

## NARRATIVES OF VERNACULAR HABITAT IN MARAMUREŞ

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### ABSTRACT

To preserve the harmony within a vernacular habitat, a delicate balance between living space, nature, and community must be maintained. This paper analyzes local communities from Maramureş, Romania, and their sustainable ways of living, and it also discusses the use of locally sourced materials in building settlements: a cautious combination of progressively integrating contemporary living solutions with preserving the powerful local heritage. Such initiatives become more challenging given that new, modern developments and rapid industrial changes tempt people away from ancient custom. In order to sustain the traditional habitat, as fundamental for the heritage preservation initiative, it is necessary to guide villagers in finding value and beauty locally and discourage them from migrating towards bigger cities or other countries. Based on two case studies of local craftsmen, Maria Zapca, a weaver from Săpânța, and Daniel Leş, a potter from Baia Sprie, the journey starts in Săpânța, home of the UNESCO heritage site The Merry Cemetery where the physical fabric of the place lends itself to sustaining local crafts and craftsmen. However, this is not an isolated case: Maramureş is famous throughout the world for its material culture such as wooden churches with tall spires – seven of them listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites – alongside a multitude of home decorating fabrics and traditional attire still made and used by locals. Regional resources such as clay, wood, stone, wool, or hemp stand as fundamentals in shaping the vernacular habitat. Furthermore, the region is well-known for preserving customs and practices, which emphasize local group members' lineage to the wider community. People are proud of their heritage and are connected to the cultural values that help shape their identity.

*Keywords:* *craftsman, cultural site, environment, habitat, heritage, Maramureş, sustainability, vernacular.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Inhabited from ancestral times, the Maramureş region – situated in the north-west part of Romania – is a place of abundant culture, story-telling landscapes and customs, passed on through generations with great care and devotion. A land of impressive mountainous landscapes and rich valleys sprinkled with small villages, the county is regarded as one of the most beautiful and distinctive regions in Europe, hosting a number of UNESCO World Heritage sites. The main geographical features of Maramureş county are its valleys and wild mountains flanking them, with some peaks reaching more than 2,000 m. A trip into the heart of the region is equivalent to time traveling, to an age as if traditions were untouched by modern developments.

It is no wonder that Maramureş is also known as ‘the land of wood’, as rich forests cover much of the region, so not surprisingly woodwork and woodcarving are predominant crafts in the region. Alongside pottery, weaving, and wool processing, all of these make use of the prime natural materials of the region. ‘The land gives life, the land feeds and support its inhabitants’ as Daniel Leş, one of the most important potters of the region believes. Examples of inhabitants’ craftsmanship can be encountered throughout the rural communities. Many traditional households welcome visitors with imposing, beautifully sculpted wooden gates, decorated with intricate geometric and vegetal motifs that reflect ancient symbols such as the sun and the moon, the circle of life, the tree of life, rhombus, or the twisted rope. Maramureş, being an archaic space with a great cultural background, preserves these symbols that reveal

the vein of the traditional art and facilitates the valorization of the local cultural heritage. ‘The interdisciplinary perspective (ethnology, mythology, religion), the synchronic analysis enhances the complexity of the mentioned symbols, the unity in diversity’ as Delia Anamaria Răchișan mentions in her paper, ‘Traditional art from Maramureș and ancestral symbols – rhombus, twisted rope’ [1].

An earlier paper had focused on wool as a sustainable material used by local communities in Transylvania, Romania [2]. The wider aim of this research is to highlight the interconnectivity between craftspeople, craft, and environment towards a sustainable presence. Cultural heritage, including cultural heritage sites, as well as folklore and traditional practices and techniques represent an important part of the whole, each piece completing the other.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

