

## Article

# Cultural Landscape as a Resource for Urban Regeneration in Rupea (Romania)

Georgeta Gabriela Rățulea , Codrina Csesznek, Mariana Borcoman and Daniela Sorea \*

Department of Social and Communication Sciences, Transilvania University of Braşov, 25, Eroilor Bd, 500030 Braşov, Romania; gratulea@unitbv.ro (G.G.R.); codrina.csesznek@unitbv.ro (C.C.); m.borcoman@unitbv.ro (M.B.)

\* Correspondence: sorea.daniela@unitbv.ro

**Abstract:** Cultural heritage plays a key role in communities' sustainable development. The culture-led development highlights the local cultural resources and specifics while being assisted by contemporary tourist interest in niche offers. At the same time, culture-led development could reinforce a process of urban regeneration. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the urban regeneration potential of culture-led development in the case of a small town from Transylvania (Romania), Rupea, by identifying local characteristics that define this town and its surroundings as a cultural landscape and also by suggesting methods for capitalizing on this cultural landscape in heritage tourism. Data collected from six interviews with cultural stakeholders, bibliographic research on archaeological discoveries, and local tourism potential, as well as through ethnographic methods, support the approach of the Rupea area as a cultural landscape. The main dimensions of this cultural landscape are the interethnic character of the area and the multitude of archaeological discoveries that indicate its habitation in the Paleolithic. Tourist capitalization could support the urban regeneration of Rupea in a culture-led development approach by arranging routes that highlight the specifics of the Romanian, Saxon, Hungarian, and mixed villages in the Rupea area and/or the points of archaeological interest.



**Citation:** Rățulea, G.G.; Csesznek, C.; Borcoman, M.; Sorea, D. Cultural Landscape as a Resource for Urban Regeneration in Rupea (Romania). *Land* **2023**, *12*, 1985. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land12111985>

Academic Editors: Kh Md Nahiduzzaman, Carmela Mariano, Celestina Fazio, Laura Ricci, Francesca Moraci and Francesca Perrone

Received: 29 September 2023

Revised: 26 October 2023

Accepted: 27 October 2023

Published: 29 October 2023



**Copyright:** © 2023 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Keywords:** cultural landscape; culture-led development; niche tourism; multiethnic space

## 1. Introduction

Cultural heritage is an identity resource and a source of community cohesion [1]. It is an instrument of legitimization [2] and support for local cultural diversity [3], strengthening people's connection with their places of origin [4]. An effective approach to cultural heritage, which is dynamic, requires the combination of conservation expertise with cultural management expertise [1]. Conservation should be for the benefit of the local people, and their involvement is a necessary condition for keeping alive and enriching the heritage [5] as a resource for sustainable development and well-being [6]. In this context, participatory practices come naturally [2]. Heritage, which has a strategic role in local socio-economic development [7], is linked to cultural institutions, local people, and communities alike, and the management of heritage resources should ensure their intergenerational transmission [8].

Nowadays, there is a clear trend toward using culture as a tool for development [9,10]. Cultural resources are considered a guarantee of sustainable development [11], and culture-led development discourse largely takes into account the specificity of local communities and cultures while placing urban and rural development strategies under the umbrella of culture-led global policies [12–14]. The space of possible human cultures is vast, but some cultural configurations are more consistent with cognitive and social constraints than others. This leads to a “landscape of possibilities that our species has explored over millennia of cultural evolution” [15] (p. 1). Cultural management thus becomes the support of sustainable regional development [16]. This development is boosted by contemporary tourist interest in differentiated and personalized, even niche products [17].

Niche tourism is more sustainable and ethical than mass tourism [18]; controlled-size groups [17] are smaller and more experienced in niche tourism [18]. Niche tourists have similar needs and special interests related to authenticity [19]; they seek authentic experiences [17,18]. Niche tourism, as an expression of special cultural interests, could even represent a solution for preserving authenticity [18]. For example, speaking of cultural niche tourism, culinary traditions could be harnessed, given their potentially crucial role in tackling issues linked to food and landscape [20].

Unlike mass tourism, which is based on the generally recognized reputation of the destinations to be visited and which, through the huge flows of tourists, has imposed an industrial approach to related services, in niche tourism, the attractiveness is linked to the possibility of differentiation and personalization of the offer [17]. From this perspective, niche tourism, which represents an alternative to mass tourism, has great potential to generate emerging forms. It is less aggressive than mass tourism in terms of its impact on the lives of communities in the vicinity of tourist attractions. Furthermore, niche tourism, such as that centered on cultural heritage, can contribute to the imposition of a sustainable approach to tourism [19].

Heritage tourism is a niche within cultural tourism [17], which “relies on living and built elements of culture and folkways of today, for they too are inheritances from the past; other immaterial heritage elements, such as music, dance, language, religion, foodways and cuisine, artistic traditions, and festivals; and material vestiges of the built and cultural environment, including monuments, historic public buildings and homes, farms, castles and cathedrals, museums, and archaeological ruins and relics” [21] (pp. 3–4). Ethnographic tourism is part of heritage tourism. It is centered on traditional settlements, ethnic groups well defined in the territory, and traditional cultural practices [22].

In this study, we highlight the urban regeneration potential of culture-led development in the case of a small town in Transylvania (Romania), Rupea. For this purpose, we aim to achieve two objectives: to identify the local characteristics that define the city of Rupea and its surroundings as a cultural landscape, and to design methods for capitalizing on this cultural landscape in heritage tourism.

## 2. Literature Review

Tourism represents a strategic way to revitalize areas in economic decline [18] and could develop low-income communities [23]. The first initiatives focused on the idea of using cultural resources for economic and social development emerged in large cities that were concerned with becoming more attractive in the increasingly competitive global economic market [14,24]. However, in recent decades, culture-led development strategies that were based on cultural heritage, tourism, and creativity have been frequently implemented in rural communities as well [25]. According to Lysgård (2019), “Most research on culture-led policies has examined them in urban contexts, especially in large cities, but studies of the construction of such policies in small towns and rural communities are expanding” (p. 11). Referring to culture-led policies guiding development, the same author points out that these are parts of a global policy discourse reconstructed through local traditions and practices, materialization, and institutionalization [13].

Other authors [14,24,26,27] highlight the link between the concept of “culture-led development” and newer concepts such as “creative city”, “cultural vibrancy”, “creative economy”, “creative districts”, “creative tourism”, or “sustainable culture”, which have recently emerged and generated innovative approaches to developmental processes amid increasing competition between large cities on the international market as well as concerns about sustainable development.

Tourism plays an important role in this approach to development based on the valorization of cultural resources, which is the case for both cities and peri-urban areas, the latter being “characterized by emerging consumption spaces with leisure and tourism facilities and residential communities” [24] (p. 1). Yet, beyond their economic function, led-culture strategies and actions can contribute to community development in terms of

increasing community participation, strengthening local identity, consolidating social networks, and enhancing social inclusion [24,28]. We consider that culture-led development, as previously described, fits very well with “asset-based community development” [29], an approach that starts with identifying local resources and consists of bottom-up actions and decisions for community development, having community members at its core and thus encouraging participation as well as the development of local networks; this approach differs from what the authors mentioned above have called the “needs-based approach” (p. 99), which relies more on external interventions for change and is based on top-down decisions and actions, with little community participation.

When studying the landscape, the first association that usually comes to mind is with geography, but the landscape is a major object of interest for community development as well as for tourism, taking into account that “cultural landscapes provide abundant and diverse ecosystem services for human well-being” [30] (p. 1). In the past decades, we have witnessed the development of traditional tourism that is influenced by tourists’ interests in authenticity [31] (p. 254).

The concept of cultural landscape was introduced to academia by the German geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1895–1896) and became central to the Berkeley School of Geography [32]. Its classical definition was given by Carl O. Sauer in 1925, cited in [33] (p. 1147): “The cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent; the naturals are the medium; the cultural landscape is the result”.

According to the World Heritage Convention, cultural landscapes represent the “combined works of nature and of man”, and “they are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic, and cultural forces, both external and internal [...]. Cultural landscapes often reflect specific techniques of sustainable land use, considering the characteristics and limits of the natural environment they are established in and a specific spiritual relation to nature” [34].

According to the Cultural Landscape Foundation [35], “cultural landscapes are landscapes that have been affected, influenced, or shaped by human involvement” (p. 1). They may be of four types: Designed Landscapes, Ethnographic Landscapes, Historic Sites, and Vernacular Landscapes. The same given landscape may have characteristics of several types of cultural landscapes. Defining landscape as an area means that we are talking about a territory that is well-defined and organized. Also, speaking of the perception of people, that means that must be taken into consideration their aesthetic judgment. Different landscapes result from the interaction between natural processes and human activities. When we talk about landscapes, we cannot accomplish this without considering history, economy, or ecology. A landscape can be improved with cultural elements, and its design results from the treatment of the external form of traditional cultural elements in order to achieve the aesthetic effect of highlighting and amplifying the traditional cultural elements [36]. In traditional cultural landscapes, which are nowadays objects of interest for tourism and implicitly lead to community development, an important aspect is connecting landscapes with their broader heritage surroundings. This focuses on historical trails and their adjacent cultural and natural heritage as a holistic cultural landscape [37].

