

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE FĂGĂRAŞ LAND. PRIORITY DIMENSIONS

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Abstract: *Between March 2018 and February 2019, an interdisciplinary team from Transylvania University of Brasov developed a project to create an inventory of intangible cultural heritage resources in the Făgăraş Land. Almost without exception, the first theme addressed by the inhabitants who were interviewed was that regarding the group of lads. The prestige of the group of lads (caroling bachelors) who in the villages in the Făgăraş Land could be capitalised on by reactivating the status and traditional assignments of the group over the entire year and thus, reactivating and/or reinvigorating other heritage resources. Local differentiations between folk costumes with the same structure represent another significant heritage resource.*

Key words: *intangible cultural heritage, Făgăraş Land, group of lads.*

1. Introduction

Făgăraş Land is the historical and administrative name of the territory whose ethnographic correspondent is the valley of the Olt River. It is a depression in the south of Transylvania bordered by the Olt River and the Făgăraş Mountain range. Between March 2018 and February 2019 an interdisciplinary team from Transylvania University of Brasov conducted a project aimed at cataloguing the intangible cultural heritage in Făgăraş Land. The current paper provides a brief summary of the project and some comments on the results of the thematic analysis of the materials acquired through field research which was conducted in order to establish the content of the mapping charts.

According to UNESCO, the intangible cultural heritage as a source of identity and continuity includes the following: (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; (e) traditional craftsmanship (UNESCO, 2018). WTO's first study *Tourism and Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2012) explicitly adds music to the performing arts, as well as gastronomy and culinary practices as another distinct dimension of the

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aforementioned concept. The mapping of the intangible cultural heritage is part of `cultural mapping`, which is defined as follows:

cultural mapping is regarded as a systematic tool to involve communities in the identification and recording of local cultural assets, with the implication that this knowledge will then be used to inform collective strategies, planning processes, or other initiatives (Duxbury, Garrett-Petts & MacLennan, 2015, p. 2).

Mapping highlights local cultural differences which are viewed as resources contributing to the consolidation of cultural identity (Sorea, 2009).

Research on Făgăraş Land has been conducted since the inter-war period when the School of Sociology from Bucharest organized monographic campaigns under the coordination of Dimitrie Gusti (in the village of Drăguş in 1929 and in 1938, and in the entire Olt County in 1938). Those scientific endeavors resulted in notable papers on Romanian rural sociology: Stahl (1972), Herseni (1977), Bărbat (1980), Ionică (1996). Recent research focused on dominant value anchored orientations in Făgăraş Land and their cultural expressions Roşculeţ (2002; 2006), as well as on the transformation of the socio-economic aspects in the post-Communist era, and on the evolution of the organization of youth groups in the area (Şandru, 2009).

The project *CarPaTO- Cartografierea patrimoniul cultural imaterial al Țării Făgăraşului* (Romanian for *Mapping the intangible cultural heritage of Făgăraş Land*) ran by the University of Brasov resumed the research on the cultural heritage of the area, and the direct and indirect results of Gusti's campaigns. Făgăraş Land comprises Braşov and Sibiu counties. The project focused on the central and eastern areas of Braşov county. The research team took into consideration the fact that from an administrative and territorial perspective some of the districts include villages that lie on the other shore of the Olt River. Hence, it operated with an enlarged definition of Făgăraş Land similar to the one that had already been provided by the historian Valer Literat (1895-1972), who established the Museum of Făgăraş Land (the museum was named after him in 2004), and which runs as follows: the ethnographic boundaries of the area are delineated by the mouths of the rivers, which means all villages that are way beyond the ones on the other bank of the Olt River and that belong to the aforementioned districts.

2. A Brief Summary of the Project

During the first stage, the project focused on interviewing the specialists in cultural heritage from the Museum of Ethnography of Braşov, the `Valer Literat` Museum of Făgăraş Land, The Braşov County Center for the Preservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture, the Negru Vodă Foundation of Făgăraş, and the ASTRA Museum of Transylvanian Civilization of Sibiu. Furthermore, representatives of the city halls and of the tourist information centers in the area were also interviewed. Thus, the people who were well-informed on the project topic and on the heritage resources considered important locally were identified. The next project stage was field research and consisted of conducting semi-structured interviews with well-informed respondents,

taking photos, making video and audio recordings, collecting old photos and other social documents (village monographs, old collections of Christmas carols and/or songs, notes of local leaders etc.)