This research takes a qualitative approach to investigating non-numerical data, concerning ontological points of cultural heritage, community, and local habitat in Maramureș, Romania. It investigates the connection between local communities, their environment, and settlements and suggests measures to consider their preservation for future generations. The aim is to present the reality of the place through verified hypotheses, a topic that has been a central point of the author’s research interests for over a decade, through regular on-site visits to local craftsmen, focusing on multiple sites. Observations were carried out after conducting interviews with locals. The study cases presented here were developed in 2019, 2021, and 2022. Maria Zapca, a principal protagonist, sadly passed away in 2021 but as one of the most representative craftswomen of the region, was central to this research. She made the author fall in love with crafts as soon as they started working with her. Archives of the historical material presented have also been researched, in order to support field findings, along with the visual materials used as documentation. The case study of local communities in Maramureș focuses on Maria Zapca and Daniel Leș, both emblematic figures of the region, who have shown the world what this region has to offer by participating in a multitude of national and international exhibitions. This documentation starts with the origins and includes site visits, working, and interviewing local craftsmen. Combining an historical archive review with in-person trips, photos and interviews were considered the best way to achieve an accurate image of the narrative of the place.

## 3 LOCAL HERITAGE IN CONTINUUM

‘Romanians from Maramureș have held onto an unadulterated life of a remote past, their villages have an archaic atmosphere of fullness and Romanian virtue. In this isolated corner of the country, one finds life and shapes that belong to olden days. Locals preserve millennia of civilization through practices, traditional clothing, habits and most of all in their consciousness’ says Ernest Bernea in his book *Maramureșul* [3].

The region stands as a testament to traditional, simple ways of living, with pride and moral values that many of us can now only read about or hear from our elders. A visit to the villages from the area enables an observer to see these traditions practiced until today. Unlike ‘fabricated’ traditions, ancestral practices and customs in the region rise naturally from the bucolic way of life that still – in part – carries on. If modernity is about progress and is soulless, Maramureș on the contrary has kept its magic and its soul, and managed to remain a unique position in Europe.

Working with craftsmen from Maramureș has been the motivation behind the author’s projects for over a decade. This journey of authenticity, connecting to ancestors and

rediscovering their crafts, to acknowledge, understand, and pass on to future generations, is work in progress. Born and raised in this region, the author became familiar with the local crafts at an early age and turned it into a main interest, looking to contribute to preserving and conveying to the world the unique traditional culture it has to offer.

Maramureș is divided in ‘four countries’: the Historic, Lăpuș, Chioar, and Codru, each with different characteristics in its traditional costumes and habits, nevertheless mostly keeping the same practices and techniques, as well as fabrics. Differences are noticeable in the patterns, colors, items layout, and so on. Traditional costumes reflect codes, shapes, and meaning that are common to an entire social group, expressing the communitarian function of traditional art [4]. Consequently, each community has its own particularities when discussing fabric attributes (materiality, patterns, and design), which are different from community to community, even if common regional features can be found, says Ana Iuga in her paper, ‘Contemporary Traditional Clothing in Maramureș’ [5].

#### 4 HERITAGE IN THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

Heritage buildings do not really have a clear definition, it is perhaps best said that several components coexist to varying degrees, such as:

- cultural and historical motifs,
- peculiar and in use values,
- symbolism, and
- the relationship between the building and its location.

Some settlements may not always have great heritage value as a property. They have great value for its inhabitants and future generations for sentimental reasons. Heritage buildings most often represent testaments of the past as well as holding symbolic values. They represent more than a roof over their heads or a shelter, but rather the space where life unfolds, from daily routines to the most valuable spiritual events, practices that contribute to the overall harmony a true habitat has to offer. The place to live, as well as to create for the local craftsman, their habitat is built in communion with the surroundings, the nature, the community, using materials mostly sourced from the region, consequently following an unwritten rule of the environment: protecting it in order to be protected. Villagers learn from their parents and grandparents that, in order to live in harmony, one cannot always take, but also has to give back: to the land that adopts you, to the nature that protects you, to the community that is always there for you, and to the environment as a whole. It is true that modern advancements have brought many changes and comfort which cannot be neglected; locals have embraced reshaping certain elements in their household and surroundings, some in small measure or others as a complete rejection of tradition.

Buildings discussed in this paper originated long before the industrial period, therefore are likely to contain more natural, less chemical-based materials and can be energy efficient, as well as being built in communion with the environment that hosts them.

