

## THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF MOLDOVIȚA VALLEY – A PREDOMINANTLY RURAL TOURIST RESOURCE IN TRANSFORMATION

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### Abstract

The purpose of the present article is to analyze the cultural landscape of the Moldovița Valley in an interdisciplinary manner. Thus, it was possible the identification on field of a certain number of peculiarities and discrepancies that characterize the current state of Moldovița Valley cultural landscape. The article is rather conceived as a diagnosis avoiding to actively advocate on the idea of preserving the landscape, as the landscape it is perceived more as a living organism. Far from being a comprehensive approach, the study brings some final remarks and suggestions concerning some aspects related to landscape dynamics in order to provide a sustainable approach.

**Key words:** cultural landscape, Moldovița Valley, rural tourism.

**JEL Classification:** L 83, Q 01

### INTRODUCTION

Rural space is the expression of man's long effort to put in his service the physical-geographical components of the space and nature. It is a space shaped by mankind according to its needs, created through hard work and filled with anthropogenic creations being a true "rustic masterpiece" of mankind. Therefore, rural development should be directed towards improving the life quality of the rural community and to preserving the natural and cultural landscape (Cândea, Bran et al. 2005, pp. 99 - 110).

The cultural landscape is considered an important resource in the economy as it is also stipulated in the European Landscape Convention which defines landscape as a *resource* with a market value, available for major economic activities, tourism and planning. In order to avoid the tendency of degradation and destruction of the existing cultural landscape, in many rural areas it is required a creative and a continuous approach regarding the problems that the landscape currently faces. The importance of studying cultural landscape derives from the fact that it is considered an important factor within the regional development process. The cultural landscape is a vital resource for a strong rural tourism as the elements that composed it (religious edifices, monuments, traditions, crafts, etc) represents, in fact, the main object of tourist activity.

This paper is an interdisciplinary research (including analysis of geography, architecture, ethnography and tourism) on the cultural landscape of the Moldovița Valley. As scientific methods, there were primarily used the *bibliographic documentation* (national and international researches) and direct *investigation on field*. The reason of choosing this area of study derives from the fact that Moldovița Valley is an area with a diverse tourist potential, but with a strong

tendency of developing tourism in a disorganized manner. This threatens the very source that allowed the insertion of tourist activities in the area, namely, *the cultural landscape*. This article intends to be a diagnostic of the current situation regarding the status of Moldovița Valley cultural landscape.

The main objectives are: defining the concept of cultural landscape, identifying general and specific elements of the cultural landscape of the study area, identifying the non-native, non-specific elements with negative visual impact and proposing some solutions to remedy the problems found.

### CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND ITS ROLE IN RURAL TOURISM

#### Cultural landscape - conceptual delimitation

First used by Renaissance painters to distinguish the paintings depicting portraits of those rendering nature, *the landscape* became a disputed concept by a multitude of domains. Today there are three scientific disciplines that have as their object of study the landscape and these are: *landscape ecology*, *landscape architecture* and *landscape geography*. Used by both painters, architects, economists, historians, geographers and others, the landscape took on meanings according to each domain, making impossible any attempt of defining rigorously the concept.

I. Zăvoianu and M. Alexandrescu (1994, p. 79) points out, however, the crucial role of geographical landscape study, noting that "of all the specialists, only a geographer examines in a scientific manner the landscape, seeing it as a result of the numerous physical-geographical and economic-geographical factors, trying to explain the interdependencies between them, seeking its objective and permanent individualities". The landscape benefits therefore of a

threefold analysis - concerning the natural elements, the human elements and the processes that govern them.

From the perspective of Mac (1990, p. 9), the landscape, in order to be understood, must be tackled on two fronts, first superficially, through the senses, and then, deepened through critical analysis, arguing that the geographical landscape is a "reveal throughout the senses (geographical perception). If we want to understand it, it is necessary to know all the components and all the causal relationship that function in this living organism".

L. Drăguț (2000, p. 14) definition is more realistic, closer to nowadays reality, defining landscape as "spatial structure characterized by its own physiognomy, individualized by interacting abiotic, biotic and anthropogenic factors, which is valued differently depending on the way it is perceived ". His definition draws attention to the fact that the landscape can be valued, depending on the needs, desires and motivations involved. No wonder why the term began to be frequently used in the most diverse domains such as: *media landscape, publicist landscape, political landscape, tourist landscape, etc.*

In the same year (2000), it was held the *European Landscape Convention* which represents the official document of international recognition of the importance of the landscape. Thus, it was created the framework for European cooperation in this domain, the convention being the first and the only treaty on landscape subject. In Romania, the Convention was ratified by Law no. 451 of July, 8, 2002 (published in the Official Gazette, Part I, no. 536 of 23rd of July 2002). Its main purpose are to promote the protection, management and planning of European landscapes while recognizing the importance of cultural landscapes defined simply as "common heritage of Europe".

