" [Cross in the house/ Cross in the stone/ Cross in all four/ corners of the house/ God with us at the table/ Mother of God at the window].

But the priest's confusion between chant and prayer is surprising. The ambiguity between the practices of the Christian Orthodox religion and magic is further highlighted by the information provided by Ana M. (69, 2015), a local from the same village, Floreşti. When her cow's milk ran out, she turned first to a witch without a cure, then to the local priest. He came for three days in a row, read prayers to the cow and the milk came back. The priest taught Ana to say the *Lord's Prayer*, but as a chant: "Tuesday three times, Thursday six times, Saturday nine times," performing the hymn-prayer over the corn or bran that the cow would eat.

In the canon book of Orthodox Christianity, the *Pidalion* (2013), in canon 36 of the 60 canons established at the Synod of Laodicea, we read that those clerics who dabble in incantations or witchcraft will be excommunicated/blamed ("We have commanded that they be cast out of the Church"). In the same way, in the most widely used *Confession Guide*, signed by Nicodim Măndiţă, sins such as wearing the colour red to guard against the devil, the appeal to "devilish help with divinations, incantations, charms and spells," if you have been struck by trouble, must be confessed to the priest (Măndiţă 2000, 21).

The priest has another healing prop provided by the church whose rightful minister he is: The Sacrament of the Holy Oil, the prayers for the sick in the *Molitfelnic*, the sacrament of Confession (through which people are forgiven their sins, in the Christian mentality sickness is usually seen as the consequence of committing sins), the Eucharist. To these can be added other means of healing proposed by the Christian tradition of the Church: pilgrimages, the veneration of miracle-working icons, intercession that the faithful ask certain saints known as healers (Cosma 2024, 125-126). But, as Valer Simion Cosma has sagaciously observed, popular religiosity – interested in the urgent healing or rapid removal of any evil sent by *magic* – operates with a notion of the sacred that does not perfectly overlap with the sacred of orthodox theology. The sacredness of popular religiosity is ambiguous (Caillois 1997, 38-39, 42), ambivalent, and can have both beneficial and malefic effects on man. It can, for example, resignify the liturgy and the Eucharist, suggesting to the follower of popular religiosity to use their power to draw *good fortune* or to find out his future in his daily life – cases taken from the everyday life of the peasant can be cited here, in which the sacrament of communion is instrumented in the art of divination (Cosma 2024, 111-112). The priest in Veta B.'s narration obeys docilely to popular religiosity, confirming the truth captured by Valer S. Cosma:

> It can be observed that, at the level of country priests, the priest himself is most often closer to the horizon of folkloric religiosity, relating, like the parishioners, in a magical-religious manner to his own function and priestly duties, than to a theological horizon in which there is a clearer delimitation of the magical from the religious and in which the mission of the priest is linked to the salvation of the souls of those he shepherds. (Cosma 2024, 114)

Back to the incantation. In the present context, we can speak of an inherent ambiguity in the practice of chanting and also of an ambiguity in the status of the person who performs it. The phenomenon of incantation, both in the collective mentality and in the way it has been described and interpreted by ethnographers, has been perceived either as an expression of a religious way of thinking or, on the contrary, as a magical practice, sometimes linked to black

magic. In incantation, an essential ingredient is "the ancient belief in the power of a word uttered in a certain ritual context, which must be fulfilled with precision, a feature common to carol verses and to popular wishes in general, curses being no exception" (Bîrlea 1983, 13). Incantation could be described either as "popular prayer" or as "poetry with a pragmatic purpose" (Bîrlea 1983; see also Răutu 1998).

On a social level, the ambiguity inherent in the status of the woman practicing incantation is an ancient feature that has survived in the collective consciousness to this day. Another specialist in Romanian folklore, Adrian Fochi (1976), establishes the precise difference between the ancient socio-professional categories of incantation practitioner, spell caster and wizard/witch, taking as a criterion the effect, they sought to have on their patient or client, namely, beneficial or harmful. In general terms, incantation has a beneficial effect, whereas witchcraft and spells have a harmful effect. Those who practise incantation generally do good, bring help, have a social role as folk or community doctors. For this reason, they are regarded positively: they utter words that have an affinity with prayer, they are people of God, but they are sometimes confused with those who cast spells or even with witches. Casters of spells generally do evil, cause sickness, trouble and misfortune and "drive a person mad." Wizards predict the future and fortune, control other people's will, break spells, cause harm, drive people mad and make them have bad luck (Fochi 1976).

It was this double ambiguity, inherent both to the act of incantation and to the position of the village practitioner of incantation, that made Veta B. refuse, from the very beginning of the first interview, the labels of spell caster and witch: "I told you that I only practice incantation with the help of the Virgin Mary. I know absolutely nothing about spells or undoing their effects." One of her arguments was that none other than the former parish priest compared her incantations to prayers. But the possible negative social perception of women practicing chanting also emerged from the testimony of Luiza C. (39, 2015, Floreşti, 2015):

> Incantations are good, but in our village, they are also considered tools of the Devil. Because you don't pray, you practice incantation. Usually, when these old grandmothers go to confession, the priest tells them: "If you continue practicing these incantations, I will not admit you to communion." In our village, [the threat of banning] communion is used to frighten people.

At the same time, the sacred energy of the Church and the priest is used in domestic white magic when the socio-ritual context demands it. This happens, for example, in the incantation for discovering the future husband with the help of basil purchased from the priest (Cecilia P., 66, 2016, Mânzăleşti; Filofteea R., 72, 2014, Colţi, etc.). The incantation for a girl who wants to get married, which Veta B. shared with us, must correspond to a certain moment: it can only be used on a clear night when the moon is visible. It can only be said on a Thursday. While performing the incantation, the practicing woman must look at a star:

> When you leave the house, fix your gaze on a star. And say: "Star, my dear little star/ All the stars must stay where they are/ Only Ioana's star must not stay where it is/ It must walk in her robe and shirt/ And from sunrise to sunset/ From noon to midnight/ Bring my future husband before my eyes/ Be he a shepherd/ Be he a gypsy/ Don't let him sit down to eat/ Or sleep to rest his weary feet." (Veta B., 81, 2015, Floreşti)

Ritual actions are not lacking either: after uttering these words, the woman doing the incantation slowly wraps around her right arm a belt that belonged to the person her client wants to marry. She utters another ritual formula as she does so.

Veta B.'s clientele is made up of members of the local community, inhabitants of the village of Floreşti, but also includes people from the surrounding area, from the city of Buzău, and even some who live in other countries, such as Germany. From the information gathered from her and other locals, it appears that magical-religious practices are a flourishing aspect of village life. In this context, Veta B. fulfils a well-defined role in the society as a practitioner of incantations, contributing significantly to the increasing degree of cohesion among the members of this community. When the person wishing to benefit from her services lives a long distance away, a number of tools are used which are invested with magical powers: Veta sends her an onion over which an incantation has been uttered (when the person in question has fallen ill after eating something), or she sends the incantation over flowing water [e.g. a river]. She even utters the incantation into a mobile phone: a sign that ancient magico-religious practices have managed to adapt to the conditions of our technologized society and have become even more effective through the use of new technologies. Sometimes Aunt Veta goes out on the road in front of her house and blows the incantation into the wind, as her mother-in-law taught her to do:

> I said it over the phone to a woman in [the village] Lac. But I did it for many people in the same way, I went out [in front of the gate] and gave them [the cure over the phone] (Veta B., 81, 2015).

One of the most common incantations is against the evil eye. It is believed that "a person dies very, very quickly because of the evil eye. [But] if you tell him [the incantation] for the evil eye, he will recover" (Veta B., 81, 2015). Another widespread belief in Buzău Land, as in many parts of Romania, is the one about stealing the goodness of milk (Luiza C., 39, 2015, Floreşti; Mircea M., 77, 2016, Sărulești; Cecilia P., 66, 2015, Mânzălești, etc.). In order to cure animals of this disease, people have to rely on the woman practicing the incantation or the priest, as Ana M. (69, 2015, Floreşti) herself admits: "After we finished the service in the house, he [the priest] said to the cantor: Iordache, let's read it to the cow! And, if you believe me, he read it to the cow, and three days after the service in the church her milk came back to normal." In this case, the incantation is a combination of a consecrated magico-religious practice and the practice of prayer recommended to Christians by the priest. *The Lord's Prayer, Our Father,* is said on certain days when the incantation is particularly effective. Veta B. adds that the effectiveness of the incantation is increased if dung from the animal in question is used.

> The priest taught me: "Aunt C., start on Tuesday! The incantation must be said on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays." But I don't know much about this incantation; what I do know is that the priest told me: "Say the Lord's Prayer. Also, take a little cornmeal or wheat bran while you say the Lord's Prayer.... Tuesday you say it three times, Thursday six times and Saturday nine times." (Ana M., 69, 2015, Floreşti).

I believe that a valid criterion by which we can separate white magic from black magic or witchcraft is the intention of the person who performs the spell or magical ritual. If we have no doubts about the "deochi" or "qualm" (evil-eye) incantation, we can say that the "love" incantation (by which the person being addressed has his free will annihilated) or the one to drive away rats leads us into the dark territory of witchcraft. Interesting are also the details Veta B. gives us on how to perform the "spell of the big rats": the person casting the spell does it naked, but wearing an apron in which bread and salt are placed. He surrounds the house three times, then sends them elsewhere, to another household. The incantator, for the incantation to be effective, must return home on a different path.



Veta B. casting a spell using a rubber band, onion, needles, and ashes, in Florești village.

Veta B. learned the spell from an old woman who lived in the mountains. She first used it when she was a maiden because pests were eating their corn. The end is her own story:

> And I took them (the mice) to a mill at T. B. The next morning, Mommy went there to see. When she went there, do you know how they went down?! B. shouted: "Sister-in-law, Sister-in-law, come here to see a misfortune! It wasn't one or ten, it was thousands! That's how the mice were getting down from there." (Veta B., 81, 2015, Floreşti)

We've talked about witchcraft, but how can it be described? Two modern definitions of witchcraft highlight the specifics of this ancient craft. For Dominique Camus, witchcraft is "a set of magical procedures performed in secret by a practitioner, the sorcerer, to satisfy a demand which entails action by one man against another man and which may come either directly from the officiant or from a third party on whose behalf he will act" (Camus 2003, 5). In contrast to this classical definition, Favret-Saada does not see witchcraft as a "belief system" but rather as a discourse on misfortune and healing, an interpretation of them. This discourse competes with two other (official) discourses: that of medicine and that of the Catholic Christian faith. Witchcraft, Favret-Saada argues, is a life-and-death struggle between the disenchanter, on the one hand, and the witch on the other hand, resulting in the defeat of one of them or even in death (Jeanne Favret-Saada 1980, 11ff, 194ff).

