

# EURO POLIS

## Journal of Political Analysis and Theory

**Issue 4 December 2008**

---

*Article*

*Will There Be Conflict?  
Identity and Values Tensions in Transylvania's Saxon Villages*

Alina Hughes

---

**ISSN: 1582-4969**

**Edited and published by the:**

**Centre for Political Analysis**

**Department of Political Science**

**Babes-Bolyai University**

**[revista.europolis@yahoo.com](mailto:revista.europolis@yahoo.com)**

**<http://www.polito.ubbcluj.ro/cpa/rev/europolis.html>**

## Will There Be Conflict? Identity and Values Tensions in Transylvania's Saxon Villages

Alina Hughes  
Nottingham Trent University

### Abstract

Behind the loud national and international call to save Transylvania's medieval Saxon villages – following the mass exodus of the Saxons in the early 1990s – lies an unspoken power struggle: a struggle between identities and values, at national and European levels. Following the Saxons' replacement in the villages by Romanians and Roma from elsewhere, the villages' built fabric now acts as the battleground between several sets of identities and value systems: those of the old Saxon ethnic group (embodied in the villages themselves,) those of the new Romanian and Roma inhabitants, and those of the (mostly) European conservation organisations that arrived in the Saxon villages to “save” them from destruction. Using post-colonial and conflict theories, this paper brings into the open this largely unrecognised clash of identities and the likelihood for this to lead to real, outward conflict.

### Introduction

Set up in the Middle Ages, the Saxon villages are some of the limited rural built-heritage that was virtually untouched by Romania's communist years. They were the cradle of a unique society – originally having emigrated from German and Flemish lands – whose life was closely woven with the natural and the built environments around it.

Recently, the villages have been the scene of dramatic social changes, as the majority Saxon population fled the villages and has been almost entirely replaced by incoming groups of different ethnicities, backgrounds and identities – namely Romanians and Roma. Such a drastic social change – within the wider context of Romania's transition from one economic and political system to another – and the resulting dynamics within the villages, arguably warrant sociological and ethnographic attention, which so far has been sparse. By contrast, conservation organisations have shown great interest in the threatened natural and, especially, in the built environment of the area and have made sustained efforts to protect and restore the villages' unique physical environment.

This paper thus addresses the apparent lack of studies, within current

literature, on the new and sensitive social context of Transylvania's Saxon villages, resulting from their population transplant and the influence made by conservationists' interventions in the villages.

In particular, a primary point of the discussion is existing evidence that differences in approaches and values of the new population of the Transylvanian Saxon villages, compared to the old, are being expressed in concrete form, through the fabric of the Saxon villages. The new inhabitants have started to mark their identity, values and way of living through changes to their homesteads, including alterations to the houses elevations fronting the street. This is at odds with conservationists' concern for the integrity and particularly, the visual unity of the village street to be preserved. The villagers are thus under pressure from conservation organisations regarding changes they make to their own homes, an added tension within the sensitive social context of today's Saxon villages.

This paper investigates the main forces creating the tension outlined above – the conservationists and the locals – and places their agenda and values in relation to each other, in order to draw conclusions regarding their relative priority. It also points out that issues of cultural identity need to be recognised as chiefly fuelling this tension.

Several relevant theories are brought in to support this investigation. Current conservation theories recognise that insiders and outsiders to a conservation site typically hold different viewpoints and values (Mason 2002) whilst pointing out that in times of turmoil, people tend to have increased needs for cultural anchors and to reaffirm their own identity (Serageldin 2000). The conflict and human need theories contribute the notion that identity is a basic human need and that exerting and protecting this is such a profound need that impeding this inevitably leads to conflict (Doyle and Gough 1991); moreover, unfamiliar contexts can be compounded by the repression of human agency, leading to people's feeling of alienation in those environments (Pepin 2008). These theories are useful in weighing up the approaches and actions of the conservation organisations acting in Transylvania's Saxon villages against those of the locals. Postcolonial theories help to define types of interactions between different cultures coming into contact with each other, as is the case in the Saxon villages, in terms of their relative dominance over the other (Hernandez 2005). Finally, Bhabha's definition of the dialectical "*in-between*", the ambivalent position between

conscious and unconscious motives which produces indecisiveness between contraries and oppositions is used to reflect upon the villagers, situated between their own value systems and the conservationists' pressure.

The paper starts by setting the context of the villages' current situation in the "Background" section, and then provides an overview of "The Organisations" by outlining their stated aims, projects and published studies of the area. The "Issues Arising" section draws out the different values and agendas of the (mostly new) local population, and is followed by a section concerned primarily with the relationship between the main values and identities involved in this context, using relevant theoretical strands such as the post-colonial, conflict and human need theories. "Conclusions" are drawn from the discussion with regard to the potential for conflict in Transylvania's Saxon villages and the issues needed to be addressed by conservation organisations to avoid this.