The cultural landscape has arisen as a result of human intervention on the natural space, in order to satisfy his basic needs, followed by a continuous process of transformation and adaptation of the place according to particular situations that have characterized at some points in time, the life of a community (population growth, religious believes, creative manifestations, technological advances, etc). All these interventions have left, along time, traces of civilization and culture, by culture meaning "all the cognitive and affective works (masterpieces), carried out or created by people" (Herseni, 1980, p.7).

Noteworthy is the approach of Burggraaff and Kleefeld (1998, cited in Crăciun, 2012, p. 4) which conducted a thorough analysis at a micro level concerning the cultural landscape (regional and communal scale), managing to individualize as an important landscape unit, the *cultop*. Defined as an area that brings together a number of elements sharing the same genesis and still preserved in the landscape, the cultop sites can be of two types, *functional* and *relicts*, both of them being found in the studied area (eg. functional cultop – Moldovița Monastery, XVth

century, relict cultop - the ruins of the ancient Moldovița monastery, XVth century).

Most attempts of defining the cultural landscape have in common the *time element* - cultural landscape is seen as a keeper of traditional values and therefore requires special attention and protection in order to preserve it for future generations. Simon Bell (1993) and Marcucci (2000) draw attention on the importance of identifying the cultural context in which a certain landscape exists, understanding the processes that have created it could offer important details that may help in the process of decision-making concerning its future status. However, Antrop (2005) points out in a very objective way that the values of the past must be integrated into the requirements and future needs of society and that the landscape protection measures should not stop the progress.

### Cultural landscape and rural tourism

In terms of tourism, the cultural landscape is one of the main attractions, whether it is present in rural areas or in urban areas. Rural cultural landscape, however, is more attractive, as it captures evidence of human interaction since the beginning of its manifestation (compared to urban areas, where the manifestations are due to some technological and cultural level). Therefore, there is no wonder why tourists seeking holiday destinations in rural areas come mostly from urban areas, a trend that some authors place since the ancient period.

Incomprehensible at first, then, harder accepted - given its lack of prestige - rural tourism imposed itself slowly but consequently, particularly on the strongly developed countries with a high degree of urbanization. Today, this type of tourism is becoming more and more appreciated being requested especially by people who live and work in increasingly stressful conditions. Even it is not declared as a product that eradicates stress, rural tourism still gives the possibility of returning to nature, to all that is pure and unaltered – a return to origins always enjoyable (Nistoreanu, 1999, p. 11).

Until two centuries ago, recreational activities in rural areas were intimately related to the rural character of the settlement itself and were primarily motivated by the desire of relaxation having a passive, nostalgic, traditional, non-competitive nature (Butler et al, 1998). In the 1970s, rural tourism was perceived rather as "soft" and "green" this explaining the increased interest in promoting activities in harmony with rural areas such as walking and hiking. To this sustainable and ecological movement it was added at the end of 1980, a substantial cultural component. This component was manifested mainly by proliferation of rural festivals and cultural itineraries linking various attractions such as museums or small workshops. The village is no longer seen only as an oasis of tranquility or as a possibility to change the decor but offers the chance of discover the rural cultural richness ignored until

recently, participation in various cultural activities, experimenting directly the rural life (Dewailly, 1998). In summary, it can be noticed a desire for transposition in the past, a desire to return to origins, to rediscover the traditional values stored in various forms in the village, but so easily accessible via "trivial" landscape (a unique synthesis of the balance between man and nature).

Dewailly, J., M., (1989), argues that in terms of rural areas, many people are looking for holiday destinations because they appreciate the shapes, color and atmosphere of such places, vernacular architecture (that uses natural materials such as stone, brick, wood or clay), craft shops, small factories, weekly markets, old bridges. Of a particular importance there is the religious architecture (churches and towers, bell towers - which often become tourist emblems of places, chapels, cemeteries) and sometimes items related to military architecture and fortified houses, ramparts, ditches, gates, citadels. Not only these heritage elements that are often the most tangible elements of a society are the only ones interested in tourism, in completing them, anything that can be called "art" or "popular" has the potential to attract tourists:

- agricultural and craft tools;
- traditional businesses and ways of leisure;
- civil or religious important events;
- legends, tales and local music;
- different colloquial language or dialect;
- crafts endangered and local cuisine.