Based on the information acquired through the field research, mapping charts were elaborated for each of the districts in the Făgăraș Land that belonged to Brasov County. The charts were organized by the UNESCO dimensions of intangible cultural heritage and include the results of the research in the field (as transcripts or summaries of the interviews with well-informed respondents), as well as information from the initial documentation interviews and from the studies published in *etno.brasov.ro*, the magazine of the Museum of Ethnography of Brasov. The charts were organized in an accessible database to enable the preparation of future activities focused on community interests. There was also a book design for a volume on *Dishes from Făgăraș Land*, as well as a short video presenting the results of the field research. Several thematic cultural routes capitalizing on identity differences at the level of the local heritage were also established. During the dissemination of results stage three events were organized: a photo exhibition focused on highlighting the results of the field research, a culinary exhibition displaying dishes characteristic of Făgăraș Land along with their recipes, and a concert where the music pieces collected in the area were performed.

3. Făgăraș Land, a Brief History

The voivodeship of Făgăraș was first attested in 1222 as *terra Blachorum*. It is at the same time one of the oldest and long-lasting form of Romanian state organization within the Carpathian arc. At the end of the 13th century its territory was under the rule of the Hungarian Kingdom. Radu, the voivode of Făgăraș Land and who was defeated by the Hungarian army that was marching south, is traditionally considered the founder of Tara Romaneasca (Wallachia) (Băjenaru, 2013). Nonetheless, the relations between the Romanians who were north and south of the Southern Carpathians were much older. In this respect, Năgler shows that voivode

Seneslau of Muntenia owned a part of Făgăraș Land. It is not preposterous to assume that the idea of donating Amlaș and Făgăraș to the rulers of Wallachia in the XIV century could have been a legacy of such a state of affairs in the previous century (Năgler, 2003, p. 217).

During the Middle Ages the Făgăraș Land was alternatively under the reign of the rulers from Wallachia and the Hungarians. The latter's policy was to control the relations with the Romanians across the mountains by offering or withdrawing their rulers' various properties. Given the long time when Wallachia was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire or the Hungarian kings, the policy proved efficient (Andreescu, 2015). In this context, during the Middle Ages, the legal framework and the social structure of Făgăraș Land were pretty similar to those from Wallachia. In the 14th century, the latter's rulers made donations to the people from Făgăraș Land and thus contributed to the emergence and consolidation of Romanian boyars' class.

After the battle of Mohács (1526) the Romanian noble Ştefan Mailat from Comăna de Jos got hold of the Făgăraş Land. After his death in the prison from Constantinople, there were successive rulers of this country. In 1573 the Hungarian Diet gives the territory to the princes of Transylvania (Băjenaru, 2013). In 1599 Michael the Brave becomes the owner of the fortress of Făgăraş and, in accordance with the custom of the princes of Transylvania, he gave it to his wife, Lady Stanca. Following the death of Michael the Brave, the fortress is given as a gift to other princes' wives: Catherine of Brandenburg, wife of Gabriel Bethlen, Zsuzsanna Lórántffy, wife of György Rákóczy I and Anne Bornemisza, wife of Mihail Apáffy I.

In 1691, as a result of *Diploma Leopoldinum*, the principedom of Transylvania went under Austrian rule. During the 17th century, Brâncoveanu and Cantacuzino families from Wallachia gained important properties in Făgăraş Land. Thus, along with the boyars who were "free people who inherited lands, woods, mountains, mills and other privileges" (Băjenaru, 2013, p. 18), another category of people emerged from among the serfs who had been rewarded for their services in the defense of the Făgăraş fortress or had been able to buy their titles of nobility. The boyars from the Făgăraş Land preserved their legal and administrative traditions until well close to the end of the 18th century.

As of 1849 Transylvania became a province that was "directly dependent on the Imperial Court from Vienna" (Băjenaru, 2013, p. 37). Between 1860 and 1865 the Romanians from Făgăraş Land got acknowledgment of the Romanian language as the official language of the district and sent their representatives to the Diet. In 1865 the old Diet was dissolved and a new Diet was convoked. The latter voted the union between Transylvania and Hungary. Until the Great Union of 1918, the efforts of the people from this territory focused on fighting against the Austro-Hungarian regime that had been formally acknowledged in 1867.

