

IDENTIFYING IMPEDIMENTS TO PRESERVING OLD HOUSES AND CREATING SUSTAINABLE BUSINESSES IN THE BUKOVINA REGION

Maria ORHEAN-VRANCEANU

*Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, 720229, Romania
maria.vranceanu@usm.ro*

Carmen Eugenia NASTASE

*Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, 720229, Romania
carmen.nastase@usm.ro*

Ancuța LUCACI

*Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, 720229, Romania
ancuta.lucaci@usm.ro*

Eugenia TRUFIN

*Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, 720229, Romania
eugenia.trufin@hotmail.com*

Abstract

In European countries, the enhancement of the cultural heritage of old rural houses of historical, architectural, economic and social value is an activity that aims firstly to bring the cultural heritage up to date, through restoration and placing it in the circuit of current socio-human values and, secondly, to promote the level of sustainable development of the rural communities. The binomial that guarantees success, both in terms of rural tourism and in terms of enhancing a village way of life, is modern infrastructure and a preserved and restored built heritage. The need for research and discussion related to the preservation of old houses is linked to the need to sustain rural traditional houses by recognising their role and contribution to maintaining harmonious relationships between people and their environment.

Key words: *preservation, old houses, sustainable businesses, Bukovina.*

JEL Classification: *Q01, Z32.*

I. INTRODUCTION

By understanding the immeasurable value of history and tradition, transformation through preservation has become a resourceful option. The act of renovating an old house is not only a measurable investment, but also an emotional and cultural one. Remodelling allows a house to preserve its distinctive characteristics and authenticity, making it harmonious with a modern lifestyle. It is more than simply a technical method; it is a way to add value by preserving the original identity while making the necessary adjustments.

Bukovina, like any other area in Romania, has gone through a chaotic modernization process with no rural planning standards that support the preservation of its architectural heritage. As a result, in a region that was renowned for its almost complete wood civilisation 30 to 40 years ago, there are now just a few dispersed examples of traditional architecture. Traditional rural houses have suffered the most as a result of this process. Developing tourism in rural regions is one strategy to address rural environmental issues, and most experts

believe that exploiting the area's natural and human potential is the key to economic, social, moral, and political recovery.

Bukovina is considered to be a mixing of cultures, beliefs, traditions and customs, deeply entrenched in the depths of its inhabitants, and is frequently regarded as a distinct land rich in culture, folklore, and religious values. Therefore, future businesses should be sustainable and successful in this area.

Climate change is becoming an increasingly observable element of our lives, and everyone and every organisation can contribute in changing the way resources are exploited and new products and services are industrialised. From this point of view, businesses cannot achieve long-term success unless they include sustainable solutions in the long-term strategies.

The growing "supply" of old houses has led to local investors purchasing them for aesthetic or financial reasons and converting them into accommodation or other economic activities (i.e. souvenir store, bakery, etc.). Such examples may be observed near Breaza, Cacica, and Campulung Moldovenesc. In recent years, this tendency has been noted in all the ethnographic regions of Bukovina

(Humor, Siret, Dorna, Campulung, Radauti, etc.).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Nobel Laureate economist Robert Solow, "in the long term, areas with a strong and specific identity are more likely to prosper than those without such an identity." In reality, each place has to identify its own unique marketing characteristics, improve them, and manage the potential of being everything to everyone or nothing special to anyone." (Licciardi et al., 2012).

Guidelines that promote the protection and development of cultural heritage are also contributing to economic growth. It is not for nothing that periods of cultural flourishing throughout history are believed to have coincided with periods of economic prosperity (Sørensen et al., 2009).

Exploiting tangible cultural heritage in rural areas involves the establishment and consolidation of a particular entrepreneurial type that examines the particularities of an enterprise in terms of challenges and obstacles related to a lack of financial resources, market access and innovation, intellectual property rights, education, and training (Zaman, 2015).