On the basis of her research, carried out between 1969 and 1972 in the rural north-west of France (an area she refers to as the "Bocage de France de l'Ouest"), Favret-Saada has highlighted the forces involved in an act of witchcraft and the stakes of the dispute between a sorcerer and an disenchanter. According to him, only sorcerers and disenchanters possess *magical power.* Ordinary individuals possess *vital force*. The bewitched person finds himself in the following situation: a sorcerer tries to deprive him of his life force by magical means, and he does not know how to protect it. The person under the spell

> is left with no other way out than to turn to a magical vigilante: the disenchanter. He or she must be able to apply a stronger magical force to the perpetrator and thus compel him or her to return the amount of life force that has been stolen. Otherwise, the bewitched, gradually losing vital force, would inevitably be condemned to ruin or death. (...) The sorcerer's defeat is marked, for him as for everyone else, by the loss of a certain amount of vital force - a loss which may be total and tantamount to death. (...) What circulates in a witchcraft crisis is the *vital force;* and what makes this circulation possible is the *magical force.* (Jeanne Favret-Saada 1977, 330)

The vital force designates the individual's capacity for survival, reproduction and production. The spell attack goes on for a long time and "only the repetition of the attacks enables the bewitched to recognize himself as such" (Jeanne Favret-Saada 1977, 333) Charms can be considered "harsh" (if they affect the "capacity for survival" or "gentle" if they affect the "capacity for production" of the head of the family concerned.

To conclude, it is worth revealing a few details about our meeting with Veta B., which shed light on the specificity of the art of the bewitching, in which the power of the spoken word can decisively tip the balance between life and death. In witchcraft, Favret-Saada observes, "the act is the word".

The data we collected from the Buzău Land emphasize the conditions that must be met for the ritual act of incantation to be effective in restoring the patient's psychophysiologic balance. All the incantations that Veta B. repeated for us were uttered at high speed. This is no coincidence, because the person who accidentally hears an incantation should not be

able to understand it. Since an incantation is frequently learned on the sly ("pe furate") and since its effectiveness depends on the relationship between the person performing it and his client or patient, reciting the incantation quickly in the presence of a third person is an effective means of protection for the person performing the incantation. Failure to keep the incantation secret may have harmful consequences for the person practicing it (Barlea 1983). As a last remark, some of the incantations repeated for us by Veta B. ended with the verbal formula "Cure, and for the old woman a "colac" [a ring-shaped loaf of bread made of milk dough]. This is a classic formula in the repertoire of incantations, which expresses an ancient belief: in order for the incantation to have the desired positive effect, the woman who performs it must be paid or rewarded. Payment is generally in the form of money or food.

Before formulating some final conclusions, we express our astonishment at the existence of a social fact with multiple implications: although we live at the beginning of the 21st century, a time in which science has made unimaginable progress until yesterday, beliefs in magic and witchcraft—the defining features of "wild thinking" (Lévi Strauss 2011)—coexist with rational thinking and positivism, with the internet and new technologies, with the achievements and aspirations of transhumanism. This social fact is not an isolated one. For example, Christine D. Worobec, a professor in the Department of History at Northern Illinois University in the USA, has published an interesting study, based on research she conducted in over 50 states located in Arhanghelsk, Kargopol district (Worobec, 2023). She surveys, among other things, the widespread belief in the "deochi," an energy that locals believe man can manipulate, bringing misfortune and harm to the health or prosperity of his fellow man, and the belief that the sorcerer (*koldun*) can steal people's fertility.

Surprisingly, political power can also enter into terrifying relations with the shadowy areas of occultism. I am not referring to the relationship between Nazism and the occult, which has been much written about and speculated about. In 2009, for example, Traian Băsescu won the presidential elections, beating Mircea Geoană. Geoană later complained that he and his wife felt energetically attacked during the presidential campaign by people specially hired by Traian Băsescu (Calapodescu 2010). This statement targeted Aliodor Manolea, a "specialist in psycho-energetics, bio-synergy and neuro-linguistic programming," who volunteered for Băsescu's campaign team and was present at several key moments, including the famous televised debate between the two candidates on December 3, 2009.

The interweaving of political and occult power does not remain circumscribed within Romania's borders. From a relevant study by Olga Khristofora (2023), we learned how the two types of power at the top of the Kremlin's political leadership pyramid are mutually reinforcing: certain groups of shamans are fighting among themselves, pivoting around Vladimir Putin, some inspiring him, others seeking to annihilate him. One of them, Alexander Gabyshev, has been arrested and committed to a psychiatric hospital.

Conclusions

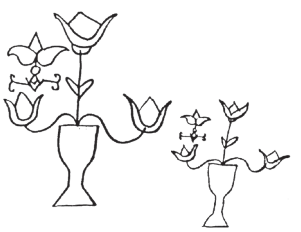
All these examples of different categories of legends associated with various places throughout Buzău County, along with the beliefs associated with the incantations, reinforce the idea that intangible heritage makes a rich contribution to defining, shaping and affirming a region's identity. As long as the narratives and beliefs we have described remain part of the present-day experience, the community continues to demonstrate its attachment to

local traditions, a factor that leads to the strengthening of social cohesion. With the aim of promoting the cultural heritate—and, by extension, the intangible heritage—of the area, the activities carried out in the Buzău Land Geopark include initiatives that help strengthen people's sense of belonging to a specific territory and community.

Thus, one of the strategies adopted is to highlight the importance and significance of the area by drawing on narratives specific to different communities. This involves promoting cultural heritage, a topic addressed in the following chapters. This is achieved both by involving local communities—particularly intellectuals (teachers, priests, engineers, etc.) who already have experience in preserving local culture (see also Goody 1977)—and by involving intellectuals from outside the communities. That is, specialists from the Geopark, as well as curators and researchers from the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, as was the case in 2015. With their help, the local cultural heritage is effectively showcased and promoted in an integrative manner that highlights both perspectives: the native's point of view ("emic," see Geertz 1983), and the point of view of a foreigner ("ethic").

At this stage, it is worth organising activities that promote local stories and beliefs, with the active involvement of the local community. Excellent places for such activities include schools and cultural exhibitions, such as those organised in Buzău Land Geopark team in recent years in several villages across the region. Another good example is the public-oriented publications hosted on the Geopark's website (https://tinutulbuzaului.org/harti-si-carti/), which allows visitors to download them; these brochures feature outstanding graphic design and have a user-friendly format. In this way, visitors to the geopark can discover and learn more about the cultural values, while also becoming interested in the natural heritage, which is extremely rich and has so many stories to tell.

Ethnological field research reveals hidden anthropological dimensions of contemporary humans: one could say that they remain open to everything that might be called or labeled irrational, magical, or mystical, despite both theistic and simplistic approaches to the condition of contemporary humans—approaches that have gained prominence in various fields, from psychology and philosophy to sociology and neuroscience: from this perspective, contemporary humans would be entirely postmodern (viewing their cultural past only with self-irony), living in a disenchanted world, seemingly interested only in consumption, slaves to the principle of immediate pleasure, relativists, nihilists, and so on. As we have seen in this article, in reality he retains a legacy inherited from his ancestors, which is activated almost spontaneously when he faces failure or an existential crisis, helping him on a psychological and epistemological level: through this legacy, he/she manages to make sense of what is happening to him/her, integrate experiences, and carry on with his/her life.



NOTES

1. "Patrimonialisation"—as it is called in French, a term that is widely used when talking about how cultural heritage is created and how it is used today (see di Méo 2007)

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A pattern for a textile from Ana Dumitrache's notebook, Colți (Buzău dept.). Courtesy of her nephew.
Archive of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant.

CHAPTER VI



On the streets of Pleșcoi village, 2015.



Making of “Eva a trăit la Pleșcoi” (Eve Lived in Pleșcoi), artists: Adrian Ilfoveanu and Nicu Ilfoveanu.
Photography by Marius Caraman, 2007.

Entrepreneurs of Tradition. Pleșcoi Sausages

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Manolache, Cosmin. 2026. "Entrepreneurs of Tradition. Pleșcoi Sausages." In *Martor 31. Supplement no. 6, Cultural Heritage in Buzău Land UNESCO Geopark*, eds. Anamaria Iuga, Răzvan Gabriel Popa, 111-124. Bucharest: Martor. [DOI 10.57225/martor.2026.31.supl6.07]

ABSTRACT

A component of intangible heritage identified in the area caused the creation of a local brand: the "Plescoi sausages" became a distinctive traditional brand. It is presented in a way that, apart the discussion regarding the importance of keeping and protecting a special technique, is also concerned with putting into contextual frame the evolution and the importance of this gastronomic product, in relation with anti-consumerism and anti-globalisation movements.



Introduction

Closely linked to identity, cultural heritage is a dynamic process, as it bridges the gap between generations and helps to pass on the community's values, thereby constantly fostering social cohesion. However, this specific cultural content, which is passed on and inherited, must be adapted to contemporary values and characteristics; in other words, it must respond to the meanings and functions that people today attribute to cultural phenomena (Loulanski 2006). At the same time, heritage can contribute to the sustainable development of a region—firstly, by strengthening social cohesion amongst its members; secondly, by promoting and encouraging the region's distinctive culture beyond the community's borders; and, last but not least, thanks to the significant economic value of cultural heritage (see Mourato and Mazzanti 2002). The economic development of a particular region can be stimulated by the conservation and redefinition of local heritage—provided that the necessary resources are found to assess and promote it.

The cultural and natural heritage of a territory can thus become a strategic part of a sustainable and resilient development project for the society of the future. This would require not only political will at local level and economic resources, but also a systematic effort to raise awareness of the need to identify, protect and promote those elements of tangible and intangible heritage that retain their significance even for a modernised society—an effort aimed at changing people's attitudes towards heritage. Everything that builds identity and makes a contribution to a societal project constitutes heritage, and those heritage items which still play a role in building solidarities useful for the inhabitants' everyday lives can be integrated in local professional, museum or tourist initiatives that create the economic and educational framework needed to harness heritage for the benefit of local communities. In this way, communities can be encouraged to reconsider their attitude towards their own way of life and traditions, and to continue practising certain types of activities, customs, traditions or elements of folklore, whilst recognising the role of cultural heritage in their material and spiritual prosperity, as well as the need to integrate it into their daily lives and



On the streets of Pleșcoi village, 2015.

future projects. The traditional culture of the past should not be merely remembered, but also understood and embraced.