‘Heritage and sustainable development are intimately linked. Understanding heritage helps us better comprehend cultural and social systems (...) sustainability is an important tool for heritage preservation (...). Preserving heritage and sustainable development are both important goals. Conflicts need to be identified, assessed, documented and managed to achieve an optimum balance’ [6].

The term ‘sustainability’ has been widely used in recent years as it gained more importance. It is the fundament of a wide range of subjects related to the continuity of the ‘untouched’ human life that preserves the surrounding environment. One such example are the ancestral clay houses, which does not come as a surprise, being identified as natural, versatile, durable, and stable in value over time. While recycling has become a key word in environmental preservation in recent years, the clay houses have been quietly doing that for ages, as when deconstructed, they are re-usable. Clay is a great example of circular economy as well, as it goes back to nature, where it originated from. Stabilized clay buildings have proven not only to be very solid and durable (they can last for centuries, without developing cracks even if natural disasters like earthquakes or floods occurs), but they also provide a natural insulation.

Earthen construction responds to energy and climate issues, due to several of its properties. One of the main properties refers to the thermal storage properties and humidity balancing efforts of clay, by all means an ecological material that contributes to the thermal comfort and the healthy aspect of buildings. It absorbs and releases moisture as the relative humidity of the air changes, therefore balancing the indoor climate of the building. It is known that high moisture levels have a negative effect on thermal performance of the building, as well as indoor air quality through the growth of molds and bacteria. Clay walls have the ability to provide an excellent constant internal relative humidity, as shown in the research carried out by Minke in 2000 and 2006 (cited in [7]).

Consequently, the thermal properties of clay walls can contribute to the energy efficient building design requirements, its mass having the thermal capacity to store daytime heat gains and to release the heat during the night. The thermal properties of clay are demonstrated throughout the year, with a constant internal temperature over the seasons that results in lower CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by limiting the gas or electricity used for heating and cooling the house interior. This reduction has a proportional effect in reducing the greenhouse gas emission, due to its energy efficient construction system. Additionally, the pores also allow a cool breeze to enter the house, comparable to the human body, the porous surface of the clay permits breathing. As mentioned above, maintaining a constant temperature irrespective of the weather conditions outside translates also in lower energy consumption. While the cement industry generates around 8% of the global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, clay has minor carbon footprints, as it is recyclable and can be gouged from the earth, locally sourced, eliminating transportation.

Martin *et al.* in 2010 [7], compared stone, adobe (traditional), and wooden (modern) houses in their investigation of the thermal behavior of existing housing in Spain. Their research shows that the indoor environment inside the traditional houses could be comfortable with less energy consumption than new buildings. They believe this is the result of the thick exterior walls of high thermal inertia. ‘The dynamic thermal characterization of clay bricks showed that the optimum thickness of earthen wall is equal to 400 mm. It enables achieving the optimum values of thermal inertia, with a significant impact on the damping factor and on the thermal lag. It ensures a reduction of the fluctuations of the outdoor temperature and a limitation of the risk of overheating the building’ (cited in [7]).

Clay is not only one of the oldest building materials, but it is shown that it is also one of the most used building materials, almost a third of the world’s population lives in some type of earthen constructions. Approximately 50% of the population of developing countries, the majority of rural populations, and at least 20% of urban populations live in earth homes (Houben and Guillaud, 1994, cited in [7]).

With such valuable properties, it is not surprising that during the last years, interests in clay as a sustainable material has increased significantly. This led to the development of studies in engineering laboratories around the world, aiming to provide clay building products certification. A natural and recyclable resource, as well as low embodied energy building material, that comes in perfect harmony with the sustainable development.

