

# **THE ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE RURAL SOCIETY OF ROMANIA: THE CASE OF NORTH DOBRUDJA**

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## **Abstract**

*Rural tourism is an element of cultural and ethnic identity of the Romanian people, being directly related to the evolution and prosperity of the community. The traditional Romania's settlement has always been based on the cooperation between its residents, partnership which has led to the preservation of customs, pilgrimages and other traditional holidays. Unfortunately, in the recent decades, the economy, population, and even the well-known natural landscape of a traditional settlement have undergone significant changes, affecting by a negative manner its identity and prosperity. The objective of this research is to analyze the attitudes of different population members (both young and seniors) towards the tangible heritage of an unique region of Romania, the northern area of Dobrudja, from the perspective of the late changes. Disparities in specific bias, the willingness to be involved in the local activities and the approach regarding the sustainable conservation and economic progress of cultural built heritage assets were discovered to correlate with age and inclusion to a specific group. The cross-examination of the personal attitudes of people who are living in the rural area regarding its cultural heritage and its commercial potential may lead to the development of a specific guideline for the preservation and sustainable development of these cultural assets in a new rural area.*

## **Keywords:**

Rural tourism, Cultural heritage, Economic development, Education

**JEL Classification:** I25, P25, D83, L83, Z32

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## **Introduction**

The beginnings of tourism in the Romanian rural area was achieved in a spontaneous and sporadic manner and, most important, lacking a organized framework. It only gained a materialized form at the beginning of the 20th century, through the accommodation of occasional visitors at locals places (Glăvan, 1995). However, since 1973, a pilot project has been launched in order to create the first rural touristic villages in Romania. Four out of the originally fourteen created villages were located in northern Dobrudja, mainly in the famous region of Danube Delta (Nistoreanu & Ghergheș, 2010).

The short period of formalisation of rural tourism has not made it possible to organize the tourism activity or to properly arrange the touristic villages. In many locations, the households that met the accommodation conditions were not officially recognised and, in others, the accommodation was done without a concrete record or the tourist activity carried out wasn't legally declared at all (Nistoreanu & Ghergheș, 2010).

Only after the fall of communism was created the legal and institutional framework for the development of rural tourism, by putting together the traditions and customs of Romania with the domestic cultural built heritage sites. The northern Dobrudja rural settlement was mainly known for the traditional villages of Danube Delta (the fisherman's villages) but also for its cultural diversity composed of almost 18 ethnic minorities. The evolution of these rural settlements was accomplished based on the cooperation and equality in every aspect of their evolution.

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Nowadays, however, these settlements are undergoing a reinventing process, involving lightly identity-shaping adjustments, including a slightly economic diversification, privatization and other changes in the northern Dobrudja's natural portrait. The pressure to adapt its original nature originate among others from: ideological changes among the younger generations or their interest in leaving the rural areas, the accelerated process of privatization and the sudden and unexpected growth of tourists arrivals in certain parts of the area (Gavrilaş, 2018). Alongside the phenomena previously mentioned, the area started to attract new residents who are willing to become potential seasonal hosts of new establishments. This small influx of people actually represents a particular type of amenity-led migration of people seeking houses, a specific type of quality of life, participation in a small community with a strong cultural identity, and most of the time, a new economic opportunity (Amit-Cohen & Sofer, 2016).

The main purpose of this research is to carefully examine the attitudes of different representative group members involved, who have been involved or are intending to get involved in local tourism activities, regardless their age born in the rural area of northern Dobrudja or currently settled in, towards two late outlines: the emergent changes in a rural (touristic) area and the economic potential of the domestic cultural heritage sites that are built within the borders of it. As far as the analysis has gone, there are no previous studies that have oriented their attention on the attitudes of northern Dobrudja rural members or new residents who decided to become part of the community. This study will also emphasize the significance of cultural minorities and the path of creating a multi-social community establishments. Also, the analysis will emphasize the great importance of the indigenous population involvement in different traditional activities, especially in the protection of the historical buildings and sites as means of long-term sustainable development that will assure improvements to the economic and cultural situation as perceived by the people living in the area.