Besides natural attractions, the presence of historical and cultural heritage significantly increases the attractiveness of an area. The more the sites prove their authenticity and uniqueness the more competitive are the destinations, especially if they are internationally recognized and included, for example in UNESCO patrimony list, Moldovița Valley being a fortunate case, as the Moldovița monastery was included on it in 1993.

#### CHARACTERISTICS AND CHANGES IN MOLDOVIȚA VALLEY CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Situated in the north - north-eastern Romania, Moldoviței Valley is a subunit of Bucovina Mountains being framed on the west by Ferdeu Mountains and on the east by Obcina Mare Mountain (fig. no. 1). Along the valley, about 50 kilometers long, came into existence several localities, their evolution being closely connected with the history of the Moldovița monastery and the region of Bucovina.



**Figure 1 - Moldovița Valley geographical position within Romania**

Bucovina is the name of a territory whose boundaries have lost its exact contour, it is almost a territory of legend but it existed for over 144 years, between 1774 and 1918. As gratitude to have interfered in mediating the Russo-Turkish conflict of 1768-1774, Austria received from Turkey the region of Northern Moldova, renamed soon after Bucovina. In 1918, on the background of the events that followed the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, Bucovina declared its sovereignty from Austria, and the General Congress of Bucovina decided unconditional unification with Romania. After 1944 the northern part of Bucovina was occupied by the Soviet Union, forming the largest part of today Chernivtsi region (Ukraine) and the southern Bucovina remained to Romania, overlapping nowadays approximately over Suceava county but the limits of the county are wider, including territories that belonged to Dorohoi and Botoșani (Moldoveanu, 2002, p. 5).

Keeping mainly symbolic the designation of Bucovina, this part of old Moldavia, is today a tourist region known throughout the world, impressing through the harmony of the landscape, durability of painted monasteries under UNESCO heritage list and, of course, because of preserving ancient traditions and customs.

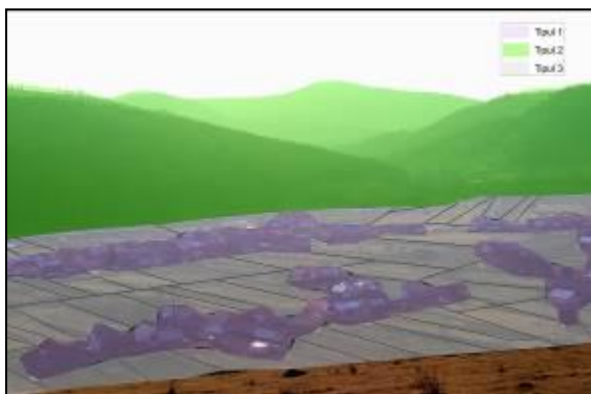
All these elements form an exceptional cultural landscape, and the Valley of Moldovița as part of Bucovina, is no exception. Thus, this area is part of the series of Bucovina valleys (Suceava Valley, Bistrita Valley, Humor Valley, Moldova Valley), true preservers of traditions, milestones for the Romanian folklore, which benefits of an unique cultural landscape.

#### General components of Moldovița Valley landscape

Moldovița Valley is a picturesque settlement, with a special charm and stands out through the multitude of landscapes it offers: *the wide valley of Moldovița river, the narrow valleys of the tributaries, forested gentle hills, pastures and meadows*, all of this outlining a place with an attractive and original aspect.

The landscape analysis conducted in the field led to the identification of three main types of landscapes with different characteristics (fig. no. 2):

- type 1: a dense and urbanized landscape, spreaded especially along the main valley where the valley has larger widths and also along the tributary valleys;
- type 2: a landscape dominated by the natural environment;
- type 3: a landscape with lengthen shaped agricultural parceling, perpendicular to the road.



**Figure 2 - Main types of landscape from Moldovița Valley, photo: Otilia Vicol, Vatra Moldoviței village**

The area of study is characterized, in terms of landscape, by an overlapping in the territory of the elements which belong to rural areas (humanized) with those related to the natural environment represented by the forest landscape, wild and relatively uniform distributed.