### **Background**

Transylvania's Saxon villages are found in clusters in the Sibiu, Brasov and Bistrița-Nasaud counties. In the 12th and 13th centuries, German and Flemish immigrants settled in these areas, primarily in order to protect Hungary's Carpathian border, to bring needed skilled tradespeople and to widen the country's culture and knowledge base (Gündisch 1998). Many villages were thus established together with cities and larger towns, such as Sibiu, Bistrița, Brasov and Cluj, as a result of the fast agricultural and commercial development following the settling of the Saxons in the area (ibid.).

The original settlers and their descendants' distinctive culture and way of life in the villages remained relatively continuous over the centuries, despite several political, state, socio-economic and juridical changes (Graf and Grigoras 2003, 55). This resulted in settlements, agricultural patterns and architectural forms clearly recognisable as Saxon (Wilkie 2001, 12).

It is precisely this distinctive physical environment that has been identified by many parties as being of very significant as national and international patrimony (Pro Patrimonio Foundation, Mihai Eminescu Trust 2002, INTBAU 2001-7). Thus seven such villages have become 'World Heritage' sites due to being "*characterized by a specific land-use system, settlement pattern and organization of the family farmstead that have*

*been preserved since the late Middle Ages“ (UNESCO 1999).*

Yet in recent years, the physical integrity of these Saxon villages has been threatened by ruin following the mass exodus of the Saxons to Germany after Romania’s major political changes in 1989, and Germany’s opening its borders to receive Eastern bloc residents of German descent. The resulting number of uninhabited houses in these settlements at first increased rapidly; later, they became predominantly reinhabited by ethnic Romanians and Roma (Michalon 2004, 7), with their different cultures, identities and ways of life.

The communist state-run cooperative farms – which had replaced traditional strip farming in the 1970s and 1980s – is now in effect bankrupt whilst the majority of the population, still employed in agriculture find it hard to survive, which they do mostly at subsistence level (Wilkie 2001, 20). Large parts of the former agricultural areas have become degraded due to a reduction in the villages’ populations and consequent abandonment of arable land areas (ibid.)

This complex and difficult set of circumstances in the Saxon villages of Transylvania has been publicised over the last few years both in the Romanian and International Press (Timonea and Hategan 2007, Bell 2007). The need for urgent action to stabilise this situation tends to be generally acknowledged and has led to plans for physical conservation/preservation and socio-economic regeneration.

In response to this, a number of international – largely European – organisations, mostly non-governmental organisations (NGOs), have made it their work to try and tackle this situation through local studies and initiatives. The following section briefly looks into such players and their stated aims in response to this situation, as well as the types of activities they undertake to achieve this.

### **The Organisations**

The main players in terms of physical interventions on buildings in the Saxon villages appear to be The Mihai Eminescu Trust (MET), Pro Patrimonio, the International Network for Traditional Building, Architecture and Urbanism (INTBAU) UK and Romania and Norway’s Directorate for Cultural Heritage. Other organisations and consultants, referred to in this paper have also undertaken studies in the area, typically commissioned by the main players identified above.

Chronologically, the Mihai Eminescu Trust – although a registered UK Charity only since 2004 – started its life with different activities whilst Romania was still under communist governance. A NGO under the Royal Patronage of the Prince of Wales, is based in the UK and in Romania. The Trust *“is dedicated to the conservation and regeneration of villages and communes in Transylvania and the Maramures, two of the most unspoilt regions of Europe”* (MET 2002, Home). It does this in three principal ways: *“preserve the villages’ fabric, remedy their loss of income and revive their sense of community”* (MET 2002, whole Village Project).

Indeed, The European Commission and Europa Nostra, the pan-European Federation for Cultural Heritage, conferred the Trust one of its five main 2006 awards, for Dedicated Service. According to the prize givers:

By rescuing and repairing more than 300 historic buildings and training more than 100 local craftsmen in traditional skills, this non-governmental, non-profit organisation has done more than any other organisation for the preservation of the Saxon heritage of Transylvania, a treasure of unique European value. Since 1989, the Trust has been working to revitalise the social and economic life of the region, by supporting the restoration of architectural heritage and developing income-generating activities such as ecological and cultural tourism, organic agriculture and traditional crafts. (Europa Nostra 2006, EU Awards Winners 2006)

In parallel with its applied projects, in 2004 MET organised in Sighisoara the first *“International Conference for the Integrated Development of Sighisoara and the Saxon Villages of Transylvania”*, which aimed at *“assessing past initiatives in the field, to define the needs for the future and to attract new partnership initiatives and funding”*. According to the MET, the conference *“agreed that Sighisoara and the Saxon villages and their cultural landscape are of world importance and are endangered”* and concluded that the Saxon triangle area *“deserves special attention and urgent action to foster the necessary sustainable economic development and to preserve the region’s heritage”* (MET 2002, Sighisoara Declaration).