Bukovina possesses numerous attractive points that can support the area to be promoted as a popular tourist destination due to its monasteries, traditional villages, and beautiful natural surroundings. These elements should be held in reserve because are arguments that instigate tourists to visit and revisit the region. Furthermore, cultural tourism and ecotourism, both of which Bukovina has huge potential for, are potential sources of expansion that can contribute further preserve the attractiveness of the area. (Cazacu et al., 2012).

In conclusion, when considering best practice in tangible rural heritage, we considered the principles outlined in the Southern Bukovina Architectural Guide, which states that "The basis for any intervention in the built environment in rural areas (whether conservation, maintenance, modernization or construction) must be: respect for the cultural heritage; [...] integration into the context by preserving unaltered the identity of the settlement, the built and natural landscape; responsibility towards the descendants; improvement of living conditions in the present, by making judicious use of local resources in the long term so that they remain available for future generations; use of renewable energy sources; use of the site so that the shape/volume and appearance of the building reflect the local climate: orientation and sunshine, humidity and prevailing winds, temperature fluctuations, etc.; the use of traditional materials and techniques that, in fact, reflect the best solutions, crystallised over time for local environmental conditions" (Deacu et al., 2016).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative assessment of scientific papers, best practices and guidelines in the field of protection, preservation and conservation of tangible and intangible heritage was approached, particularly in the Bukovina region, to conduct the present investigation.

The major research issue is the challenge of preserving the tangible heritage of Bukovina and the creation of sustainable businesses. The main barriers that cause the disappearance of the tangible heritage, in this particular case, the traditional houses in Bukovina, are numerous and must be identified. Furthermore, identifying the obstacles that interfere with the development of business models initiatives that capitalise on traditional houses can provide valuable information for all stakeholders interested in contributing to rural growth.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Learning to appreciate the cultural heritage of the village is not always easy for locals. They thoroughly built durable, substantial tangible houses and opened hotels, then were surprised to find that tourists prefer wooden houses. However, it did not happen overnight. The discoverers, mostly foreigners, were attracted by the gorgeousness of the Bukovina community and decided to invest in traditional houses here, expecting to offer guests a unique experience. As the demand for accommodation in such homes increased and they became desirable for rooms in modern buildings, locals started to return to traditional buildings as well.

Table 1. Impediments in preserving old houses and creating sustainable businesses in the Bukovina Region

Key area	Impediment
Costs and materials	Limited information and awareness of the benefits of the restoration of traditional houses
Education	The increasing lack of interest among young people in vocational schools of traditional crafts Migration of young people from rural to urban areas for education and well-paid jobs Young people who live in rural areas possess modest entrepreneurial skills
Young people	The practice among young people in rural areas of

	building modern houses that are not adapted to traditional features Loss of youth interest in culture and ancestral traditions
Decisions of traditional house owners	Old perceptions of traditional homeowners about the effectiveness of the house Abandonment or demolition of traditional houses by owners
Costs and materials	Restoration of traditional houses involves high costs for owners or potential investors Certain types of construction materials for the restoration of traditional houses have disappeared from the market or are very difficult to locate
Support and financing	Traditional house owners do not identify entrepreneurial development and support for their heritage
Local legislation	Lack of measures and decisions at local level regarding the preservation of cultural identity and tangible and intangible heritage
Folk craftsmen	Difficulties in preserving traditional artistic crafts and the rarity of folk craftsmen

Source: Author's elaboration

A. INFORMATION

Limited information and awareness of the benefits of the restoration of traditional houses

Traditional rural houses are a symbol of the areas from which they originate. Furthermore, the structure and architecture of these houses evolved over time as families adopted architectural components and customised them according to their financial means and available resources.

However, the passage of time has resulted in the deterioration and disappearance of many traditional houses in the Bukovina villages. Some have been demolished as a result of the ravages of time, while others have been destroyed to make available space for

other new and modern houses. Restoration and conservation can provide a second life to tangible heritage while also contributing to the socioeconomic growth of communities.