A cultural landscape that could be built around a small city, as is the case in our study, can also be approached in association with the concept of “urban regeneration”. Culture-led development is a fundamental dimension of current strategies for urban regeneration as well as for increasing the competitiveness of cities in the economic market; culture is seen as “the crucial ingredient” in the processes of reinventing the image of cities, attracting tourists, and increasing the quality of life of their inhabitants [10].

As a former socialist country and as part of the CEE (Central and East Europe) region, Romania has followed a similar path of urban development as many other cities in this part of the world [10]; thus, unlike Western European cities where culture has become an important factor of socio-economic regeneration, some countries of Eastern Europe have turned into a “Wild East” after the fall of communism, a change characterized by

“incoherence, deregulations (...), and clientelism” [10] (p. 73) in the field of urban development. In such a context, culture has played a marginal role in urban regeneration and local development strategies. In Eastern Europe, some traditional settlements were subject to uncontrolled structural and spatial transformations, which caused the deformation of centuries-old spatial systems of high cultural and natural value. This is why local initiatives and actions in the field of industry policy are supposed to play a significant role in consolidating the image of a harmonious landscape in public awareness [38]. However, matters have started to change lately as Eastern European countries have become increasingly attracted to recognizing and exploiting their cultural capital [10]. But we must also take into consideration another challenge encountered by the conservation of cultural landscapes, namely urbanization, and bear in mind that many traditional cultural landscapes worldwide are currently undergoing rapid urbanization [30]. Therefore, the need to better care for the urban landscape as a cultural, material, and regenerative resource is urgent and inevitable [39].

A solution cultivated across Europe in the last decades for protecting the cultural landscape is citizen participation, which has become a formal requirement in landscape and heritage planning all over Europe. The concept of landscape is to be elaborated with regard to the ways in which embodied practices manifest themselves and create place and the intertwinement of the cultural and the natural [40]. The European Landscape Convention (2000) [41] encourages public participation in defining landscape heritage values and identifying strategies for its protection, management, and planning [42]. Furthermore, the traditional knowledge and the ancestors’ ways of life recognized as cultural heritage have become a driving force towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [43]. According to Torralba et al. (2023) [44], landscape approaches are gaining momentum on both scientific and policy agendas. The concept of landscape is to be elaborated with regard to the politics of the community [45], since the protection of cultural landscapes is a challenge for local management. For management to succeed, management approaches must recognize and respect the core values and experiences that are at the heart of culturally significant landscapes [46]. The challenge is to assess the values and keep the balance between tourism development and cultural heritage protection [40].

As far as Romania is concerned, investments in both culture and culture-led development are important leads for local developmental strategies. At a national level, there are strategic objectives aimed at “protecting and enhancing cultural heritage, contemporary creation, and cultural diversity” [47] (p. 6), as well as “implementing reforms and investments in culture” [47] (p. 13).

As Sepe (2013) argued, urban regeneration should be closely linked to the history and culture of the place in order to shape or strengthen the identity of the place, and future design strategies should focus on both physical constructions and the built environment, as well as on connections between users and intangible elements such as history, cultural identity, memories, and emotional experiences [48].

### 3. Materials and Methods

The concept of “asset-based development” [29] has been applied as a starting point in the methodological approach in order to identify the characteristics of Rupea’s area that could be considered local resources able to contribute to the definition and promotion of this zone as a cultural landscape. As previously mentioned, this concept denotes a form of community development that is focused on identifying and using local resources while emphasizing community participation as well as bottom-up development strategies. According to the authors mentioned above, the asset-based approach means that stakeholders and community residents are involved in the process of identifying resources and determining how these assets can best be used for community development. Pioneered by Kretzmann and McKnight in the early 1990s, asset-based community development is anchored in local assets and capacity building [49]. Jaye et al. (2022) [50] consider that the asset-based approach is very suitable for rural areas and remote environments because

it is oriented towards the assets that can be found in such communities and areas. Jakes et al. (2015), cited in [50], show that “the advantages of asset-based approaches include the recognition of local knowledge, resources, and leaders, and the identification of historical narratives and their enduring influence” (p. 285). Thus, this approach is “citizen-led, relationship-driven, and capacity-building” [29] (p. 100), which makes it very suitable as a starting point for our socio-ethnographic study that focuses on the idea of culture-based development as well as the potential of an area as a cultural landscape.

The data we consider relevant for the purpose of this study come from three sources:

(1) Interviews with cultural stakeholders.

Between July 2022 and April 2023, we conducted non-directive interviews with three members of the staff of cultural organizations currently working in Rupea (logged I1–I3): the Romanian local resident acknowledged as an authority in the field of ethnographic traditions and author of a recent paper (2023) [51] on houses in Rupea (I4), and the retired technician who had prepared the construction documentation, rehabilitation, and commercial transactions for houses in the Rupea area for over 50 years (I5). We also conducted an in-depth interview with an archaeologist directly involved in the archeological excavations of recent years in the perimeter of Rupea and in its immediate vicinity, co-author of many articles on the results of these excavations (I6) [52–62]. All these stakeholders are well-known in the Rupea area for their involvement in the cultural field. We have analyzed the interviews thematically.

(2) Document analysis. We have covered the bibliography related to the archaeological discoveries in the area, from basic documentation [63,64] to recent articles [52–62]. We have also used the results of older archive research, capitalized by one of the authors of the study in two medieval history papers about Rupea and Sighișoara [65,66], and more recent monographic articles regarding the tourist potential of the Rupea area [67–71].

(3) The ethnographic method. We have made numerous observations on-site and had plenty of informal discussions with the locals. More specifically, in 2019–2023, we conducted several working visits to Rupea, where we had informal meetings and conducted short interviews with citizens interested in the cultural life and development of the town and the area. We thus collected qualitative data in the form of opinions and social representations about cultural heritage resources from more than 25 citizens, using the snowball method for their selection. During these conversations, the six stakeholders mentioned above were recommended for more in-depth research. We have also capitalized on our own knowledge regarding the Rupea area, given that two of the authors come from this area. They know it very well and are concerned with studying its historical and sociological aspects.

Data analysis consisted of two stages. First, we identified those pieces of information regarding cultural resources that could be used in future culture-led development processes, particularly information that carries the purpose of strengthening the idea of cultural landscape in the Rupea area. We combined data from the three sources mentioned above into a unitary and coherent presentation. We indicated the source for each accessed document. Likewise, in the case of the information collected from the processing of the interviews, we indicated from which of the interviews the opinions expressed come. Explicitly unassigned information has been obtained through the ethnographic method. The second stage involved a creative approach aimed at building potential cultural tourism routes that are easy to implement and carry a participatory dimension in the sense of involving the locals in the processes of sustainable local development.

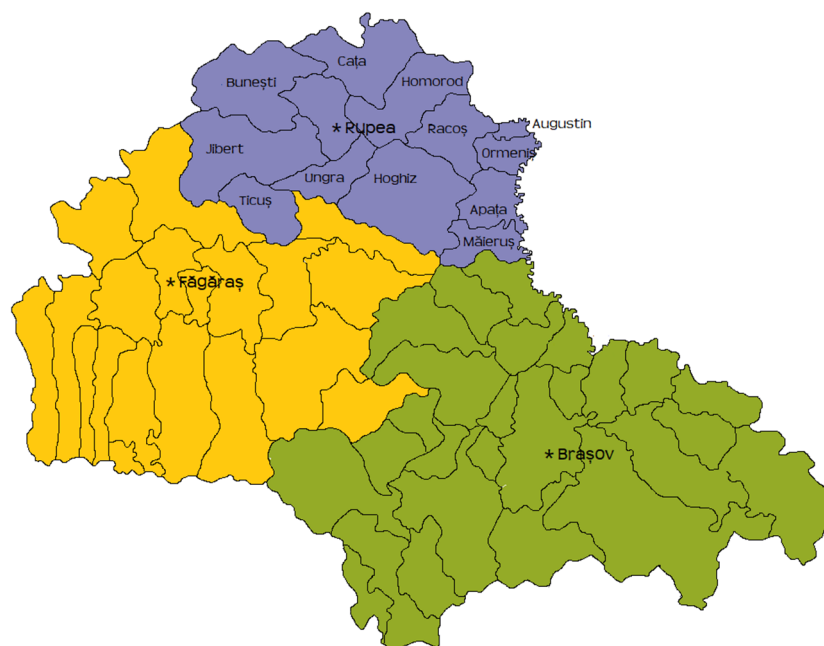
#### 4. Rupea—General Description of the Area

Rupea is located in Brașov County, in southeastern Transylvania. It is a town that represents the economic, legal (through the Court of Rupea), and cultural center of the area under the same name. This status is due to Rupea’s location on the northwest side



of the county, at a relatively long distance from the nearest cities in the counties of Braşov and Mureş (Braşov, Făgăraş, and Sighişoara). Braşov is the center of the ethnographic area of Țara Bârsei and the county seat of Braşov. It has, like Rupea, a history of multi-ethnic settlement but is much larger and more socio-economically developed than Rupea. Large industrial enterprises have been operating in Braşov since the first half of the last century, and it is currently one of the most important tourist destinations in Romania. Făgăraş is the center of another well-known ethnographic area in Romania, namely Olt Land; the town of Făgăraş is of medium size, and the area has a majority Romanian population. Sighişoara is a medium-sized town in Mures County. Being an important tourist destination for its significance as a former Saxon chair and for the medieval architecture preserved in its historical center, the medieval fortress is still inhabited today; in the whole of Mures County, Hungarians represent a significant part of the population [72].