## 5 NARRATIVES OF THE PLACE

Narratives were chosen for discussion because they are the prototypical products of orality, as their existence is connected by expression. Narratives help transform (neutral) spaces into personalized places by adding the spirit of the place to the physical space, as one without the other would not be complete, would not make a whole. Safeguarding not only the fabric of the place, but all the spiritual values and practices that comes along is the key in the comprehensive preservation that could be rightly passed on to future generations. Examples of such initiatives should be discussed, as such two case studies of local craftsmen, Maria Zapca and Daniel Leș, are analyzed, being perceived as true examples of authentic narratives that keep traditions alive till the day and both of them take great pride in doing so.

One of the most representative figures that is still actively following this path of authenticity is Daniel Leș, a representative potter from Baia Sprie, Maramureș. He is the figure who promoted local craftsmanship for the past years not only at a national level, but also abroad, forging the path through his great love for clay, dating way back to his childhood. He is not only an emblematic figure for the craft he is mastering, but also for the vernacular way of living he is strongly promoting and embracing on a daily basis. Daniel is ‘saving’ local heritage, repurposing old houses that otherwise would have been disposed, as well as living a fulfilling spiritual life closely following ancestral values. The houses that he preserves are testaments to the past, carrying along years of experience, marked by important events that shaped locals’ personalities, himself living in a 100 years’ old house, bought in his youth, the place where he still is to be found till the present day. Daniel believes that ‘the most important things in a human’s life are people’. There is an old Romanian saying that goes ‘it is hard to toil clay, but it is harder still to live with a tongue-tied person. Clay is very much like people. It is very hard to work with it if you have not prepared it properly’. Daniel says he is kneading the earth from Maramureș for over 40 years. ‘Under the soles of my feet and with my hands (...) and I am proud I do pottery. I think clay is the noblest matter, which we ourselves are made of. It is very easy to work with clay when it listens to you, when it becomes malleable. A good clay needs to be fermented for a year, to be rained on, to freeze and then to thaw. Once it becomes malleable, you feel it in your hands, it listens to you, it is a pleasure to work with. I am deeply involved in everything I do, thinking that once completed, I have to show it to God’ [8].

Deeply engrained in the traditional beliefs are ideas that could be perceived in the present as form of therapies or modern spiritual practices. Reality confirmed by Daniel, who mentions ‘I’ve always been very blessed to be surrounded by what the specialists draw today as therapy: walks in fresh air, being brought up at the countryside, with nature and animals, I have had natural, phrased in the present as organic food, in healthy amounts, I have had the security given by the family at large and the community. In our village, if it happened that someone would lose their animals, or their houses would burn, “God forbid”, all the locals would gather the money and the man power needed to help rebuild the house, they would undoubtedly help their neighbor to cover the loss. A popular gathering in the local villages, called “clacă” was also organized after such events and efforts have been done by the entire

community to place the person in loss back on track, to his initial situation “in line with the world”. No one was left with the misfortune that came upon him or her. This is how it used to be before in almost any village. Nowadays, often in the cities one does not even know the name of their neighbor, you live close to him but you are not aware of his sorrows. You also meet your extended family only for important events, when there is a wedding or a funeral; that is how it is nowadays’ [9].

Adding to this, Daniel continues: ‘we are all born creative, but society wants us useful, so we often neglect our creative side and we yearn occasionally to develop it, less pretentiously, to be able to regain our balance. This is human nature, you can’t help it. I’ve met so many people that rediscovered their creativity playing with clay in my workshop. Watching them, I surprised them being children again. I believe every human possesses something of its own, that can’t be neither copied nor lived by someone else in the same way. And we all have the mission to rediscover this gift and enjoy it during our lives, making others happy as well. To become whom, we’ve been called to be, fulfilled with what we have. The easiest way to failure would be to try to live someone else’s life. We are relevant when we embrace what we are created to embrace’.

If searching to understand, buildings communicate to us information regarding the places are set in, reflect the culture of the region during a certain period, and the resources it had access to. A building tells the story of the people who lived in it and the stories vary according to the space and time; this makes it the more fascinating and conveys the desire for its discovery. Daniel has made great efforts towards preserving the vernacular habitat; he is the one who is in constant search for old houses, houses that people want to give up to, destroy, and he believes that along with them not only the actual construction vanishes but its narratives as well, and that makes it even more painful. He could not allow this to happen, therefore he recovers such houses in order to re-place them and offer them a new life back in Baia Sprie, where he built his authentic domain. He restores each house to their original structure, with the help of the local craftsmen, making use of traditional resources, materials, and knowledge.

