

## **CULTURAL HERITAGE AS A DRIVER FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN JIU VALLEY**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The natural landscape of Jiu Valley serves as the region's main attraction for tourism. Besides its natural resources, Jiu Valley has also a rich cultural heritage through its coal mines and the culture of the momârlani rural community. By capitalizing on this heritage, the region can develop a sustainable tourism sector that does not depend only on its natural resources and can diversify tourists' experiences. This paper explores the potential for cultural heritage to drive tourism development in Jiu Valley, with specific reference to the Momârlani, their traditions and the museums dedicated to preserving their culture.*

**KEY WORDS:** *cultural heritage, industrial, sustainable tourism development, jiu valley, momârlani.*

**JEL CLASSIFICATIONS:** Z32, Q01.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Tourism in Jiu Valley depends mainly on its natural resources, but is confronted with the challenge to move beyond the winter season and provide more diverse services (ADTIVJ, 2023). For a sustainable tourism development, the region needs to capitalize on other available resources such as its rich cultural heritage. When referring to cultural heritage I use Konsa's (2013) definition of "everything that is considered to be worthy of preserving in culture and that one wants to leave to subsequent generations". This includes both tangible elements such as objects, artefacts, buildings or places as well as intangible elements such as practices, expressions, knowledge or skills. Jiu Valleys cultural heritage rests mainly in its history of coal mining (industrial heritage) and the culture of the momârlani rural community. However, this heritage is declining (Kideckel, 2018), making efforts to preserve them as urgent and essential. By

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preserving and capitalizing on this resource, the region can become a unique destination that can attract more tourists and prolong their stay, as well as providing opportunities for heritage education.

This paper explores the potential for cultural heritage to drive tourism development in the Jiu Valley, with specific reference to the heritage of the momârlani and their efforts at preserving their culture. The paper is structured as follows. The first section highlights the decline of heritage in Jiu Valley and challenges of preservation. It presents the efforts to preserve heritage by taking the case of the Petrila mine complex. The second section provides a short historical overview of the Momârlani community, with a focus on their interactions with migrant workers during the coal mining beginning, the conflicts that shaped their identity and their traditions. The third section presents the efforts of the momârlani to preserve their heritage through the construction of village museums and makes an overview of these museums. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations regarding the preservation of industrial heritage, heritage education and awareness, promotion of different elements from the momârlani culture and building partnerships between the community and authorities.

## **2. HERITAGE IN JIU VALLEY**

When speaking of cultural heritage, one might usually think of castles, churches, fortresses and other tangible elements from a specific culture. When taking a look at the world heritage list from 1999, certain regions and types of cultural property we're being overrepresented (Falser, 2001), namely the regions of Europe, Latin America, Asia (mostly China and India) and European colonial historical towns, Christian places of worship and monasteries and archaeological sites. But cultural heritage also refers to intangible elements such as rituals, knowledge, music or language as well as industrial heritage. As part of cultural heritage, industrial heritage represents the physical and immaterial remains of industrial activities such as industrial buildings, technology, skills, workplace rituals and so on.

Jiu Valley's has a rich industrial heritage as its history is tied to coal mining. To take a few examples, in 1990 there were 14 mine perimeters (Faur et al, 2017), some of which were demolished, as well as the Paroșeni thermal power plant. Near those perimeters there were worker colonies, such as the "colonie" from Petroșani or "colonia Ștefan" from Lupeni, constructed during the Habsburg empire (Iancu & Stoica, 2010). It has also railways that cover most the valley, one train depo with steam locomotives and a water tower nearby. Important to mention is the mining museum of Petroșani, which holds several coal-mining equipment pieces from both the beginnings of coal exploitation and from more modern times (Iancu & Stoica, 2010).