At the 2022 population census in Rupea, 4907 inhabitants were registered, a decrease of 6.87% compared to the previous census, the one in 2011. Among the inhabitants, 3137 (63.9%) declared themselves Romanian, 706 (14.4%) Hungarians, 484 (9.9%) Roma, and 52 (1.1%) Saxons [73]. The Rupea area represents 22% of Braşov County and includes, in addition to the city of the same name, 12 townships (TAU, Territorial Administrative Unit) [69] (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Rupea, with its TAU, in the north of Braşov County. Own adaptation according to the information in [69], on the support [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/List%C4%83\\_de\\_comune\\_din\\_jude%C8%9Bul\\_Bra%C8%99ov](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/List%C4%83_de_comune_din_jude%C8%9Bul_Bra%C8%99ov) (accessed on 25 October 2023).

To the east and northeast of the Rupea area, towards the Eastern Carpathians, there is an area mainly inhabited by ethnic Hungarians. To the west lies the Hârtibaciului Plateau, and to the southeast, Țara Bârsei, areas with a high density of Saxon villages. To the southwest, the Rupea area borders Țara Făgăraşului, a Romanian residential area that has been well-established throughout the history of Transylvania [74–78]. To the northwest and north lies the Târnave Plateau, also a predominantly Romanian living area.

The ethnic distribution of the population in the Rupea area is slightly different from that in the city: 41.7% Romanians, 23.1% Hungarians, 34.0% Roma, 1.2% Germans, and 0.1% other minorities [70]. Therefore, the Rupea area is multi-ethnic. There are Romanian villages, predominantly Hungarian villages, and villages that were predominantly Saxon, currently inhabited by Romanians and Roma. In fact, in almost all villages in the area, Roma people live as a minority group.

Romanians represent the local population. The Romanian people have come into being in the same territory they live in today. According to the dominant historical theory, the process of ethnogenesis took place in the first half of the first millennium AD, after the conquest of Dacia by the Romans, led by Emperor Trajan [79,80]. Szeklers have been attested in the area since the 12th century as defenders of the intra-Carpathian Hungarian kingdom's borders. In this context, they received privileges and the right to manage the territory on the eastern border of Transylvania [80]. After 1900, the Szeklers referred to themselves as Hungarians. The Saxons were colonized in the area by Hungarian royalty in the 13th century. *Andreanum Diploma* (1224) indicates the locality of Drăușeni, located east of Rupea, as the border of Pământul Crăiesc. The direction of the Saxon colonization and its stages can be followed with the help of the antiquity of the Romanesque-style constructions in the territory [81]. Following this trail helps us draw the conclusion that the settlement of the Saxons in the Rupea area is subsequent to their settlement in Sibiu—the most important Saxon fortress in Transylvania—and Cincu—the easternmost chair of the Saxon region of Sibiu. Until the enforcement of the *Edict of Concivility* issued by Emperor Joseph II in Transylvania, the Saxons lived in the central area of Rupea, and the conterminous areas were occupied by the local Romanians and Szekler craftsmen who came later in the 18th century from the neighboring villages.

After World War II, the Saxons in the Rupea area began emigrating to Germany. Although the process developed slowly in communist Romania, it intensified after 1989. As a result, the share of ethnic Saxons in the Rupea area has significantly decreased. This decrease is visible in the results of successive censuses of the Romanian population in the period 1956–2021 (Table 1), more precisely comparing the 1977 census with that of 1992. Detailed information regarding the Roma in the area is missing. Their presence in the city of Rupea is recorded around 1800 [65], where they are described as aids of the Saxons and Romanians in various household chores.

**Table 1.** Population of Rupea by ethnicity. Sources: [72,82].

Census Year	Stable Population	Romanians	Hungarians, Szeklers	Roma	Saxons	Others
2021	4907	3137	706	484	52	-
2011	5269	3591	975	360	82	-
2002	5759	4063	1245	338	110	-
1992	6326	4331	1428	371	193	-
1977	6640	3617	1502	242	1269	3
1966	6273	3414	1455	69	1327	2
1956	4691	2532	602	162	1385	3

According to the data available at the National Institute of Statistics, in 2022, the Rupea area had the accommodation capacity shown in Table 2 below. The table also shows the number of tourists who benefited in 2022 from the available accommodation. There are no available data for four of the TUAs in the area (Apața, Augustin, Cața and Ormeniș) nor for the number of tourists staying at motels in Rupea or in guesthouses in Homorod and Jibert.

**Table 2.** Accommodation capacity and the number of tourists staying in the Rupea area in 2022. Source: [82].

Locality/TUA	Total Places	Hotels: Number of Places/Number of Tourists Accommodated in 2022	Motels: Number of Places/Number of Tourists Accommodated in 2022	Tourist and Agritourism Guesthouses: Number of Places/Number of Tourists Accommodated in 2022	Apartments and Rooms for Rent: Number of Places/Number of Tourists Accommodated in 2022
Rupea	172	90/879	74/-	8/1096	-
Bunești	109	-	-	91/5107	18/241
Hoghiz	68	-	-	68/632	-
Homorod	16	-	-	16/-	-
Jibert	20	-	-	20/-	-
Măieruș	52	-	36/490	16/542	-
Racoș	12	-	-	-	12/352
Ticuș	8	-	-	-	8/585

## 5. Results

### 5.1. The Cultural Heritage Resources of the Rupea Area

In the center of Rupea, there is a fortified evangelical church dating from the beginning of the 14th century [67]. Like other churches belonging to the Saxons in Transylvania, this one was a Catholic church until the parishioners joined the Reformation. There is also a Roman Catholic church in the city, dating from the beginning of the 19th century, built on the land of a former Franciscan monastery from the 18th century that had been destroyed by a fire. It is a baroque church located near the pedestrian access road to the Rupea citadel from the city. Its parishioners are Hungarian. So are the parishioners of the Unitarian and Reformed (Calvin) churches in the city, currently housed in newer buildings.

The Orthodox from Rupea have two churches. They are parish churches built in the 18th and 19th centuries, respectively. The oldest of these, dedicated to Saint Nicholas, was built as an Orthodox church but functioned as a Greek Catholic church from 1819 to 1948 [51]. This change in confession was the result of the establishment of the Romanian Church, united with Rome in Transylvania, as part of the Catholic Church. At the end of the 17th century, the Orthodox Metropolitan of Transylvania converted to Catholicism together with part of the subordinate clergy, accepting the proposal of Catholic Vienna to grant privileges to the Romanians who followed their Metropolitan and to guarantee the preservation of the specific Greek (Byzantine) practices of worship in the newly established church, the Greek Catholic church [83].

The process of the Romanians' conversion to Greek Catholicism continued until the 19th century and was accompanied by martyr resistance and reprisals from the Austrian army's side. The Romanians from Rupea, who refused to convert to Greek Catholicism (I4), built a new Orthodox church at the end of the century [51]. They first built a small wooden church, and then in 1892, they built a stone and brick church around it (I4). The communist authorities installed in Romania after the Second World War banned the Greek Catholic cult and forced the priests and believers to convert to Orthodoxy. The Greek Catholic places of worship turned into Orthodox places. After 1989, the Greek Catholic Church was recognized by the Romanian state, and in many areas of the country, its old parishes were re-established. This did not happen in Rupea. Both Romanian churches are currently Orthodox.

The stakeholders interviewed and all the citizens we questioned agree that the current main local tourist attraction is the Rupea Fortress. It is a medieval fortress transformed into a fortress with three enclosures by the Saxons. The fortress had dwellings that could be used as needed in the 10th century. The citadel was rehabilitated with European funds between 2009 and 2013 and is currently visited by a multitude of tourists [84]. It is visible from both directions from the European road E60 (Figure 2).





**Figure 2.** Rupea Fortress. Source: authors' collection.

A section of the Braşov Ethnography Museum [85] operates in the city of Rupea under the name of the “Gheorghe Cernea” Ethnography Museum. Separate from it, a private collection of Romanian clothes, fabrics, furniture, ceramics, tools, and icons of local provenance from the 18th–20th centuries could be exhibited. This collection was gathered by Ana and Vasile Borcoman, a couple from Rupea who work in Rupea as teachers and are housed on their property in the city. As most of the locals claim, the two were important actors in shaping the local residents' interest in the preservation of cultural heritage.

Two Romanian cultural associations are active in the city: “Junii Cetăţii” (“The Striplings of the Fortress”), which derives from the Rupea House of Culture old men's choir (founded in 1963), and “Ramidava XXI”, a more recent association. The activities of the first-mentioned association are focused on musical performances and presentations of popular customs and traditions [86]. Association members consider themselves responsible for keeping and perpetuating the tradition. Among them are elderly people, acknowledged and respected as connoisseurs of popular customs, folk costumes, and practices related to significant events in the life of the community. They have participated in numerous shows in Romania and other European countries, “Poland, Belgium, Germany, beautiful countries” (I1). Many of their costumes are “over 100 years old and still retain their beauty”, carefully preserved in the old dowry boxes of local brides (I1). Others were recently sewn by “women who still have patience and skill” (I1). The women in the association are very attentive to the significance of the garments; they know what piece can be worn by whom and in what context. Worn by ignorant, alienated clothes lose their “true value”, they become simple festive clothes (I1). Part of the public success of the association's artistic performances is due to the authenticity of the attire worn.