This paper undertakes with a few theoretical considerations regarding the reorganization of rural touristic settlements in Romania, the adjustments that the northern Dobrudja establishments have undergone and the fundamental position of traditional cultural built heritage in the rural area. The theoretical analysis will be followed by a complete description of the applied methodology, a review of the cultural heritage of the rural northern Dobrudja area and its potential value, and also the examination of the locals bias and new possible members of the community. Ultimately, the discussion focuses on the part owned by the domestic cultural built heritage sites and their importance related to the cultural development of the indigenous community and future economic development of the area, with a great impact on the economic growth of the country.

## **1 Literature review**

### **1.1 The current transformations of rural Romania**

Nowadays, agriculture and rural development in Romania continue a softly blurred path on the edge of a crisis situation and a local economy that is far from the position of supporting its development. Moreover, the decrease in ratio between the boost of agricultural products prices and those of industrial products used by farmers, deepens the crisis, which leads us to the conclusion that agriculture has a low productivity and efficiency compared to other countries, especially to the EU members (Ion, Dobre and Gergely, 2005). The lack of a suitable vision for the future of a Romanian traditional village, the new occupations and qualifications needed in the process of diversification of activities - to lay the foundations for multifunctional rural development as well as the most efficient ways of integration into the European Union, is becoming more and more acute.

After the fall of the communist system, Romania has undergone a period of many changes, most of them with a negative impact on the economic, demographic and environmental progress. As a result of poor governance, the substantial changes made on a national scale have been affecting the rural areas of the country, depicted in significant multidimensional changes (McCarthy, 2005). All these alterations have brought in the limelight a particular approach that rural area and other complimentary land purposes have gained several distinct commodity and non-commodity uses simultaneously, and therefore, should not be considered, from a traditional angle, exclusively agricultural but perceived as multifunctional spaces (Robinson, 2004).

The concept of multifunctional space was defined by the literature as including rural historic landscapes (Countryside Agency, 1999) and rural heritage landscape fabric (Amit-Cohen and Ben-David, 2012). These terms are associated with approaches that consider agricultural settlements and cultivated land as part of the overall open space system and emphasize their unique character as cultural landscapes (Eetvelde and Antrop, 2005; Maruani and Amit-Cohen, 2010; Stern and Rabinowitz, 2006).

The courses of modification are conspicuous in Romania, where agriculture has been the pillar of rural settlements (especially before the communism fall) for a long time, it has suffered a severe regress in importance to the national economy in recent years. For example, its contribution to the GDP in 2017 was 4,4 % and to GDP's growth was mere 0,7% (National Institute of Statistics, 2018). Nevertheless, the productivity of this sector has indicated a significant boost, in terms of both output per unit of labour and output per unit of capital (National Institute of Statistics, 2018). Also, in the late years when Romania has become a part of the EU, we noticed an improvement regarding the legal terms of trade, but also a fluctuation of the income drawn from agricultural production, and a decline in number of the self-employed ranchers (National Institute of Statistics, 2018). Unfortunately, a consistent percent of the late farmers have now moved to other sectors of activity, especially in commerce, tourism and the public sector (for safety reasons).

For some unfavourable areas of the country, the government has promised dedicated programs that will increase the percentage of young population into the rural area, and will assure financial support in order to revitalize the local economy, mostly to capitalize the historical and cultural values of the rural landscape and its historical built heritage. At the same time, in areas like the northern Dobrudja, socio-demographic changes have been ongoing, due to financial support offered to locals and potential new inhabitants who are willing to be established in rural settlements in order to create small businesses, and thus converting the local demographic structure and the pattern of demand for services and goods (Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, 2018). As a result of the latest changes made in some regions of the country, several institutions or NGOs have emerged and are investing a huge effort in protecting the natural environment and open spaces, which could get jeopardized by the increasing number and uncontrolled expansion of particular settlements (Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, 2018).

## **1.2 The late changes emerged in Northern Dobrudja**

There are 179 villages and communes in the northern Dobrudja which sums up around 106,000 residents (National Institute of Statistics, 2018), which account for about 0,5% of the state's population (National Institute of Statistics, 2018). At some point, all these traditional settlements are undergoing a brief or profound adjustment process. The extended void between the current economic and social condition and the original values of the traditional village has become an incentive to start the process of transformation.