But most of this heritage is declining as its industrial sites are being destroyed (Kideckel, 2018). This destruction occurred at two levels (Kideckel, 2018): from above, through business and political elites who purchased and demolished industrial complexes for profit, and from below, through local scavengers who stripped abandoned sites for scrap metal. However, the successful efforts to prevent the demolition of the Petrila mine complex and its adaptive reuse, remain a unique exception that has the potential to raise awareness of the decline of heritage in the

region. The Petrila mine complex was officially classified as a historical monument in 2016 due to the actions of some NGOs and local civic actors, thus preventing its demolition (Danciu & Gaiță, 2019). It is the first bottom-up industrial regeneration project in Romania (Danciu, 2019), which aimed at the reconversion of the complex into a new administrative, economic and cultural center (Danciu & Gaiță, 2019). For its physical reconversion though, the transfer of the complex to the ownership of Petrila local authorities remains fundamental (Danciu & Gaiță, 2019). The only development in this sense is in 2022, when the county authorities of Hunedoara managed to buy it. But even after 2 years, the space is used by the authorities mainly for a few cultural events, mimicking what civil society actors we're already doing. In the meantime, as civic actors have already pointed out to the authorities, some buildings are collapsing or slowly decaying.

Although Petrila's industrial heritage is declining, the actions of the actors involved in the reconversion of this complex opened new perspectives for the future of Jiu Valley. These actions are part of broader efforts at redefining the identity of the region through the preservation of its heritage. Some of them begun before Petrila, through the construction of museums dedicated to the culture of the indigenous rural population called *momârlani*. Once marginalized by the dominant industrial culture, the *momârlani* are beginning to gain recognition (Pascu, 2019). In what will follow, I will introduce the *momârlani* and their traditions, followed by an overview of the *momârlani* museums.

### **3. WHO ARE THE MOMÂRLANI?**

Before coal mining began under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the population of Jiu Valley was small, rural and engaged mainly in agriculture and animal husbandry. With the beginning of coal exploitation, workers from various countries were brought into the region. The rural population initially viewed these newcomers with hostility and their relationship was tense. Some of the newly arrived workers exploited the rural population, purchasing their land at extremely low prices after getting them intoxicated (drunk), or, in extreme cases, seizing the land through threats and coercion. Additionally, the demand for timber in the coal mines led to widespread deforestation, displacing many peasants from their homes (Stanca, 1996). As a result, the rural population were gradually pushed to the periphery of the region, settling on the hillsides, while the migrant workers settled in the urban area in colonies (Pascu, 2017; Stanca, 1996).

These conflicts over land and the spatial polarization contributed to the formation of distinct communities (Pascu, 2017). According to Felea (2013), these aspects were instrumental in constructing collective identities in the region. Furthermore, as Stanca (1996) asserts, the conflicts also marked the first categorization of these communities into "*barabe*" and "*momârlani*". Supposedly, the rural community called the workers as "*basarabe*", and in turn the "*barabe*" called the peasants "*momârlani*". The exact origin of the term "*momârlani*" remains uncertain, with several hypotheses existing but none being definitively proven. The term "*barabe*"

however, which can be found in other mining regions such as Bistrița-Năsăud (Pascu, 2017), means newcomers, without land.

Despite these conflicts, the momârlani and barabe did not remain entirely isolated from one another. Economic exchanges took place between the 2 communities and over time in order to generate additional income for their households (Felea, 2013), some momârlani began working at the mines, but mainly in the auxiliary sectors (Felea, 2013.). Although the separation of the two communities has driven them to adopt different lifestyles, it has also allowed the momârlani to preserve some of their traditions up to the present. Let us briefly explore some traditions that can be found in the momârlani community.

One distinctive tradition is the burial of their dead in their own yards rather than in communal graveyards (Felea, 2013, Crăciun, et al., 2002). Some hypotheses (Felea, 2013) try to explain this practice: protection from desecration by migrating people, a strong land ownership instinct and a testamentary value which ensures that the land remains within the family, continuity of Dacian practices, the distance from the village center and impassible roads during winter or rainy weather and the value of the land. However, as Felea (2013) argues these hypotheses cannot be proved. They show how the community sees itself and wants to be seen by others (Felea, 2013).

Another tradition practiced by the momârlani is the Nedeie, a form of pastoral holydays that take place in the mountains or in churches yards each year. The nedei are not specific only to the momârlani as they can be found in other regions with different names. It is argued that the origins of these holydays can be found in the Roman fairs known as Nundiae/Novendinae/Novendiales, which were later influenced by slavic traditions and evolved into nedele, eventually taking on their current form as nedeie (Stanca, 1996). These traditions have an economic function for the exchange of goods such as folk creations, ornamental motifs or decorative techniques. They are also very important in choosing marriage partners (Felea, 2013).