The second cultural association from Rupea, “Ramidava XXI”, organizes folk dance courses for children, folk craft workshops, various festivals, and other cultural events [71,87]. Their dancers, who learn from a young age (among them preschoolers, I2) the complicated steps of a wide variety of popular dances from the area, impress audiences in the tours and festivals they participate in. The organization of local cultural events can become a financial challenge for the association, which often covers part of the expenses from its own funds (I2), but the efforts are rewarded by the appreciation and joy of the community. More importantly, “someone must remind the elders and tell the young people who they are and

what it means to be from Cohalm" (I3). Cohalm is the alternative name of Hungarian origin (Kőhalom) of the locality of Rupea. Each generation is obliged to carry on the tradition and honor its ancestors. The assumed purpose of the efforts of the members of Ramidava XXI is to convey the significance of traditional customs (I3), "which should not be seen as simple performances". Together, the two associations strengthen the prestige of the Romanian cultural heritage of the area. From discussions with local residents, it appears that the activities of the two associations benefit from broad community support.

The traditional houses of the Romanians and Saxons in Rupea were structured similarly: a large room on the first floor facing the street, with access by an external staircase and through another smaller room, and a cellar on the ground floor. The merchants' houses in the center had a commercial area and several rooms upstairs (I4). After the First World War, Romanians began to build houses with three rooms on the first floor and to transform the side of the cellar facing the street into living space, but these were houses located on the streets further from the borders of the settlement. The Saxons lived downtown, and the areas of the city inhabited by Romanians, Saxons, and Roma were compact. On some streets, the central Saxon residential area continues with the Romanian one until the periphery of the settlement (I4). The Romanians were successful in buying land for houses in the central area from the Saxons, but this was conducted relatively late and with difficulty (the first purchase contract was concluded in 1926, I4). Some of the Saxon properties on the main street were expropriated during the communist period, and the Town House of Culture and the hospital were built in their place. Some of the Saxon houses inhabited by the Romanians after the Saxons left for Germany have been modified. But in the city center, there is a core of buildings that still preserve the old Saxon burgh architecture.

Most of the Saxon or former Saxon villages (e.g., Jimbor, currently having a majority Hungarian population) in the vicinity of Rupea have fortified evangelical churches. In the churches' surrounding areas, i.e., in the center of the village, there were open terraces where the young people of the village danced to the music of the local brass band on Sundays and other holidays after the service. The girls decorated these dance spaces with flowers and fabrics. "It was always a joy to pass by" (I5). The church of Viscri, a village where the current king of the UK owns the property, is registered in the UNESCO heritage. These churches are points of interest on various tourist routes [88]. In August, the "Haferland Week" Festival is organized in the area between Rupea and Sighișoara (Haferland means "Land of Oats" in German), with traditional crafts, arts, and gastronomy [89]. In the olden days, the Saxons in the area grew oats and were famous for them. August is the month of return tourism, when traditionally Transylvanian Saxon residents in Germany return to their native places for vacations. Most of the Saxon households in the area were, at the time when the Saxons had not yet left, well organized. "From the gate to the edge of the garden, everything was in its place. And in the house, on the farm, and in the stable, everything was arranged functionally, almost as if in a mechanism. So that the householders do not waste time, which is precious" (I5). In the Saxon residential areas, the streets are wide, and there is generous space for maneuvers between the houses and the road as an interface between the private space delimited by the facade of the house and the high gate, with a masonry vault, and the public space. In order to border the pedestrian circulation, there are narrow layers of flowers in this space.

But the most beautiful flowers are in the Hungarian villages in the area (I5). The houses are decorated with attention to color details, and some courtyards have carved or openwork wooden gates. In front of every yard, there are flowers; as if in a housewives' competition, "you enter the village and you cheer up; it is as if the whole village is laughing; you can see the joy of living" (I5). The admiration for the organization of the living space of the Saxons and Hungarians also appears as an important topic in the discussions with the Romanian locals during our working visits to the Rupea area.

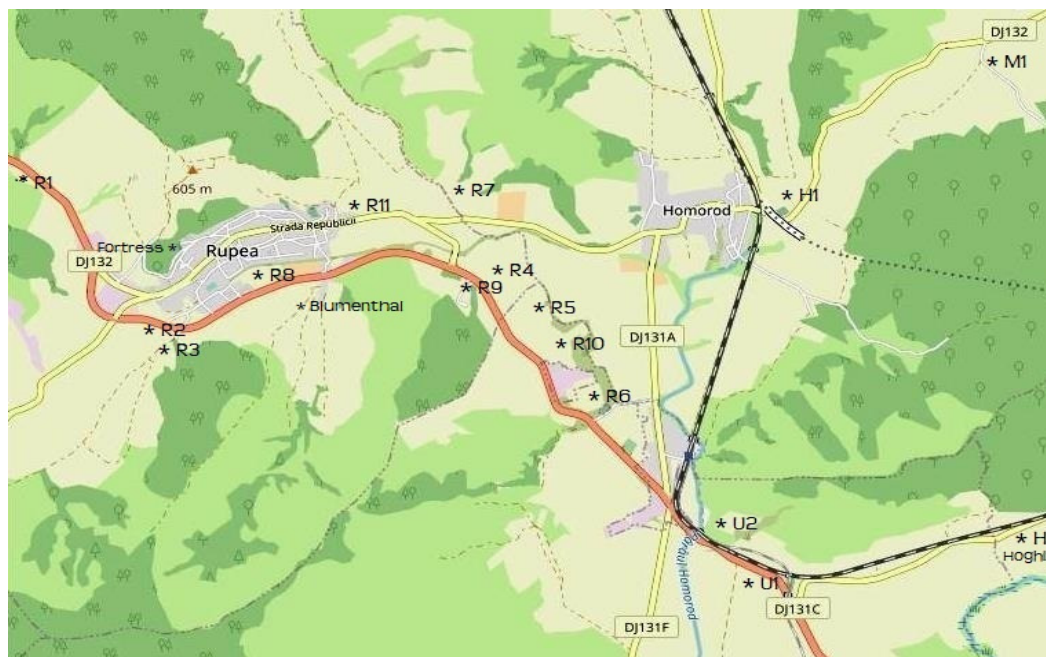
Near the town of Rupea is the village of Hoghiz, the capital city of the TAU under the same name. In the village, there are three noble castles from the 16th century located in vast parks: Bethlen–Haller Castle (sometimes called "The Fortress"), Kalnoky Castle,

and Guthman–Valenta Castle. The history of their residence and the repeated changes of owners until communist and then post-communist Romania strengthened the cultural heritage value of these castles.

The village of Racoșul de Jos (TAU Racoș) is also located in the Rupea area. In the center of the village is Sükösd–Bethlen Castle. Attested from the 17th century, it successively belonged to several Hungarian noble families, as well as the village. The castle is currently open to the public, and the area available for touring has been expanding as the rehabilitation process continues [90]. The village is famous for the nearby geological reserve, consisting of a volcanic crater, a formation of basalt columns, and “Lacul de smarald” (“Emerald Lake”), a lake formed in the crater of an old quarry [91]. At Racoșul de Jos, the “Ziua Pietrei” (“Stone’s Day”) Festival takes place in August. On this particular occasion, there are organized guided tours to geological sites, concerts, dance performances, art exhibitions, craft workshops and fairs, and culinary fairs [92].

The Rupea area is one where signs of habitation (tools, ceramics, and the remains of houses) have been discovered since the Paleolithic. In the perimeter of the city of Rupea and in its vicinity, recent archaeological research has revealed several traces of human presence from this era [52], from the Neolithic [53–55], Eneolithic [53,56–61], the bronze age [53], the iron age, the period of the Dacian kingdom, and the period after the conquest of Dacia by the Romans [62]. Some traces were identified through the extensive analysis of the landscape’s configuration, while others were anticipated in connection with the sources of salt in the area. In other cases, the information has been collected from elderly locals who discovered shards during yearly spring plowing.

In Figure 3 below, the points of archaeological interest are indicated. As they are on the land of the city or the surrounding villages, the points are marked R1–11 (from Rupea), H1 (from Homorod), H1 Hoghiz (from Hoghiz), M1 (from Mercheașa), and U1–2 (from Ungra). The Rupea fortress and the Blumenthal Valley are distinctly marked; they are old sites known by these names in specialized literature. In Table 3, the historical periods related to each of the archaeological sites in Figure 3 are indicated.



**Figure 3.** Archaeological discoveries were made near the city of Rupea. Location according to S. Gridan (16), on support <https://wiki.openstreetmap.org/> (accessed on 16 September 2023).

**Table 3.** Traces of human presence in the city of Rupea and its surroundings from prehistory and Antiquity to the Middle Ages.