We therefore consider the creative initiative of the Buzău Geopark team to be a timely one, given its aim to promote the region's unique cultural character. Based on the premise that cultural heritage complements natural and geological heritage very well, and that these three components can make a valuable contribution to the utilisation of local natural resources and the sustainable development of the region, the Geopark team and its partners, together with local communities, have opened several venues dedicated to the identification, conservation, promotion and interpretation of local heritage through the organisation of local exhibitions. These illustrate what the communities in question perceive as their heritage and, by extension, their identity, and reveal what the communities perceive as current crises and future challenges. This re-evaluation takes the form of preserving traditional methods or models, or transforming local dishes into a local brand, against a backdrop of the industrialisation of traditional recipes and the loss of old culinary techniques.

Pleșcoi sausages

Pleşcoi is a village in the Berca commune, about which many locals say that the centre actually moved from Pleşcoi to Berca: "the Pleşcoienii were rich, they were doing business because they were horse dealers. The Berca people had nothing, but they got rich due to oil." The assertion has a clear nostalgia, although there are few who have grasped the pioneering



Entering the village of Pleșcoi, 2015.



Promoting local products from Pleșcoi village, 2015.



Shop for local products from Pleşcoi village, 2015.

times of the Berca Extraction Scaffolding (oil mining). It was only in the post-war era that the extraction Scaffolding came into full swing of production growth, polarizing the workforce in neighbouring communes. Meanwhile, it has reduced its activity to "a common workplace," just like the other economic objectives in Berca (the "Rubin" glass factory or the brick factory) (Lixandru 2013).

What made this place so famous, now down from the commune's residence to its component village, were the butchers' products: sausages, *pastrama*, dried beef sausage and *babic*. At a first glance, looking at the geographical area of these products on the map of Buzău County, it does not seem to be a considerable one (Berca, Mărăcineni, Săpoca, Cernăteşti). Zooming a little to the scale of the map, we can see that the position of Buzău County is similar to a turning plate, at the intersection of four provinces of Transylvania, Moldova, Muntenia and Dobrogea (Caiet... 2016). Buzău County, like the neighbouring counties in the west (Săcuieni before 1845, when it was disbanded, and Prahova after 1845), was crossed by the shortest roads that the Brăneni shepherds travelled to Brăilei Pond where they carried their flocks to hibernate (Caiet... 2016).

Moreover, it should not be neglected that in the east there is Brăila, a former Porto-franco area and was under ottoman administration, being an ideal market for mutton products. This position offered a commercial advantage to any local produce, which the original butcher's products from Pleşcoi provided over time. At the same time, such a settlement explains the influences that traditional culture has absorbed. Some examples give us the legends of Pleşcoi sausages (found on www.carnatiplescoi.ro), which applies to other butchers, where the status of this space makes it possible to communicate between different worlds and mutual

Inside the local products shop, Plești, 2015.



influences. Continuing this road marked by influences of all kinds, the testimony of Otilia I. (43 years, 2015, Pleşcoi) is suggestive when it says that for the establishment of its own meat product outlet (Gabişti - from Pleşcoi), Pleşcoi and Pleşeşti, she was inspired by the way of presenting similar shops in Spain where she worked for a while, first succeeding in drawing attention, then creating a brand and implicitly an important craftsmanship experience they have practiced all their lives but are no longer active, especially because of their age, but also because of lack of customer orders. Unlike other artisans or semi-industrial manufacturers, SC Produse Tradiționale Gabioti from Pleşcoi SRL also has a website, being the only company that makes the products in Pleşcoi visible.

There are, however, a number of artisan producers not so visible to those who are passing through Pleşcoi but who provide local consumption and not only. The volume of their business was at a level that satisfied them with sufficient profit, without risking the expansion of production. Thanks to the constants of this level, they were placed in time in the informal economy area. The local community recognizes their products, although there are also opinions that sausages are not done as they once were: "Now they add pork ...," the cold cuts are being prepared all year round.

It is difficult to fix the time when the meat products Pleşcoi brand is said to have reborn. But there were some moments that brought them back to attention. In June 2006, the press in Romania made the *Pleşcoi Revolution* known to the public. It was a "peaceful communication action meant to identify, protect and promote many traditional food products, the true inheritance of real Romania, an integral part of the Romania brand" (Ioan 2007). The announcement sounded mobilizing: "FLASH MOB—Come on SUNDAY 25th of June 2006 at 14:00 pm, in front of McDonalds Restaurant in Piața Romană. For 1 minute, we will silently savour a traditional Romanian Pleaşcoi sausage! The fight started! You come, too!" (Ioan 2007).

The initiator was not a local producer, but the *Wine Press Club*, which invited other civil society organizations or the business community to join in order to react against "Romania's mcdonaldisation, against the industrialization of traditional recipes and the disappearance of the old manufacturing techniques, the takeover of the brand by industrial giants without respect for recipes and tradition," all of which have the effect of transforming a traditional product into a consumer one (Ioan 2007). The suggested solution was the knowledge and harness of the local gastronomic heritage, aiming "not only to identify and protect the traditional recipes, but also to promote tourism in the respective areas, creating opportunities for sustainable development for the small rural communities and avoiding the proletariat of the Romanian household" (Ioan 2007). And for all these goals to be feasible, the affiliation of the *Pleşcoi Revolution* to the *Slow Food* movement, headquartered in Italy, and the organization of a national fair of traditional products, appeared as mandatory steps.

A year later, on September 22nd, 2007, in the presence of 300 people, the Peasant Club of the Romanian Peasant's National Museum read the Pleşcoi Proclamation and the sculpture of Adrian Ilfoveanu (in 2007) was unveiled, "Eva lived in Pleşcoi," made from 70 kg of famous sausages, but they lacked on the Romanian market. The two symbolic gestures of artistic expression drew attention to the danger of "losing our cultural identity" and denounced "cheap and easy" consumerism, "fast-food civilization." In the documentary film "Eve lived at Pleşcoi," Adrian Ilfoveanu said, "It's a very old age Eve, hundreds of years old, a very old sausage—they gathered in a contemporary manifestation, in fact. Sure, I also had some fears. It is the first time I sculpt in meat, with meat." The organizers of the event, also held in a symbolic place—the Romanian Peasant's National Museum - were firm, indicating that

"if hundreds of years were needed to consolidate traditions and their affirmation, we are now destroying them with the speed at which we eat a hamburger."[1] In this discourse two attitudes are dealt with, a representation one and a critical one, recognizable in the *Slow-Food* stream, to which this event was connected, having in fact to do with a shift of emphasis that would lead to the marketization of a rediscovered tradition, as opposed to the usual sale of indeterminate products or a brand unaffected by discontinuities.



Poster "Eva a trăit la Plești" (Eve Lived in Plești), artists: Adrian Ilfoveanu and Nicu Ilfoveanu. Photography by Marius Caraman, 2007.



Making of “Eva a trăit la Pleșcoi” (Eve Lived in Pleșcoi), artists: Adrian Ilfoveanu and Nicu Ilfoveanu.
Photography by Marius Caraman, 2007.









The exhibition “Eva a trăit la Plești” (Eve Lived in Plești), artists: Adrian Ilfoveanu and Nicu Ilfoveanu.
Photography by Marius Caraman, 2007.



Two years later, on November 6th, 2009, the Association for the Promotion of Pleşcoi Sausages, was registered with a specific purpose: "promoting and defending the economic, commercial, professional and legal interests of its members—meat processing companies and Pleşcoi sausage producers—while at the same time supporting the development and implementation of its own or group strategy in this sector of activity."[2] In the same status, the mission of the association was equally well defined, consisting of "promoting traditional meat products and especially Pleşcoi sausages in order to continuously improve their competitiveness and product quality, as well as the fulfilment of the legal formalities necessary to obtain protected geographical indication—PGI[3] and the use of quality symbols for this product at national and European level."[4]

The two episodes mentioned above, in opposition to the general direction dictated by an increasingly influential consumerist trend, are illustrative of the new re-configuration trend through the use of tradition, a brand and a cultural map. In this sense, Pleşcoi sausages become an ideal pioneer, primarily by recognizing this product[5] and by establishing a new tradition of local consumption (Dumitrescu 2015). In this case study, it is interesting to note the balance that is established between the local and a wider socio-economic and cultural area. Beyond the implicit prestige that this product generates for the benefit of the community, precise localization is the main argument for IGP, DOP, and STG certifications. However, at the same time receiving a representation function, the product is adopted by a wider community on the whole the county level.[6]

Besides, the popularity of Pleşcoi sausages is indisputable, compared to other Romanian brands already certified at a European Union level.[7] Following the EU accession, the *acquis communautaire* has made it necessary to obtain that European passport in order to access an international market and perhaps to rethink the message with which products such as Pleşcoi sausages penetrate this global market. Thus, the so-called supermarket phenomenon of traditions was inevitable (Dumitrescu 2015). The global becomes accessible through the local, with the exotic meaning, being subsidiary and a tourist attraction capital with which it was desirable to integrate a future marketing campaign. The well-known Pleşcoi sausage, which has been recognized by government officials, has begun to be exploited in sales strategies and by retail chains that have sought to win customer fidelity through offers on a recognized, but high quality, price (example Carrefour, Cora, etc.). In this tension between the local, traditional and modern urban area, Pleşcoi sausages continues its road to recognition and sale. The first provides the other food, the second becomes the alternative by virtue of which traditional space can be re-created, refreshed (see Popescu 2002).

Beyond the fable territory on which the identity of Pleşcoi sausages is built, the legends also indicate the many influences that made it possible for a particular gastronomic product to appear, which the locals perpetuated during the socialist period, despite the oppressors encountered (convictions for those whose production exceeded the needs of their own households), but they also promoted it with obstinacy in the post-socialist period, having to compete with supermarkets and hypermarkets, in order to go through the bureaucratic procedures that make the granting of the Protected Geographical Indication conditional upon access to the market Community.

With a stabilized recipe over time, despite its non-compliance with the industrial producers, Pleşcoi sausages recycle the past in the first place to re-affirm and strengthen the brand, and then to make the most of the present, as it is a tradition for consumption practices.

Conclusions

Promoting gastronomic products specific to the area and turning them into a brand (starting from the relevant example of Pleşcoi sausages), by obtaining quality certifications such as "Protected Geographical Indication" for as many as possible, based on recipes with continuity in local gourmet tradition can be another viable way through which traditional space can be reinvigorated. The use of local gastronomic heritage is possible in correlation with the promotion of tourism in the respective areas, thus offering new opportunities for sustainable development.

NOTES

1. The statement belongs to Gheorghe Moisescu, one of the authors of the "Pleşcoi Proclamation", made public during the event "Eva lived at Pleşcoi" (Crivat 2007).

2. Acc. to The Statute of the Association for the Promotion of Pleşcoi Sausages, Cap. II, point II.1 (Caiet... 2016).

3. Request registered in 2012 by TRI 94 PROD COM SRL, SC Valmar 05 SRL and SC Produse Traditionale Gabioti din Pleşcoi SRL (Manta 2013).