When it comes to marriage, endogamous marriage characterizes the momârlani. The practice was determined by the expropriations that began with the expansion of coal mining and were based on the need to preserve land within the family and community (Felea, 2013). Moreover, couples who could not have children adopted relatives' children to ensure that inheritance remained within the community.

Pițărăii is another tradition that can be found in the momârlani community. It is a romanian custom taking place in Christmas Eve, with its origins in the roman festival Saturnalia, held in the honor of Saturn, the god of agriculture and harvest (Mugurel, 2012). As Mugurel (2012) notes, pițărăii involves community members going door to door in an established route, carrying ceremonial flags and singing to homeowners. In return, they receive symbolic gifts of grains, fruits and traditional pastries (Mugurel, 2012).

#### **4. MOMÂRLANI MUSEUMS**

Jiu Valley has been associated from the beginning with the image of the miner and coal-mining, up until the mineriads. Meanwhile, the momârlani community were virtually unknown outside the region until recently (Pascu, 2009). Following the

mineriads and the closure of the mines, the momârlani community are starting to preserve their heritage, as seen in the establishment of several museums dedicated to their culture. Most of them were created by the momârlani, with the exception of one which was created by outsiders that lived in the region.

Currently, in Petroșani there are two museums: the museum of the Momârlan and the museum located in the courtyard of Saint Varvara Church. The Museum of the Momârlan, positioned on Slătinoara street was created with the intention to preserve the traditions and customs of the momarlan people (Stefan, M., 2022). Inspired by the model of the Village Museum in Bucharest, the owners wanted to replicate such a space in Petroșani (Pascu, 2009). With the hope that the museum will be later integrated into a cultural tourism network, a guest house for visitors was also opened (Pascu, 2009). The museum contains over 20.000 pieces of authentic furniture, icons and photos, clothes, fabric, a loom, ceramics, a pick-up and old vinyl records, costumes, footwear, ceramics, pitchforks, iron tools, wooden food containers and many more (Pascu, 2009; Stefan, 2022).

The museum located in the courtyard of the church was established by a momârlan priest of the Livezeni parish, with the support of the town hall. Aware of the danger of losing old artifacts due to the passage of time and a growing disregard for ancestral heritage, he sought to preserve these valuable cultural elements (Felea, 2013). Thus, he established at the St. Varvara Church an “ethnographic center” by relocating a traditional house to the churchyard and constructing a sheepfold beside it (Felea, 2013; Pascu, 2009). He views this center as a repository of evidence showcasing the continuity of the Romanian people (Felea, 2013).

Another museum dedicated to the momârlani is located in Uricani and represents an ethnographic and local history museum called „Mesajul Străbunilor” (the message of the forefathers). The idea of building this museum came from 2 primary school teachers which were born outside the region in Alba County, but were teachers in Jiu Valley. After visiting a similar museum in Lupșa and understanding the need to show school children how their ancestors lived, the teachers returned in the region and established the museum in Lupeni (Pascu 2009). Later, it was relocated to a traditionally built house in Uricani and integrated into a tourist attraction project centered around the "Retezat" boarding house, which features a horse-riding school, swimming pool, climbing wall, tubing slope, horse-and-carriage rides, playground, tennis court, and many more (Pascu 2009).

Lastly, there is the Momârlan Village Museum, an ethnographic park located in Petrila on Jieț street. The idea of establishing such a museum was first proposed by Dimitrie Jura (Felea, 2013) a momârlan that worked at the Astra Village Museum in Sibiu, but was later implemented by the town hall of Petrila, which has a momârlan as a mayor. According to Apostol & Danciu (2018), unlike traditional ethnographic parks that relocate buildings, the Momârlan Village Museum follows the Venice Charter from 1964 which emphasizes preserving cultural landscapes and avoiding displacing structures. This museum replicates traditional buildings using vernacular techniques while maintaining their original spatial context (Apostol & Danciu, 2018). Each structure references an existing prototype from the Jiu Valley, with clear indications of its location for direct observation (Apostol & Danciu, 2018). At the same time,

addressing the decline of traditional crafts, the village museum aims to integrate young people into traditional trades such as woodworking, stone masonry and pottery through specialized training programs (Apostol & Danciu, 2018).