As much as we wish to have the rural area divided equally between the local population and the newly-created community who fled from the urban areas of the country, the situation is positive only in favour of those who actually decide to start a small business in the area. For example, in the past three years, the number of accommodations in the rural area of northern Dobrudja has decreased annually by 10% while at a national scale the statistics show a consistent growth, up to 20% compared to 2016 (National Institute of Statistics, 2018). Moreover, the number of tourists who stayed in rural guesthouses has doubled over the last five years, last year exceeding one million visitors, and a growth rate up to 23% from 2016. (National Institute of Statistics, 2018).

Thus, by comparison with the national average, the northern Dobrudja region has presented until 2017 a insecure situation and a lack of ability to create a harmonious synergy composed of the domestic traditional and cultural elements. However, there is a general agreement that the changes, both positive and negative, are spreading through most parts of Romania's rural areas. Moreover, rural tourism and especially agro tourism has become a way of fully capitalizing the rural environment, with its agricultural, human, technical, economic and cultural-historical potential due to its huge potential regarding the uses for accommodation, dining and recreational activities, natural food products, household or traditional art and craft activities on the premises (Glăvan & Nicula, 2016). Unfortunately a lot of the legislation problems and alterations have created a dangerous ground for the development of rural tourism and agro tourism.

Regarding the arrival of new locals (residents), on one side of the matter, we talk about a permissive and inconsistent law on urbanism, which consists in less control performed by the local authorities and the creation of a speculative framework of abuses, the removal from the agricultural circuit of some parts of the productive land and an uncontrolled development of urban constructions (villas, guesthouses). Among any other issues, it is of great relevance the attitude that most of the new-locals have, who don't care to respect the rural landscape and its architectural style. There, they build their accommodations in a great dissonance with the natural conditions and the traditional specific (Glăvan & Nicula, 2016). On the other hand, it is important to mention one of the possible reasons that the rural area of northern Dobrudja isn't that developed due to the harsh conditions of the Danube Delta, which adds the restricting legislation which protects the Danube Delta Biosphere and its buffer area which consist in about 70% of the total area of Tulcea County (National Institute of Statistics, 2018).

As a result of the all the mentions above, the Association ADI-ITI was born with the main purpose of organizing, regulating, financing and monitoring the long-term development of the region with the jointly coordination between it and the administrative-territorial units included in the Integrated Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Danube Delta (2020)(ADI-ITI, 2018). The main purpose of the association is to implement the mechanism of Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) within the area of the administrative-territorial units regarding Strategy for Integrated Sustainable Development of the Danube Delta. The fundamental target of the establishment is represented by the general interest of residents and the import of new residents interested in developing original business models which suits the strategy mentioned above, in order to improve the life quality in the Danube Delta. This purpose will be achieved one step at a time by increasing the capacity of fundraising and ultimately, finance the necessary investments in sustainable development in the Danube Delta. As far as ADI-ITI affirmed, there is a long list of companies who already received findings from a total budget of 1.1 billion Euros (ADI-ITI, 2018).

A fundamental change which we consider convenient at this time is the decision to allow members to establish their own enterprises, such as workshops, consulting and tourism services, small manufacturing industries or simply getting back to the basics - agriculture. Moreover, the number of members working outside the rural community, mostly in urban localities, has notably increased, not to mention the number of rural locals who left Romania to work in agriculture, in countries like Spain, Italy and Germany. The changing, almost non-existing, business environment required a fix up from the former economy and a new opening to private investments (Avădănei, et al., 2016).