No.	Archaeological Site	Historical Periods
1	Blumenthal	Hallstatt, Roman
2	Rupea Fortress	Neolithic, Copper, Bronze, Medieval
3	R1	Bronze
4	R2	Bronze?, Roman, Medieval
5	R3	Hallstatt, Bronze, Medieval
6	R4	Palaeolithic, Neolithic, Copper, Post Roman
7	R5	Palaeolithic, Copper, Hallstatt, Roman, Post Roman
8	R6	Hallstatt, Roman, Post Roman
9	R7	Palaeolithic, Neolithic, Copper, Bronze
10	R8	Neolithic, Hallstatt, Roman
11	R9	Copper
12	R10	Hallstatt
13	R11	Bronze?, Hallstatt?, Medieval
14	H1	Copper, Bronze, Medieval
15	H1 Hoghiz	Copper, La Tène
16	M1	Bronze
17	U1	Neolithic, Copper, Hallstatt
18	U2	Neolithic, Copper, Bronze, Roman

Archaeological sites are not marked (indicated) in the field at present. The sporadic excavations carried out there cover small areas that can be fully investigated (i.e., down to the oldest/deepest habitation level) in an intensive field campaign. This fact is mainly due to the general underfunding of archaeological research in Romania and, secondarily, to the increased interest of treasure hunters in new archaeological sites. These are prospectors for whom the value of a site is given exclusively by the possibility of finding gold, silver, or precious stones there.

### 5.2. Rupea Area as Cultural Landscape

The geographical location makes the Rupea area one of the cultural confluences and stimulates interethnic coexistence. As a space of cultural interference, the Rupea area could be valued as a cultural landscape.

A second dimension of this potential cultural landscape is represented by the multitude of local archaeological discoveries, discoveries that indicate— as highlighted above, the human presence starting from the Paleolithic in the area. Archaeologists link this abundance of sites to the positioning of Rupea at the intersection of travel routes in the territory on the surrounding hilly peaks, in correlation with the existence of exploitable salt resources. Where there is salt, there is a good chance that there is also a human presence [54].

Perceptible inter-ethnic interferences in architecture, garb, traditions, and gastronomy, on the one hand, together with the high density of points of archaeological interest related to different periods, are defining the Rupea area as a cultural landscape. In addition to these and supporting them is the openness to the organization of cultural events of various kinds by the “Junii Cetății” and “Ramidava XXI” associations.

The two defining dimensions of the cultural landscape can be enhanced by configuring distinct local tourist routes. In the case of ethnic interference, the routes should cross both Romanian, (former) Saxon, Hungarian, and mixed villages, highlighting the specific local architecture. Churches, as architectural expressions of the believers’ relationship with



divinity [93], are the main objectives of these routes. In many villages, there are small ethnographic museums near and/or under the administration of the churches. Visiting them as objectives on the tourist routes in the Rupea area supports their development and would also encourage the establishment of new ones. Eastern European Christianity, especially rural Christianity, allows associations of pre-Christian practices and beliefs [94,95], and village museums could highlight these associations, which would be spectacular.

The area targeted by the routes to highlight neighborhoods and ethnic interference is easily accessible by car and is covered by national and county roads in good working condition. A spring–summer–autumn alternative to personal-car tourism could be the bicycle. For the Saxon part of the area, there is already a low-difficulty mountain bike route that connects the fortified Saxon churches [96]. The route could be extended through the Hungarian villages to the east and northeast of small health resorts of local interest. From the discussions with the locals, it emerged that the small health resorts located east of the Rupea area represent pleasant destinations for short trips of a few days, which led us to propose routes to them on the multicultural dimension of the cultural landscape.

These tourist routes could enhance the value of the multi-ethnic space of the Rupea area by including a gastronomic tourism component. In this area, ethnic similarities and differences in gastronomy can be easily noticeable regarding soups and stews [97]. Easy to prepare in large quantities and spectacularly diverse, they could represent the core of the area's gastronomic brand. The use of brands is generally effective in promoting intangible cultural heritage [98]. Local emblematic foods and cultural-gastronomic routes with well-defined branding destinations are attractive to "authenticity seekers" [99]. Furthermore, the importance of soups and stews in local gastronomy is a more widespread characteristic feature in Transylvania [100]. The plateau in front of the main access gate to the Rupea Fortress, the park area in the center of the city, and the former market area of the medieval settlement are suitable places for the sale of local agri-food products. In addition to soups and brews, the locals could offer dairy and meat products prepared according to traditional recipes, bread and traditional pastries, even seasonal vegetables and fruits from their own production, or honey, jam, and syrups.

In order to highlight the traces of human presence in the area dating back to the Paleolithic, we consider it effective to organize guided pedestrian tours of the archaeological sites, with tours ending in an exhibition space dedicated to the artifacts discovered at these sites. The distances between most points of archaeological interest in the perimeter of the city of Rupea and the vicinity allow such an approach in one-day tours. Currently, most of the objects discovered in the area's sites can be found at the warehouses of the Braşov County Museum of History. For these and future discoveries, an exhibition center could be set up right in Rupea Fortress. Many of its visitable rooms are currently empty. The locals had been repurposing the rooms throughout time, and in accordance with their history of use, some that had been intended as private living spaces could also be set up for exhibition, displaying furniture and objects that are specific to both the inhabitants' activities in the periods of temporary refuge in the fortress and the settlement(s) it served. The proximity of the exhibition spaces intended for living in prehistory and in the Middle Ages strengthens the cultural landscape dimension of the continuity of living in the area.

The funds obtained from the guided tours would be of great use for the current regime of sporadic excavations at the sites in Rupea. When the raised funds equal the expected expenses for the next site to be opened and researched, that one will undergo full research and then be arranged for tourist visits. As one site after another is surveyed and developed for visitation, guided tours to the unmarked sites of sporadic discoveries will become rigorously configured historical tourism routes.

## 6. Discussion

Although this is ethical niche tourism, sustainable and oriented towards authenticity through the specific interests of the beneficiaries [18], we believe that the order in which the research of the sites is conducted should take into account their attractiveness for treasure



hunters. The sites referred to as most attractive to the treasure hunters should be the first ones to be investigated by archaeologists—as soon as possible and as quickly as possible—in order to avoid or limit the hunters' destructive interventions. The sites' location should be roughly indicated in the guided tours at the beginning of this self-sustainable program of excavations (conducted with funds from tourist visits to points of archeological interest). To the same effect, it would be useful to specify in the guided tours the type of artifacts that archaeologists expect to find at the other sites, namely tools and ceramics, perhaps bone ornaments, and certainly not objects made of precious metals.

The involvement of the local community/communities in the logistical support of the archaeological research through accommodation and food would reduce the financial pressure. The women from the area and surroundings are used to and happy to cook together [74,97,100] and to strengthen their community prestige through hospitality. Tourism social entrepreneurship (TSE) represents an effective way of managing this type of logistical support for archaeological excavations in the area. TSEs, which strengthen local social networks as a support for regional economic interactions [101], catalyze the sustainable development of host communities [23,102]. It boosts the local economy, educates local tourism actors, creates sustainable livelihoods [23], provides innovative solutions at the community level [19], and effectively mobilizes local resources [103]. Romanians' representations of the country's economic situation and development prospects are rather lacking in optimism [104], and government predictions should be carefully corroborated with local social particularities [104,105]. In this context, TSE should be taken into account as a way of managing several activities related to Rupea as a cultural landscape.

The valorization of the Rupea area as a cultural landscape that we propose thus recognizes the role attributed by Baltà Portolés [1] to cultural heritage in strengthening community identity and cohesion. Through TSE, the condition of the involvement of local people in the preservation and enrichment of heritage, considered necessary by Gray and Kuokkanen [5], is met. Moreover, community participation, social inclusion, and the strengthening of social networks are features associated with culture-led development [24]. The valorization that we propose as cultural landscape can be part of a development strategy for the Rupea area—with the city of Rupea in the center and the neighboring rural localities—which credits the specifics of local communities and cultures, a feature highlighted by Montaldo et al. [14] as defining culture-led development. Our study is part of the trend of expanding culture-led development research towards small towns and rural communities, a trend signaled by Lynggård [13]. As Bajec and Kranjc [43] show, the ways of life of ancestors as cultural heritage support sustainable development within the horizon of the 2030 Agenda. The valorization of the Rupea area as a cultural landscape that we propose is also one oriented towards sustainable local development.

Newsome, Moore, and Dowling [106] identify three macro markets in niche tourism (cultural, event, natural area) and seven secondary markets (adventure tourism, ecotourism, festival, heritage, nature-based, religious, and sports tourism). The tourist itineraries that we propose in the cultural landscape of Rupea combine offers from several of these markets. We are talking about adventure, festivals, heritage, and nature-based tourism. The itineraries approach can be personalized; they are comfortable for small groups and have a flexible schedule. The itineraries can be valued differently, as the tourists' interests in relation to the local offer are configured differently. Even with regard to festival tourism, like "Stone's Day" from Racoș, the interests of the participants are well anchored in the local cultural peculiarities, and the number of participants allows differentiated satisfaction of these interests. In all forms of niche tourism with potential for development in the Rupea cultural landscape, the discovery component is significant. Tourists interested in the cultural landscape are looking for their own experiences and representations of the local heritage. This approach represents a viable alternative to mass tourism, an alternative that we recommend for the Rupea area.

Tourism related to Rupea's cultural landscape dimensions is a niche one, with groups of tourists of the kind described by Dujmović [18], i.e., small in size, with experience and

well-defined interests. At the same time, the combination of the routes to the archaeological sites, those centered on traditional dwellings and ethnic neighborhoods situated between the hills on the edge of the Hârtibaciu plateau and the extensions of the volcanic Eastern Carpathians, allows the Rupea area to be approached as a holistic cultural landscape through the local touristic offer, bestowing a landscape resembling those defined by Otero et al. [37].