*The visual force lines* of the landscape are directed mainly to the valleys, creating the impression of symmetry and balance. The hillslides dominate the landscape creating the illusion of enclosed, protected even hidden space, due to rich forest vegetation, but also offers countless panoramic viewpoints. The pastures and meadows sprinkled with haystacks are a proof of the daily interaction between people and nature and increase the attractiveness of the landscape. The agricultural landscape, bordered by low hedges or clumps, offers an open and harmonious landscape. *Textural diversity* (coniferous and broad leaved mixed, the grassland, the paved roads, the water courses, the various constructions) is supported by a generous color palette that gives a special personality to the area of study.

#### **Specific components of moldovița valley cultural landscape**

The cultural landscape of Moldovița Valley is influenced mainly by the position of the settlements along a valley which divides the area into two (east-west) but, at the same time, offers the opportunity to observe the ingenuity with which people were able to exploit any flat land they could find, even though those

were situated at a higher altitude (on the former terraces of Moldovița river). It also can be observed, as an example, that the main part of the Vatra Moldoviței village is located on the left bank of the river (east side), due to the significant widening of the floodplain (with a width of 3 km).

But the uniqueness of Moldovița Valley landscape derives mainly from the harmonious coexistence of several elements among which there are (Romanian Architects Order - Northeast Branch – (RAO), 2009):

- the existence of a curtain of vegetation - which outlines the topography and at the same time, outlines the limits between the natural and humanized areas;
- the haystack and the hay barn – which harmonizes the landscape;
- the traditional fence made by “răzlogi” (wood leftovers) - is an important element in the cultural landscape of this area and a traditional and cheap modality to set the land boundaries;
- improving the courtyard appearance - by inserting alleys made of stones or rounded woodpieces; the front garden is decorated with seasonal plants, ornamental flowers pots, swings, benches of various designs;
- the backyard is made up of various crops or even small orchards;
- the traditional households fit the landscape due to low size, use of natural materials and colors and merge in a discrete manner with the environment.

A more rigorous analysis of the landscape, according to basic elements postulated by Simon Bell (1993, p. 11), highlights the importance of the following landscape elements:

- *Linear elements* - are designed to target and induce order in landscape and are represented by the vegetation alignments, road axis, railway, fences, river valley, trails;
- *Punctual elements* – act like centers of attention, focus and distract in the same time while looking at other elements and are represented by hay silos, singular trees, roof tops or small groups of houses (specific mostly in the northern half part of the study area where there is a predominant Hutsuls population like the Rașca and Argel villages). We can also integrate here even the haystacks, as *elements of rhythm and organization* (fig. no. 3);



**Figure 3 - Punctual elements (the haystacks and hay barn), Argel village, photo: Otilia Vicol**

- *Surface elements* - are represented mainly by agricultural land and "help" the viewer to approximate how much the area extends;

- *Elements of volume* - are elements that determine the scale of the landscape and create spaces that the viewer can relate to easily. Appropriate semi-enclosed pens, traditional household having the construction closing the yard on three sides leaving open only the side street as a symbol of communication between the individual (family life) and community (social life). At a larger scale but still in the same category is the Moldovița monastery courtyard, which is closed on all four sides and impresses by its massiveness as a constant reminding of its essential role in the evolution of Moldovița Valley settlements.

Moldovița Valley cultural landscape is, undoubtedly, influenced by the traditional architecture which is a reflection of the dominant economic profile based on the logging industry and livestock.

Compared with the natural landscape and the economic and social conditions, Bucovina's architecture reveals a series of original formulas, in which the proportions and volumes are combined into a harmonious functional unit (Jula, Mănăstireanu, 1969, p. 59).

Before the formation of village communities, since the beginning of human evolution, the house was the fundamental axis of social and family life, the mark of man's existence on earth, a symbol of human purpose and attitude in a certain time and place (Abuțnăriței, 2011). Folk architecture is one of the most important and revealing areas of traditional Romanian culture. The art of building is an ethnographic document showing cultural unity, continuity, unbroken living on the site of our ethnogenesis - the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic area (Petrescu, 1969).

Therefore, the traditional houses of the study area are in fact the Bucovina specific house, being constructed of dovetail pine logs, on a foundation of sandstone blocks with shingle roof (fig. no. 4). The horn is not ejected, but it is left in the attic, to be used in smoking the pigmeat. Usually, the house has two rooms, in the middle there is the entrance porch, to the left there is the kitchen and on the right the dowry room, where there were preserved all the beautiful garments (Nedelea, 2007).