Working in parallel is Pro Patrimonio, a non-governmental organization under *“the high patronage of King Michael I of Romania”* (Pro Patrimonio 2005, About Us), officially established in 2000, based in Bucharest, Romania, and supported by a network of associated organisations in the

UK, France and the United States. It aims to *“restore, rescue and revitalize endangered buildings and sites for the benefit of future generations’ as well as ‘integrating the buildings it restores in the economic and social fabric of the country and the local communities”* (ibid.). It is a member of Europa Nostra, a pan-European Federation for cultural heritage, including the *“rural, built and natural environment”* (Europa Nostra, About Europa Nostra). Pro Patrimonio’s remit is the whole of Romania’s heritage.

In the Transylvanian Saxon villages area, it has pursued its aims and responded to the local situation by organising cultural heritage awareness raising events (the European Heritage Days in the Saxon village of Viscri) and by purchasing and restoring House No. 18 in Viscri *“to serve as an information center for the local community on the various cultural traditions of its various inhabitants”* aimed at reinvigorating the village community (Pro Patrimonio 2005, House No 18 in Viscri). In collaboration with other partners, it will also be providing management and technical expertise to edit *“a heritage map and build a system of signposts for the area”* aimed at revitalising and protecting the area (Pro Patrimonio 2005, Historic Heritage and Sustainable Development of Saxon Villages).

In recognition of all its work, the Foundation was been selected by the Romanian Ministry of Culture as a special advisor *“to help define a new legislation framework compatible with European Union legislation for the management and preservation of the architectural heritage”* (Pro Patrimonio 2005, Projects & Activities).

Another important player in the area, Riksantikvaren, or The Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage, states as their key concern the *“preservation of the cultural heritage of mankind”* (Riksantikvaren, International Activities). In Romania, their ‘PREM’ project of 2002-2005 (which stands for *“Preparing a Romanian Village for EU membership”*) was aimed at safeguarding the Saxon heritage in Transylvania and used international partners to achieve it. The project consisted of 3 strands: the first, *“to restore / repair 36 village houses in the municipality of Laslea and to train craftsmen and offer work to the local population to enhance their ability for sustainable development and upkeep of the Saxon built heritage”*; the second, *“to establish a model farm for development of new crops and techniques for a sustainable biodiversity and landscape development of the traditional cultural landscape”*; and the third, *“to promote the conscious use of modern planning tools to conserve and valorise the urban cultural heritage in*

*Medias town*" (Terje 2006, 2).

Collaborating with the Norwegian Directorate mainly on the architectural and planning side was INTBAU, the International Network for Traditional Building, Architecture and Urbanism. Set up in 2001, INTBAU is one is administered from London under the patronage of the Prince of Wales. The network is a "*world wide organisation dedicated to the support of traditional building, the maintenance of local character and the creation of better places to live*" (INTBAU 2001-8, Home).

In conjunction with the Technical University of Dresden, INTBAU has acquired material and developed a 'Pattern Book' describing "*the vernacular architecture of the Transylvanian Saxons*", intended not only as a record but also "*as a guide to those renovating, extending or building anew in the Saxon village*" (INTBAU 2001-8, Transylvania Pattern Book).

Specialist studies of the Saxon Villages in Transylvania have been made by two parties, both commissioned by the MET: Kim Wilkie Associates and the Article 25 Charity.

Kim Wilkie Associates' report, *The Saxon Villages of Transylvania, Romania: A Future for the Mediaeval Landscape*, explored the composition, work, way of dwelling of communities and the infrastructure available to them - based on two communes (each comprising several Saxon villages). Its findings were synthesised into recommendations to retain active communities in the villages as well as "*to preserve the special character and qualities of the Saxon villages*" with the immediate priority that "*existing inhabitants, whatever their ethnicity, are recognised as custodians of the Saxon heritage*" and a focus on them preserving the unique qualities of the villages (Wilkie 2001, 19). It makes suggestions as to how to best combat changes made to homes (Wilkie 2001, 16), emphasising that the importance to the success of their advice of the "*full co-operation and participation of the community and its leaders*" (Wilkie 2001, 38). The advice is thus that "*[e]ncouragement, education and involvement are therefore essential*" to the Trust's work (ibid.).