Taking over the Rupea area as a cultural landscape would not only bring benefits to the locals. It involves the effective management of relationships between community members involved in TSE as well as between the members and the community as a whole. It also assumes control over potential conflicts in inter-ethnic relations, a subject of historical depth and still sensitive in Transylvania. In this context, the protection of the cultural landscape actually represents a challenge for local management, as considered by Tuvikene [45]. Maintaining the balance between tourism development and cultural heritage protection [40] is an important dimension of this challenge. The danger of the aggressive, treasure-hunting investigation of archaeological sites included in tourist routes, which we have mentioned above, is a local connotation of a wider challenge related to the sustainable management of heritage tourism. The fairly common temptation to maximize profit by lowering the quality of tourism products and services offered even under the TSE regime is also subject to this challenge. But it is a challenge worth taking on, like any challenge aimed at the sustainable development of an area.

As mentioned above, the cultural landscape of the Rupea area is defined by three dimensions, two of which are primary (multicultural settlement and archaeological finds) and secondary (activities of cultural associations). From discussions with local people, it appears that they attach much more importance to the secondary dimension than to the main dimensions. However, this result can be considered a specific asset [29] in this area and used in cultural management and community development projects.

## 7. Conclusions

The transformation of the city of Rupea into the central node for tourist routes centered on local archaeological sites or on the ethnic specifics of traditional dwellings in the area is an approach to urban regeneration. It is a non-invasive approach that can be managed as a source of benefits for local people and involves the protection of local cultural heritage. The assumption of the Rupea area as a cultural landscape with the dimensions that have been highlighted represents a way of valorizing the past by orienting it towards the future: the effective current management of the identified resources, implicitly their protection and conservation, outlines the tourist prestige of the area and ensures its preservation. Thus, assuming the Rupea area as a cultural landscape can be an important step in the process of urban regeneration as well as the sustainable development of both the city and the area.

In the presentation of the area's heritage resources, we only referred to those most well-known. This could be a limitation of the present study. Each of the villages in the Rupea area has at least one church, a village museum, a monument dedicated to heroes, a site, or a celebration that can be used on niche tourist routes. We considered their exhaustive presentation out of the economy of our argument, but they convey consistency to the cultural landscape. In the future, we aim to explore the cultural heritage assets of these communities in more detail and also broaden the scope of research both geographically and in terms of collecting data from the local community members, with the aim of integrating their vision and voices into local culture-led development strategies.

Through this research, we aimed to highlight the urban regeneration potential of the Rupea area through specific mechanisms for culture-led development. Our approach is intended to stimulate the interest of potential tourists or visitors to the area who can discover new values in this cultural landscape. At the same time, the results of our research favor the knowledge of more isolated places by highlighting local cultural resources and their potential to be capitalized on by the tourist market. The entry of these isolated places into the tourist circuit can also favor return tourism. All these aspects can contribute to

community development and increase cohesion and a sense of local belonging. The results of our research can be a source of solutions for local operators in the tourism field, as well as for projects by local administrations and cultural management institutions.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, G.G.R., C.C., M.B. and D.S.; methodology, C.C. and D.S.; validation, G.G.R., C.C., M.B. and D.S.; investigation, G.G.R., C.C., M.B. and D.S.; writing—original draft preparation, G.G.R., C.C. and D.S.; writing—review and editing, G.G.R., C.C. and D.S.; visualization, M.B.; supervision, G.G.R., C.C., M.B. and D.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Data Availability Statement:** No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

1. Baltà Portolés, J. Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Cities. Key Themes and Examples in European Cities. *UCLG Comm. Cult. Rep.* **2018**, 7. Available online: [https://www.agenda21culture.net/sites/default/files/report\\_7\\_-\\_cultural\\_heritage\\_sustainable\\_development\\_-\\_eng.pdf](https://www.agenda21culture.net/sites/default/files/report_7_-_cultural_heritage_sustainable_development_-_eng.pdf) (accessed on 14 July 2022).
2. Mäkinen, K. Cultural heritage: Connecting people? *Monit. Glob. Intell. Racism* **2020**, 6, 1–4. Available online: <http://monitoracism.eu/cultural-heritage-connecting-people/> (accessed on 14 July 2022).
3. Calligaro, O. From “European cultural heritage” to “cultural diversity”? *Polit. Eur.* **2014**, 3, 60–85. [CrossRef]
4. Wellbeing and the Historic Environment by Historic England. 2018. Available online: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/wellbeing-and-thehistoric-environment/wellbeing-and-historic-environment> (accessed on 14 July 2022).
5. Grey, S.; Kuokkanen, R. Indigenous governance of cultural heritage: Searching for alternatives to co-management. *Int. J. Herit. Stud.* **2020**, 26, 919–941. [CrossRef]
6. Heritage, A.; Tissot, A.; Banerjee, B. Heritage and Wellbeing: What Constitutes a Good Life? International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM). 2019. Available online: <https://www.iccrom.org/projects/heritage-and-wellbeing-what-constitutesgood-life> (accessed on 14 July 2022).
7. Barca, F. L’Anno europeo del patrimonio culturale e la visione europea della cultura. *Digit. Sci. J. Digit. Cult.* **2017**, 2, 75–93.
8. EENC Paper. *Challenges and Priorities for Cultural Heritage in Europe: Results of an Expert Consultation*. 2013. Available online: <https://eenc.eu/uploads/eenc-eu/2021/04/21/07d4959fa85d06c29a0e262d18398e75.pdf> (accessed on 14 July 2022).
9. Lysgård, H.K. The ‘actually existing’ cultural policy and culture-led strategies of rural places and small towns. *J. Rural. Stud.* **2016**, 44, 1–11. [CrossRef]
10. Nedučin, D.; Krklješ, M.; Zlatomir Gajić, Z. Post-socialist context of culture-led urban regeneration—Case study of a street in Novi Sad, Serbia. *Cities* **2019**, 85, 72–82. [CrossRef]
11. Jeanotte, M.S. Story-telling about place: Engaging citizens in cultural mapping. *City Cult. Soc.* **2016**, 7, 35–41. [CrossRef]
12. Loulanski, T. Cultural Heritage in Socio-Economic Development: Local and Global Perspectives. *Environ. J.* **2006**, 34, 51–69.
13. Lysgård, H.K. The assemblage of culture-led policies in small towns and rural communities. *Geoforum* **2019**, 101, 10–17. [CrossRef]
14. Montalto, V.; Alberti, V.; Panella, F.; Sacco, P.L. Are cultural cities always creative? An empirical analysis of culture-led development in 190 European cities. *Habitat Int.* **2023**, 132, 102739. [CrossRef]
15. Poulsen, V.M.; DeDeo, S. Inferring Cultural Landscapes with the Inverse Using Model. *Entropy* **2023**, 25, 264. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
16. Borin, E.; Donato, F. What is the legacy of the European Year of Cultural Heritage? A long way from cultural policies towards innovative cultural management models. *Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Policy* **2020**, 10, 1–17. [CrossRef]
17. Lotter, M.; Geldenhuys, S.; Potgieter, M. A conceptual framework for segmenting niche tourism markets. In Proceedings of the 6th International Adventure Conference (IAC), Segovia, Spain, 30 January–2 February 2018.
18. Dujmović, M. Komercijalizacija kulturne baštine u turizmu. *Soc. Ekol.* **2019**, 28, 145–161. [CrossRef]
19. Boukas, N.; Chourides, P. Niche tourism in Cyprus: Conceptualising the importance of social entrepreneurship for the sustainable development of islands. *Int. J. Leis. Tour. Mark.* **2016**, 5, 26–43. [CrossRef]
20. García-Martín, M.; Huntsinger, L.; Ibarrola-Rivas, M.J.; Penker, M.; D’Ambrosio, U.; Dimopoulos, T.; Fernández-Giménez, M.E.; Kizos, T.; Muñoz-Rojas, J.; Saito, O.; et al. Landscape products for sustainable agricultural landscapes. *Nat. Food* **2022**, 3, 814–821. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
21. Timothy, D.J.; Nyaupane, G.P. Introduction: Heritage tourism and the less-developed world. In *Cultural Heritage and Tourism in the Developing World—A Regional Perspective*; Timothy, D.J., Nyaupane, G.P., Eds.; Routledge: London, UK, 2009; pp. 3–19.
22. Busuioc, M.-F.; Simion, T.; Niculescu, A.C.; Trifănescu, R. New opportunities for niche tourism in Romania: Ethnographic tourism. *Rom. Econ. Bus. Rev.* **2016**, 11, 35–43.
23. Aquino, R.S.; Lück, M.; Schänzel, H.A. A conceptual framework of tourism social entrepreneurship for sustainable community development. *J. Hosp. Tour. Manag.* **2018**, 37, 23–32. [CrossRef]