On the one hand, the owners of traditional rural houses in Bukovina need to be informed about legislation and best practice in the field of heritage preservation, to protect and to increase the value of the heritage assets. Many of the existing owners are not aware of the economic functions that their houses can obtain or of the contribution to community development. Additionally, most owners of traditional houses are convinced that restoring these assets is particularly costly and are not interested in further information.

Potential owners or other stakeholders, on the other hand, should be made aware of the existence of tangible heritage in rural Bukovina. Local governments, the business sector, and civil society are all active in encouraging the restoration of cultural heritage in rural regions, as well as opportunities for entrepreneurial growth within the community.

"Stefan cel Mare" University of Suceava, for example, has created a portfolio of traditional rural houses in the main ethnographic areas of Bukovina and transformed it into an online map for people interested in cultural heritage, through the PORT Cultural project. The houses displayed on the platform are not for sale, but those with interest can discover numerous houses in rural communities.

"Save the Bucovina Village", a project of ADER (Association for Economic and Regional Development), is another example of best practice that promotes the preservation of tangible heritage and increases the value of traditional buildings in Bukovina. The project has published a brochure with information on how to preserve and strengthen tangible cultural heritage. The major objective underlying this initiative is to support the preservation of traditional houses, as well as the development of new houses that integrate within the rural architecture.

B. EDUCATION

The increasing lack of interest among young people in vocational schools of traditional crafts

In the Bukovina region, there were in the past many folk craftsmen who contributed to the construction, decoration, and furnishing of traditional houses with specific elements. Example of crafts are wood processing, clay processing, furrier product manufacturing, pottery, tissue, folk, popular mask, egg decoration, and icon painting. The Bukovina Cultural Centre has a database of folk craftsmen who still practice folk crafts today. Nevertheless, the number of folk craftsmen is nowadays much smaller than in the past. Many of them are old and do not practice the crafts

anymore. In the past, folk crafts were being transmitted further through apprenticeship periods with experienced folk craftsmen.

Nowadays, young people from Bukovina are no longer interested in these crafts or in traditional vocational craft specializations. The migration of young people to cities and other EU countries, very low incomes in the rural areas, the replacement of certain types of materials with modern ones (e.g., replacing wood windows with insulated windows), and the replacement of traditional houses with modern structures are the major causes for the disappearance of crafts.

Younger generations must protect and preserve cultural traditions while also trying to reintegrate them into the modern way of life in rural communities. Consequently, stakeholders should increase the interest of young people in traditional crafts and vocational educational programmes.

According to Stroe (2020), Bukovina is an area with a rich material cultural history that attracts people from all over the world. As a result, protecting and taking advantage of the existing resources is critical to maintaining authentic traditional villages in the Bukovina area.

Migration of young people from rural to urban areas for education and well-paid jobs

The decisions of young people to migrate from rural to urban areas for education and well-paid jobs are influenced by social, economic, and individual factors (Rosvall, 2020). Migration of young people from rural to urban areas is a normal phenomenon in the Bukovina region.

The main reasons for this phenomenon are the high level of education, the diversity of jobs, the high salaries, the highly developed infrastructure and facilities, and the high standard of life. Entrepreneurial opportunities are also more abundant in urban areas due to infrastructure, innovation centres, and funding opportunities, as specialised and available workers.

The Covid-19 pandemic has stimulated many people living in cities to move to rural areas to work (González-Leonardo et al., 2022). Subsequently, the attractiveness of rural areas and traditional heritage led them to move permanently to smaller communities.

Other young people sought to help their home communities grow and implement further development initiatives. The alternatives for developing rural areas through heritage valorisation are various, and are greatly impacted by the resources available in rural areas. The development of businesses that recognise the local community and its tangible and intangible heritage are opportunities to strengthen the local economy and creating jobs in the community for tourist locations. Furthermore, investing in cultural events and workshops that value local traditions, music, and

cuisine can attract a significant number of tourists to rural areas and generate awareness of the area. We consider that the development initiatives of young people must be supported by local communities and governments.