Their actions were most often of a radical nature and even consisted of not accepting Hungarian laws and vehemently opposing the increasing tendency of total assimilation of the population by the Hungarians, especially in terms of the official language acknowledged for the district (subsequently turned into the county) of Făgăraş (Băjenaru, 2013, p. 259).

Thus, Făgăraş Land went through a lot of political and administrative changes since its first historical registration and until its integration into Romania after WWI. The impact upon the community in the area was amplified by the repeated invasions of the Tatars (Nägler, 2003), by Vlad Ţepeş' incursions conducted with the aim of punishing the people from the area for sheltering his rivals coveting the throne of Wallachia, and by the campaign ran by General Buccow at the order of Empress Maria Theresa with a view to imposing Catholicism as the main denomination.

After the change of the political regime in 1947, a powerful anti-Communist resistance movement emerged in the Făgăraş Mountains. The Făgăraş Carpathian group led by Ion Gavrilă Ogoranu is the longest lasting resistance group. Its members benefitted from the support of the villagers from Făgăraş Land (Gavrilă-Ogoranu, 2017).

4. Information Distribution by the Dimensions of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Concept

The information acquired during the field research was unequally distributed by the six dimensions of the intangible cultural heritage. Of all these, (d) `knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe` dimension proved the least promising. That is at least partially the consequence of the decades of Communism that brought havoc to (elderly) respondents and their generation's lives. They learnt by force that everything they knew from their elderly about the world was no longer trustworthy, and that it was shameful and even dangerous to show their faith in anything else but scientific materialism. They lost contact with the pace of rural life, with the knowledge of identifying the good/bad time for harvesting by signs and by the saints' names written in the religious calendar. They became industrial workers as a result of the forced industrialization process undertaken all over Communist Romania. During the interviews they showed difficulty remembering and talking about such dated and eccentric knowledge compared to their daily familiar universe and narrative. Nonetheless, that situation is also attributable to incompletely pursued research avenues. The people from Făgăraş, like all mountain people, are reluctant to talk to strangers about their beliefs. Most often, the questions where reluctance emerged were answered by brief comments like: `Oh, but who could possibly remember something like that!' or by shallow expedited replies. Had the reluctance been overcome, most likely there would have been information on the pool of beliefs about the universe that survived Communism. That was the case with another less generous dimension in terms of the information gained, namely that of (a) `oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage`. The local prestige of one of the respondents facilitated researchers' access to more material about *iele* (Romanian for *fairies*), vampires, curses and bad omen treasures in Drăguş than the whole project team had managed to gather from the entire area under focus.

For the dimensions of (b) `performing arts, music included` and (f) `gastronomy and culinary practices` the field interviews yielded more information. The dances and Christmas carols characteristic of each community were inventoried. The conclusion drawn was that there are significant differences among these dances and songs when it comes to shaping local identity. Community recollection events, traditional local festivals, dances, carols, religious songs from Făgăraş Land were also inventoried. The somewhat surprising appetite of the people from the area for *romanţe* (Romanian for vocal or instrumental musical piece, sung in a poetic and sentimental mood) was unveiled and can be most likely attributed to being in the vicinity of the city and/ to the imports from Bucharest – a city where many Transylvanians established in pursuit of better living conditions during the inter-war period. Concerning gastronomic practices, the traditional menu cooked on celebrations was retraced and confirmed. Additionally, a lot of recipes of dishes cooked by local housewives who took great pride in them were recorded. The field research also highlighted a great diversity of pies as part of locals' menu.

The dimensions of (e) `traditional craftsmanship` and (c) `social practices, rituals and festive events` benefitted from the greatest amount of information and were an area where the respondents answered very easily.

5. The Groups of Lads from Făgăraş Land

The first topic approached by the locals during the field interviews was, almost without exception, that of the groups of lads.

