

# Re-contextualizing the Identity Marks and re-shaping the Landscape and its Elements: Notes and Witnesses from rural Slovakia\*

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## Abstrakt | Abstract

### ***Rekontextualizace identifikačních znaků a přetvoření krajiny s jejími prvky. Poznámky a svědectví ze slovenského venkova***

Článek, zaměřený na slovenský venkov, poskytuje etnografický vhled do rekontextualizace forem identifikačních znaků a způsobů přetváření krajinných prvků v emickém a etickém pojetí. Výzkum přibližuje pohled zahraniční badatelky na vybraný kulturní terén a skupinu. Pozornost je zaměřena na současné aspekty krajiny a její etnografické prvky, jak byly zaznamenány in situ. Tyto prvky jsou zkoumány ze synchronního a chronologického hlediska.

*The article, focused on the rural area in Slovakia, provides ethnographic insight into the re-contextualizing forms of the identity marks and the ways of re-shaping the landscape's elements, having emic and etic approaches. The research introduces the perspective of the non-native researcher with the selected cultural terrain and group. Attention is directed to the contemporary aspects of the landscape and its ethnographic elements, as they were noticed in situ; the synchronic and chronologic views of them are considered as well.*

## Klíčová slova | Keywords

*Slovensko; nepůvodní vzhled; krajinné prvky; identita; emický a etický přístup*

*Slovakia; non-native outlook; landscape elements; identity; emic and etic approach*

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## Introduction

The key goal of the research is synchronically and diachronically revealing and interpreting the continuities and discontinuities of the tangible and intangible ethnographic elements, with symbolic and real identity value, expressed on/in cultural landscapes, providing examples from the rural areas in Slovakia. The investigation is of a non-native researcher, who has encountered these sites for the first time. It portrays the interpretation of how the ethnographic patterns build and shape the cultural landscapes on the one hand and how the scenery and its elements are perceived by the community on the other. Hence, I incline towards an analysis of the *“specific objects or features in a place or landscape to which people are attached”*.<sup>1</sup>

Before I start my inter- and trans-disciplinary research, I will consider the historical retrospective on the subject. In most studies of social and cultural anthropology, older or newer, the various shaping factors on identity<sup>2</sup> and the rural character of Slovakia<sup>3</sup> are presented, debated, emphasized, and recalled. For example, David Václavík asserts *“the countryside is the place preserving the origins of the Slovak identity, including for instance a strong bond with traditions and religion”*.<sup>4</sup> While ethnographer Peter Slavkovský states that *“the traditional culture of communities living in the countryside and in smaller towns forms the original basis of Slovakia’s cultural heritage and by its nature belongs to the European peasant civilization”*.<sup>5</sup> As follows, the village (*dědina*) was analysed from different points of view, like a social space, as a lifestyle and unit of the administrative organization,<sup>6</sup> through the lenses of the experiments and transformations by which it has been overpowered in the successive political regimes of varying stripes.

Historically, the Slovak ethnologist Olga Danglová, in one of her studies, remarks on the contexts that determined the unity and the unaltered preservation of the features of the rural community in Slovakia until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She affirms this situation was possible due to the harmony of housing and work (farming and pastoralism) in the local village milieu, and to an enclosed social life and endogamy.<sup>7</sup> According to other sources, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the country

1 Maria Carmen HIDALGO – Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ, *Place attachment: conceptual and empirical questions*, Journal of Environmental Psychology 21 (3), 2001, pp. 273–281.

2 Vladimír KRIVÝ – Oľga DANGLOVÁ (eds.), *Svet mnohých ‘MY a ONI’: Kolektívne identity na súčasnom Slovensku*, Bratislava 2006; Gabriela KILIÁNOVÁ – Eva KREKOVIČOVÁ – Eva KOWALSKÁ E (eds.), *My a tí druhí v modernej spoločnosti. Konštrukcie a transformácie kolektívnych identity*, Bratislava 2009.

3 Zuzana BEŇUŠKOVÁ et al., *Tradičná kultúra regiónov Slovenska*, Bratislava 1998.

4 David VÁCLAVÍK, *Shaping the Slovak Identity and the Manifestation Thereof in the Social Iconosphere*, Historická Sociologie 2, 2019, p. 39.

5 Peter SLAVKOVSKÝ, *Agrárna kultúra Slovenska. Premeny v čase*, Bratislava 2002, p. 160.

6 Lubomír FALŤAN (ed.), *Malé vidiecke sídla na Slovensku začiatkom 21. storočia*, Bratislava 2011.

7 Olga DANGLOVÁ, *Vidiecke sídlo ako priestor identity. výber z prípadových štúdií štyroch slovenských obcí*, Národopisná Revue 21 (2), 2011, p. 95.

was under the socialist regime, in remote places it was still possible to capture the “*dying pre-capitalist world of small towns and villages*”<sup>8</sup>, the last ones, Ľubomír Lipták defined as the basis of the Slovak “microcosmos”.