The work commissioned to the Architects for Aid (A4A) Charity, active since 2006 and now named Article 25, set out to look into "*the role of community participation in improving conservation practices in the work*" of the MET (Article 25 2008, participatory design). Its conclusions following local research undertaken in some Transylvanian Saxon villages within

the area where the Trust is active set out “possible approaches facing the Mihai Eminescu Trust regarding public participation in the revival of the villages” so that “a more sustainable and effective conservation plan can be generated” (ibid.) in a comprehensive report of its methods, findings and conclusions.

This A4A report for the MET, under the main title “*Whose Heritage Are We Restoring?*”, firstly outlines relevant current discourses in the areas of conservation ethics, community participation in heritage valuation and conservation planning and possible methods of enabling this, and specific issues with community participation in post-communist societies. On this background is presented the research ‘on-the-ground’ undertaken by the organisation and issues inherent in the process and with the findings. The report conclusions raise questions regarding the weight of the conservation practitioner against that of democratic will in the action area and with this, to what extent the Trust’s work is valid if not validated by community endorsement.

According to the A4A report, the MET need to become familiar with and “locate [...] the Trust’s activities at the heart of current policy concerns” (Linsell 2008, 29), especially in relation to questioning cultural value. Invoking the necessity of considering the relationship between the ‘saving’ of the past and the “*environment of the future*” (Linsell 2008, 85), the report questions the Trust’s choice of projects and of their timing, posing that: “[b]y preventing the surfacing of a road so that the streetscape is in keeping with the traditional, we have possibly prevented the inhabitants from gaining easy access to health care, education and grade, reducing development. Perhaps some forms of heritage do not justify their conservation and evolution should prevail” (Linsell 2008, 86).

It may be relevant that, unlike Kim Wilkie Associates’ report, the Mihai Eminescu Trust has not published that produced by Architects for Aid, also commissioned by and produced for the Trust. However, the report has been independently published.

Overall, this brief overview of heritage preservation work and studies, undertaken by third parties in rural Saxon Transylvania, shows that some of the organisations outlined above have undertaken considerable conservation activities so far in the area with some impressive and, as seen, acclaimed results. Though working in different areas, on different scales and on varying priorities, the stances of the above mentioned

organisations and associated parties appear to converge in appreciating the great value of the Saxons' built and natural environments in the area and in believing in the necessity to preserve the villages' in a way that ensures they are actively lived in.

The information made readily available by these organisations, taken as a whole, suggests that this may be achieved by strengthening the local economy whilst informing and educating locals as to the value of the villages' heritage and through seeking their active participation. However, as implicit in or openly suggested by some of the work, questions and concerns can and have also been raised with regard to approaches and projects of some work carried out in the area.

### **Arising Issues**

Generally from the material made available by the conservation organisations, it is clear that concerns exist for the local population – primarily, its economic wellbeing – as the agent for keeping the villages lived in and maintained. However, there appears to be little evidence of appreciating the unusual and sensitive social context inherent in settings where the majority of the population has recently arrived from elsewhere, and belongs to different ethnicities and cultures.

In particular, as shown by the Architects for Aid report, the notion of protecting the villages' heritage as world-wide heritage, whilst arguably in-and-of-itself worthy, seems not to have been informed by a concern with the views of the new population regarding villages' conservation or the extent to which it values their environment.

The PREM report states clearly that:

The new inhabitants are both poor and of a different ethnic background, which is not giving much impetus to either repair or maintenance. When maintenance or reconstruction is undertaken, it is most often without understanding of the structural characteristics of the house or an understanding for the benefit of preserving the uniform harmony of the village and the uniqueness this represents. (Riksantikvaren, PREM, 8).

The idea of the new Saxon villages' inhabitants not appreciating the local heritage at present is also implied in Kim Wilkie Associates' report, within the recommendation to inform or educate the locals as to the value of their (new) village. The report mentions examples of ways in

which this lack of appreciation is manifest in its advising that “[t]he outward statements of modern comfort, such as pebble-dash, crazy paving, tarmac and Alpine picture windows, are best combated through education rather than regulation” (Wilkie 2001, 16). Two assumptions seem to be made here: firstly that what the building interventions mentioned stem from is the locals’ wish to make outward statements of modern comfort; secondly, that the villagers are at least in some way wrong, as there is no suggested doubt over the fact that such actions need to be combated.

Further, in a different passage, the Wilkie report states that “[t]he focus should be on cultural education as well as practical solutions ... for income generation and modernisation that are sympathetic with historic cultural landscape” (Wilkie 2001, 39), making it difficult for the reader to divorce it from the notion that it is the locals’ lack of cultural education – presumably in particular related to issues of heritage and conservation – that leads to their undertaking unsympathetic changes to their village environment.