### **1.3 Local cultural built heritage in rural areas and its status**

The relevance of cultural landscape has grown considerably in the last 30 years, an interesting fact that Growth (1997) mentioned in a famous study, was that even the ordinary buildings can become part of a cultural built heritage, because they express the interaction between the population and the place where they are living in. Thereby, a built landscape acquires a specific traditional feature when is related to a group that has a well-defined cultural identity. This identity is much better outlined when, in a relatively small area as northern Dobrudja, are living peacefully for centuries about 18 minorities who shared to each other some of their singular identity. Regarding the historical evolution of the protection of the local cultural built heritage, in 1999 the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) decided to adopt and detail a new regulation regarding the preservation of these landscapes or historical sites. As the treaty stated, the built domestic heritage has a great value because represents a fundamental expression of a community culture and the liaison with the physical territory and, on the other hand, it represents the voice of worldwide cultural diversity. The vernacular heritage, as it is called in the literature, embraces not only the physical form and fabric of buildings, structures and spaces, but the ways in which they are used and understood, and the traditions and the intangible associations which attach to them (ICOMOS, 1999).

As many other countries, Romania has become an active part of ICOMOS being aware of its vernacular heritage, especially in rural areas of Transylvania, where there are buildings that represent old crafts, agricultural activities, and a rural lifestyle. Also, despite the fact that northern Dobrudja isn't included on the list of main objectives, ICOMOS has provided the proper support for Roșia Montană, in order to become an UNESCO heritage (ICOMOS Romania, 2018). It is of great importance to give the proper meaning to a part of the monuments which commemorate the past, and to transform others into main tourist attractions used with a commercial purpose (Fuentes, 2010).

Behind the importance of capitalizing the cultural built heritage through its preservation linked to the original landscape, as important is the assimilation of them into the rural areas progress. Many authors stated that this process is being driven by three essential reasons (Amit-Cohen & Sofer, 2016):

- The strengthening process of the national or local communal identity and an acute feeling of patriotism (Silva, 2014).
- The preservation of the heritage with an economic future intention: making use of the of an old building space for new operations and the proper approach of considering the cultural value of historic buildings as an “added value”, increasing both its economical and property value (Takamitsu, 2011; Xavier, 2004; Zukin, 2012).
- The involvement and motivation of the political party and other government institutions which by preserving the cultural heritage and getting actively involved in local community will enhance the group standard of living and will avoid the locals' emigration (Claval, 2012).

As time passes by, these motives keep changing and adapting to the local situation, historical and economical status and the involvement from both locals and national institutions.

Knowing every detail about the historical objects, can become a real benefit for the future generations, a great opportunity into the values and encourage their conservation and the sustainable development of rural landscape renewal. Right before the communism fall, in August - September 1989 UNESCO declared through a convention, its mission in Romania regarding the protection of cultural heritage. This convention has many remarks regarding the "systematization" plan of the rural area of Romania for safeguarding the cultural heritage of the country as part of the preservation of the cultural identity of the people. And since 1989 the news weren't that good because the government was mainly interested in protecting the cultural heritage of Bucharest and wasn't paying the proper attention to the one located in the rural areas of the country.

Moreover, the administrative reorganization has substituted for territorial divisions based on geography and history which were clearly dissimilar in terms of surface area, level of development and culture, regions whose boundaries have been drawn but in such way to ensure they offer a comparable economic offer (UNESCO, 1989). The real situation was worrying thanks to the huge migration from rural to urban area, because the villages weren't assuring the same economic possibilities. The same report stated that, due to the fact that the rural area wasn't of great concern regarding the systematization, the villages "would die a natural death" (UNESCO, 1989), a common situation happening now, 30 years later. Because the communist system was interested in only developing a part of the rural area, and leaving other parts the way they were, UNESCO stated that this would create a huge discrepancy between the objectives of the necessary modification of Romanian countryside and the safeguarding of the rural housing if, from the heritage standpoint, the housing was clearly of high quality. Nowadays, this modern process "links the concept of ecology to the cultural quality of live" (UNESCO, 1989). So, UNESCO recommended an active maintenance of our rich traditional heritage rather than a passive one that will be on a long-term in advantage of modern Romania. For sure, that "systematization" represented a threat to the survival of a "high-quality" cultural heritage, nowadays the results are more than conclusive.

Related to the members of northern Dobrudja rural areas, especially the protected part of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, we can't conclude whether its members vary in their attitudes or may be passive to safeguarding the vernacular cultural heritage. Therefore, it would be an interesting research to find out their perceptions and attitudes regarding the situation.