Young people who live in rural areas possess modest entrepreneurial skills

Many young people from Bukovina decide to study and work in other large cities in Romania because the rural areas do not provide enough educational or employment opportunities. Furthermore, young people with entrepreneurial skills choose to exploit their business ideas in urban areas, so rural areas encounter problems in terms of entrepreneurship. From this point of view, policy makers should focus their attention toward developing the entrepreneurial skills of young people living in rural areas. This has the potential to create a wealthy and dynamic economic environment in the future.

The establishment of particular entrepreneurial programmes in various fields is an important first step in educating young people in rural areas. Issues such as identifying a business idea, implementing the business idea, obtaining funding, promoting the business and making future investments in business development are essential actions for young people who want to become entrepreneurs and harness the rural resources. From this perspective, we consider that the creation of public-private partnerships that support entrepreneurial education courses for rural communities is an efficient action to educate young people.

Many new business models designed by rural young people cannot be exploited due to a lack of financial resources or insufficient information about how to obtain them. Therefore, financial education is without question mandatory to access funding funds or loans from banks.

Openness to new technologies is another important feature in developing entrepreneurial skills. Awan and Gauntlett (2013) stated that young people living in rural areas use technologies for activities that are of practical value in their daily lives. From this perspective, entrepreneurship education courses for these young people should include aspects of using recent digital technologies such as digital marketing, e-commerce, social media promotion. To build a quality life in rural areas, young people need to consider issues related to sustainability, climate change, advanced technologies (Cambra-Fierro and Pérez, 2022).

C. YOUNG PEOPLE

The practice among young people in rural areas of building modern houses that are not adapted to traditional features

The historical region of Bucovina is known for its rich cultural material heritage and the unique natural landscape that complements this heritage. Throughout time, the customs of the people of this region have left their mark on rural settlements and have embellished the local architecture with traditional features that have created a specific identity of this area.

Nevertheless, several of the historic characteristics significantly embedded in Bukovina's distinctive architecture have experienced revisions in recent years. Younger generations have abandoned the traditional house inherited from families and preferred to construct modern houses.

The current values of young people are different and combine the modern with the best practice from other continents. Traditional houses are considered by young people as symbols of an archaic lifestyle with many limitations. From this perspective, young people are looking for a modern existence that expresses their current identity. Likewise, there is an active competition among the younger generation in Bukovina to build large, modern houses that deviate from the traditional architectural style.

A major cause for the destruction of old houses in the Bukovina area is the lack of awareness of the historical and cultural significance of traditional architecture. There are many European tourists who seek to find the cultural natural heritage of Bukovina, so as many young people as possible should be supported to preserve their cultural heritage.

Loss of youth interest in culture and ancestral traditions

Currently, young people in the Bukovina region do not show much interest in ancient culture or the culture inherited by the elders. In this respect, multiple factors influence this mentality among young people. Firstly, the spread of urbanisation has led to the migration of many young people from rural areas with intellectual potential in treasuring local traditions. As a result, engaging young people in rural cultural traditions is becoming increasingly challenging.

On the other hand, the educational system is not incorporating issues like cultural and traditional values. Implementing cultural heritage information in curriculum would have a significant impact on the cultural education of young people through direct exposure to their past. Through effective education in this area, young people could identify opportunities for the development of rural areas that are abundant in valuable resources inherited from their ancestors.

The use of digitalization to enhance tangible and intangible heritage is a practice that can promote the profile of rural areas, as many people are now focusing on sustainability, circular economy, or green economy. Moreover, it is young people who have the capacity to adapt traditions and tangible heritage to the actual modern and dynamic lifestyle.

Local communities play an important role in increasing young people's awareness in tangible and intangible heritage that local communities have. Community participation in the organisation of events, workshops or positive campaigns on tangible and intangible cultural heritage is a key opportunity to attract young people and raise awareness of its importance to personal identity.