Similarly, INTBAU’s Pattern Book – developed with the Technical University of Dresden – is also declared as “is intended to be both a record of what was built and as a guide to those renovating, extending or building anew in the Saxon villages” (INTBAU 2001-8, Transylvania Pattern Book). As an organisation for “the maintenance of local character”, its guide is highly likely to be aimed at those new developments which are not in-keeping with the traditional villages’ environment. This interpretation is confirmed by the PREM report, which promotes the Pattern Book’s role to “preserve the architectural style and unity [of Saxon houses], while allowing for modernisation and change” (Riksantikvaren, PREM, 36).

It is clear from this that there are problems facing the conservation practitioners working in Transylvania’s Saxon villages, in the form of work, undertaken by locals, that does not conform to the formers’ vision: divergence thus exists between the external organisations and the locals.

In response to this divergence, some organisations involved in the area (such as Pro Patrimonio) do not explicitly mention it. Others assume that this is a result of locals’ lack of information or cultural education (e.g. Kim Wilkie Associates, arguably, the MET who has published the former’s report on their own website, and implicitly, INTBAU, who has undertaken the Pattern Book guide for the purpose of guiding locals).

Meanwhile, the Architects for Aid charity has openly ascertained and recognises the divergence of values between the locals and the outsiders – as well as establishing through research an initial set of values held by the inhabitants of some villages that were reported on. Its findings in the Transylvanian Saxon villages support current conservation theories purporting that insiders’ (here, the locals’) values and viewpoints differ from those of parties from the outside, as do those of professionals and non-professionals (Mason 2002, 15-16). Initial research undertaken by A4A in several villages questioned (amongst other things) the local communities on the issues it considered as needing to be addressed as a priority in their village; *“interestingly enough, no one ever mentioned the need to preserve and restore the Saxon architecture as one of their main concerns”* (Linsell 2008, 72).

A4A’s recommendations thus are for the affected communities’ values to be considered alongside those of the professionals and of the outsiders – as advocated by current thinking within the field. In particular, it calls for the MET – and other practicing organisations – to adopt a participatory approach in their planning and undertaking of conservation projects.

The divergence between the outsiders and locals’ agenda, as expressed through the village fabric interface, entails in turn a divergence between the new locals and the culture of the previous Saxon villagers. Differences between the cultural traditions of the old and new inhabitants are both acknowledged and brought to a wider attention by Pro Patrimonio in its project for *“an information center for the local community on the various cultural traditions of its various inhabitants (the old Saxon population...)”* whose culture is embodied in the inherited Saxon villages *“and its new inhabitants (Roma, Romanians, Hungarians and a few Germans established in the area)”* (Pro Patrimonio 2005, House No 18 in Viscri).

### **Identities**

This latter concern, voiced by Pro Patrimonio with regards to the cultural traditions of the various ethnic groups involved in Transylvania’s Saxon Villages, helps to bring the discussion onto underlying issues of identities of the parties involved, believed by this author to lie at the heart of the current context.

Rather than being just outward statements of modern comforts, pebble-dash or crazy paving – which do not inherently bring about increased comfort – seem more likely to be an expression of the identity and values held by those who initiated them. As argued elsewhere, whilst external organisations work to preserve and restore the physical environment’ embodying the values, culture and identity “of an ethnic group all but disappeared from the area... the new inhabitants struggle to appropriate the villages in a way that is meaningful to their own cultural values and the practical challenges facing them in everyday life” (Hughes and Hughes 2007b).

In fact, it appears that “[t]he greater the turmoil caused by transformation, the greater the need for anchors to culture as a reaffirmation of identity” (Serageldin 2000, 51). In the light of this, it has already been suggested that the typical Romanian and Roma inhabitants of the Saxon villages, uprooted from their original settlement within a country and area subjected to dramatic changes, as well as subjected to globalising forces exerting an increasingly strong influence, react through a resisting tendency to reaffirm their own cultural identity. This can explain both types of recent transformations these inhabitants initiated on their Saxon houses - some adopting a more Romanian look and others features from fashionable European resorts. (Hughes and Hughes 2007a, 9).

Looking at physical evidence of changes made in the villages, there seem to be two recurring ways of adapting their homes favoured by the new inhabitants who can afford it. First, is the introduction of a first floor balcony reminiscent of Swiss chalet architecture. Second, is the removal of the small pitched roof leaning towards the short side of the house (which is almost always the street façade), a typical feature of Saxon village houses.

These changes are both conspicuously – and thus purposefully, it can be argued – expressed on the houses’ street facades. And whilst the introduction of the balcony may offer the inhabitants an added use, the removal of the small roof pitch – and with it, its transformation into a roof form typical of the rest of Romania – is a rather complex and costly structural change which has no added practical use and may be therefore interpreted as an entirely symbolic gesture of identity marking.