After 1940, the village opened its gates, even forced into new economic entities, forms of landownership, and management. All these intruded “*communism in the landscape*”<sup>9</sup> and urbanization of the rural settlement began to be implemented. As well the new possibilities attract the peasants (farmers) to seasonally leave their farms and go for work in urban areas. Thus, changes took place regarding the use and management of the agricultural landscapes of the villages,<sup>10</sup> the image of the rural architecture,<sup>11</sup> and the social life of the community.

The continuous line of the rurality index until the current time is confirmed by the data provided by the United Nations that inform – 46.27 % population of Slovakia lives in the rural area and there are about 2,749 rural municipalities.<sup>12</sup> Nowadays, the elements of their scenery and it itself (based on the selected villages) are recontextualized in the conditions of neoliberalism. The village and its landscapes are perceived as a resource for sustainable development and mixed economic functions, as heritage resources and alternative lifestyles, etc. The rural community, consisting of natives, newcomers, or seasonal residents is in the process of passing towards the “post-productivist transition”,<sup>13</sup> re-evaluating the functions of the village and what it means in the era of globalization. As well, during the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many rural communities are trying to regain and reshape their unique identity by passing on and promoting their cultural heritage elements, especially through economic and tourist mechanisms. For example, recently, the authors’ group<sup>14</sup> analysing four villages, winners of the Village of the Year Competition up to 2017, focuses on the following suggestive thematic dimensions: village as a manager, village as a host, painted village, village as a garden, and village as a community.

### **Positioning at the edge of the emic and etic insight**

The ethnographic contacts with the identity value brought and made by the human

8 Ľubomír LIPTÁK, *Protirečivé stránky modernizácie. O slovenskej otázke na prelome storočia*, Historická Revue 7, 1996, p. 28.

9 Jiří LÖW – Igor MÍČHAL, *Krajinný ráz*, Kostelec nad Černými lesy 2003.

10 Katarína KRISTIÁNOVÁ – Jana ADAMKOVÁ, *Slovak agricultural landscape – transition responses*, A|Z ITU Journal of Faculty of Architecture 7 (2), 2010, pp. 121–132.

11 Juraj PODOBA, *Vývoj staviteľstva a spôsobu bývania v dedinskom prostredí v 20. storočí*, Bratislava 2011.

12 Slovak Republic, Summary Data: [http://www.sodbtn.sk/obce/index\\_kraje.php](http://www.sodbtn.sk/obce/index_kraje.php) [14.03.2023].

13 Brian W. ILBERY, *The geography of rural change*, London 1998.

14 Jolana DARULOVÁ – Katarína KOŠTIALOVÁ – Zdena KRIŠKOVÁ, *Vidiel tradičný, moderný a inšpiratívny. Dedina roka. Hrušov, Dobrá Niva, Oravská Lesná, Spišský Hrhov, Banská Bystrica 2020.*

behaviour in the landscape require to be considered through the lenses of both epistemological insights – the emic<sup>15</sup> and the etic.<sup>16</sup>

The etic vision unfolds on several theoretical interdisciplinary contributions. Building upon my field research in rural Slovakia, I consider that this human creation, shaped over the course of history, is carried out in close relationship with the possibilities or lack thereof provided by the local natural milieu, social and economic contexts, through a synergy of the folk and religious practices, as well as aesthetic and artistic expressions. These mixed cultural data build and archive the symbolic and real collective identity, its changes, and conversions. They reveal the value of the landscape's heritage created, preserved, and passed on by the related cultural group. Thus, as Daniels asserts the landscape "*gives shape to the imagined community of the nation*".<sup>17</sup> As well, my focus on rural areas emerges from Susan Buggey's statement that the "*traditional knowledge relates contemporary cultures directly to traditional places. [...] Seeing places as markers of identity requires looking at them through the worldview and experience of the peoples associated with them*".<sup>18</sup> In such a way, the cultural landscape and its elements placed under my analysis are complex phenomena with a tangible and an intangible identity. The tangible structure and components of the landscape, like resources and natural conditions, to which the materiality provided by man is added, as a result of capitalizing on these tangible structures, an identity is visually expressed. This identity reflects the culture of the group as well, which is palpable, sensory, and functionally active. The intangible components arise from ideas and interactions which have an impact on the perceptions and shaping of the landscape. These are pragmatic actions, experience, cultural practices, and even religious beliefs closely linked to the environment and the way it has been perceived over time. Therefore, for rural Slovakia as well, it is matching the assertion that the "*cultural landscapes mirror the cultures which created them*".<sup>19</sup>

The cultural landscape should not be seen only as a tangible construct but must also be decoded and seen beyond what the visible parts show us. Evocative for this statement, Tim Ingold's assertion is "*to perceive the landscape is, therefore, to carry out*

15 Kenneth L. PIKE, *On The Emics and Etics of Pike and Harris*, in: Thomas N. Headland – Kenneth L. Pike – Harris Marvin (eds.), *Emics and Etics. The Insider/Outsider Debate* (Frontiers of Anthropology), Thousand Oaks 1990, pp. 28–47.