The museum has over 20 buildings (including a tourist information point and a church) which represent 3 specific subareas (Apostol & Danciu, 2018):

1. "The heart of the village" (Vatra Satului) where the primary homesteads can be found as permanent residences and family gathering places. Historically, the momârlani lived dispersed in the hills before settling in the valley. Only the elderly, young children, and parents remained in the village, while others migrated seasonally with livestock returning mainly to give supplies during holidays or winter months.
2. "Seasonal dwellings and hayfields area" (zona sălașelor, fânațelor) situated on hills near the village, it can be said that it primarily serves the first area. Seasonal pastoral homesteads can be found here, with two-room houses, single-room huts, or many times homestead annex with or without cultivated land such as hayfields, orchards or vegetable gardens. Some permanent homesteads do exist but are few in number. However, the farther the land is from the village core, the more common huts become as a form of permanent dwelling.
3. "Alpine area" (zona alpină) extends from the mountain foothills to the main peaks of the surrounding mountains (Retezat, Vâlcan, Parâng, and Șureanu). Constructions here are scarce, sheepfolds being the most common structures, but with traces of early temporary dwellings such as cotroane (earth shelters) or bordeie (dugouts), and stone markers (gomile/momâi).

The existence of these museums can be considered as a strategy of the momârlani to reaffirm their identity in a context where they have been marginalized and are currently losing their traditions. Therefore, aware that their traditions are declining (Felea, 2013), the momârlani are trying to reconstruct and institutionalize them as heritage. These museums encompass the momârlani image of themselves, which they consider to be representative to be presented to outsiders (Felea, 2013). Meanwhile, as younger generations migrate, households gradually disintegrate leaving the remaining population to focus on their traditional occupations and immersed in a nostalgia for a past that can only be recovered in these museums (Felea, 2013). Furthermore, the closing of the mines seems to be an opportune moment for them to be known for their culture, after being marginalized by the coal-mining industry (Pascu, 2019).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Sustainable tourism development in Jiu Valley can be achieved through the preservation and promotion of the region's cultural heritage. Currently, heritage in the valley is declining (Kideckel, 2018), but there have been efforts to preserve it, opening new possibilities for the future. The most visible of these efforts are the ones at the Petrila mine complex, which was saved from demolition and classed as a historical monument. However, such efforts need to be extended to the other mining perimeters that exist, in order to prevent either their demolition or decay and integrating them into

a touristic experience. Furthermore, since most of these perimeters were connected through railroads, this constitutes an opportunity for scenic train journeys or railway-themed attractions that showcase the region's industrial past.

Before the efforts at Petrila, the momârlani had also taken initiatives in preserving their heritage through the creation of museums. Besides these museums, other elements from the Momârlani heritage present an opportunity. For example, traditional momârlan cuisine can serve as a driver for gastronomic tourism. Local gastronomic points can be established in the region and local producers should be encouraged to have products sold at these museums. Traditions such as the Nedei can be used to attract tourists by showcasing folk music, dances or foods and can be connected to different events taking place in the mountains. Artisanal objects can be crafted and sold as souvenirs either at events or at the museums. At the same time, heritage education should be part of the tourist experience, as it can enhance their understanding and appreciation of the Momârlani culture and provide learning opportunities regarding the importance and practice of safeguarding heritage.

By integrating all of these elements within a broader touristic experience, along with the adaptive reuse of the mines, Jiu Valley can develop a sustainable tourism sector. A sector that can raise awareness to the decline of heritage and share knowledge about safeguarding, move beyond visiting and recreational or sports activities, facilitate interactions and building connections with the community or reduce its dependence on natural resources.

However, institutional support remains essential to sustain and expand these efforts. While many initiatives have been driven by local communities and civic actors, success on the long term depends on partnerships between authorities, local community, civil society and entrepreneurs. One successful model in this sense is the Jieț Village Museum, which was made possible due to the partnership between local authorities and some community members. This partnership is likely due to the fact that some of the local officials and community members are Momârlani, and maintain a strong shared identity regardless of their status. In this case, building long lasting partnerships based on a common identity and common values can contribute to more successful efforts.

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