D. DECISIONS OF TRADITIONAL HOUSE OWNERS

Old perceptions of traditional homeowners about the effectiveness of the house

The existing traditional houses in Bukovina are a cultural treasure inherited from ancestors that put their souls in constructing and maintaining it for their inheritors. The traditional mentality inherited from the ancestors indicates that the purpose of traditional houses is only to live and not to turn them into businesses that can harness the values and resources of the community.

Fulea (2015) argues that the exploitation of traditional houses for economic purposes represents a problem for many owners who want to keep them just as simple houses, as was the clothing that ancestors wore in the past. Many of the owners of traditional houses who do not intend to live in them do not want to capitalise them for economic purposes or identify opportunities for entrepreneurial development because the traditional house is considered in the local tradition as a "parental house" (Duțescu, M. L., 2013). Consequently, the decision to turn the traditional house into a business is contrary to the ideology inherited in every rural community and is considered a harm to the unwritten rules of the ancestors.

Abandonment or demolition of traditional houses by owners

Bukovina is a region rich in tangible and intangible cultural heritage, which is now threatened by the disappearance of many features. Each village in the region is characterised by a different architectural style, which expresses the originality and creativity of rural communities in the design and architectural improvement of their houses. However, in many parts of the region the landscape is losing its charm because houses are being demolished, making way for new and modern ones. The buildings created nowadays do not

remember any of the traditional architecture elements inherited from the ancestors.

According to Maxim and Chasovschi (2021), certain rural areas in Bukovina are characterised by the appearance of many new and modern houses, whose architectural elements do not fit the existing cultural landscape, which is detrimental to the authentic cultural image. On the other hand, there are many traditional houses that have been abandoned or left in poor shape by their heirs who have moved to other European countries.

Ivan (2020) argues that the effect of migration in recent years in the Bukovina region has led to the abandonment of traditional houses, whether it is migration from rural to urban, or migration to other countries. As a result, very few owners can envisage a second life for these traditional houses and capitalise on them economically, since most of them have left.

E. COSTS AND MATERIALS

Restoration of traditional houses involves high costs for owners or potential investors

There are many traditional homes in the Bukovina region, although many of them require investment in rehabilitation or restoration. From this perspective, restoring traditional houses involves high costs for owners or potential investors, hence they frequently choose to demolish them.

Many of the materials required for repairing older buildings are either expensively priced or hard to obtain on the local market, especially to the absence of traditional craftspeople. Furthermore, renovation or restoration projects require craftsmen specialized in traditional architecture and their scarcity has increased the cost of carrying out these activities.

The town hall in Ciocanesti, for example, provides construction materials to owners who build houses with traditional architecture or improve their current structures with traditional elements. From this perspective, we consider that the local administration and other stakeholders can support initiatives to restore or renovate traditional houses in rural Bukovina to balance the high costs.

Certain types of construction materials for the restoration of traditional houses have disappeared from the market or are very difficult to locate.

Over the years, certain categories of building materials necessary for the renovation or restoration of traditional houses in Bukovina have disappeared from the market, are very difficult to find or are no longer of the same quality. Examples of such materials are shingle and the pitch black. The craftsmen who used to make shingles have gradually disappeared as people have sought other modern resources to roof their

houses. In addition, craftsmen who used to make windows for traditional houses no longer do so because people no longer buy wooden windows. Almost all the building materials of the past have been replaced by modern materials that no longer require the work of craftsmen. However, the restoration of traditional houses is still possible using materials that are adapted to the current needs of rural communities.

F. SUPPORT AND FINANCING

Traditional house owners do not identify entrepreneurial development and support for their heritage

An ongoing challenge in the valorisation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage is that owners of traditional houses fail to identify entrepreneurial development opportunities for their heritage. From this perspective, the development of entrepreneurial skills of rural communities can be a step forward in identifying local development opportunities. On the other hand, shaping an awareness raising campaign among rural stakeholders on entrepreneurial development opportunities is essential in an environment characterised by uncertainty.