16 *Ibidem*, pp. 48–61.

17 Stephen DANIELS, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States*, Princeton 1993, p. 5.

18 Susan BUGGEY, *An Approach to Aboriginal Cultural Landscapes in Canada*, in: Igor Krupnik – Rachel Mason – Tonia Horton (eds.), *Northern Ethnographic Landscapes: Perspectives from Circumpolar Nations*, Washington 2004, pp. 19–20.

19 Harald PLACHTER – Mechtild ROSSLER, *Cultural landscapes: reconnecting culture and nature*, in: Bernd von Droste – Harald Plachter – Mechtild Rossler (eds.), *Cultural Landscapes of Universal Value – Components of a Global Strategy*, Jena 1995, p. 15.

*an act of remembrance, and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past*".<sup>20</sup> In this course of ideas, it is necessary to appeal to the opinion of geographer Jan Hromádka, who established the first classification of landscapes in Slovakia in 1943. In his analysis of the cultural values of landscape, he points out that the landscape "is reflected in work, culture, religion, and customs and man's life as the specific feature of the regional differences in sceneries' types to outline the image of the landscape while capturing its 'spirit'".<sup>21</sup>

As "a process by which social and subjective identities are formed",<sup>22</sup> the cultural landscapes are a dynamic construct; its constituents are always continuously changing, converting, and metamorphosing. The "landscape is never passive. People engage with it, rework it, appropriate it, and contest it. It is part of the way in which identities are created and disputed, whether as an individual, group, or nation-state. Operating at the juncture of history and politics, social relations, and cultural perceptions, the landscape is a concept of high tension".<sup>23</sup> The cultural landscape on the whole, in rural Slovakia, reveals a rapid content mutation, conflicts, and uninterrupted trials that cause various clashes, similar to the transformations that the community faces. Insofar, Pierce Lewis affirms "our human landscape is our unwitting biography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears in tangible visible form".<sup>24</sup> In such a way, the cultural landscape is a space with multivocality and multilocality value,<sup>25</sup> emerged from the political events, economical regimes, social changes, living experience, and even natural hazards. These demonstrate "the landscapes reflect the complexity of people's lives. They are historically contingent and their mutability stems from the various ways in which people understand them and engage with the material world".<sup>26</sup>

20 Tim INGOLD, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, London – New York 2000, p. 189.

21 Jan HROMÁDKA, *Všeobecný zemepis Slovenska*, in: Dimitrij Andrusov – Ján Hromádka – Martin Novacký – Jozef Babor (eds.) *Slovenska vlastiveda I*, Bratislava 1943, pp. 83–332; Jan OTAHEL, *Landscape and Landscape Research in Slovakia*, Belgeo. Revue Belge de Géographie. Landscape Research in Europe 2–3, 2004, pp. 337–346.

22 William J. T. MITCHELL (ed.), *Landscape and Power*, Chicago 1994 [2002], p. 1.

23 Alan BARNARD – Jonathan SPENCER (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, London – New York 2005, p. 488.

24 Lewis PIERCE, *Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene*, in: Donald W. Meinig – John B. Jackson (eds.), *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, New York 1979, p. 12.

25 Margaret C. RODMAN, *Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality*, *American Anthropologist*. New Series 94 (3), 1992, pp. 640–656; Bradley S. JORGENSEN – Richard C. STEDMAN, *Measuring the Spatial Component of Sense of Place: A Methodology for Research on the Spatial Dynamics of Psychological Experiences of Places*, *Environment and Planning B. Planning and Design* 38 (5), 2011, pp. 795–813.

26 Christopher TILLEY – Kate CAMERON DAUM, *An Anthropology of Landscape: The Extraordinary in the Ordinary*, London 2017, p. 10.

The ethnographic individuality of the communities generates an emic approach to their cultural facts related to their space and natural environment. For example, in a volume focused on northern landscapes, the authors build their discourse around the term ethnographic landscape, which *"includes the physical landscapes that have a great value to indigenous people, reflected in their associated myths, stories, rituals, and spiritual practices"*.<sup>27</sup> The Ethnography Programme of the National Park Service in the USA emphasizes the ethnographic values of the landscape, formulating the term of ethnographic landscape as an emic concept. It is considered to be *"a relatively contiguous area of interrelated places that the members of contemporary social groups define as meaningful because it is inextricably and traditionally linked to their own local or regional histories, cultural identities, beliefs, and behaviours"*.<sup>28</sup> As well, these peculiarities are revealed by the ethnic landscapes, defined as *"areas perceived by one or several ethnic groups in a distinct way. This perception is frequently connected to the characteristics of the area, which are the result of activities and interactions of human and natural factors"*.<sup>29</sup>