24. Li, J. Culture and tourism-led peri-urban transformation in China—The case of Shanghai. *Cities* **2020**, *99*, 102628. [CrossRef]
25. Balfour, B.; Fortunato, M.W.P.; Alter, T.R. The creative fire: An interactional framework for rural arts-based development. *J. Rural. Stud.* **2018**, *63*, 229–239. [CrossRef]
26. Marques, L.; Borba, C. Co-creating the city: Digital technology and creative tourism. *Tour. Manag. Perspect.* **2017**, *24*, 86–93. [CrossRef]
27. Tsang, K.K.M.; Siu, K.W.M. The 3Cs model of sustainable cultural and creative cluster: The case of Hong Kong. *City Cult. Soc.* **2016**, *7*, 209–219. [CrossRef]
28. Flint, W.R. *Practice of Sustainable Community Development. A Participatory Framework for Change*; Springer: New York, NY, USA, 2013.
29. Mataritta-Cascante, D.; Lee, L.H.; Nam, J.W. What elements should be present in any community development initiative? Distinguishing community development from local development. *Local Dev. Soc.* **2020**, *1*, 95–115. [CrossRef]
30. Liu, J.; Fang, Y.; Yan, Q.; Chen, C. Modern Zoning Plans versus Traditional Landscape Structures: Ecosystem Service Dynamics and Interactions in Rapidly Urbanizing Cultural Landscapes. *J. Environ. Manag.* **2023**, *331*, 117315. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
31. Li, X.; Wang, C. Understanding the relationship between tourists' perceptions of the authenticity of traditional village cultural landscapes and behavioural intentions, mediated by memorable tourism experiences and place attachment. *Asia Pac. J. Tour. Res.* **2023**, *28*, 254–273. [CrossRef]
32. Jones, M. The Concept of Cultural Landscape: Discourse and Narratives. In *Landscape Interfaces*; Palang, H., Fry, G., Eds.; Landscape Series; Springer: Dordrecht, The Netherlands, 2003; Volume 1, pp. 22–51. [CrossRef]
33. Wu, J. Landscape of culture and culture of landscape: Does landscape ecology need culture? *Landsc. Ecol.* **2010**, *25*, 1147–1150. [CrossRef]
34. UNESCO. World Heritage Convention. Cultural Landscapes. Available online: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape/#1> (accessed on 14 July 2023).
35. The Cultural Landscape Foundation. About Cultural Landscapes. Available online: <https://www.tclf.org/places/about-cultural-landscapes> (accessed on 2 March 2022).
36. Liu, T. Application of Traditional Cultural Elements in Landscape Design. *Appl. Math. Nonlinear Sci.* **2023**. [CrossRef]
37. Otero, A.; Timothy, D.J.; Galí, N.; Vidal-Casellas, D. Historical Pathways as Promotion and Protection of the Cultural Landscape: Tourism and the Camí de Ronda on the Costa Brava. *PASOS Rev. De Tur. Y Patrim. Cult.* **2023**, *21*, 255–270. [CrossRef]
38. Gajdek, A.; Krupa, B.; Nowak, A. What is attractive rural landscape? Differences in the social and expert assessment of the changes in the rural landscape of the Carpathian region in Poland with regard to the need of its protection. *J. Mt. Sci.* **2023**, *20*, 501–515. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
39. Stilling, S.; Braae, E. Relational heritage: 'Relational character' in national cultural heritage characterisation tools. *Landsc. Res.* **2023**, *48*, 917–934. [CrossRef]
40. Yu, J.; Safarov, B.; Yi, L.; Buzrukova, M.; Janzakov, B. The Adaptive Evolution of Cultural Ecosystems along the Silk Road and Cultural Tourism Heritage: A Case Study of 22 Cultural Sites on the Chinese Section of the Silk Road World Heritage. *Sustainability* **2023**, *15*, 2465. [CrossRef]
41. European Environment Agency. European Landscape Convention. Available online: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/policy-documents/european-landscape-convention> (accessed on 2 September 2023).
42. Ducci, M.; Janssen, R.; Burgers, G.J.; Rotondo, F. Co-design Workshops for Cultural Landscape Planning. *Landsc. Res.* **2023**, *48*, 900–916. [CrossRef]
43. Bajec, J.F.; Kranjc, D. Significance of cultural heritage practices in karst landscape management: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. *Carbonates Evaporites* **2023**, *38*, 10. [CrossRef]
44. Torralba, M.; Nishi, M.; Cebrián-Piqueras, M.A.; Quintas-Soriano, C.; García-Martín, M.; Plieninger, T. Disentangling the practice of landscape approaches: A Q-method analysis on experiences in socio-ecological production landscapes and seascapes. *Sustain. Sci.* **2023**, *18*, 1893–1906. [CrossRef]
45. Tuvikene, T. Absence, Presence, and Mobility. A Landscape Approach to an Unfinished Tram Project. *Transfers-Interdisciplinary J. Mobil. Stud.* **2022**, *12*, 47–59. [CrossRef]
46. Schlanger, S. More Than Meets the Eye: Integrating the Management of Landscape Character and Archaeological Resources for Culturally Significant Landscapes. *Adv. Archaeol. Pract.* **2023**, *11*, 42–51. [CrossRef]
47. Ministerul Culturii. Planul Strategic Instituțional al Ministerului Culturii 2024–2027 (Institutional Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Culture 2024–2027). Available online: [http://www.cultura.ro/sites/default/files/inline-files/FINAL\\_PSI%20Ministerul%20Culturii%202024%202027.pdf](http://www.cultura.ro/sites/default/files/inline-files/FINAL_PSI%20Ministerul%20Culturii%202024%202027.pdf) (accessed on 17 June 2023).
48. Sepe, M. *Planning and Place in the City: Mapping Place Identity*; Routledge: London, UK, 2013.
49. Webber, S.; Butteris, S.M.; Houser, L.; Coller, K.; Coller, R.J. Asset-Based Community Development as a Strategy for Developing Local Global Health Curricula. *Acad. Pediatr.* **2018**, *18*, 496–501. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
50. Jaye, C.; McHugh, J.; Doolan-Noble, F.; Wood, L. Wellbeing and health in a small New Zealand rural community: Assets, capabilities and being rural-fit. *J. Rural. Stud.* **2022**, *92*, 284–293. [CrossRef]
51. Danciu, V. *Memoria Caselor Orașului Rupea*; Petru Maior: Reghin, Romania, 2023.
52. Doboș, A.; Gridan, S. Recente descoperiri paleolitice în sud-estul Transilvaniei: Microzona Rupea—Homorod—Ungra, județul Brașov. *Mater. Cercet. Arheol.* **2018**, *14*, 5–12.