Then, the current Romanian and Roma inhabitants of some Saxon villages where conservation organisations are at work, may now find themselves under pressure regarding the way in which they interact with, make their mark on and appropriate their homes, actions through which they exert their identities. Outsiders' campaigns and actions are therefore directed (at least in part) against those locals' identities.

With regard to this, the conflict theory and human need theory provide a useful basis: they contend that identity is a basic human need and that exerting and protecting human identity is so profound that threats to it will lead to conflict (Doyle and Gough 1991 in Pepin 2008, 292).

Moreover, in terms of conflict resolution theory, wants are negotiable, whilst human needs, being fundamental, are not. This does of course apply evenly to wants held as highly worthy within one's identity value system, as non-commercial conservation efforts of unique environments tend to be held within the Western European culture as well as that of architecture and conservationists more widely, including Romania.

These are useful premises for creating a hierarchy of the relative priorities in the Saxon villages: those of the outsiders - who wish to see its environmental heritage preserved and are therefore motivated by a want - and those of the new locals - who in exerting their identity within that environment exercise a basic human need, which is non-negotiable (ibid.).

The whole argument might come to a natural halt here, except for the likely claim from the part of the conservation organisations acting in the Saxon villages, who may argue that their intention is not to impose their wants onto the locals - thus undermining their expression of identity. Indeed, their intentions are transparent in wanting to save an endangered environment as heritage of the world (as UNESCO declared it in several of the villages); a common "*folk memory of Europe*" (Jessica Douglas-Home 2002 in MET 2002, About Us) alluding to an overarching European identity anchored in a common background.

It was ascertained earlier that the conservation organisations agree upon the need to engage the cooperation and participation of the local communities in their actions, rather than imposing their own will on the locals. And since such cooperation and participation is not readily forthcoming, several organisations have set, as seen, the intention to

culturally educate the locals, rather than impose their work and guidance upon them.

Yet, the concept of cultural education or information itself is inherently unidirectional rather than cooperative; and the intention of the external organisations seems quite clearly for locals to embrace their own views following this educational process. The implication here is also that the conservation organisations' are certain of their own values – expressions of their own identity – and that they wish the locals adopted them: they must therefore hold their values as superior. It could then be said, as argued elsewhere, that should such education plans come to fruition, the result would be the "*unidirectional imposition of one dominant culture upon another*" – the very definition of acculturation within post-colonial theory (Hernandez 2005, xi).

Unintentionally perhaps, cultural education inherently represses the locals' need to express and make choices motivated by their identities, albeit using unidirectional training, rather than force, as the agent.

However, such plans are in fact unlikely to succeed, according to Bhabha's theories, applied onto the context of the Saxon villages (Hughes and Hughes 2007a, 11). In light of these theories, it appears that if cultural education did take place and it seemed convincing to the locals, it would most likely not simply lead to an attitude change (as suggested by the Wilkie report), but to indecisiveness and ambivalence between their own cultural way of thinking and living and values appreciated rationally, taken from educational programmes (Bhabha 1994, 128).

Nevertheless, it is still some organisations' current plan to set up educational programmes aimed towards the new locals preserving the Saxon village environment. As argued above in this section, such plans can be viewed as a threat to locals' basic human need for identity and as such, as leading towards conflict.

Arguably, there is another reason for conservation organisations to avoid plans to culturally educate the locals. As most are newly arrived from other parts, the new villages constitute for them a more or less unfamiliar cultural system – embodied in the physical environment – which therefore does not naturally support their sense of who they are. If combined with this, there are sufficient forces to repress their human

agency in relation to these environments – such as restrictions to their choices in affecting their homes – the environment will ultimately alienate these people (Pepin 2008, 296) and they may leave. This could contribute to the already existing migration away from the villages – recognised by several organisations themselves as a main threat to the villages' survival.

Still, other options might remain open to the organisations in their genuine and selfless desire to save the unique environment of Transylvania's Saxon villages.

Transylvania Trust's programme in the predominantly Hungarian village of Rimetea, is a successful example of the use of financial and legislative mechanisms for achieving their conservation vision of the village. As lobbied by the Trust, in October 2000 the National Committee of Monuments declared Rimetea a protected architectural and urban area, and since 2004 the pre-assessment of building permits was assigned to the Trust also.

To complement this regulatory measure, a system of grants is made available to all the inhabitants of Rimetea's historic buildings; receiving the grant is conditional upon homesteads' work being in line and guided by the Trust's conservation guidelines. However, according to the director of the Rimetea programme, the grants are not substantial enough by themselves to motivate the villagers' use and desire to be part of the conservation programme is also key to and typical of those engaged in the scheme (Furu 2008).