The traditional architecture is defined by harmony, an ideal accord between volume, material and technology. All these elements give the traditional village scale and character. It is a human-scale architecture of great sobriety, highlighted by a fine sense of proportion. These proportions come from a deeply understanding of the qualities and limitations of the building material (timber) and from respecting the inherited traditions that were influenced by regional conditions (*genius loci*) (RAO, 2009).



**Figure 4 – Traditional Bucovina house, Strâmtura village, photo: Otilia Vicol**

An architectural element of great beauty, loaded with special symbolism is the porch, an intermediate space between inside and outside, a space of communication but also with a practical function, protecting against the weather. Its beauty derives from the attention paid on porch pillars which are often carved, decorated with different archaic motifs such as *the wheel, the string, the sun* or different vegetable elements like *leaves or flowers*, etc.

The local population presents certain characteristics and specificities as there are several ethnic groups in the area. Alongside Romanians there are the Hutsuls, the Germans and the Ukrainians, each putting their own mark on the landscape. Thus, alongside Romanian traditional houses one can also admire the traditional Hutzuls houses built of logs pine and yew joined with wooden pegs. Most of them could be found in Moldovița and Argel villages, the oldest in the area with over 300 years and being located in the village of Moldovița (fig. no. 5).



**Figure 5 – Traditional Hutsuls house, Moldovița village, photo: Otilia Vicol**

The Germanic architectural type (fig. no. 6) also may be admired alongside with the so-called "Freudenthal" houses (fig. no. 7) ("Freudenthal" is the name of the German colony that lived in the area during the Habsburg occupation (Pușcașu, 2004, p. 199) and with the Austrian houses.



**Figure 6 – House in Germanic architectural style, Moldovița village, photo: Otilia Vicol**



**Figure 7 – „Freudenthal” houses, Moldovița village, photo: Otilia Vicol**

The cultural landscape is not a static one, as the daily life is also part of it, as long as it still retains traditional customs and occupations. Fortunately, in Moldovița Valley the traditional occupations are still present although at a much smaller scale.

Even so, there are more than 40 craftsmen willing at any time to initiate and guide those interested in the art of decorating eggs or in the art of weaving, sculpture or painting wooden icons (<http://www.creatiepopulara.suceava.ro/creatie.htm>).

Also, there are several exhibitions of great value as that from the Village Museum, a museum dedicated to the Hutsuls culture, situated in Moldovița village. Very remarkable is the private collection of decorated eggs Lucia Condrea from the same village, an exhibition that dazzles with the large number of exhibits and with the diversity of egg painting techniques presented. Traditional trades and crafts are extremely important elements of the cultural landscape. They determine, moreover, how to build the homes and everyday objects. Crafts can become tourist attractions precisely because they are still valid and are part of everyday life, unlike Western world where they are only staged (ROA, 2009). The religion and the Church also play an important role in the community, encouraging it from the earliest times to maintain a living in harmony with local traditions and characteristics.

In summary, the cultural landscape of the study area can be also easily classified and analyzed according to the typology proposed by Crăciun (2012, pp. 8-13), that identified the following types:

- *the residential cultural landscape*, which overlaps on the built space, with a morphometry specific to scattered villages;

- *the agricultural cultural landscape* represented by the parcelled plots and meadows;
- *the agro-pastoral cultural landscape* represented by pastures and sheepfolds;
- *the forestry cultural landscape*, well defined and dominated by coniferous;
- *the cultural landscape of communication ways* (the road is represented by both the modernized and unmodernised versions; the rail transport is more an example of *uncultural landscape*, the line being closed after the 2010 floods now being left in decay);
- *the sacral cultural landscape* represented especially by Moldovița monastery and also by the communal traditional churches.

#### **Moldovița valley cultural landscape: in danger?**

As it was stated in the previous chapter, the cultural landscape is not a static entity as it is subject to continuous changes. Unfortunately, the changes incurred on Romanian village during the communist period, brought conspicuous damage on the local architecture. Because it was imposed a new type of house, whose features have not complied the characteristics of the place, much harm was done to the landscape (ROA, 2009). With a height regime greater than that of traditional houses (ground and first floor) with a bulky look, the model imposed was meant to be an element of modernization of the village (fig. no. 8).