#### **1.4 Cultural built heritage in the Northern Dobrudja villages: description and location**

In the rural area of Romania, which constitutes most of the Tulcea County and the northern Dobrudja, it can be found a wide variety of sites or other buildings that have a strong historical and cultural value, illustrating the peculiarities of the local culture. Why it is so interesting to analyze this region from the point of view of vernacular cultural heritage? Well, it has a unique feature - cultural diversity. Northern Dobrudja is inhabited by Romanians, Lipovians, Turks, Tatars, Greeks, Ukrainians, Italians, Jews and many other minorities, and it is well known for their peaceful and productive cohabitation. Throughout history it never existed an ethnic conflict, as so, we can firmly state that this land is the heaven of multiculturalism. The fact that there is this tendency towards cosmopolitanism between the Danube and the Black Sea is reinforced by the whole history of this land, which has met with various master ships like the Dacian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine as well as Turkish. Each and every traditional village can be considered part of the vernacular heritage thanks to the architectural singularities that define the minorities mentioned above.

The main types of sites could be included in three different categories of local cultural built heritage are (Amit-Cohen & Sofer, 2016):

- The general cultural heritage sites which usually is defined by the traditional architecture of the locals houses and other annexes (many different types in Dobrudja due to its cultural diversity). Among the most common elements which define this category are the citadels and other security buildings, the wells, memorial sites and other national sites regarding the local history.
- The domestic ideological cultural heritage sites which illustrate the ideological culture and spirituality of the local minorities. The most common ideological elements include the way in which locals get involved in farming activities, their mutual collaboration and responsibility, the specific education according to their ethical pattern and self-labour, without depending

on labourers who don't belong to the minority. The most common examples of ideological cultural heritage are the local workshops, schools, gardens and agricultural lands.

- The private and local cultural heritage sites which include elements that illustrate each village's unique legacy: the first buildings, cemeteries, churches or other settlements associated with domestic memories.

The traditional Romanian village and its cultural heritage sites are usually located in two main sections: the central public place (which usually gathers the school, church and cultural house) and the farming area, which usually is located on the outskirts of the village. Here we can usually find barns, storehouses, animal farms or fishponds. This elements are the ones who sketch the whole picture of the traditional Romanian (from northern Dobrudja) village cultural heritage.

Unfortunately, a part of the local tradition and architecture was lost when the communists decided to implement their "systematization" program, some traditional houses were demolished, and instead were built blocks of flats. The phenomena gets severe on the outskirts of the village thanks to the new residents who decide to build their villas without any regard of the local architecture. Also, given the present economical situation of Romania, many of the animal farms or workshops are abandoned or simply used as a storage spaces.

The northern Dobrudja national cultural heritage sites is characterized by a diversified location, mainly due to the ethnic minorities of the area. Sometimes historical buildings can be found at the village's core and other times can be found way out the outskirts of it. Regarding the residential areas, they are mostly characterized by low houses, with medium vegetables or flower gardens with fences, painted usually in blue, and unpaved roads. The main characteristics of a house depend on the ethnicity of the owners.

## 2 Research methodology

As mentioned before, the aim of the present research is to examine the attitudes of different representative group members involved, who have been involved or are intending to get involved in local tourism activities, regardless their age, born in the rural area of northern Dobrudja or currently settled in, towards two aspects: the continuous changes in a rural (touristic) area and the economic potential of its domestic cultural heritage. As prior studies have shown, we have decided to start from the assumption that the happening demographic changes will influence many aspects concerning the conservation and economic development of the vernacular assets. The examination was based on the argument that there is a connection between the locations of vernacular heritage, as ICOMOS calls it, and the assets within the village's proximity and also the willingness of the locals to contribute to a sustainable development. Therefore, by analyzing the location of the heritage main resources and the attitude of the local population towards the traditional village and its preservation, we could evaluate their potential role as drivers for the social and economic development. Therefore, the results of this research may contribute to the common effort of stimulating the rural population of Romania, not only of northern Dobrudja to safeguard their built cultural heritage. One way of analyzing the situation is to illustrate that development and a new way of life complement each other. This phenomena involves a complex examination of the physical location of the cultural built heritage in the official territorial plan of the traditional Romanian village (which includes both the built-in space and the agricultural one) and the examination of the locals' attitudes towards the economic potential of these heritage assets.