The group of lads is a cohort of local single young males who gather together yearly in order to go Christmas caroling. The behavior of its members is strictly regulated during winter celebrations because they are the main performers of some archaic rituals related to the end/beginning of a yearly cycle. At the same time, it is part of their attributes to organize winter season parties for the youths of the village and, as such, to introduce teenage girls into the dance events – a ritual that acknowledges the latter's nubility. The young males usually gather as a group on the eve of December, 6th (Saint Nicholas 'day) when they appoint their leaders and establish the roles of the members. Their activities begin at Christmas and end on the twelfth day (the 6th of January) or on Saint Johns' Day (the 7th of January). All this time they eat and party at some host (in some cases they also sleep in the host's house, a practice that was very common until the mid of the last century), that is a householder's house in the village who makes his house available to this end. During the work days of this time period the youths work for their host: they cut wood, clean the snow, the stable etc. On celebrations, this is their starting point for church or for the places where dances are organized. In most cases (that is in most villages) the cohort has its own flag which is carried by each of the youth at a time and is carefully guarded. In many villages in Făgăraş Land the group of lads is accompanied by a zoomorph mask called *turca* which is allowed to behave as it wishes and dances and scares young girls, women and children (Şandru & Sorea, 2011). According to Traian Herseni (1977), the mask represents a pre-Christian mother goddess, whom the cohort invokes and accompanies. Until WWII, between the priest of the village (whether of Orthodox or Greek Catholic denomination) and the group accompanying the *turca* there was an overt conflict. The youth who carried and danced with the mask was not allowed to take Communion. In this respect, Herseni highlighted the initiation connotations related to the youth's acceptance into the group. Mircea Eliade (1991) also pointed out the religious syncretism between pagan and Christian elements manifest in the way the group of lads was established and worked. Nowadays, the conflict is settled. The group is blessed by the priest when they begin caroling, but the mask is banned from entering the church.

The age of group members is much younger compared to "the old days", that is a generation ago, because the group members are no longer drafted (the group leader used to be appointed from among those who had already been conscripted) and because high-school students, compared to college students, are much more eager/more easily to convince to join the group. Nonetheless, the life of the communities from Făgăraş Land still centers on the groups of lads during winter time celebrations.

6. Other Social Practices, Rituals and Festive Events

The field interviews frequently indicate two other agrarian rituals: The `Ploughman` and the `Wreath`. The `Ploughman` is related to the start of ploughing activities within community's borders in spring. On the second day of Easter, the young ones begin to look for the most diligent single young male, namely the first to have gone ploughing (while he hides as well as he can in his own house). Once they find him they put him on the harrow and carry him surrounded by a lot of people to the closest running water where they push him into the water so that he gets soaked wet. In his turn, he also tries to soak the others and then offers them drinks. There are some villages where, instead of the most diligent single young male, it is the leader of the group of lads who is honoured (more often than not it is actually the very same single young male).

The `Wreath` celebrates the end of the harvesting season in summer. A wreath (or a cross - both forms are encountered in the area) is made of the last ears from the village's harvest. The wreath is worn by a young girl. If a cross (which surprisingly is called a `club`) is made, then its holder is a single young male. On its way, the accompanying people sing a song about who, from among the sun and wind, is more powerful. Once the wreath reaches the village, a dance is performed wearing it and the entire community participates in the party. According to field information, the `Ploughman` plays a more important role for the locals in the east of the Făgăraș Land, whereas the `Wreath` in the center and in the west.

The interviews contain information that is less frequent and less emotionally loaded about some social practices and festive events: *Zoritul* (which is caroling on the eve of Saint Nicholas, Saint Basil and Saint John's days for those who are christened by their names), festive events on Heroes' Day (usually organized around the monuments raised by the villages to honour the locals who died during the two world wars), as well as (almost) yearly gatherings of the `Sons of the Village`. In some villages, either on the occasion of the latter event or not necessarily related to it, traditional weddings are organized for touristic entertainment.

7. Traditional Outfit in Făgăraș Land

When interviewed about crafts, some of the respondents referred to the old mills, and to the wood and old wool manufacturing installations that benefited from the geographical features of the area which facilitated access to small water courses streaming from Făgăraș Mountains. There are also some references to the smithies in the villages.