4. Acc. to The Statute of the Association for the Promotion of Pleşcoi Sausages, Chap. II, point II.1 (Caiet... 2016, 7).

5. In the publication "Renaşterea Buzoiană" (2006), whose title does not seem to be a coincidence, there are 10 recipes which have among the ingredients the Pleşcoi sausages: Cheese potatoes and Pleşcoi sausages, Baked cabbage, Pasta with Pleşcoi sausages, bean dish with Pleşcoi sausages, Romanian pizza, rice and sausage crockpot, Caesar's hodge-podge, ciorbă with Pleşcoi sausage, Potatoes and Pleşcoi sausage pudding, Spicy Pleşcoi sausage goulash.

6. Cristi Bîgiu, President of Buzău County Council: "We tried to promote these brands. Unfortunately, last year ... and here I am glad and thank the Ministry of Agriculture for the involvement, we even tried to take more products with which we can take pride with from Buzău County at a fair in Italy. Unfortunately, not all producers were interested in participating, but it was an action in which the costs would have been minimal, all being borne by the County Council. I presented them, these sausages were a success somewhere near Rome, I do not remember the town anymore. And with your support, an official record of these sausages will bring recognition including to Buzău County" (Campus TV Buzau 2014).

7. Marian Grigoraş, Director of the Agricultural Direction of Buzău: "Today we have a territory animation where the Pleşcoi sausages originated, the traditional products of this area. We want to actually put in place a European passport, that is, to have that Protected Geographical Indication. To be sold in Europe as a traditional product" (Campus TV Buzau 2014).

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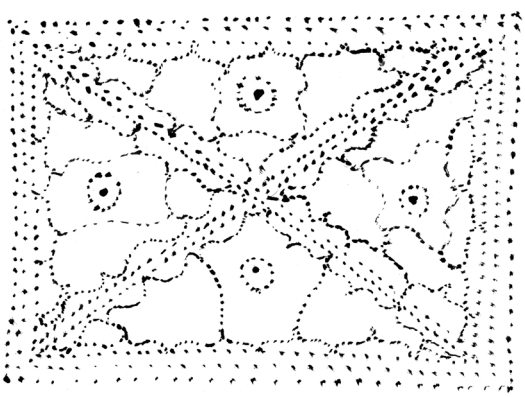
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CHAPTER VII



A pair of memorial crosses (one made of stone, painted, and the other of wood), Bozioru, 2015.



Memorial cross made of stone, Muscelu Cărămănesc, 2014.

Traditional Crafts

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the Ținutul Buzăului Geopark, traditional arts and crafts can become increasingly significant within the economic structure of local communities and society as a whole, as they represent the most accessible way for rural art and culture to become part of everyone's everyday life. By practising these crafts, people can earn an income and secure jobs. In promoting, supporting and stimulating peasant craft production, rural and eco-tourism can act as a catalyst, because, when it comes to crafts, the tradition must also be profitable, not merely preserved.

"To preserve the tradition of our ancestors' art wherever it still survives, and to revive it where it has disappeared, is a duty incumbent upon us."

(Al. Tzigara-Samurcaș)

A visible and prominent marker of local identity, traditional crafts have always been important factors in the economic, social and cultural life of a particular region. Having emerged in response to the practical needs of a peasant's household, craftsmanship faithfully reflects the transformations in the economic and social life of a community, preserving the artistic forms and expressions handed down by tradition from ancient times, from generation to generation—forms and expressions that evolve and are renewed, or which might just as easily disappear.

Ethnographic research has shown that, in a region with an ancient past, the more isolated it has been, the better it has preserved archaic elements. The entire area under study[1]—the UNESCO Buzău Region Geopark—comprises ancient villages of "moșneni" (free peasants, landowners whose estates were passed down from father to son), boyar estates or monastic holdings attested in documents from the 16th and 17th centuries. With the largest number of free landowners in Muntenia, Buzău was a traditionally conservative county until 1945; indeed, the small local industry itself was characterised by a high degree of craftsmanship. In the pre-war period, the peasantry in these villages put up particularly strong and organised resistance both to the local boyars, who possessed significant material resources, and to foreign-owned companies, to which large tracts of land in this part of the country had been granted under concession for the exploitation of underground and surface resources, particularly oil and forests. We should mention in passing that during the interwar period there were oil fields here operated by the "Columbia" company, the "Romanian-Belgian Petroleum Company" and "Steaua Română," natural gas fields at Beceni, Beciu, Niculești and Policiori, a lignite mine at Ojasca, the "Bahna" and "Aluniș" amber mines at Colți, a

gypsum quarry at Odăile, whilst at Meledic and Fişici there were balneoclimatic resorts of local interest, featuring iodised and brominated sodium chloride waters and ferruginous sulphurous waters, all of which provided employment for the local workforce.

Locals who practised a craft—either permanently or seasonally—as their main or secondary occupation made use of the area's natural resources (timber of various species —fir, spruce, beech and oak, hornbeam—supplied by the forested areas, natural deposits of salt, stone, sandstone, sand, clay, oil and natural gas, and amber) or raw materials obtained from the peasant's household. The craft product was first and foremost a commodity and, in most cases, an item with artistic features, belonging equally to the realm of folk art.

The Buzău region followed the same trajectory as other deeply conservative ethnographic areas; the strong and rapid industrial development of the last century diminished the proportion of craft activity here as well. Craft activity gradually declined, with craft products being replaced by industrial or mass-produced goods. Whilst in the past there was a wide variety of craft specialisations generating a substantial volume of craft production intended for trade (particularly within the natural and bountiful context of the permanent or periodic fairs held in the region's major centres), today the number of practitioners of traditional crafts has dwindled, even though some of these fairs (once the main market for these products) continue to exist.

In Sub-Carpathian Buzău, even today, the number of annual fairs is greater than in the lowland or mountainous areas of the county. In the second half of the 19th century, 97 fairs were held here (compared with 25 in the lowlands and 8 in the mountains). Gradually, the fairs in the villages situated on the slopes or at higher altitudes (Pănătău, Colţi, Odăile, Căneşti) disappeared, but the number of fairs in the valleys was maintained and even increased. Until around 1940, these annual fairs brought together all the craftsmen and tradespeople from the Buzău Valley, the Slănic Valley and the Bălăneasa Valley: the woodenware makers from Coita and Buştea (Mânzăleşti) or from Găvanele, with their spoons, bowls, plates and cups, spindles and spools made from softwood; the furriers from Lopătari; the coopers from across the region who crafted oak barrels, tubs, vats and buckets used by fruit growers and winegrowers throughout the county; the carpenters and joiners from Luncile, Terca, Mânzăleşti or Ploştina; the woodworkers from Bozioru with their artistically crafted small brandy barrels; the woodcarvers, carpenters, stonemasons, bricklayers and joiners from Odăile; the woodcarvers from Brăeşti, Bisoca, Lopătari and Buda, or those from Vintilă Vodă with their "thrones" made of carved wood, and the potters from Mânzăleşti, Calvini, Berca (Joseni), Scorţoasa (Plopeasa), Pârscov and Policiori. We are talking about widely practised crafts that have now been lost, but which were carried out on a large scale before the Communist era: the processing of wool, hemp and borangic, silkworm rearing, the rough or artistic working of stone and wood, pottery and metalwork, etc.

A brief, selective overview of the crafts practised in the mountain villages of Buzău at the end of the 19th century[2] may suggest a rough assessment of what has been lost over the course of a century: between 1898 and 1902, in Bozioru there were 3 blacksmiths, 12 woodworkers, 24 coopers, 4 wheelwrights, one shoemaker and one furrier; in Pâclele, there were 2 woodworkers, 2 joiners, one wheelwright, 5 coopers, 2 bootmakers, 3 blacksmiths and 9 tinsmiths; Vintilă Vodă had 6 wheelwrights, 3 coopers, 2 bootmakers, 2 blacksmiths, one furrier and one ox-driver; in Beceni there were 4 furriers, a cooper, a shoemaker and a leather worker; in Pătârlagele there were 2 woodworkers, a joiner, 3 shoemakers, 3 blacksmiths, 5 furriers, a tailor and a leather worker; and in Colţi, 2 woodworkers, a joiner, 4 wheelwrights and 2 blacksmiths. Almost every household had a loom, with the women

weaving and embroidering fabrics characteristic of the Chiojdu, Buzău and Slănic Valley; their tradition has remained strong to this day in Mânzălești, Lopătari, Bisoca, Beceni and Chiojdu. In some villages, the craftswomen developed a genuine specialisation, producing – beyond their own needs – goods for trade (particularly carpets, fine interior textiles and headscarves), thus making this craft an important source of livelihood. Between 1900 and 1940, traditional garments and interior textiles were produced here, reaching as far as Covasna and Întorsura Buzăului. There were 24 fulling mills operating in the area, serving the cottage industry, as well as 264 distilleries with 328 stills for producing plum brandy and 102 sawmills for producing planks, all located in the mountain villages. In the villages of the Slănic Valley, numerous furriers were at work, whilst the nuns at the monasteries in Rătești and Barbu ran a workshop producing silk [*borangic*] fabrics, where many local young women learnt techniques and patterns for weaving fabrics of exceptional fineness.

By the 1970s, only 17 annual fairs were still held in the area under study—six times fewer than in 1936—a decline influenced by improvements in transport links, but also by the expansion of state-run trade into the villages, which also offered local practitioners of the most sought-after crafts the opportunity to sell their products through cooperatives and state-run enterprises. Alongside the annual fairs, weekly smaller ones emerged more recently, mainly due to the fact that the number of peasants and craftsmen supplying these local markets had steadily declined. Among the oldest and largest weekly fairs are those at Pătârlagele (the oldest, as Pătârlagele had been an important rural centre even before 1900), Pârscov, Cislău, Lopătari, Beşlii and Beceni. The fair in Pârscov remains, even today, a valuable indicator of the economic and social development of the villages in the area, a sort of local "barometer" of prosperity.



Memorial cross made of stone, Muscelu Cărămănesc, 2014.

Initially, crafts were practised in response to the needs of the village communities; gradually, specialisations emerged amongst the craftsmen as a result of long-standing practice. The land, stone, wood, water and salt gave rise to an ancestral economy based on working the land, with an emphasis on livestock rearing, fruit growing and the processing of produce; households produced what was necessary for their livelihood, whilst crafts provided goods for daily life and local occupations. Craftspeople have always held an important social position in rural communities. The limited development of technical resources in terms of the tools and machinery used by craftspeople favoured the persistence of craft activities within the cottage industry sector until late in the day, despite the evolution of rural communities following the Second World War.