53. Gridan, S.; Florian, C. Contribuții la cunoașterea neoliticului și eneoliticului din sud-estul Transilvaniei, comuna Homorod (județul Brașov). In *ArheoVest III. Interdisciplinaritate în Arheologie și Istorie*; Fortiu, S., Stavilă, A., Eds.; JATE Press Kiadó: Szeged, Hungary, 2015; pp. 119–133.
54. Lazarovici, G.; Lazarovici, C.M.; Gridan, S. Surse de sare și procesul de neolitizare din S-E Transilvaniei. In *Anuarul Muzeului Etnografic al Transilvaniei*; Argonaut: Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 2018; pp. 303–319.
55. Oancă, M.; Lazarovici, G.; Gridan, S. Cercetări în stațiuni Starčevo-Criș din zona Rupea. In *Marea Unire de la Marea Neagră*; Colesniuc, S., Ed.; Celebris: Constanța, Romania, 2018; pp. 21–30.
56. Lazarovici, C.M.; Lazarovici, G.; Gridan, S.; Florian, C.; Aparaschivei, C.; Roman, C. Cercetări privind cultura Petrești la Rupea. In *Marea Unire de la Marea Neagră*; Colesniuc, S., Ed.; Celebris: Constanța, Romania, 2018; pp. 31–44.
57. Lazarovici, G.; Lazarovici, C.M.; Gridan, S.; Pirău, H.; Aparaschivei, C.; Oancă, M.; Florian, C.; Roman, C. Cercetări arheologice la Rupea. Campania din 2018. *Acta Terrae Fogorasiensis* **2018**, *7*, 21–37.
58. Gridan, S.; Lazarovici, G.; Lazarovici, C.M.; Aparaschivei, C.; Gridan, O. Contribuții la cunoașterea culturii Petrești din sud-estul Transilvaniei- zona Rupea (jud. Brașov). In *ArheoVest VIII, Interdisciplinaritate în Arheologie și Istorie*; Fortiu, S., Ed.; JATE Press Kiadó: Szeged, Hungary, 2019; pp. 155–174.
59. Mârza, I.; Lazarovici, G.; Gridan, S. Analize mineralogice și determinări petrografice ale unor unelte și așchii descoperite în așezarea de la Rupea 7- Pârăul Mălinilor (Comuna Homorod, jud. Brașov). *Acta Terrae Fogorasiensis* **2019**, *8*, 13–21.
60. Gridan, S. An eneolithic innovation from south-eastern Transylvania. The Ariușd-Cucuteni culture sickle blade from Rupea 4- La Movilă settlement (Rupea, Brașov county). *Acta Musei Tutovensis. Istor. Veche Și Arheol.* **2021**, *17*, 23–41.
61. Beldiman, C.; Gridan, S.; Beldiman, D.-M. Un obiect de podoabă preistoric din os descoperit în sud-estul Transilvaniei (com. Homorod, jud. Brașov). In *ArheoVest XI. Interdisciplinaritate în Arheologie și Istorie*; Fortiu, S., Ed.; Istros: Brăila, Romania, 2022; pp. 243–274.
62. Gridan, S.; Urdea, P.; Hegyi, A. Castrul de la Ungura, jud. Brașov. Cercetări multidisciplinare. In *ArheoVest V2. Interdisciplinaritate în Arheologie și Istorie*; Fortiu, S., Ed.; JATE Press Kiadó: Szeged, Hungary, 2017; pp. 851–883.
63. Costea, F. *Repertoriul Arheologic al Județului Brașov*; C2design: Brașov, Romania, 2004.
64. Repertoriul Arheologic Național (RAN). Available online: <http://ran-tmp.cimec.ro/sel.asp> (accessed on 2 September 2023).
65. Borcoman, M. *Așezări Transilvane: Rupea*; Editura Academiei: Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 2010.
66. Borcoman, M. *Sighișoara și Așezările Scaunului Omonim*; Argonaut: București, Romania, 2020.
67. Stancescu, A.M.; Necioab, R. Monografia turistică Orașul Rupea. 2021. Available online: <https://www.primariarupea.ro/wp-content/uploads/MONOGRAFIE-REDACTATA.pdf> (accessed on 2 September 2023).
68. CULTEMA. Rupea-Cohalm. *Patrimoniu Cultural Pentru Dezvoltare Locală*. Available online: [http://cultema.umpcultura.ro/files/promotionale\\_cultema/Brosura%20Rupea/brosura%20RUPEA%20RO%20web%20spread.pdf](http://cultema.umpcultura.ro/files/promotionale_cultema/Brosura%20Rupea/brosura%20RUPEA%20RO%20web%20spread.pdf) (accessed on 2 September 2023).
69. Consiliul Județean Brașov. Strategia de Dezvoltare Durabilă a Județului Brașov 2021–2030. In *Analiza Situației Actuale a Județului Brașov*. Available online: [https://addjb.ro/uploads/user\\_upload/nSDDJB\\_II\\_Analiza\\_situatiei\\_actuale\\_a\\_județului\\_Brașov.pdf](https://addjb.ro/uploads/user_upload/nSDDJB_II_Analiza_situatiei_actuale_a_județului_Brașov.pdf) (accessed on 3 September 2023).
70. Asociația Transilvană Brașov Nord. Plan de Dezvoltare Locală Zona de Nord a Județului BRAȘOV. Available online: [http://galatbn.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/PDL-FINAL\\_varianta-initiala.pdf](http://galatbn.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/PDL-FINAL_varianta-initiala.pdf) (accessed on 14 July 2022).
71. Primăria Rupea. Strategia de Dezvoltare Durabilă a Orașului Rupea. Available online: <http://www.primariarupea.ro/img/upload/strategie-dezvoltare-durabila-rupea.pdf> (accessed on 3 September 2023).
72. Institutul Național de Statistică. Tempo Online. Available online: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table> (accessed on 20 October 2023).
73. Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor. Rezultate Definitive: Caracteristici Etno-Culturale Demografice. Available online: <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive-caracteristici-etno-culturale-demografice/> (accessed on 3 September 2023).
74. Băjenaru, C. *Țara Făgărașului în Timpul Stăpânirii Austriece (1691–1867)*; ALTIP: Alba Iulia, Romania, 2013.
75. Sorea, D.; Csesznek, C. The Groups of Caroling Lads from Făgăraș, Land (Romania) as Niche Tourism Resource. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 4577. [CrossRef]
76. Sorea, D.; Bolborici, A.M. The Anti-Communist Resistance in the Făgăraș Mountains (Romania) as a Challenge for Social Memory and an Exercise of Critical Thinking. *Sociologia Slovak Sociol. Rev.* **2021**, *53*, 266–286. [CrossRef]
77. Sorea, D.; Roșculeț, G.; Rățulea, G.G. The Compossessorates in the Olt Land (Romania) as Sustainable Commons. *Land* **2022**, *11*, 292. [CrossRef]
78. Sorea, D.; Csesznek, C.; Rățulea, G.G. The Culture-Centered Development Potential of Communities in Făgăraș Land (Romania). *Land* **2022**, *11*, 837. [CrossRef]
79. Giurescu, C.C. *Istoria Românilor*; ALL: București, Romania, 2015; Volume 1.
80. Pop, I.A. *Scurtă Istorie a Românilor*; Litera: București, Romania, 2023.
81. Năgler, T. *Așezarea Sașilor în Transilvania*; Kriterion: București, Romania, 1992.
82. Institutul Național de Statistică. Direcția Județeană de Statistică Brașov. In *Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor 2021- Județul Brașov*. Available online: <https://brasov.insse.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/RECENSAMANTUL-POPULATIEI-SI-AL-LOCUINTELOR-2021.pdf> (accessed on 3 September 2023).



83. Giurescu, C.C. *Istoria Românilor. Vol.III: De la Moartea lui Mihai Viteazul Până la Sfârșitul Epocii Fanariote (1601–1821)*; ALL: București, Romania, 2015.
84. Ministerul Investițiilor și Proiectelor Europene. Proiecte de Succes. Available online: <https://mfe.gov.ro/vechea-fortareata-rupea-reabilitata-din-fonduri-europene/> (accessed on 3 September 2023).
85. Muzeul de Etnografie “Gheorghe Cernea”. Available online: <http://ghidulmuzeelor.cimec.ro/id.asp?k=154&-Muzeul-de-Etnografie-Gheorghe-Cernea-RUPEA-Brasov> (accessed on 14 November 2022).
86. Junii Cetății Rupea. Available online: <https://www.juniicetatiirupea.ro/> (accessed on 2 September 2023).
87. Festival Aniversar Fanfara Țărănească Rupea—100 de ani de Activitate. Available online: <https://brasovtourism.app/ro/events/festival-aniversar-fanfara-{}-{}-r-nesc-{}-{}-rupea-{}-{}-100-de-ani-de-activitate> (accessed on 3 September 2023).
88. Bisericile Fortificate Săsești din Zona Rupea. Available online: <https://www.traseeromania.ro/bisericile-fortificate-din-zona-rupea/> (accessed on 14 November 2022).
89. Haferland. Available online: <https://haferland.ro/> (accessed on 20 August 2023).
90. Castelul Sükösd-Bethlen. Available online: <https://www.castelulsukosdbethlen.ro/istoric/> (accessed on 14 November 2022).
91. Rezervația Naturală Complexul Vulcanic Racos, Ghid Turistic și Geologic. Available online: <https://amfostacolo.ro/impresii9.php?iid=86000&d=descopera-racos-si-comorile-ascunse-ale-zonei-{}-{}-viscri-bunesti-bv> (accessed on 14 November 2022).
92. Festivalul “Ziua Pietrei” la Racos, Ediția a V-a. Available online: <https://www.monitorfg.ro/2022/08/19/festivalul-ziua-pietrei-la-racos-editia-a-v-a-la-ce-actiuni-puteti-participa-in-cele-2-zile-de-festival/> (accessed on 14 November 2022).
93. Blaga, L. *Trilogia Culturii*; Humanitas: București, Romania, 2018.
94. Sorea, D. Two Particular Expressions of Neo-Paganism. *Bull. Transilv. Univ. Brașov Ser. VII* **2013**, *6*, 29–40.
95. Sorea, D.; Scârnci-Domnișoru, F. Unorthodox depictions of divinity. Romanian children’s drawings of Him, Her or It. *Int. J. Child. Spiritual.* **2018**, *23*, 380–400. [CrossRef]
96. Amazingromania. Colinele Transilvaniei—MTB Printre Sate Săsești și Biserici Fortificate. Available online: <https://amazingromania.net/mtb-in-colinele-transilvaniei/> (accessed on 3 August 2023).
97. Borcoman, M.; Sorea, D. Ethnic Soups from Rupea Area (Romania) as Resources for Sustainable Local Development. *Sustainability* **2023**, *15*, 943. [CrossRef]
98. Hammou, I.; Aboudou, S.; Makloul, Y. Social Media and Intangible Cultural Heritage for Digital Marketing Communication: Case of Marrakech Crafts. *Mark. Manag. Innov.* **2020**, *1*, 121–127. [CrossRef]
99. Gupta, V.; Sajjani, M. A study on the influence of street food authenticity and degree of their variations on the tourists’ overall destination experiences. *Br. Food J.* **2019**, *122*, 779–797. [CrossRef]
100. Bolborici, A.-M.; Lupu, M.I.; Sorea, D.; Atudorei, I.A. Gastronomic Heritage of Făgăraș, Land: A Worthwhile Sustainable Resource. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 1199. [CrossRef]
101. Neumeier, S.; Pollermann, K. Rural Tourism As Promoter Of Rural Development—Prospects And Limitations: Case Study Findings From A Pilot Projectpromoting Village Tourism. *Eur. Countrys.* **2014**, *6*, 270–296. [CrossRef]
102. Sheldon, P.; Pollock, A.; Daniele, R. Social entrepreneurship and tourism: Setting the stage. In *Social Entrepreneurship and Tourism: Philosophy and Practice*; Sheldon, P.J., Daniele, R., Eds.; Springer International Publishing: Cham, Switzerland, 2017; pp. 1–18.
103. Altinay, L.; Sigala, M.; Waligo, V. Social value creation through tourism enterprise. *Tour. Manag.* **2016**, *54*, 404–417. [CrossRef]
104. Stroe, F. Arguments of a different type of Romanian social project. *Bull. Thetransilvaniauniversity Brașov Ser. VII* **2018**, *11*, 113–126.
105. Stroe, F. The lingering Hellenism. *Bull. Thetransilvania Univ. Brașov Ser. VII* **2022**, *15*, 175–182. [CrossRef]
106. Newsome, D.; Moore, S.A.; Dowling, R.K. *Natural Area Tourism: Ecology, Impacts and Management*; Channel View Publications: Bristol, UK, 2013.

**Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.