Most of the information that the people of Făgăraș shared vividly related to household crafts by which parts of the traditional outfit were created like: weaving, sewing and skimmers' craft. Traditional outfit is not (really) for borrowing, nor is it made by women and girls in their household anymore as it was the case before Communism, that is in the second half of the 20th century. However, in every community there is information on who and where they weave or sew. Skimmers' craft used to be a specialized one. The need for replacing parts of the old costumes with new ones is still present. In many

villages, on the initiative and as a result of the continuous efforts made by local leaders (the priest, the school principal, a skilled and charismatic woman) some of the old parts of traditional outfits reached small village museums along with other of household crafts.

The manufacturing of costumes in people's households has contributed to the emergence and consolidation of some local features of traditional clothes. The unitary design of traditional clothing was particularized by each community in its own way. The most spectacular differences appear in the case of women's costumes. In this respect, women's old traditional outfit from Făgăraş Land is much more impressive than the one from Sălişte. The latter was quite fashionable during the inter-war period under the influence of the cultural association *Astra* that promoted the consolidation of Romanian identity in Transylvania, as a result of the first beauty contest organized in Romania and won by a young lady from Sălişte, and as a consequence of the appreciation showed by Romanian queens for this particular traditional costume (Sorea & Băjenaru, 2019b). The basic design of the old outfit consisted of a blouse, a breastplate, an apron, a *cretinţă*, that is a woollen rectangular piece worn under the apron in front of the outfit and a cap with *pomeselnic*, namely a head cover made of white fabric whose style of wrapping depended on the marital status of the lady wearing it. The parts did not change, but the ornamental models and the colours differed from community to community. Additionally, different manners of wearing them were identified (long sleeves or sleeves tied above the elbow, different blouse cleavages etc.).

In Făgăraş Land the details on the outfit are significant enough to identify the place of origin of the woman wearing it, even in the case of neighboring village or in the case of the villages belonging to the same administration, regardless of whether they were located on the Olt river shores or in the same valley but on the mountainous side of the river (Sorea & Băjenaru, 2019a). The locals (both males and females) are very proud of the features of their outfit.

8. Conclusions: The Groups of Lads and the Differences in Traditional Outfit as Resources of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

The initiative aiming at cataloguing the resources of the intangible cultural heritage from Făgăraş Land has highlighted the richness and diversity of these resources. The field research has also unveiled the interest of the locals in preserving and valorizing the potential of the heritage.

From among the subjects approached in the interviews, the ones about which the respondents offered by far the richest information were those related to groups of lads and the traditional outfit that is characteristic of each community and differentiates it from those in the neighboring villages.

Until WWII the attributes of the group of lads covered the whole year. Some of these consisted in organizing all social and religious events during the year, performances for the benefit of the community (for the elderly) and guaranteeing the respect for moral principle (Herseni, 1977).

The current prestige of these groups in the villages from Făgăraş Land suggests the potential of this heritage resource to strengthen the sense of community. Thus, the

Status and the traditional attributes of the group of lads could be revalued. The group of lads could be involved, upon request and with the support of local authorities, in reactivating and/or in reviving the other resources of the heritage, namely the 'Ploughman' and the 'Wreath', in areas where their importance as community events is diminished. The group of lads could also be involved in the activities conducted for the benefit of the community, especially those related to village development. In this context, by establishing relations with town halls, the prestige of the group's leader could considerably increase and his status could become attractive to the young people who graduate from high school. Thus, the group of lads could take over some of the community's responsibilities, whereas the community (by local authorities) could rely on the group of lads and hence there could be a win-win relationship.

It is for the best interest of the people from Făgăraș Land to preserve the local differences in their outfit since these underpin the potential for consolidating the identity of the community. More pragmatically speaking, the niche demand for traditional outfit parts characteristic of this area could mean more jobs. The more frequent the occasions to put on the traditional costumes occur, the higher the demand for new and authentic outfit becomes. A group that would be active all year round would thus indirectly impact the identity of the community.

Any of the resources catalogued as a result of the field research could unveil, under more detailed scrutiny, their potential to strengthen community identity. The focus of the current paper on only two of these, namely the groups of lads and the traditional outfit, is the result of their prestige in the representations of the people from Făgăraș Land about their intangible cultural heritage. Additionally, they are the easiest starting points in configuring an approach towards the consolidation of community identity. In this community identity, as Bolborici (2016) points out, the common European identity (i.e. the common cultural and historical roots that Europeans share) are found.

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