Starting from the assertions mentioned above, my analysis occupies a middle position between the etic and the emic approach. Kenneth L. Pike asserts *"an emic unit is a physical or mental item or system treated by insiders as relevant to their system of behaviour and as the same emic unit is spite of etic variability"*.<sup>30</sup> Within the article, it is operated with examples of empirical materials that reflect how ethnographic contents are included and related to the landscape from the perspective of the native people that have created and performed them. Complementarily, this relationship is analysed in an etic way by me, the researcher, who is also an outsider to the analysed sites and cultural group. Thus, my approach resonates as well with Marvin Harris' statement, that: *"to ignore the special interests and motivations of scientific outsiders is surely to misrepresent the emics of the scientific tradition. It is for this reason that the emics of the observer must be categorically distinct from the emics of the participants and that is precisely why we need the term etics as well as emics"*.<sup>31</sup>

27 Igor KRUPNIK – Rachel MASON – Susan BUGGEY, *Introduction: Landscapes, Perspectives, and Nations*, in: I. Krupnik – R. Mason – T. Horton (eds.), *Northern Ethnographic Landscapes*, p. 1.

28 Michael J. EVANS – Alexa ROBERTS – Peggy NELSON, *Ethnographic Landscapes*, CRM. People and Places. *The Ethnographic Connections* 24 (5), 2001, p. 54.

29 Johannes GNÄDINGER – Dora DREXLER et al., *Ethnische Landschaften – Ein neuer Ansatz zur Analyse, zum Schutz und zur Entwicklung traditioneller Kulturlandschaften*, in: *Landschaftsökologie: Grundlagen, Methoden, Anwendungen*. Laufener Spezialbeiträge, Laufen 2011, p. 137.

30 K. L. PIKE, *On The Emics and Etics*, p. 28.

31 *Ibidem*, p. 49.

## Research methods and data used

The cultural diversity of Slovakia and the cultural pieces of the landscape demands an investigation by using them for recovering and rebuilding the cultural past of the community, to objectively read the character of the contemporary times on the field. As primary sources, empirical data (interviews, field diary notes, comments, photographs) registered during field research were used and interpreted through theoretical lenses.

As the main way of working, the multi-situated ethnography method was applied. It gave me fruitful results and advantages for comparing and describing the ethnographic elements of the cultural landscape and it as a whole, for establishing the cultural structure and ways, through which the regional and local identity is reflected. This method was useful in implementing, because "*some forms of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites*".<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, ethnographic field research was conducted during of September, October 2020 – April, May and June 2021, in eight villages.

These are Veľké Leváre (Malacky District, Bratislava Region) situated in the eastern part of the country; Čičmany (Žilina District and Region) placed in northern part on Malá Fatra Mountain; Podbiel and Oravský Biely Potok (Tvrdošín District, Žilina Region), in the north, on Fatra Mountain; Vlkolínec (Ružomberok District, Žilina Region) is situated in the central part of the country between the mountains of Veľká Fatra and Nízka Fatra; the villages of Osturňa and Ždiar (Kežmarok District, Prešov Region) are in the northeast, on Spišská Magura Mountain; Špania Dolina (Banská Bystrica District and Region) in the central part of the country on Nízka Fatra; and Brhlovce (Levice District, Nitra Region) in the central-south part of Slovakia in the eastern extremity of the Slovak Ore Mountains (Slovenské rudohorie).

I have chosen these rural sites because here, the mechanism and modalities of how the people give and receive the multifunctionality of/to landscape, convert and adapt its value, elements and resources can be pursued. The selected sites answer as well at the questions: How is the 'rural idyll' perceived?<sup>33</sup> Is it a rebirth, as an ambivalent mechanism of returning to the roots and identity, of escaping from urban life, and of economic touristic benefits?

In-depth interviews with various informants were carried out. They were selected in order to be representatives of the various ages and education profiles. Therefore, the interviewees were women and men, around group ages of 20 and 75 years old. The

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32 George E. MARCUS, *Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography*, Annual Review of Anthropology 24, 1995, p. 105.

33 Michael BUNCE, *Reproducing Rural Idylls*, in: Paul J. Cloke (ed.), *Country Visions*, Harlow 2003, pp. 14–30; David BELL, *Variations on the Rural Idyll*, in: Paul J. Cloke – Terry Marsden – Patrick H. Mooney (eds.), *Handbook of Rural Studies*, London 2006, pp. 149–160.

young group under 30 years old were in their last stages of finishing their university studies or were already engaged. The group of late middle age finished superior studies and were working in various educational, cultural, and tourist-leisure positions in their native villages. The interviewees of late adulthood were retired persons. The field data was interpreted considering the scientific contributions on the subjects as the tangible and intangible culture, ethnic and cultural identity, cultural landscape, rural area, etc., appeared in various local and broader academic publications. The method of working with administrative, geomorphologic, and ethnographic maps was implemented for establishing the sites and the local and regional visit routes, to extract data about the historical, natural, and cultural attributes of the communities and their habitat.