Evidently this latter characteristic of Rimetea – a village which has not experienced a sudden population replacement – may not readily hold true in the Saxon villages. By in large Rimetea's heritage is also the villagers' heritage: this is not the case in the Saxon villages. Legislative measures may certainly be applied and their limitation of non-conforming changes may be successful; but it can act as a disincentive for locals to carry out maintenance and improvement works at all.

Another factor to consider in the Saxon villages equation are typical identity traits of the Romanians and Roma in the area. According to Mitu (2001, 30), Transylvanian Romanians' suspicion of foreign dominance is fundamental to their perception of themselves and others, as they see themselves as a function of a dangerous – though undefined – foreign enemy. Their condition defined by having been for centuries

under oppression (as slaves), Roma may possibly join the Romanians in a reaction of distrust and resentment toward the foreign initiated or backed regulations. More like perhaps, it is for the Roma to by-pass such regulations by remaining officially not registered as citizens – which is the means they often use to avoid prejudice, even when this denies them public services (CEDIMR-SE 2001, 17-18). Though in light of these identity traits, the route of educating the new Romanian and Roma locals seems even more likely to result in conflict through further fuelling their mistrust and suspicious tendencies.

### **Conclusions**

The above discussion arrived at a number of points. Firstly, in the unique situation of Transylvania's Saxon villages, protecting the physical heritage of a nearly vanished ethnic group almost necessarily impinges on the right to identity expression of another (that of the new Romanian and Roma population).

Secondly, it is confirmed that a value held in high regard within one party's value system – in this case, the value of the external, mostly European, organisations' selfless work to save the heritage of another group and country – may be perceived, whether or not on a conscious level, as a threat by another party to its expression of identity – here, by the new locals.

Thirdly, the worthy agenda of the conservation groups acting in Transylvania's Saxon villages qualifies as a want when framed within conflict and human need theories. Identity exertion by contrast, is a fundamental and non-negotiable human need and according to these theories, it needs to take priority, since if repressed, conflict is predicted to ensue.

Fourthly, any intentions to culturally educate the locals, even though advocated by previous specialist studies, are unlikely to simply lead to a shift in the villagers' attitude and actions, whilst there is a greater chance for these to be perceived with suspicion and resentment and indeed, to fuel these up where they already exist. Even if such education took place and was convincing to the villagers, in reality it would probably lead to undecided thinking rather than a positive embrace of the Saxons' heritage, since the villagers' own identity and values will continue to exist and influence their reasoning.

Fifthly, the idea of educating the locals was shown to have colonial connotations of an attitude of cultural superiority; educating the locals was unveiled as akin to acculturation – in basic terms, a form of cultural colonialism. External organisations must therefore confront the idea that their positive intentions may have another dimension, not immediately apparent from within their own value system.

Sixthly, legal control and financial incentives remain theoretical options for the external conservation organisations to use in their attempts to save the Saxon heritage of the villages. Whilst successful elsewhere, these methods seem inappropriate in the particular context of the Saxon villages, where the heritage to be saved is not of the new locals' culture. Regulations (which are limiters rather than catalysts) would need to be complemented by other means, such as financial incentives, though, as shown, the introduction of grants may meet with the suspicion typical of Transylvanian Romanians towards foreign initiatives and with Roma's general resistance to registration. Moreover, paying a social group to protect the expression of another's identity at the cost of sacrificing its own, not only undermines a fundamental human need, but the one subsuming the other two – recognition and security (Pepin 2008, 292); as seen, in accordance with conflict theory, conflict being the likely and inevitable result.

Most importantly perhaps, concluding from the points above, all conservation organisations acting in the area, as indeed elsewhere, need to be aware of and understand the identities at play in that context in order to ensure basic human needs are met and that plans and actions take these extensively into account. This is necessary also in devising participatory approaches to conservation planning to ensure these include the local communities' needs and values.

A comprehensive study of the cultural values, way of life and identities of all stakeholders in the Saxon villages of Transylvania, and particularly of the local communities, undoubtedly needs to be urgently undertaken and to inform conservationists' approaches and interventions.

## Bibliography

### Books

- Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Doyle, Len and Ian Gough. 1991. *A Theory of Human Need*. Hampshire, Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Graf, Rudolf and Mihai Grigoras. 2003. *The Emigration of the Ethnic Germans of Romania under Communist Rule*. In Levai, Csaba and Vasile Vese, *Tolerance and Intolerance in Historical Perspective*. Pisa: Plus - Universita di Pisa.
- Hernandez, Felipe. 2005. *Introduction: Transculturation Architectures in Latin America*. In Hernandez, Felipe, Mark Millington and Iain Borden, eds., *Transculturation. Cities, Spaces and Architectures in Latin America*. Amsterdam, New York: Editions Rodopi B.V.
- Linsell, Nikki. 2008. *Whose Heritage Are We Restoring?* Blurb.com
- Mason, Randall. 2002. *Assessing Values in Conservation Planning: Methodological Issues and Choices*. In The Getty Conservation Institute ed., *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage*. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute.
- Mitu, Sorin. 2001. *National Identity of Romanians in Transylvania*. Budapest: Central European University Press.
- Serageldin, Mona. 2000. *Preserving the Historic Urban Fabric in a Context of Fast-Paced Change*. In The Getty Conservation Institute ed., *Values and Heritage Conservation*. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute.

