Landscape preferences reveal cohorts of actors and conflicting aspirations in Southern Transylvania, Romania

Andra Milcu*1

1Leuphana Universitaet, Lueneburg – Scharnhorststraße 1 D 21335 Lüneburg, Germany

Abstract

Cultural landscapes in Southern Transylvania, Romania, are known for their high natural and cultural diversity and for a tight co-evolution between rural communities and local ecosystems. Small scale, low intensity farming persists in the valleys, supporting high biodiversity and providing diverse ecosystem services. In the last 70 years, Southern Transylvania has been affected by rapid social, cultural and economic changes that put many valued elements of its landscapes under threat. Since Romania’s accession to the European Union (2007), Transylvania has been facing the choice between development based on "production for profit", versus a relatively untested development based on conservation, landscape multifunctionality and sustainability. In this context of contradictory development pathways, clarifying the viewpoints and preferences of local people is important. We undertook a photograph-based study using the Q methodology – interviewing 129 residents from 30 villages – to understand what locals think and value about their landscapes. Our results revealed five different archetypes of the existing landscape preferences (factors), and their preferred roles for human well-being.

Individuals associated with the first factor, "Prosperity", would like to see signs of wealth and economic growth. By adopting a productivity logic disregardful of natural and cultural values, they seemed most determined to adopt any means or technologies in order to achieve economic growth. These individuals also had the power and interest to actively contribute towards such modernization, because many managed or controlled relatively large areas of land. People sharing the second landscape preference, "Traditions", were most committed to maintaining the cultural identity of the landscapes, and were actively seeking a balanced relationship between human intervention and nature. Diversity in use was particularly important to them, in order to balance the provision of multiple services, including cultural benefits and sense of place, with economic development. People loading on the third factor, "Human benefit" recognized dependence on nature for basic human needs such as food and clean water but also for income generating activities such as day labor. They highly appreciated the role of landscape as a space for leisure activities and community celebrations. For people sharing the fourth preference, "Farming", landscapes were spaces for agriculture and other practical uses of the environment. They were directly shaping and being dependent on the landscape for financial gain, making their deep involvement with the landscape obvious. Finally, people having a "Nature" landscape preference, expressed high appreciation for greenery-dominated landscapes and their overall aesthetics and naturalness. These individuals grouped under the fifth factor mostly cared about nature and their relationship with it, and they shared a general concern for the degradation of ecosystem services, in particular

*Speaker
regulating ecosystem services. They were recreation consumers and landscape observers, and their minimal interaction with the landscape was driven by a quest for tranquility.

This revealed diversity of perceptions and expectations outlines areas of considerable disagreement between preferences for traditions and multifunctionality and views on modernization and intensification. This is all the more relevant in polarized Transylvania, where globalization is driving increasingly specialized, high productivity landscapes, while rural development measures incentivize more diverse and multifunctional landscapes. Based on our results and recent literature contributions, we envisage disputes may arise from the initially latent tensions between the often externally driven NGOs and residents sharing an interest in cultural and natural heritage preservation, and other residents who antagonistically try to imprint their own identities and values on the landscape.

**Keywords:** cultural landscape, landscape preference, modernization, multifunctional, Q methodology, tradition