Many owners of traditional houses are unaware of the effects of the economic value of their tangible and intangible heritage. For example, many traditional houses that are no longer inhabited can be turned into sustainable accommodation, cultural centres, cafés, souvenir shops, bakeries or leisure facilities. Likewise, owners of traditional houses lack knowledge about accessing appropriate funding resources for the economic valorisation of traditional houses. Therefore, working with people or institutions specialised in this field can be an opportunity to access this information.

G. LOCAL LEGISLATION

Lack of measures and decisions at local level regarding the preservation of cultural identity and tangible and intangible heritage

There is no local legislation in most Bukovina municipalities to protect and enhance traditional cultural heritage and architecture. The Ciocanesti commune, renowned at the national level for the distinguishing architecture on all the houses, is an example of settled practise. This is due to a local council decision that adopted measures to promote and preserve traditions in Ciocanesti. This example can be a model to replicate for other town halls and owners of traditional houses to promote traditional architecture and encourage the preservation of traditional motifs on the facade of houses. Vijulie et al. (2013) argue that Ciocanesti is a model of best practice for many villages in Suceava County because both owners of traditional

houses and owners of new and modern houses keep traditional motifs of local architecture inherited from their ancestors on the frontage.

Similarly, according to Ungureanu and Lazuran (2014), the Ciocanesti commune, from a tourist point of view, is characterised by the uniqueness of its tangible and intangible cultural heritage, which leads many tourists to visit the town. In addition, they argue that Ciocanesti is different from the villages in the rest of Suceava County due to the existence of a local architecture that has been protected and valued over time. According to Dutescu (2013), the architecture of the houses preserved within the communities shows the individuality and originality of the community.

In conclusion, local administration can support, preserve and develop the cultural heritage of the Bukovina region. From this perspective, efficient allocation of resources and the implementation of appropriate legislation in the field of heritage conservation are real challenges that need to be addressed. The involvement of rural communities in the protection, conservation and enhancement of tangible and intangible heritage is also an imperative activity.

H. FOLK CRAFTSMEN

Difficulties in preserving traditional artistic crafts and the rarity of folk craftsmen

In the Bukovina region, the preservation of traditional artistic crafts has become a necessity. At the same time, as people have aged, folk artisans have become increasingly scarce, and young people have shown slight curiosity in acquiring the skilfulness. Moreover, many groups of folk craftsmen in various fields are no longer able to pass on the craft to young people because the problems of old age no longer allow this. To avoid risking the loss of many traditional crafts, specific procedures must be implemented to pass them on to younger generations. The main reasons for this phenomenon are the low income achieved from crafts and the destruction of the traditional material heritage, which no longer emphasises traditional motifs.

Handmade products using traditional crafts are no longer of the same value as in the past. Nowadays, people prefer to buy in mass from other sources as it is cheaper. As a result, the earnings of the folk craftsmen are low and this situation does not encourage young people to specialise on a craft. Furthermore, trade channels are very limited, and this creates financial instability for craftspeople.

In the past, traditional crafts were passed down from generation to generation through apprenticeship. Today, this type of programme is not developed or appreciated by young people. Moreover, apprenticeships in traditional crafts are almost non-existent today. However, there are initiatives in rural areas of Bukovina to promote traditional artistic crafts so that they can be passed on to the next generation of young people through various workshops.

As a conclusion, we have highlighted the major difficulties in preserving traditional crafts and the reasons for the rarity of folk crafts. These are interconnected challenges that require multilateral solutions. Addressing these problems requires a collaborative effort involving multiple stakeholders such as public authorities, communities, and the private sector.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Since this type of rural settlement has almost completely disappeared in Europe, Romanian villages have the opportunity to offer something truly unique to community spaces. The increased interest of international tourists is an obvious sign that we are capable of overcoming poverty and devastation and achieving wealth, but only if we use our past achievements responsibly. Along with natural beauty, built heritage can ensure a better life for future generations, and sustainable development can move from an economic concept to reality. But the future of Romanian villages will be bleak if natural heritage and traditional architecture are exploited rather than protected.

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