### Articles

- Gundisch, Konrad. 1998. *The History of Transylvania and the Transylvania Saxons*. Georg Schuller, translator. <<http://www.sibiweb.de/geschi/7b-history.htm>> (2007, Sep.12)
- Pepin, Michelle. 2008. *Cities and the Destruction of Human Identity*. *The Design Journal* 11/3: 287-300.

### Conference Papers

- Michalon, Benedicte. Nov 25-27, 2004. *Playing on Ethnicity to be Here and There. The three paradoxes of "ethnic migrations"*. In EAPS Working Group on International Migration in Europe, ed. *International Migrations in Europe: New Trends, New Methods of Analysis*. Rome: Institute for Research on Population and social Policies, National Research Council.

<[http://66.102.1.104/scholar?hl=en&lr=&q=cache:S4P9whCAMmAJ:www.irpps.cnr.it/ricmob/web\\_conf/download/Michalon%2520paper.pdf+michalon+ethnicity](http://66.102.1.104/scholar?hl=en&lr=&q=cache:S4P9whCAMmAJ:www.irpps.cnr.it/ricmob/web_conf/download/Michalon%2520paper.pdf+michalon+ethnicity)> (2007, Sep.14)

- Hughes Alina and Tom Hughes. 2007a. The Cultural Dimensions in Romania's Saxon Villages: Issues for Restoration and Regeneration Initiatives. In ADGD ed. Identity in the Design Environment. Symposium, Nottingham Trent University. [www.ntu.ac.uk/ADGD/events/index.html](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/ADGD/events/index.html)> (2008, Oct.14)
- Hughes Alina and Tom Hughes. 2007b. Involving the local population: a case study of a restoration and regeneration project in Transylvania's Saxon villages. In INTBAU ed. History, Heritage & Regeneration. Conference, Sibiu

### Internet sources

- Centrul de Documentare si Informare despre Minoritatile din Europa de Sud-Est (CEDIMR-SE). 2001. Romii din Romania. Centrul de resurse pentru diversitate etnoculturala. [http://www.edrc.ro/projects.jsp?project\\_id=14](http://www.edrc.ro/projects.jsp?project_id=14)> (2007, Sep.11)
- INTBAU. 2001-7. Transylvanian Village Development Workshop. INTBAU. <<http://www.intbau.org/Transylvania.htm>> (2007, Sep.14)
- Kim Wilkie Associates. 2001. The Saxon Villages of Transylvania, Romania [online]. Richmond upon Thames: Kim Wilkie Associates. <<http://www.kimwilkie.com>> (2007, Sep.13)
- Mihai Eminescu Trust. 2002. Mihai Eminescu Trust. <[http://www.mihaieminescutrust.org/content/nd\\_standard.asp?n=117](http://www.mihaieminescutrust.org/content/nd_standard.asp?n=117)> (2007, Sep.14)
- Pro Patrimonio Foundation. Pro Patrimonio Foundation. <<http://www.propatrimonio.org/ro-en/projects/viscri.htm>> (2007, Sep.14)
- UNESCO. 1999. Villages with Fortified Churches in Transylvania. UNESCO. <<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/596>> (2007, Sep.14)
- Riksantikvaren. Internationl Activities. Riksantikvaren. <[http://www.riksantikvaren.no/english/International\\_activities/](http://www.riksantikvaren.no/english/International_activities/)> (2008, Sep.23)
- Article 25. 2008. participatory design. Article 25. <<http://www.article-25.org/-participatory-design-.htm>> (2008, Sep.25)

**Newspaper articles**

Bell, Gavin. May 12, 2007. Lost in Transylvania. Guardian Unlimited [online]. Guardian News and Media Limited. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2007/may/12/saturday.romania>> (2007, Sep.15)

Timonea, Dorin and Ovidiu Hategan. May 7, 2007. Scandal pe casele sasilor. Romania libera [online], 7 May. Societatea "R" S.A. <<http://www.romanalibera.ro/a94317/scandal-pe-casele-sasilor.html>> (2007, Sep.15)

**Primary sources interviews**

Furu, Arpad. October 14, 2008. Telephone interview with the Rimetea Programme Director [unpublished]. Cluj, Romania