**Table no. 1: Main attributes of the respondents by percentage (N = 100)**

| Category   | Characteristics                                       | Respondents |           |
|--|---|-------------|-----------|
|  |   | Number      | Share (%) |
| <b>Location of the village and its respondents</b> | East (Sfântu Gheroghe)                                | 28          | 28%       |
|  | Central (Murighiol)                                   | 25          | 25%       |
|  | South-East (Jurilovca)                                | 18          | 18%       |
|  | North-West (Niculițel)                                | 29          | 29%       |
|  | Total   | 100         | 100%      |
| <b>Residence/Status</b>                            | Within the boundaries of the old village - the locals | 89          | 89%       |
|  | In an expansion neighbourhood - the residents         | 11          | 11%       |
|  | Total   | 100         | 100%      |

|                          |       |     |      |
|--------------------------|-------|-----|------|
| <b>Members age group</b> | 18–39 | 10  | 10%  |
|                          | 40–65 | 19  | 19%  |
|                          | 66+   | 71  | 71%  |
|                          | Total | 100 | 100% |

*Source: Designed by the author, based on the own research*

In order to reach the goal of the study we underwent an analysis that involved more aspects like: the number and location of sites, the specific values, and the attitudes of the different groups which belong to the numerous minorities found in northern Dobrudja. The survey was conducted in 4 traditional villages located into or on the outskirts of Danube Delta, all of them being owed to comply with the Reserve rules. We chose two longstanding well-established touristic villages (Sfântu Gheroghe and Murighiol) that have been undergoing for a while a process of restructuring within the original borders of the village and two other traditional villages (Jurilovca and Niculițel) where the new expansion of neighbourhoods has started a while ago. Some of these settlements were considered official touristic villages from the very beginning of rural tourism in Romania.

In these villages, we distributed a questionnaire randomly to 100 residents aged 18–65+, who responded between September and November 2018. According to the data provided by the local authorities, the sample represents 3% of the total inhabitants of the analyzed areas, and the representativeness of the sample increases due to the fact that the surveyed inhabitants are those who are, have been involved at a certain point or intend to get involved in local tourism activities. A number of eighty-five of the respondents were local members (original from the area) and the rest were the new residents interested in developing the local tourism. In each village, we considered proper to divide the locals into three age categories (see Table 1). The largest age group of members among the respondents was the older, as a common situation in Romania's rural area, 66+ group, which accounts for about 71% of the sample. The residents of the expansion neighbourhoods, which literally are a few buildings located at the outskirts of the old village, showed less willingness to participate and also their quantity was quite ineffective compared to the rest of the locals (we found only 11 respondents). The new residents were grouped into a single group, and about 60% of them belonged to the younger age group (18–39).

### **3 Results and discussion**

The research was conducted on a group of four categories of subjects (according to their age: 18–39, 40–65, and 66+ – and residents of all the categories mentioned before) who responded to a set of questions regarding their beliefs and mindset towards the conservation of the rural cultural built heritages and possibility of tourism development within the village and its surroundings. The main questions were:

1. Describe your approach (the deep understanding of the conservation and willingness to be involved) towards the act of conserving tangible historical heritage (buildings, vegetation) in your village: positive/ unconcerned /negative.
2. Where (in what place) would you like to implement the process of economic activity: in the village central area/in the village farmyard/in the village historical epicentre, on the outskirts/or the proper location is being considered unimportant for you?
3. Which economic activity regarding the development of the area would you like to have implemented at a conserved site: commercial/leisure/educational?
4. Of the above activities regarding the development of conserved sites in your village (core/outskirts), in which activity would you like to be actively involved?

With respect to the awareness and enthusiasm of the locals and the few residents questioned, to become an active cell of the community and contribute to the development and preservation of the cultural built heritage assets are detailed in Table 2, Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5.