Vernacular architecture represents the simple form of addressing human needs, it is a model that tried and stood the test of time. As such, in the old times, houses have been built with the purpose to be de-constructed and re-built elsewhere, using ingenious techniques that seem to be still viable after centuries. Unfortunately, the appreciation is still lacking for these historical houses, as many villagers trade them for more modern, contemporary buildings, that are not using locally sourced materials neither local craftsmanship and there might not be as energy efficient or sustainable. Nevertheless, it takes a long time and energy before the old houses are re-stored to their former glory, Daniel says: ‘the houses don’t belong to me, but I want them to continue the story, I don’t want them to be lost and end up on the fire pile. I save them from the fire and the “criminals” they come from France, UK and want to make wooden floors out of them. They can’t do something like that with the culture and history of our country’. He started this initiative in his youth, at the beginning having this idea in mind that the little money he would be making from his pottery craft, he would invest in re-storing traditional houses. Consequently, he started with his first house dating back to 1830s–1860s, followed by a second one from 1780s, both clay houses that have been covered with shingle. He has made efforts to bring the two houses as closest to their original making, in order to re-purpose them and create a workshop for his beloved craft, pottery. His desire was not only to use the space to create and teach the craft he is mastering so well, but also to create a place where he could display his work, as well as host the people who are travelling from faraway

places and come to learn local pottery or just want to visit this magic land (Fig. 1). Inevitably, these establishments continued to weave narratives throughout their spaces and will continue to do so, considering their close interdependence with the community.

As mentioned above, Daniel started with a clay house, which needed a new roof, he afterwards renovated and remodeled it here and there, where required, adding a bathroom, a room in the attic, filling it at the end with antiques that he gathered throughout the years (Figs. 2 and 3). This was followed by a second clay house from 1870s, a peasant house, low rise, with wooden beams and a slightly lower roof, for which he has done small reparations and re-painted the interior (Fig. 4). The wooden flooring has been finalized later on, one of the most important achievement being the insulation achieved, therefore in summer it is cool and in winter it is very warm due to its thick walls made with straws. ‘It is a pure pleasure to sleep in a clay house’ believes Daniel, who continued his mission and added to his portfolio a third house, made out of wood (Fig. 5). Together with a local craftsman, the house has been dismounted and installed in his garden on the hill, in Baia Sprie, ‘where it was given the chance to live for a little longer, at least as long as I am alive’, adds Daniel. ‘And I believe my children will not destroy them either as I teach them their value. I’ve gathered them during the last 10 years and I can say I saved them’ [10]. In order to build strong and lasting houses, the materials used have been sourced locally, materials that are characteristic for the region of Maramureș, encouraging sustainable practices and principles, whilst following ancestral spiritual beliefs, to be in alignment with the universe.

Consequently, the wood had to be cut down in winter, when it was full moon, removing the sap straight after. When the wood was obtained, the person doing the work had to be sitting on his knees, asking for forgiveness from God. In traditional beliefs, it is thought that we have been created with nature simultaneously, we are one, therefore we have to live following nature’s rule, in order to preserve the harmony and thrive. Following nature’s rules, old houses have been built with limited knowledge by the locals, using materials from the region and mostly human labor; tools were very limited. Consequently, walls are not straight, as in nature everything is organic, uneven, not perfect and this is totally embraced. Everything was built without prior architectural studies.



Figure 1: House interiors – Daniel Leș (*Photo: Clițan*).



Figure 2: Casă de lut și piatră – ‘Clay and stone house’ (*Photo: Clițan*).



Figure 3: Casă de lut și piatră – ‘Clay and stone house’ (*Photo: Clițan*).



Figure 4: Case de lut – ‘Clay houses’ (*Photo: Daniel Leș*).



Figure 5: Casă de lemn – ‘Wood house’ (*Photo: Clițan*).