The critical and comparative ethnographic interpretation was applied to the identification, and understanding of the natural, historical, and social contexts in which the cultural practices emerged, evolved, and metamorphosed. I used the field diary for noting the field observations, data about informants, and villages researched. To catch the ethnographic features of the community, the methods of visual anthropology (photography and video recorder) were applied.

### **Examples, notes, and results from the *situ***

I will give more examples of ethnographic prints from four circles in the rural sites, and I will in such a way shape, or outline, their cultural landscapes. The traces will be synthetically analysed, emphasizing the identity value that they have retained or was offered to them over time. The prints are interconnected and associated with influential historical events, economic processes, reforms, and administrative plans, the conversion and adaptation of the social and cultural practices, mythologization or de-mythologization of the ideas, beliefs, and narratives. Through them, the community inherits its identity, imprints it, and passes it on.

The first examples consist of **buildings** with various functions. British sociologist Barbara Adam says, "*the landscape is a chronicle of life and dwelling*,"<sup>34</sup> and in this sense, reading the design arrangement of the village, analysing and correlating its elements, we discover and understand the cultural layers of its social structure; we observe and interpret the relationships established between the local community and its living environment and the attachments that link each other.

A chronologic retrospective of the built infrastructure arrangement leads me to several references. Looking historically at the pre-industrial period, I exemplify the house and household, the church, the inn, the school, and the shelters inside and

34 Barbara ADAM, *Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazards*, London 1998, p. 54.



outside of the built-up area of the village. The cultural-natural correspondences were highlighted by demographic and social processes (e. g. the settling of the colonists, Wallachian colonization), ethnic preferences, and the morphology of the terrains, as Rastislava Stoličná mentions.<sup>35</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, schools and administrative edifices, warehouses, sports grounds, etc. were included in the rural settlements. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, collectivization led to the construction of the co-operative yards called "JRD". These entities changed the economic structure of the village and gave new forms of employment to its inhabitants. As I have seen, this built environment is not just *"the physical expression of the organization of space – a spatial organization made visible"*,<sup>36</sup> it is the result of political and economic ideologies.

Coming back to the present, based on eyewitness accounts during my stay in Oravský Biely Potok, Bardejovské Kúpele, Brhlovce, Veľké Leváre, I noticed the following. The main road of the village, the municipal building, the bus stations, the church, the markets, postal office are the key indicative and referential points, and they configure the tissue of the landscape. The local marketplace located in the centre of the village, stores, and bars, placed in the headquarters of the former shops or in new small buildings ensure the consumption needs of the residents. The remains of the former agricultural cooperatives, farms, schools can be seen; as well as other various unused buildings. In some localities, the manor house has been transformed into a local museum of history and ethnography, under state or private management. In other villages, for example in Veľké Leváre, the mansion was for a long time a psychiatric hospital, and today the building is abandoned. Other rural edifices have poor architectural conditions, which shape a dramatic and depressive image of the landscape.

Referring to the building culture in rural areas in Slovakia, Juraj Podoba asserts that *"in the process of overlaying several different building subcultures, the always younger, newer subculture in a way denied the architectural character of the historically older group and pushed it out of the settlement..."*<sup>37</sup> Appropriate evidence for this statement, as I noticed during my research, is the hybridized arrangement of the houses inside of the village. According to certain rules, their design is dictated by modern elements, utility, or by principles of proximity. The old buildings (the remains of the traditional houses) preserve the aesthetic image and have memorial and patrimonial value (Fig-

35 Rastislava STOLIČNÁ, *Lokálna a regionálna identita ako predpoklad uchovania kultúrneho dedičstva (Reflexia pred vstupom Slovenska do Európskej únie)*, Etnologické rozpravy 1, 2004, pp. 34–35.

36 Amos RAPOPORT, *Spatial Organization and the Built Environment*, in: Tim Ingold (ed.), *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, London – New York 1994, p. 470.

37 Juraj PODOBA, *Medzi tradíciou a nivelizáciou: zánik regionálneho domového typu*, Etnologické rozpravy 4 (1–2), 1997, p. 29.

ure 1). They are the last evidence of the past *genius loci* that binds the locals to their native family history. They diachronically and materially express the attachment of people to place contextualized in all three states of being inside something, formulated by Edward Relph “behavioural”, “empathetic”, and “existential”<sup>38</sup>

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Figure 1. Haban dwellings in Vel'ké Leváre museographically preserving the Hutterite culture. Photo: © Dorina Dragnea 2022.