**Table no. 2: Personal attitude regarding the preservation of tangible historical heritage (N=100) (%)**

| Population group |                  | Attitude regarding the conservation of cultural heritage (%) |             |          | Total (%) |
|------------------|------------------|--|-------------|----------|-----------|
| Age              | Residence/Status | Positive   | Unconcerned | Negative |           |
| 18-39            | Members N= 8     | 37.5   | 50          | 12.5     | 100       |
| 40-65            | Members N= 16    | 62.5   | 25          | 12.5     | 100       |
| 66+              | Members N= 71    | 53.5   | 23.9        | 22.6     | 100       |
| 18-65            | Residents N= 5   | 100  | 0           | 0        | 100       |

Source: Designed by the author, based on the own research

The bias towards conservation, by age group and status (members who live within the borders of the traditional village residential area, and residents who live on the outskirts of the village) are presented in Table 2. Among the questioned prospects 62.5% of adults with ages between 40 and 65 years are willing supporters of conservation as well as 53.5% of members with ages 60+ and a small group of residents who compared to the only 37.5% of the younger members are 100% committed to get involved into the preservation of tangible historical heritage. It is really interesting how the new residents of the village (alien of the local tradition and culture) are more interested into its preservation, rather than the locals who were born there.

**Table no.3: Locals' attitude regarding location of conserved sites, by age and status (%)**

| Population group and status |                  | Preference of location of conserved site (%) |          |                        | Total (%) |
|-----------------------------|------------------|--|----------|------------------------|-----------|
| Age                         | Residence/Status | Central area of the village                  | Farmyard | Location is irrelevant |           |
| 18-39                       | Members N= 8     | 25   | 62.5     | 12.5                   | 100       |
| 40-65                       | Members N= 16    | 37.5   | 50       | 12.5                   | 100       |
| 66+                         | Members N= 71    | 9.86   | 70.42    | 19.72                  | 100       |
| 18-65                       | Residents N= 5   | 60   | 40       | 0                      | 100       |

Source: Designed by the author, based on the own research

The attitudes towards the place (location) of various new economic activities (Table 3), slightly differs from a group to another, but as the calculation shows, most of the community members, apart from the residents, consider that these activities should be held in conserved heritage sites located in the farmyard. Most of the locals believe that the historical public centre of the village should be considered part of their past and culture, and by no means it is going to be altered. Affected by their location, 60 % of the residents consider really important to locate all the economic activities in the public centre.

**Table no. 4: Locals' attitude regarding types of economic and development endeavours, by age and status (%)**

| Population group and status |                  | Preference of economic development (%) |         |             | Total (%) |
|-----------------------------|------------------|--|---------|-------------|-----------|
| Age                         | Residence/Status | Commercial                             | Leisure | Educational |           |
| 18-39                       | Members N= 8     | 37.5                                   | 50      | 12.5        | 100       |
| 40-65                       | Members N= 16    | 25                                     | 31,25   | 43.75       | 100       |
| 66+                         | Members N= 71    | 9.86                                   | 70.42   | 19.72       | 100       |
| 18-65                       | Residents N= 5   | 20                                     | 20      | 60          | 100       |

Source: Designed by the author, based on the own research

Regarding the type of economic and development endeavours (Table 4) the most of the community's young members (18-39) consider the conserved sites of the village most suitable for entertainment and leisure activities as 70.2 % of the senior members (66+). On the opposite side are found 43.75% of the adult groups (40-65) and the new residents (60%) who consider the area most relevant for educational and cultural activities, stating that education represents the basis of economic development (for example, by organising museums that with an entry fee). Also, the young locals and the residents consider the conserved site would also be useful in a commercial purpose. Unfortunately, only 9.86% of the seniors (66+) could realize the importance of a commercial purpose, most of them manifesting their complete disinterest regarding this matter.