During the communist era, the collectivisation of agriculture and industrialisation completely transformed the landscape of traditional crafts. Of the 18 communes in the Geopark, only 8 remained uncooperativised or were partially cooperativised (Bisoca, Vintilă Vodă, Săruleşti, Valea Salciei, Beceni, Scorţoasa, Lopătari and Mânzăleşti), these being the most "conservative" in terms of traditional crafts. Nationalisation (including of forests) and collectivisation influenced both mentalities and customs, altered the structure and significance of fairs within the local economy, and brought about changes in craft production, including a shift in the value or importance placed on the relationship between the utilitarian and the aesthetic.

Communism found in peasant craftsmen both upholders of tradition and, at the same time, self-employed professionals—two categories which, from the perspective of the ideology of the time, represented an absolute contradiction. Their lives were inextricably linked to the market, forming part of the economy of the past. Communism introduced into their work that external impulse which caused some aspects of traditional craftsmanship to become artificial. The peasant market no longer regulated the course of events, as it once did, but rather the state and its officials, through orders that influenced production; this gradually caused the link between the craft practised and the social and economic life of the village —with their cultural implications—to become increasingly insignificant. The real market still functions, but craftsmen end up no longer knowing why they produce or what value the objects they produce have, as these gradually change their function.



In this context, a number of trades have developed and expanded (stone-cutting, pottery, weaving workshops, fruit processing in distilleries, etc.), whilst others have lost their purpose or disappeared altogether (sheepskin tanning, for example). Let us take just one example: pottery. Pottery centers developed into major centres producing ceramics of greater artistic than functional value: Mânzăleşti, Plopeasa, Grabicina, Joseni (in the commune of Berca), Beşlii (where nearly 40 potters were working in 1960) and Bisoca, whose production is distinguished by the shape of its vessels and specific ornamentation, suited to the needs and tastes of the population of the time.

Between 1950 and 1989, in Buzău County, large-scale industry rapidly shifted its focus to those villages where traditional crafts were still practised, in order to benefit from the locals' craftsmanship as well as from cheap labour. The establishment of factories and socialist-run factories in rural areas encouraged home-based work, providing employment for the rural population during the winter and preserving certain traditional working methods and styles. Traditional resources, which form the basis of the artisanal production promoted by the political leadership of the era as an essential component of the national identity narrative, were thus fully utilised. The less obvious reason for this approach, however, is a more pragmatic one, intrinsically linked to the specific nature of traditional craftsmanship: there are certain products that cannot be produced entirely, or at all, by machines (stringed



Jugs from Mânzălești ceramic centre, at the "Time of Man" community Museum, Mânzălești, 2015



Reconstruction of the potter's kiln at the "Time of Man" community Museum, Mânzălești, 2015.

musical instruments, small wooden or iron objects, braided ropes or plant fibres, embroidery, barrels, earthenware pots, etc.).

In many localities in the area, folk art and arts and crafts cooperatives, workshops and small workshops were established after 1945, which operated by drawing on the skills of folk craftsmen, recruited to work under the guidance of qualified staff. The decision to organise them into cooperatives (against the backdrop of the abolition of private property in the late 1950s and the stagnation of traditional craft activities) made it possible for these crafts to continue, as they adapted to the new conditions in order to survive. Just two examples: the "Arta populară" [Popular/Traditional Art] cooperative in Râmnicu Sărat, established in 1971, for which around 940 women worked in the 1980s—over 30 of whom came from the villages of Mânzăleşti, Lopătari, Puieşti and Bălăceanu. They worked from home for the co-operative, producing fabrics and embroidery specific to the area, using traditional tools and techniques whilst preserving the style of each village and each craftsperson. The home-based work system enabled craftswomen to practise their craft alongside other household activities, whilst also allowing the employer to engage craftswomen from the most remote villages and hamlets. The cooperative supplied the raw materials and any necessary documentation, where required, thereby ensuring the authenticity of the products through the use of traditional local techniques and artistic forms. Operating under the same system in Bozioru, around the same period, were a tinsmith's and joiner's workshop and a cartwheel workshop – the only one of its kind in the county at that time—which were run by the local council and the consumer co-operative respectively.

This small-scale "rural" industry, forced to withstand competition from large-scale industries that developed predominantly after 1950, found a new market through partnerships with ethnographic museums, local cultural authorities, and craft cooperatives. By organising folk craft fairs and local creative schools, the museums contributed, for better or worse, to the revitalisation of traditional crafts during the communist period. This process continued after 1989. However, these interventions in the nature of craftsmanship – motivated by a desire to preserve a certain local identity and memory – altered its meaning and imbued it with an artificial character, detached from community life. The only benefit was that the craftspeople—the most talented or those best suited to becoming entrepreneurs—continued to work.

The market economy introduced with the new regime in 1990 altered both the significance of craft production and the relationship between supply and demand, but above all led to a withdrawal of state involvement in supporting tradition and rural craftspeople. These artisans are confronted with inflation, the devaluation of their labour, the lack of secure markets for their products, a lack of demand, and the low purchasing power of the local clientele, which leads slowly but surely to the total disappearance of some of the peasant crafts in places where they had flourished up until 1940.

Since 1990, we have encountered either craftspeople with a strong individual identity, who attend specialist fairs, sell their wares, produce goods and strive to build a brand, or craftspeople in the classical sense of the term, operating on a local scale, who provide the necessary products and services still in demand within the local economy: joinery, carpentry, cooperage, stonemasonry, weaving, sewing, tailoring, blacksmithing or metalwork. The former seek to build and retain a clientele – as a distinct part of the production process—through a constant market presence, online promotion and participation in relevant events. Those who managed to survive after 1990 were those who learnt most quickly to source their raw materials, choose viable career paths and adopt the most reliable social or negotiation strategies—in other words, those who adapted most easily to a competitive economic environment.



Poster of an exhibition in 2003.

Family-run businesses, workshop-museums, physical or online shops, and the establishment and promotion of a personal brand that sets the product apart are forms of "privatisation" embraced by those who continue to practise a traditional craft successfully, both socially and/or economically. In these cases, the craft is no longer merely a specialisation, but can become a career.

Ethnographic museums have played, and continue to play, an important role for these craftspeople. Those who collaborate with a museum gain, through its mediation, credibility beyond the boundaries of their home village, a wider audience (and therefore a wider clientele), and the opportunity to expand their market even beyond the country's borders, gaining access to international distribution channels for their products and their traditional heritage. A lasting relationship with a museum, based on mutual trust,also influences the craftsman's specialisation or working style, as well as leading to "recognition" (through the awarding of prizes and honours to the craftsman) of the quality of their products, which subsequently serves as a source of social prestige within the community. The creations of such folk craftsmen have been presented to the public at county folk art exhibitions, their work being supported by the County Centre for Folk Art and the craft cooperative in Buzău County.

This category includes folk artisans such as Amelia Papazissu (goat-hair weavings), Mircea Micu (musical instruments), Mitel Leuțu (ceramics), Ioana Matei (painted eggs) and Rica Leu (traditional costumes). They are the ones who enjoy visibility within their community and the attention of local authorities. At the same time, they wish to pass on the knowledge they have inherited and acquired through organised activities (courses for young people, craft fairs, exhibitions, and local, national or even international cultural events). However, in most cases, this prestige does not bring them material benefits commensurate with their knowledge or skills. These "accredited" craftspeople are not members of professional or trade associations that would provide them with a steady and stable income, nor are they supported in any way by state subsidies that might in some way reward their contribution to the local cultural heritage.

Amelia Papazissu, who learnt to weave on a horizontal loom in her home village, Cărpiniștea (Beceni), and learnt the craft of weaving on a vertical loom from Sister Benedicta at Rătești Monastery, has used only traditional motifs from the Slănic Valley in her creations, which are made from natural-coloured wool and goat's hair. From 1984, she began working as an instructor at the traditional weaving section of the Beceni Children's Club, organising over the years dozens of solo exhibitions of woven fabrics, towels and folk costumes from her family's personal collection, taking part in craft fairs organised by the country's leading museums specialising in this field and becoming what is known as an "authentic creator of folk art." She runs a small private museum, built around her collection of folk art (her husband is also a woodcarver and a passionate collector), and has her own creative workshop in Beceni; for the Papazissu family, folk art is a small business.

In 2013, she was awarded the title of "Living Human Treasure," a lifetime, personal and non-transferable title granted annually by the National Commission for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage to those who simultaneously fulfil the roles of bearer, preserver and transmitter of traditional cultural models and are recognised as such by both the community of bearers and the academic community, demonstrating the exceptional nature of their work in their field.

The same title was also awarded in 2013 to Mircea Micu from the village of Săruleşti, a maker of bagpipes, alphorns and flutes, and a performer of instrumental music, who in turn mentored a class of pupils at the Buzău Folk Art School for six years. Although he is the custodian of a very ancient, almost lost musical repertoire specific to the Slănic Valley, as well as possessing exceptional and enduring knowledge of folk medicine, and although his age now makes long journeys almost impossible and prevents him from being a distinguished guest at various cultural events, Mircea Micu continues to live modestly, as an authentic peasant (and craftsman).

Rica Leu from Mânzăleşti is one of the many women in the Geopark area skilled in domestic crafts (spinning, weaving, sewing, tailoring). Together with the weavers Tanţa Găman from Poiana Vâlcului (Mânzăleşti), who specialises in weaving *borangic* (silk) headscarves, and Maria Dedu from Mânzăleşti, who also weaves homespun cloth, Rica Leu became involved in 2013 in an entrepreneurial project,[3] which focused on the production of clothing and accessories made from woven fabric, borangic and wool, embellished with embroidery. The garments, produced using traditional techniques and materials but based on original, modern designs, and sewn by a team of six women from Mânzăleşti coordinated by Rica Leu, were made to order and sold both in Romania and abroad. The project's initiator, a young businesswoman who was not originally from the village, secured the support of the school and the Mânzăleşti town hall to organise workshops—traditional craft gatherings—where the craftswomen would teach the village children, as well as their mothers, how to weave and sew using traditional techniques.

It was a fine example of a cooperative form of association amongst folk craftspeople—a contemporary way of promoting crafts recognised worldwide for their beneficial effects—with the aim of preserving and promoting the ancient traditions of the region's crafts with artistic potential, whilst adapting their production to the demands of a globalised world. This is because such initiatives are not merely aimed at preserving and developing occupations and trades, or the distinctiveness of a culture and its own heritage, but also at creatively drawing on the most characteristic elements of traditional craftsmanship (working techniques, raw materials, forms, ornamentation, colours) to produce new creations in the spirit of tradition.