I noticed the concurrent presence of investments in the modernization of houses, but also the refurbishment and the repair of the old ones. It is observed the renovation and transformation of the old residences into holiday and tourist houses by the locals and by the new urban comers and cottagers (e.g., Čičmany, Podbiel, Osturňa and Ždiar, Špania Dolina– see Figure 2 and 3). The dwellings metamorphosed with visible architectural interventions inspired or not by traditional decor are in the core of the village, in the same row as the homesteads of the inhabitants. The attractiveness of such interventions in the habitat is almost always favoured by the scenery, which provides resources and mechanisms of returning to the roots through the prism of the new eco-lifestyle and business.

38 Edward RELPH, *Place and Placelessness*, London 1976, p. 50.



Figure 2. Guest Houses in Ždiar retaining the aesthetics patterns of the local architecture.  
Photo: © Dorina Dragnea 2020.



Figure 3. Hybridized architectural elements of the cottage houses, Čičmany village.  
Photo: © Dorina Dragnea 2020.

As well, new forms of construction like halls, small factories, workshops, etc. have entered the landscape of villages, especially on their outskirts. These are the effect of small entrepreneurs' initiatives, of state or foreign investments aimed at capitalizing on the local resources (e.g., platforms for wood processing (logging – e.g., Podbiel), food processing), and job creation for locals. In such a way the new rurality shapes and upgrades the new image of the village, which *“brings changes in the lifestyle of rural communities, as well as different patterns and deepening specialisations in the settlement system”*<sup>39</sup>

The function of the villages is changing, the transition from agricultural to tourist one, which involves recent forms of resources, aimed at meeting the needs of locals, newcomers, and tourists. Thus, the locals perceive the rural landscape as a dynamic environment. It is involved in a continuous process of design and reconfiguration of its structure, and its building elements are adaptable to their new forms of use, like leisure, consumption, and economic capitalization of the heritage, developing cultural and food tourism, and ecotourism. These settings show ambivalent realities, such as the economic and social progress or stagnation within the community, and active or broken work relations that lead to the functional conversions of the landscape.

Other examples, which I will give, the buildings with spiritual functions are, like the chapel, the church and the church square, the bell tower, the road crosses, the column shrines, the statues of saints, the devotional pillars, and the space of the cemetery. The majority of them have an active spiritual functionality and confirm the religiousness of the locals. The sacred buildings communicate several tangible features of the village, like the planning network of the locality, the position of the oldest and the newest neighbourhoods that are arranged around them, and the specific church architectural styles. Among the intangible features, I noticed the denomination/s of the inhabitants, the local history, the civic pattern of inter- and intra-relational ties of the locals with the members of the same community or with the neighbouring village, social norms, and the character of kinship relations. For example, based on attending the Liturgy officiated in the Orthodox Church (Bardejovské Kúpele village) on the occasion of The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, on 27 September 2020, I noted temporary ritual and ceremonial practices, forms of devotion, religious folklore shared by the local community. Consequently, the sacred buildings are architectural and aesthetic testimonies of the religious identity and of the moral values of the inhabitants, and of witness as to how they relate symbolically and magically to the inhabited space.

39 Hana HORÁKOVÁ, *Modern rurality, neoliberalism, and utopias: the anthropologist's account*, in: Hana Horáková – Andrea Boscoboinik – Montserrat Soronellas (eds.), *Utopia and Neoliberalism. Ethnographies of Rural Spaces*, Berlin 2018, p. 16.

Both in the villages from the upland and lowland regions of the country these sacral buildings are intimately associated with local stories, legends, beliefs; they are part of the village's sacred space. In my fieldwork, I noticed in Brhlovce the community space is protected by various crosses carved in stone, having unique craft beauty. One of these crucifixes can be seen at the border with Žemberovce village (Figure 4). In the cemetery, stone crosses and tombstones with different carved, scribbled,



Figure 4. Stone cross on the villages' border. Photo: © Dorina Dragnea 2020.

and incised decorations and ornaments are arranged. A small sacral building, the stone chapel, built in 1907, is placed at the crossroads, near the Roman Catholic Church. In Čičmany village, stations of worship consisting of a statue of the Virgin Mary and a candle are placed at the side of the roads. Copper and wooden Crucifix-

ions, and devotional pillars with the image of Jesus and the Virgin Mary are present at crossroads, near roads in Špania Dolina.

Zuzana Benušková specifies the historical factors and conditions for spreading sacred buildings and mentions the role of crafts' guilds in the emergence or borrowing of the ecclesiastical architectural styles. Summing up, we quote the following: Catholicism, especially since the period of re-Catholicization in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, has conditioned the expansion of the cult of saints. In the upper Orava, in the vicinity of Trnava and Záhorie, but also in other areas of Slovakia, statues of saints, the Passion of Christ, and chapels are present.<sup>40</sup> The wooden sacral architecture, which includes churches, wooden bell towers also called Hussite (*husitské*), are widespread especially



Figure 5. The church from the village of Zboj, Snina district exhibited in the Šariš Museum in Bardejov. Photo: © Dorina Dragnea 2020.

in Liptov, Turiec, Gemer and Novohrad regions with a more pronounced representation of Protestant Christians.<sup>41</sup> The wooden churches called *cerkva*, are one of the specific cultural manifestations of the churches of the Eastern Rite dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their creators – carpenters and painters – were locals, but they

40 Zuzana BENUŠKOVÁ, *Religiozita a medzikonfesionálne vzťahy v lokálnom spoločenstve*, Bratislava 2004, p. 26.

41 *Ibidem*, p. 29.