The village and its world represent one of the guiding points we have left confronting the abundance of ‘consumerism’ that progressively undertakes our core values. It is a model of living life at its fullest, without fireworks and glitter, in order to strive for a balanced life, modeled by the common sense, wisdom, respect, and peacefulness. There is nothing to add to what our grandparents did, but just to preserve.

To end with a last advice from Daniel, who believes that he is not in the position to offer advices, but he would like to do so, nevertheless. He says ‘if I would be to give an advice to

my closest people, I would invite them to stop a little, because when you want to see, to understand what is happening around you, you have to stop' [11].

Daniel continues to enlarge his current portfolio, 'saving' more houses, in partnership with members of the community that come from faraway places, driven by the desire to be part of this region's narratives and save the vernacular habitat, their culture (Figs. 6–9).

## 6 SUSTAINING CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES

Craftsmanship plays a significant role in Romania, particularly in Transylvania. Crafts are an integral part of a wider context; they are part of a whole, a system, inside which each element is interconnected, and one could not survive and strive without the other, or at least not in harmony. In other words, the discussion is on the inevitable balance and interconnection between the three elements, the craftsman, the craft, and the environment in which this takes place. The entire communion follows a natural rhythm; a missing piece leads to disruption which sometimes can play a significant role. As such, cultural heritage in the area is quite complex. Therefore, heritage elements such as cultural heritage sites, as well as folklore and archaeological sites and museums, cannot be left unvoiced. They are an important part of the whole, where each piece completes the other.

The world order is uniquely perceived in a Transylvanian village through abundant and practiced cultural heritage. Surprisingly, this begins with its architecture as the human establishment within its surroundings emerge in perfect harmony; each piece of the system



Figure 6: Houses under development (*Photo: Clitan*).



Figure 7: Houses under development (*Photo: Clițan*).

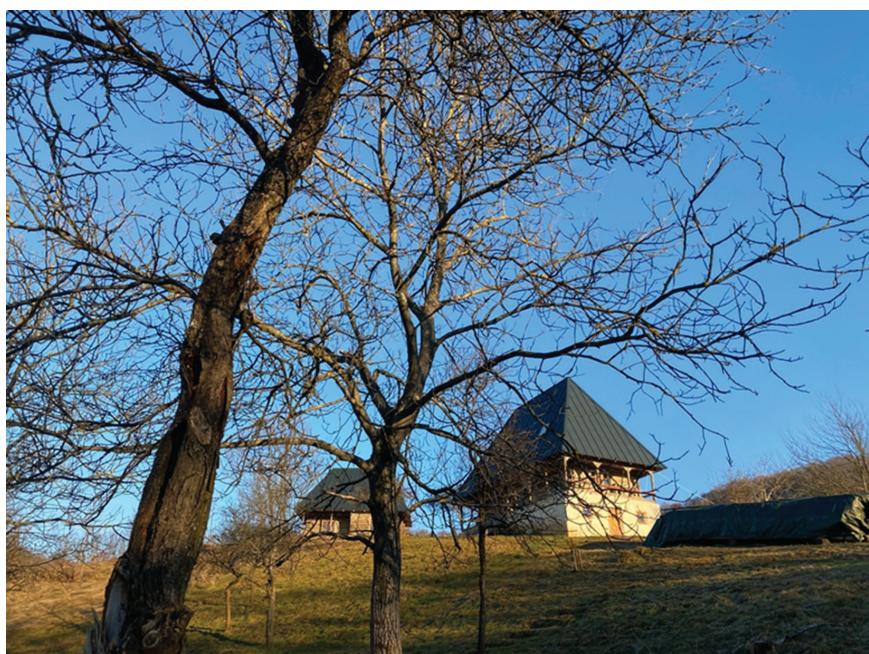


Figure 8: Houses under development (*Photo: Clițan*).