In general, however, craftsmanship remains a domestic occupation, practised at home alongside a secure job that provides a steady income. Dependent on the number of customers and current orders, local craftspeople face low purchasing power amongst their clientele, difficulties in sourcing raw materials, and the need to invest in technology. They constantly perceive rapid modernisation and the pressures of the market economy as threats to the survival of their craft.

The judicious use of modern technology can boost their productivity and ensure the necessary products are available, provided that orders are placed directly—rather than through intermediaries—with small village workshops and traditional craftspeople. Providing sales outlets for their products can prevent the depopulation of villages and poverty amongst local people, can have a positive impact on social cohesion and, above all, can ensure the transfer of knowledge and skills that form part of the area's cultural heritage. In our view, craftspeople in this category can, or should, establish a local brand.



Painted eggs from the “Time of Man” community Museum, Mânzălești, 2015.

The workshop of Amelia Papazissu from Beceni, Cărpiniștea, 2015.



Mircea Micu, the bagpiper, Sărulești, 2014.



Generational change. Rica Leu at the "Time of Man" community Museum, Mânzălești, 2015.



From Rica Leu's collection. Mânzălești, 2015.



Rica Leu's workshop, Mânzălești, 2015.



The blacksmith Stan Constantin in his workshop in Bozioru, 2015.



Ceramic pots signed by the artisan Crăciun Leuțu, Mânzălești, 2015.



Workshop of the woodworker Gheorghe Morogan (al lui Moraru), Izvoarele, Bozioru, 2015.



The stonemason Marius Popescu in his workshop, Ciuta 2015.



Wooden chair worked by hand during the interwar period,
by Gheorghe Morogan's grandfather, woodworker.
It was painted afterward.



The stonemason Nelu (Ion) Baba in his workshop. Ciuta, 2015.

The occupational and ritual context of traditional crafts is changing as rural life modernises, but the rediscovery, in terms of craftsmanship, of the identity of people who have experienced commuting to industrial jobs is both a challenge and a responsibility in such an area with potential for community development programmes.

Within the area studied, there are still locals who possess knowledge of heritage value and significant experience in the craft they have practised all their lives. However, they are no longer active, mainly due to their age, but also because of a lack of commissions: Stan Constantin from Bozioru—blacksmith; Ion Ursu from Terca—cooper and woodcarver; Nică Perţea from Terca—stonemason; Barbu Elena from Pinu, Brăeşti commune—weaver; Maria Ghinea from Begu, Pănătău commune—weaver, Dobra Damian from Valea Salciei – weaver, Filofteia Ungurean from Răteşti – weaver, Maria Burlacu from Valea Salciei—needlework, Stana Căşaru from Bisoca—traditional costume maker, Marius Popescu and Nelu (Ion) Baba from Ciuta—stonemasons. Then there are the craftsmen who are still active, some of whom, as already mentioned, have distinguished themselves through the recognition they have gained at county and national level and through their role as custodians and transmitters of tradition. We would like to mention here Mitel Leuţu from Mânzăleşti—a potter; Ioana Matei from Niculeşti, in the commune of Vintilă Vodă—an egg-painting artisan; Amelia Papazissu from Beceni—a weaver; Rica Leu from Mânzăleşti—a folk costume maker; Mircea Micu from Săruleşti—a bagpiper and maker of wind instruments; Vasile Turea from Niculeşti, in the commune of Vintilă Vodă—a woodcarver; Dimian Dobre from Bozioru—a carpenter and wheelwright; Ionel Frăţilă from Bozioru—blacksmith; Ion Zota from Lopătari—house builder; Dumitru Vasile from Nucu, in the commune of Bozioru—tailor; Georgeta Irimia from Brăeşti—spoon-maker; Vasile Moisac from Mânzăleşti—wheelwright and woodcarver; Gheorghe Firan from Chiojdu—blacksmith. There are also younger craftspeople who practise trades passed down through the family, from their parents or relatives, whilst trying to adapt their craft to the demands of modern times: Gicu Cărăbuş, Ciprian Ionuţ Chira and Nicu Scutaru from Colţi—amber polishers; Morogan Gheorghe from Izvoarele, in the commune of Bozioru—a woodworker; and others.

The traditional local crafts that could be revitalised in an economic context favourable to small-scale craftspeople, supported by specific measures and even subsidised by the state, are: artistic woodworking (traditional furniture, dowry chests or "thrones," doors, windows and gates, wooden tools and vessels, tools specific to the domestic textile industry—chiefly spinning forks, musical instruments—flutes, cavales, bagpipes, crafted by artisans from the villages of Bisoca, Neculele, Mânzăleşti, Chiojdu and Lopătari); stave-making (vessels made from staves, particularly mortars or grinding bowls and small barrels for the production of *ţuică*—the local spirits—, which still have a role to play in the local economy); wheel-making (the manufacture of wheels and carts); wickerwork; stone carving; pottery; furriery (with centres operating in Vintilă Vodă, Mânzăleşti and Beşlii); artisanal metalwork and amber craftsmanship; textile arts. Crafts related to wood and stone working can be sustained for a long time to come within the Geopark's area. Cooperage and wheelwrighting are also crafts with a future in a region where fruit-growing and viticulture are among the main occupations of the local people. The occupational context of traditional crafts is changing as rural life modernises, but the rediscovery of people's cultural identity through commuting to industrial jobs presents both a challenge and a responsibility in such a promising area, through community development programmes.

Traditional crafts with artistic value could now become increasingly significant within the economic structure of local communities and society in general, as they represent the most accessible means by which art and culture (not just rural culture) can permeate everyone's daily lives. Practising these crafts can generate income and provide employment.

In promoting, supporting and stimulating rural craft production, rural and eco-tourism can act as a catalyst. For, when we speak of craftsmanship, the profitability of tradition takes precedence over its continuity, because "for craftspeople, 'tradition' is not merely a matter of 'folk art' [...], but also a matter of the market, which in no way diminishes the artistic value of the artefacts in question." (Stahl, Constantin 2004, 128)



Painted eggs from Cecilia Petrescu's collection. Mânzălești, 2015.

NOTES

1. This article is based on field research carried out between 2014 and 2017 as part of the interdisciplinary GEOSUST project, funded by Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein through the EEA Grants programme and coordinated by the Institute of Geodynamics of the Romanian Academy at the University of Bucharest (information about the project can be found here: https://tinutulbuzaului.org/proiecte-si-noutati/geosust-tinutul-buzaului-si-dezvoltarea-durabila/).

2. See Lahovari, Brătianu, and Tocilescu (1898 – 1902).

3. The "De desubt" project joined the "Țara lui Andrei" social responsibility project competition, supported by OMV Petrom, 2013.

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Foaie de Zestre

Fie d'ziua mila ta spre noi; precum și noi am năzuit catre tine; - Făcutam eccasta foe de Zestre ce o dăm fiicei noastre Maria ce trece în casatorie cu D-l Năstase Petrescu zdlui comuna Mănești dupe cum mai jos se arata. -

1.) Una falci fănceata în Bădie. -
2.) Trei fălci islaz. în trupul Țepelcasa.
3.) Una falcie pădure în Baicu. -
4.) Livede de Pomi fratesti (cea dupe podul Țepi și Frăsini)
5.) Doi Juncani și o Nătenă. -
6.) Una vacă cu vitel în burta
7.) Opt vite marunte.
8.) Una trestioare.
9.) Trei (Care) straie. -
10.) Patru perne moi; și patru mosi. -
11.) Trei zeci cotari velinte cu seșto.
12.) Zece cotii tăl. -
13.) Patru spre zece cămasi
14.) Sapte stergături.
15.) Una Oxidee și o rochie.
16.) Una Scurteica. -
17.) Una bunda
18.) Trei Stergare Boroneje.
19.) Patru oje bumbac de purtare. -
20.) Una lada. -

Este tot Două zeci particele dăvere ce o constituim de la fiicei noste Mărei din averile proprii ale noste mobile și imobile. -

Scrisa astăzi 28 Iulie 1896 la Comuna Mănești

Părinți.
Eu Dragna Stan N Bedliu
cu Stan Cozma
Com. jitia.
cu Ioan Tatu Stavar

Dowry List in 1896. Courtesy of Cecilia Petrescu, Mânzălești.

CHAPTER VIII



Commemoration of the Dead. On the way to the cemetery. Florești, 2015.



Traditional Products Fair in Buzău, 2016.

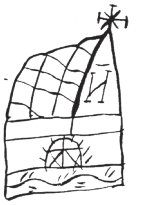
Cultural and Natural Heritage: A Resource for Sustainable Development in Buzău Land

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents another way of capitalising on the cultural heritage of the Buzău region, both tangible and intangible, through museum displays. It introduces the few museum displays already in the region, created by the regional authorities, such as the Vasile Voiculescu Memorial House in Pârscov and the Amber Museum in Colți. It also presents the Geopark's initiative to create several visitor and information centres, such as the "Time of Man" Museum in Mânzalești and the "Seven Fairy-tale Places" in Lopătari. The chapter focuses on the "Time of Man" exhibition, a "community museum," which is the result of a collaboration between the Geopark team, the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, and the local authorities. The article also introduces a number of other initiatives that are focused on promoting the local cultural and natural heritage. One of the key opportunities for the future of the region is the potential for establishing new visitor centres, in partnership with local authorities and private collectors in the region



Introduction

Less famous than regions that are highly mediatized in terms of cultural heritage, such as Maramureș or Bucovina, the area proposed for the establishment of the Geopark "Ținutul Buzăului [Buzău Land]" provided a pleasant surprise to the specialists involved in the process of putting together the application dossier for UNESCO International Geoparks Network. The team of ethnologists, anthropologists and sociologists from the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant carried out a serious inventory of the region's tangible and intangible heritage in order to identify those elements that could have contributed to the region's sustainable development. This resulted in approximately 170 interviews with local people from more than 30 communities, 7.800 photographs and a documentary film of about 40 minutes about the custom of commemoration of the dead, the "Paștele Blajinilor" [Easter of the Dead] (filmed in Mânzălești).

The field research carried out between 2014 and 2017 revealed a very rich, vibrant and varied cultural heritage. In addition to the vernacular, secular and religious architecture within which we were able to identify numerous specific traditional elements, there is also a significant preservation of various crafts. These include: loom weaving, the sewing and decorating of traditional garments, the making of musical instruments, egg-painting, traditional pottery, as well as special crafts such as amber processing and the making of wooden or stone sideways crosses (see also Passima et al. 2010).

Sideway cross on the way towards Muscelu Cărămănești, 2014.



The legend behind the name of the village of Mânzălești, staged at the opening of the "Time of Man" Museum. Mânzălești, 2015.