However, the changes now occurring in the rural world are no longer dictated or imposed, but arise as a result of "borrowing" and "adoption" of foreign conceptions concerning the idea of progress and prosperity. The desire for modernization and the conversion toward tourist activities tend to make, unfortunately, in an ad-hoc manner, notwithstanding that ignoring the specificity of the place will inevitably lead to the destruction of the main tourism resources, *the cultural landscape*.



**Figure 8 – Type of houses imposed during communism, Vatra Moldoviței village, photo: Otilia Vicol**

Field analysis identified a number of non-specific items, with a strong, dissonant visual impact:

- houses with upper floor situated near the street;
- pensions built in the so-called "mountain style", with roofs in strong slope;
- pensions or houses with multiple floors, having a large footprint on the ground;
- colored plaster (fig. no. 9);



**Figure 9 – Mario Pension, Frumosu village, photo: Otilia Vicol**

- lining the front of the house with plastic wrap;
- complicated shapes of the roof;
- strident colored roofs (red, green, blue);
- "laces" of sheet metal used on decorating houses;
- concrete and wrought iron fences with insertions of statues representing lions or eagles;
- façade decoration with river stone imitation;
- insertion of fake traditional elements (kitsch) - especially the case of new pensions which aestheticized their garden with different so-called rustic elements: benches and swings, carts filled with ornamental flower pots, statues representing dwarf frogs and other animals, concrete fountains.

Unfortunately, the traditional houses from Moldovița valley are mainly in a quite bad situation and those renovated had been modified in the terms of roof (the shingle being changed with a metal sheet) or facade (the exterior wood was covered with plaster or the porch was closed for expanding the living space).

Necessary but distressing, the waste collection bins harm the serenity of the landscape, being placed in highly visible locations. The interventions regarding regularization of Moldovița river and of some tributaries by building gabions to protect the area from possible unwanted effects of flash floods also creates visual discrepancies (fig. no. 10). The only solution that can be proposed to improve these shortcomings would be tuning them - waste collection area could be fenced allocated a small wooden fence taking care every day to clean and sanitize the perimeter; river banks should be neat and rich in vegetation.



**Figure 10 – Gabions on Moldovița river, Moldovița village, photo: Otilia Vicol**

It is obvious that the villagers want and should take advantage of the progress of modern life. As a result, the character of villages changes from one day to another the community integrating in the present era. This causes a conflict between tradition and modernity that manifests differently depending on the conditions of each geographical area. In order to solve this conflict it must be taken into consideration both the integration of these constructions in the traditional sites and their spiritual continuity (Gogonea, 2007, p. 33).

Regarding the tourism activities practiced in the area, they are still at a rather low level of development, although there are a number of initiatives in this regard. Thus, restoring into use the narrow gauge railway line and the forestry train, known as Mocănița from Moldovița village, and the plan of extending the line towards south, to Vatra Moldoviței village, shows a high interest in increasing the tourism cohesion in Moldovița Valley and the initiative immediately attracted the attention of tourists. Although these investments in tourism can be considered mostly beneficial, they also may act in a negative manner if there are not respected the characteristics of the place.

Thus, encouraging the traditional, using mainly natural materials, recycling and not least, informing the public regarding the importance of preserving cultural heritage are the primary means towards a sustainable development.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of cultural landscape in Europe is often presented as an inseparable interweaving between nature and culture but also as a key element in strengthening the cultural identity. Its integration into tourism development plans is more than necessary and should be acclaimed by all the stakeholders involved. Public awareness on the importance of traditional values and encouraging the population to actively involve in the process of landscape management can bring many economical, social and cultural benefits. This paper, far from being approached all aspects

concerning the moldovițean cultural landscape, succeeded to meet its objectives, in a concise manner. This article acts more like a starting point towards a more rigorous analysis and as it feels the need to expand the research also from the sociological perspective.

Thus, it will be possible to find out the current opinions of the population regarding the changes that affects their living area, all this information gathered being very helpful for a more accurate diagnosis of the area and also will help in creating coherent forecasts. It would also be useful the insertion of a precise analysis on the population, with special reference to shares of different ethnic groups present in the area in order to

find out if they currently have sufficient resources to get involved and to maintain their role in the actual cultural landscape. This is however a challenging task, considering that at the last census the Hutsuls ethnicity was not an option, and the Hutsuls mainly chose between Ukrainian or Romanian categories.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

"This work was supported by the the European Social Fund in Romania, under the responsibility of the Managing Authority for the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013 [grant POSDRU/CPP 107/DMI 1.5/S/78342]".

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