Figure 9: House under development (*Photo: Clitan*).

is an extension into the other. Consequently, the local villagers simultaneously played the architect role, master builder, and decorator of their own space, making a suitable habitat for living and mostly for the creation process that has an important role in their lives. This habitat stands as the starting point, as well as central core and the place of security, the shelter, the sanctuary. In general, this space has mostly perceived as having a feminine valency, as it was a woman's space, while the man was mostly out in the forests and mountains, supporting the household. The interior of traditional houses has a simple plan, with two or three rooms, evolving to more complex structures towards the late 18th century. Being planned for a pragmatic use, more than symbolic or aesthetic purposes, the interior incorporates elements of contemporary comfort living amongst heritage pieces, as furniture items, textiles, soft furnishings in the form of woven carpets, rugs, embroidered towels and pottery, heirloom furniture, and so on (examples of such an interior in Figs. 1 and 10). These are items that have been used with fulfilling results on a continuum basis in a household, and therefore have not been preserved as only heritage pieces but integrated into daily life for generations.

As a result of this fusion, the interior and the exterior space are not separated. A semi-sheltered veranda that lines the façade of the house, called 'prispă' (as seen in Fig. 11), is the connecting element that has a function on its own, as well as representing a decorative touch.

As part of a strong community, houses are connected amongst each other, being separated by gardens and orchards, or they are scattered on the hills.

Another architectural element that villagers focus on is the gate. This represents a passage between the community and the family. It is an example of craft on its own. Usually, it is



Figure 10: Living amongst crafts – Maria Zapca (*Photo: Clițan*).



Figure 11: Verandas as workshops – Maria Zapca (*Photo: Clițan*).

crafted by local craftsmen, and it hosts an array of symbols dating from thousands of years, each gate being a unique individual work of art, guarding the sanctuary of the home within. As mentioned, the gates are made from wood, true artistic examples; wood is associated with Maramureș and Transylvania since early times. As Takács stated in her publication [12], the definition of cultural heritage is always shifting, followed by an impact on cultural cooperation practices.

The definition used by UNESCO since the 1989 Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore [13] is as follows: ‘Folklore (or traditional and popular culture) is the totality of tradition-based creations of a cultural community, expressed by a group or individuals and recognized as reflecting the expectations of a community in so far as they reflect its cultural and social identity; its standards and values are transmitted orally, by imitation or by other means. Its forms are, among others, language, literature, music, dance, games, mythology, rituals, customs, handicrafts, architecture and other arts’.

Sustained through an interdependence between local industries and craftsmen, the latter assemble their own utter habitat in perfect harmony with nature and blend within the community at large, transmitting further the memory of the place. Traditional practices are therefore supported by ‘living-in’ museums, true examples of craftsmanship and cultural heritage, that prominent figures like Maria Zapca (weaver and textile master) or Daniel Leș (potter) conduct their entire life and activity within and avail to the world an authentic way of living and making that have been practiced by generations. These are part of the cultural fabric of Maramureş, a visual rural landscape that should be preserved by generations to come, not only in terms of ancestral practices but also for sustainable living solutions that have been proven to be effective over time. Showing the results to the world, means sustaining a small community in the 21st century.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research is to continue to preserve local environment through discussions of local heritage from Maramureş. In the context of vernacular architecture, environment, community, ancestral practices, as well as documenting and presenting the results within relevant international publications that could lead to further discussions and collaborations supporting this initiative. To encourage authentic ancestral settlements and local practices by immersing in them, understanding the complex structure behind, to make it viable with contemporary approaches to living methods, the following recommendations are inferred:

- The continuous promotion of vernacular habitat as a means to raise awareness, as well as to sustain local economies and preserve their narratives.
- Incorporating limited but necessary contemporary living solutions into traditional settlements to ensure the latter will continue to be viable for future generations.
- To support local craftsmen for art, architectural, and cultural projects, in order to keep local heritage alive and to promote them throughout the world.
- Discussing similar case studies within international frameworks to exchange know-how and best practices.
- To bring traditional culture and practices back into education so the younger generation becomes aware of ancient customs and skills.
- To encourage young people to search for their identity through exploring their heritage, using authentic narratives in their demarche.

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