During the research we observed that established local craftsmen—some of them already holding the title of "living human treasure"—are still striving to pass on these valuable intangible cultural heritage items to the younger generation in a process which is proving increasingly difficult in today's society. The intangible cultural heritage also includes the persistence of traditional music and dance, oral culture (stories, fairy tales, superstitions) and a special gastronomic heritage bearing the imprint of both Moldavian and Wallachian cuisine, due to its location at the confluence of Wallachia and Moldavia.

During the research we carried out, we found that the cultural heritage of the region targeted to host the geopark was only to a certain extent emphasized. Festivals and fairs organized by local authorities in the county seat or other localities within the same county only sporadically brought to light aspects of the cultural heritage in our area of interest. Somewhat more significant in this regard were the activities carried out within the Buzău County Museum, primarily at the ethnography section housed in the Vergu Mănăilă house (18th century monument), as well as some of the temporary exhibitions organized at the Art Galleries in the city. As one can easily notice, unfortunately, most of these activities took place outside the designated area of the Geopark.

Museums established in the 1980s

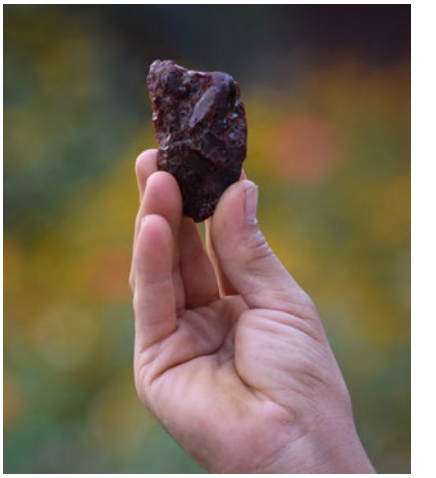
When we started our research, the only museum institutions we identified in the area of the future geopark were the Colți Museum Collection (later named "Amber Museum") and the Vasile Voiculescu Memorial House in Pârscov. Established in the 1980s, they functioned from the very beginning as sections subordinated to the Buzău County Museum.

At its inauguration, the Colți Museum Collection displayed across two distinct sections the cultural artefacts representative of the community. On the one hand, in an exhibition unique in the country, the history of the locality was documented in direct correlation with the resource that has made this area famous since the accidental discovery of the first nuggets: amber. In fact, more than 2 hectares of land in the Colți commune constitute a protected area (a geological and paleontological nature reserve) due to the large number of such amber pieces found both in the riverbeds and in the soil. In the museum, visitors could learn about the history of the extraction of this fossilized resin in the area over a millennia-long time span. The exhibition also included a significant number of valuable amber nuggets, as well as the tools used by the locals in the process of extracting, processing and transforming them into jewellery (pickaxe, chisel, hammer, wooden lathe). On the second floor of the building specially constructed for this museum in an architectural style specific to the area, a valuable ethnographic collection reflecting the traditional way of life in Colți was on display. Decommissioned in 2007, due to the deterioration of the exhibition space, this ethnographic section was already closed during the period of our research, and only the amber section was open to the public. The disappearance of this part of the museum has to some extent affected the degree of representation of the traditional identity of the Colți community within this museum site.

In 2020, after several stages of building restoration, the institution reopened its doors under a new name, "The Amber Museum." Built around this gemstone of organic origin, the museum's discourse is this time much more attractive, enhanced by innovative technological features. One segment of the exhibition that is a real crowd-pleaser is the story of the world's largest amber nugget, a 3,5 kg piece.



Photography from the “Amber Museum” in Colți
website: https://muzeubuzau.ro/muzeul-chihlimbarului-colti/.



Amber from Colți, 2016.



Searching for amber. Colți, 2014.

Dark in color, the piece, extracted from the bed of a stream in Colţi, displays the unique characteristics of amber from the area, which have led experts to classify it as a special sub-category, called "rumanite." The winding history of the huge nugget reads like a film script. Convinced it was a simple river boulder, the owners used it for years in their household to prop open a door. Once its inestimable value was finally recognised, the piece was acquired by the Buzău County Museum and placed in the legal category of "National Cultural Heritage Treasure."



Photography from the "Vasile Voiculescu Memorial House" website: https://muzeubuzau.ro/casa-memoriala-vasile-voiculescu/

Located in the commune of Pârscov, the "Vasile Voiculescu Memorial House" reconstructs the setting in which the famous figure was born and spent much of his life. A dedicated doctor and a writer whose unique talent was realized in works of great value in poetry, prose and drama, Vasile Voiculescu was also a victim of the communist regime. At the age of 74, he was imprisoned for his links with the intellectuals who formed the religious circle "Burning Bush." Accused of "conspiracy against the social order," he spent the next five years in Jilava and Aiud prisons, ruining his health, and dying a year after his release. Rebuilt according to the original plans of his family's home, the building houses a collection of ethnographic, documentary and decorative art objects, which reflect the family atmosphere and aspects of his private and professional life.

New cultural heritage centres

The discrepancy between the extraordinary potential that we noticed during our research and the under-represented cultural and touristic offer led the project coordinators geopark to initiate a process of promoting the region's heritage in all its forms, in the context of

greater community involvement. Consequently, through joint efforts, new centres of cultural and touristic interest started to emerge during the course of our research project. The new component of the cultural offering, developed under the "umbrella" of the Geopark, has proved to be much more dynamic and moreover, a catalyst for sustainable mechanisms of community and local development.

The "Time of Man" Museum in Mânzălești

Inaugurated in 2015, the first of these centres: The "Time of Man" Museum is located in the vicinity of the famous "Grunj"—the volcanic tufa that is a natural monument with the status of a nature reserve in the commune of Mânzălești. For the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant team this exhibition holds a particular significance, being the only one in the geopark territory in whose establishment we directly participated. From the preliminary activities of documentation, to the shaping of the concept together with geologists (especially Răzvan Gabriel Popa) and artists from partner organizations in the project and up to the arrangement of the permanent exhibition, we, a small team from the museum (Rodica Marinescu, Magda Andreescu and Anamaria Iuga) were involved in all stages of its realization. In this way we were able to observe "from the inside" how a community museum is made.





Fieldwork in Mânzălești village, 2015.

This is also because, unlike the museum points described above, "Time of Man" reflects to a large extent the identity imprint of the locals, who wanted such a museum and who actually participated in its creation (see also Andreescu and Marinescu 2018). At a closer look, we notice that a direct correlation can be drawn between the locals' sustained effort to preserve their heritage over a rather long period of time and the strong community involvement in putting together a local ethnographic exhibition nowadays.

An official initiative of the pre-1989 regime facilitated the emergence in the rural areas of museum sites designed to





Local ceramist at the opening of the "Time of Man" Museum. Mânzălești, 2015.

illustrate the official nationalist discourse through historical and memorializing ethnographic exhibitions. Established through a top-down approach, the exhibitions often did not allow the voices of community members to be heard and, as a result, the community itself did not perceive them as representative. The regime change in 1989 led to the rapid dissolution of the museum site in the commune of Mânzălești, but the community's need to express its identity and achieve cultural representation through the display of representative objects continued to manifest itself. The main driving forces were the teachers who, by mobilizing the community, built up a valuable local ethnographic collection. In order to set up a museum, the authorities requested the specialized assistance of the Buzău County Centre of Art and Culture, which led to the development and implementation of a conventional exhibition concept, centred on reconstructions of peasant houses. Inaugurated in 1998, the museum was decommissioned twelve years later in order to the refurbishment the building. This is why our team found here a favourable ground for the establishing a local museum: a newly renovated exhibition space, a collection of ethnographic artefacts, a mayor, Valeriu Beşliu—a former teacher—, who was deeply committed to efforts to express the specificity of the community through cultural heritage. And, last but not least, a community that wanted to re-establish the museum in the same space, but with a new focus.

The exhibition project agreed upon was an ambitious one centred on the community's material and spiritual landmarks. The key elements around which the museum's discourse was built were *the Tree of Life,* with its roots in the soil rich in salt, a mill—a technical installation, both utilitarian and a symbol of the passage of time—, and a pottery kiln, a reference to the time when Mânzălești was a famous pottery centre. Specific elements of the intangible cultural heritage—crafts, traditions, beliefs and superstitions—have been inserted into the museum's discourse so that the exhibition outlines a special world in which stories not only unify and lend coherence to the ensemble of cultural artefacts, but also help visitors who cross its threshold to make sense of it. A keen observer can detect echoes of the museological style created by Horia Bernea and established at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant (see Bernea 2001). This is the reason we wanted "The Time of Man"



General view of the first exhibition hall at the “Time of Man” Museum. Mânzălești, 2015.



General view of the second exhibition hall at the “Time of Man” Museum. Mânzălești, 2015.

to be a museum unlike any other. To this end, we set a certain rhythm in the arrangement of the objects, organised in such a way as to ultimately create an active space that leaves room for stories, questions, wonder and opinions. Members of the community, from the elderly to local schoolchildren, have enthusiastically got involved in the creation of this museum, and this voluntary work has enhanced its representativeness. They provided information and objects, helped prepare the exhibition space, display the exhibits, and, last but not least, helped to organise a large-scale community celebration to mark the opening of the "Time of Man" Museum.

"7 Fairytale Places" in Lopătari

A year later, in 2016, the initiative group for the establishment of the geopark marked a new attraction on the map of the future UNESCO site: the non-formal education and visitor centre "7 Fairytale Places" in Lopătari. In this case too, a building was chosen which had previously housed a local ethnographic museum before 1989. Renovated and refurbished in the 2000s to accommodate the municipal library, the building proved to be a more suitable space for the new museum facility. Located in the centre of the village, with easy access from the main road, the building reflects the traditional architectural style. An emblematic identity feature for the community, the vernacular architecture has been preserved here to a greater extent than in other localities in the county, where modernization has led to a rapid dissolution of the built heritage. It is no coincidence that three houses from the beginning of the last century are listed in the Register of Historical Monuments in Buzău County as architectural sites of local interest in the commune of Lopătari. Through the involvement and with the constant support of local teachers, who mobilised the commune's pupils, the team of the Association Buzău Land managed to create a different kind of exhibition point. It is characterized by a modern and interactive interpretation of the way in which the elements of the intangible cultural heritage (stories, beliefs and superstitions) have developed and intertwined organically around the array of natural and geological elements and phenomena, rare or even unique in the country, found in this area. Through these stories, visitors of all ages can easily familiarize themselves in the "7 Fairytale Places" centre with: Mud Volcanoes, Trovants [*trovanți*—in Romanian; sandstone concretions], the Living Fire, the Giants' Wall, Salt, Amber, as well as Living and Dead Water and the beliefs related to them. The exhibition includes miniature reconstructions of the natural phenomena that led to the creation of the seven emblematic places in the region, creative installations designed by the team of geologists, together with the students, but also together with the community of Lopătari, under the guidance of Prof. Ioan Zota, passionate about promoting the cultural and natural heritage of the commune.