Figure 6. A Detvian Cross in Zvolen. Photo: © Dorina Dragnea 2020.

also came from Galicia, Carpathian Ruthenia, and Moldova<sup>42</sup> as Zuzana Benušková points out (see Figure 5).

It is necessary to remind the creative originality of the Detvian crosses within the surroundings of Podpoľanie Region, which I saw during fieldwork. These artifacts of folk art are the result of a local handicraft talent. They are carved in oak wood, with simpler or more compound ornaments, with geometric and vegetal motifs, with complex notches, and painted in several colours or monochromes. Being placed at crossroads, cemeteries, the crosses preserve the pre-Christian and Christian beliefs of the local community; they fit harmoniously with the environment, displaying an outstanding image of it (Figure 6).

The **economic activities** shape a certain type of seasonal dynamics, the rhythm of daily life, and aesthetic and qualitative changes in the scenery. The locals are the catalysts, the bearers, and the image of the occupations they carry out. They understand the landscape, as Tim Ingold asserts as *“the taskscape in its embodied form”*.<sup>43</sup>

I specify the following notes for synchronically and chronologically analysing the elements. For example, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the villages in Stredné Považie and Kysuce Region (the northwest part of Slovakia) dealt with agriculture, cattle and sheep breeding, and wirework; the inhabitants of Liptov Region with the mining, masonry; the occupation marks of the Turiec Region’s villagers were oil-makers and herbal-healers, etc.<sup>44</sup> The inhabitants of Ždiar were engaged in agriculture, herding and logging. In the same region on the Spišská Magura, the inhabitants of Osturňa, *“in addition to agriculture and shepherding, animal husbandry, made wooden agricultural tools and 19<sup>th</sup>-century cloth. Embroidery, weaving linen, making carpets, and sewing moccasins – these were activities that the inhabitants carried out until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century”*.<sup>45</sup> In the past, the vital occupations of the inhabitants largely revealed the identity of the locality, an identity established by the locals themselves, and conferred by the neighbours. Related activities prove the autarchic economic character of the small communities. Types of activities left their mark on the typology of the village, the architecture of the house and the household, in the design of the surrounding landscape. Their content faded in the landscape during the collectivization in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While the post-war reality from rural Slovakia and the changes in scenery urges me to make a *“historical recovery of ideologies”*.<sup>46</sup>

42 Ibidem, p. 33.

43 Tim INGOLD, *The Temporality of the Landscape*, World Archaeology 25 (2), 1993, p. 162.

44 Z. BEŇUŠKOVÁ et al., *Tradičná kultúra regiónov Slovenska*.

45 Mária UŠAKOVÁ, *Osturna – rezerwat zabytkowego budownictwa ludowego na Słowacji*, Ochrona Zabytków 40 (4), 159, 1987, p. 290.

46 Alan R. H. BAKER – Gideon BIGER, *Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective: Essays on the*



As is known, technological progress and the mechanization of the work process and intensification of agricultural production during the socialist regime altered the Slovak village and the surrounding natural environment. New elements have entered the arrangement of the rural landscape, which had to respond to the socialist economic progress, such as the animal farms (cattle, pigs) and birds, and vegetable gardens within the JRDs. The presence or the ruins of these infrastructures can be still seen in the settlements. After collectivization the structure of small-size plots of fields and meadows was replaced by large fields of arable land; the proportion of meadows and natural vegetation on the meadows and balks dropped,<sup>47</sup> the river banks were strengthened, drained, and irrigated to provide space for the construction of new urban areas, transportation corridors for collectivized intensive agriculture<sup>48</sup> for industrial and technical structures, and the surface mining of minerals.<sup>49</sup>

After 1989, the de-collectivization of agricultural cooperatives began and as result, many family farms were created, or alternatively, the "*land was leased by large businesses, which have gradually taken over the failing cooperatives as well*".<sup>50</sup> As a consequence, the shifting from a planned economy to a market one, and the changing of the ownership status on the land gave new economic, social, and ecological meaning to the landscape. Concurrent globalist trends, sustainable use, and management of resources affect the rural community in Slovakia as well. The capitalization and use of alternative energy resources show its traces on the inner areas and outskirts of localities, where isolated or cluster solar panels are placed (e.g., Podbiel). As well, the appearance of this modern rurality, which is characterized "*by a diversity of local economies, identities, and lifestyles*",<sup>51</sup> implies a current adaptation and re-enactment of the natural, economic, social, and cultural resources grounded on local practices and habits.