**Table no. 5: Locals' type of economic activities in conserved heritage assets and willingness to be involved in specific activities, by age and status (%)**

| Population group and status |                  | Type of economic activity (%) |         |             | Total (%) |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|---------|-------------|-----------|
| Age                         | Residence/Status | Commercial                    | Leisure | Educational |           |
| 18-39                       | Members N= 8     | 37.5                          | 37.5    | 25          | 100       |
| 40-65                       | Members N= 16    | 31.25                         | 31.25   | 37.5        | 100       |
| 66+                         | Members N= 71    | 15.49                         | 49.3    | 35.21       | 100       |
| 18-65                       | Residents N= 5   | 20                            | 20      | 60          | 100       |

*Source: Designed by the author, based on the own research*

In Table 5 is illustrated the data on the locals' willingness to be involved in activities which will lead to economic development by making the cultural heritage assets worthwhile. Members of all age groups including the new residents preferred to become involved in commercial-educational activities apart from the elders (66+) who were more interested in the leisure activities. An interesting fact is that, in the younger group, equality was outlined between leisure and commercial activities. Under the lately conditions in the rural area, members who usually didn't get the chance to a proper education or who don't have a profession sought income opportunities.

## Conclusions

Most of the old traditional built assets are, most of the time, declared as vernacular cultural heritage when they illustrate the authenticity of the past, its particular history and the memories of a society which values its traditions. Vernacular assets represent the traditional and natural way for communities to live. Of course, it is a continuous process including necessary changes and continuous adaptation in response to social and environmental constraints. As we are experiencing the need of quality of life and a sustainable development, the need for cultural quality was outlined. The survival of the tradition represents the key of cultural quality in a medium that is threatened by the forces of economic, cultural and architectural globalization.

Throughout this research, we examined attitudes towards the cultural built heritages in northern Dobrudja's traditional villages. The community members manifested interest regarding the development of economic activities which include the proper conservation of their vernacular heritage in different locations illustrated by the questionnaire.

All the research prospects, regardless their membership to a specific group, preferred involvement in economical-educational and economical-leisure activities. Willingness to be involved in conservation was greater among the residents, being most interested in economic-educational activities. Also they showed a considerable interest in the process of sustainable conservation of the vernacular assets, despite their lack of information in relation to the village's history. In terms of these attitudes, depending on the affiliation to each age group, the following results were outlined:

- The young respondents (18–39 years old) were the least interested in the conservation of the cultural built heritage, mostly because they weren't directly connected to the village's creation and it's past, and also because many of them were interested in leaving the rural area in a more economical developed one, preferably the urban area, or other European countries. They have expressed a high interest towards the economic potential for local development, though both leisure and commercial activities. They perceived the public centre of the village as its core, as the other members of the village, regardless their age.
- Half of the adult respondents (ages 40-65 years old) preferred to locate the economic development in the farmyard, but despite their conservative attitude they considered the educational and leisure activities the most important pursuing a sustainable economic development. Contrary to the residents and younger respondents, they had been born and grown up in the village and they were accustomed to local traditions and history, knowledge that became part of their personal identity. Also they were eager to get actively involved in any economic development activity as soon as the opportunity will rise.
- More than half of the elder respondents (66+) were interested in the conservation of the vernacular heritage, mainly because their tight links to the past and knowing deeply the local history. As their age is a little restrictive regarding their active participation to the local activities, they seemed most interested in leisure ones

and preferred to become part of the local "revolution" on this particular niche of economic development.

- An interesting fact is that the new members (residents) are huge supporters of the protection of cultural heritage assets, even though they didn't grow up in the area, don't know that well its history, but they mainly came to start a new local business where this heritage represents one of the main attractions of the area. They considered that the central public space, should become the main subject of the economic development by making worthwhile all the monumental public buildings and other aspects part of the built heritage.

The findings regarding the attitudes of different local groups to sustainable economic development of vernacular heritage confirmed the main presumption of this research. The results illustrate a strong bond between people's attitudes toward economic development in the cultural built heritage sites and their age, attitude regarding the protection of vernacular heritage, the development, the positioning preferences and even the types of economic activities. Although parts of the attitudes varied from a group to another, the desire to engage in the protection and economic development of the area was noted. The main disparities were linked to the extent of knowledge regarding the history of the village, and preferred activities regarding the economic returns of a possible exploit of the heritage. To sum up, in order to act accordingly to the locals wishes, it will be needed a custom-made strategy which will consider each of their views, adaptive to the profile of the village and also to the local legislation. The main aspects of this strategy should include: sustainable development, education, conservation of the assets, ways of stopping the emigration and also a clear economic objective.

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