Information panels at the 7 Fairytale Places exhibition. Lopătari, 2016.



General view of the 7 Fairytale Places exhibition. Lopătari, 2016.

In addition to these installations there are two information panels for each of the natural phenomena on display: one featuring an image (or a suggestive drawing recalling local legends), and the other providing information about the legendary place, accompanied by the actual story, adapted for visitors. The panels are taken from an older exhibition, organized, in the autumn of 2012, at the National Peasant Museum at the Peasant Club, and entitled "Giants, Dragons and Living Water. Mysteries and Unseen Wonders of the Buzău Region." The exhibition was organized by the Geomedia center, under the coordination of Alexandru Andrășanu, as part of the AFCN funded project, "Immaterial on material. Seven fairytale places in Buzău Region," an early opportunity to promote the idea of a geopark, which was to take shape later on.

The Museum of Forms in Bozioru

The map of cultural and tourist attractions in the Buzău Region was enriched in 2018 with a new landmark dedicated to the geological formations known in the area as "living stones": the Museum of Forms in Bozioru commune. Shaped over time by natural factors (rain, wind), the trovants are deposits of sand and layers of cemented sandstone in a wide variety of shapes that can be associated with both zoomorphic and anthropomorphic silhouettes. Based on the fact that this commune is home to one of the most consistent micro-reliefs populated with trovants, the team from the Buzău Land Association displayed several



Museum of Forms. Photography from the Facebook page "Povestea trovanților", https://www.facebook.com/povesteatrovantilor/photos.

such formations and their stories in this centre. Thanks to the modern concept, which incorporates elements of Augmented Reality, the visitor experience is an interactive one.

The year 2025 marked a turning point in terms of this objective, because after a period of refurbishment, in July it reopened in an expanded format, under the name "The Story of the Trovants Visitor Centre." Through the joint efforts of the Geopark administration and the local community, and with the involvement of a significant number of volunteers (both local and from outside the area), a modern and interactive exhibition was created in two of the rooms, dealing with distinct issues but using the same tools offered by technology. In the first room (The Story of the Trovants), visitors can engage in a "dialogue" facilitated by Augmented Reality elements with six trovants. By telling their stories, they take the curious visitors on a journey through the different geological eras of the Buzău region, from the prehistoric delta and the retreat of the sea, to the period when the mountains appeared. A valuable collection of local fossils and rocks complements the discourse with information about local culture and elements related to prehistoric life in the area. This last aspect prepares visitors for the memorable experience of the immersive journey they are about to embark on in the second exhibition hall. This is because, with the help of ingenious animated panels using Augmented Reality, the fauna that existed in the region more than 25 million years ago "comes to life." The ancestors of giraffes, bears, rhinos, elephants, and extinct species of monkeys populate this space, where their natural environment is "recreated" to the delight of visitors of all ages. In the new section, built under the name "25 MILLIONS," features a life-size hologram that recounts the 25-million-year history of the Buzău Land as well as the long history of amber, the precious resource of the neighbouring commune of Colți. Beyond the advanced technology, "25 MILLIONS" also brings to visitors' attention an extraordinary exhibition of fossils, whose age far exceeds 25 million years. Each of the exhibits on display represents a key milestone in the history of the emergence of life in the planet's seas and oceans. These do not focus solely on species characteristic of the area where the geopark is located today, but cover a wider area encompassing distant regions and corners of the world: Morocco, Scotland, Mexico, China, etc.



Photography from the Facebook page "Povestea trovanților", https://www.facebook.com/povesteatrovantilor/photos.

Geo Gate in Sătuc

With the desire to create a "gateway" to the territory of "Buzău Land" that would inform and spark the interest of those who enter the UNESCO site, the implementation and management team of this site launched the *Geo Gate* project. To this end, with the financial support of the local authorities, a deserted house in Sătuc, in the commune of Berca, has been converted into a modern visitor centre. Situated on a road that is heavily travelled between Buzău and Brașov and by tourists on their way to the Muddy Volcanoes, *Geo Gate* offers a memorable experience to all who visit. This is because the organisers set out and succeeded in creating an interactive, welcoming space where visitors can discover in a multi-sensory manner key objects – clues relating to the geopark's tourist and cultural attractions. Using VR headsets, visitors can take to a whole new level by taking a virtual tour of the museums and geo-sites of the "Land." Educational laboratories complement the visitors' educational yet entertaining experience; using digital microscopes, they can explore fossils and geological artifacts, thereby learning more about the origin of volcanoes and the times when the places where today's "Buzău Land" was located at the bottom of a sea.

Aluniș Art Center

The activities carried out by the team of the Association of the Buzău Land, aimed at laying the groundwork for obtaining the accreditation of the area as a UNESCO site, have also boosted other initiatives carried out at the level of civil society. In the complicated context of the blockages and restrictions caused by the Covid 19 pandemic, the first significant public events were organized in the localities of Aluniș (com. Colți) and Bisoca village (com. Bisoca), foreshadowing the multitude of activities implemented since then in the two hubs with a cultural, tourist, educational and community profile developed by non-profit associations.

"Aluniș Art Center," founded by Iulia Sârbu in the village of her birth, brought new life to a community in dissolution. The abandoned school building of this village of only 50 inhabitants, close to the rock settlements, was renovated and became the host for events that have been going on at a rapid pace ever since. The cultural offer launched by this new point of interest on the map of the Buzău region is very varied: art exhibitions, get-togethers, poetry and literature evenings, folk, classical and folkloric music concerts, and workshops on crafts that are on the verge of extinction in the area. It is worth noting that these educational activities have developed organically, giving rise over time to weaving camps and the Colți Pottery School. The art camps organized here have acquired an international dimension through creative residencies attended by artists from abroad. Gradually, the centre has diversified its range of projects, involving local residents, children and young people in activities dedicated to preserving a clean environment: greening actions, nature exploration and observation camps. One of the association's most ambitious projects, entitled „Weaving Connections" was financed from European funds through Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan. It aimed to research, document and revitalize the tradition of wool processing in the Buzăului Valley as a prerequisite for the creation of a local cultural brand, boosting responsible tourism in the area and revitalizing the local cultural heritage. One of the successful components of this approach has been the collaboration with the City Hall

of Pătârlagele in the organization of the Museum Collection, basically a local ethnographic museum, within the Pătârlagele Cultural Centre.

Zestrea bisoceană [Bisoca's Dowry] House

Set against the mountainous landscape of the commune of Bisoca, the second of the above-mentioned non-profit associations operates under the local brand "Zestrea bisoceană" [The Bisoca Dowry]. The three Cășaru sisters have built over time this hub, which they wanted to be "peasant and communitarian." The aim of this project was to develop the local community, create jobs for women over 30, while promoting the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the area. A special emphasis was placed in the association's work on handicrafts, due to their potential to develop sustainable economic activities, such as the production and sale of local handicrafts like the making and marketing of local specific handmade shoes and jewellery. The craft workshops organized here are complemented by other educational activities (e.g. traditional women's gatherings). The "slow" approach to both tourism and local gastronomy was another effort to encourage sustainable development. The promotion of hiking trails that respect and protect the natural and cultural landscape, and the creation of a local gastronomic point in addition to the existing one in Poiana Mărului are part of these efforts.



Photography presenting the "Zestrea Bisoceană" House, from the Museums and collections' section of the Buzău Land Geopark website: https://tinutulbuzaului.org/aventura-si-drumetie/muzee-si-colectii/.

The inauguration in 2020 of the "Zestrea Bisoceană House" marked the beginning of exhibition activities, a constant in the NGO's activity. An old Wallachian house was rehabilitated and reconfigured in order to create a library, but above all a place to visit. Here, a collection of ethnographic artefacts from the community, together with their stories, have been put together in the permanent exhibition *The Life of the Wallachian Peasant.* Following the implementation of a cultural project financed by the Administration of the National Cultural Fund, in 2023 the House of the Zestrea Bisoceană was developed through a temporary exhibition dedicated to a specific element of the cultural heritage belonging to the mountain villages on the upper course of the Râmnicu Sărat river: the "shirt in *broci*" (the model is sewn with wool thread dyed by hand using the root of a plant known locally as "broci," *Rubia Tinctorum*). The temporary exhibition, which also travelled to the Bucharest Municipal Museum, was designed to promote the cultural heritage associated with this type of shirt not only locally but also in other places in the country and abroad.

Conclusions

As can be easily observed, the scale and pace of efforts to use the natural and cultural heritage for the sustainable development of the region have not only not diminished since the accreditation, but quite the opposite. The local stakeholders—the geopark management team, local NGOs with a strong community character, and local authorities—have been involved in a synergistic process aimed at improving the quality of the environment and the cultural, social, economic and educational life of the communities in the 18 municipalities within the territory of the *UNESCO* site.

As with the case of its counterpart in Haţeg ("Ţara Haţegului Geopark"), which has proven its validity over time, Ţinutul Buzăului Geopark proves to be a model worthy of replication in terms of both preserving the cultural and natural heritage of the area, and in adopting innovative approaches to its use.

Confirming the validity of the approach proposed and implemented by the Ţinutul Buzăului Association with the support of its partners, including the Buzău County Council, the "Ţinutul Buzăului" Geopark received its UNESCO revalidation certificate in 2026. The success of its re-evaluation by international experts formed the basis for this decision, which, in accordance with UNESCO regulations, ensures its continued status for a further four years.

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General view from the second hall of the exhibition "Ținutul Buzăului. Priveliști. Rosturi. Povești" [Buzău Land. Scenery. Meanings. Stories], organized at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant in 2017. The exhibition was inspired by the "Time of Man" Museum in Mânzălești.



Weaving workshop with Amelia Papazissu (Living Human Treasure), held during the exhibition "Ținutul Buzăului. Priveliști. Rosturi. Povești" [Buzău Land. Scenery. Meanings. Stories], 2017.



Geoparks—Buzău Land being a prime example—represent the territories of the 21st century. They embody a new development model, that is participatory, multi-stakeholder, performance-based, and globally connected, while remaining locally grounded. They are also committed to integrating natural heritage with cultural identity and economic sustainability. They replace static protection with dynamic governance, top-down mandates with bottom-up initiatives, and the isolation of exemplar with public engagement. Within the UNESCO system, as demonstrated by Buzău Land, the Geopark designation is not the culmination of efforts, but rather the commencement of an ongoing process of sustainable development.

(Alexandru Andrășanu, see "Chapter 1: Geoparks as the Territories of the 21st Century")