For example, the local people in Sebechleby (Hont Region) dealt with agriculture and grapevine cultivation. So, as a result of this activity, the landscape was modelled with a complex of cellars carved in stone as well as wine cellars.<sup>52</sup> In Zemplín Region

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*Meanings of Some Places in the Past*, Cambridge 1993, p. 3.

47 Jan FERANEC – Gerard W. HAZEU – Susan CHRISTENSEN – Gabriel JAFFRAIN, *Corine land cover change detection in Europe (case studies of the Netherlands and Slovakia)*, Land Use Policy 24 (1), 2007, pp. 234–247.

48 Olah BRANISLAV – Martin BOLTÍŽIAR – Igor GALLAY, *Transformation of the Slovak Cultural Landscape Since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and its Recent Trends*, Journal of Landscape Ecology 2 (2), 2009, p. 45.

49 J. OTAHEL, *Landscape and Landscape Research in Slovakia*, p. 341.

50 David KOSTLÁN, *Hospodářský vývoj v malých obcích*, in: Ľubomír Falťan (ed.), *Malé vidiecke sídla na Slovensku začiatkom 21. storočia*, Bratislava 2011, p. 172.

51 H. HORÁKOVA, *Modern rurality, neoliberalism, and utopias*, p. 11.

52 Maria MEDVEČKÁ, *Rezerwaty architektury ludowej na Słowacji*, Ochrona Zabytków 40 (4), 1987, p. 287.

the viticultural landscapes are materialized by underground corridors, wine cellars located on tuff slopes.<sup>53</sup> The tradition in viticulture is the heritage on the basis of which places with beautiful wine routes were formed over time, like the ones of the Carpathians, Záhoria, Nitra, Hontian, and Tokaj.<sup>54</sup> In my field research, this evidence of the wine culture was noticed in Brhlovce as well. Here, the underground spaces carved in the rock, of which some are still used for living and some are utilized for wine production and storage cellars (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Cellars for the storage of potatoes. Photo: © Dorina Dragnea 2020.

In fieldwork, carried out in Špania Dolina (Banská Bystrica District), situated in the south part of the Low Tatras, the surviving traces can still be observed indicating that the inhabitants had a long tradition of mining copper ore and copper factories, which was active until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This peculiarity has influenced the architecture of the dwelling, organization of the interior space, and shaping of the household structure, and as a result, ‘the Miners’ houses were created. Nowadays, these features were converted into decorative and aesthetic tools, giving the

53 Z. BEŇUŠKOVÁ et al., *Tradičná kultúra regiónov Slovenska*, pp. 227–228.

54 Eva ŠEVČÍKOVÁ, *Malokarpatský región – využitie tradícií v rozvoji regiónu a turizmu*, *Etnologické Rozpravy* 2, 2005, p. 131.

landscape a tourist and leisure aspect. The combination of the whitewashed walls of the houses with the black wooden architectural elements (small windows, doors) and the galleries with pillars gives an air of refinement and elegance to the dwellings. The proper placement and use of outdoor wooden "storage spaces" reflect the prudence and good handling of the topographic character of the place. The landscape of the village is intersected by small canals and pipelines for water supply, suggestive of its mining past.

Another example are the artificial water reservoirs called *tajchy*<sup>55</sup> in the Banská Štiavnica Region. They were built from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and are connected by tunnels. They were needed for supplying the mining processes with water and energy. These anthropogenic reservoirs with technical and economic utility imposed the rethinking of the ways of using the features of the lands, like actions of deepening the valleys and digging. Starting with the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century-beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the decrease of the mining activity, the role of these basins decreased too. In time they become barriers against floods; a part of them are sources of potable water, fish farming, etc.,<sup>56</sup> and more recently they are perceived as places of technical heritage sites and used for recreational activities due to their beautiful fit within the landscape.

Additionally, in relation to a mining environment and activity, some beliefs and spirits have appeared like *permoník*, a long time ago. In the faith of the locals, they were considered to be small people, like elves, who appeared in the mines and the mountains showing the miners the veins and good places to dig. Also, according to folkloric sources, the *permoníki* have shown the treasure to the miners with a noble heart. In such a case the *permoníki* help them in their work. While wicked men are led by them into the abyss of the mines. These anthropomorphic figures also love young people who live a pure life. And at their wedding, the *permoníki* demand an empty seat, and the young people give them plenty of food and drink. For this, the *permoníki* give them tallow in their lamps.<sup>57</sup> Nowadays, this mythological being enriches the folklore related to the main occupation of the region.

The pastoral culture that was and still relatively characterizes the villages in the high part of Slovakia: Orava, Liptov, Spiš Regions (e. g. in my field research - Osturňa) has inspired the production and promotion of craft goods (Figure 8), that became not just markers of one village or region, but they are considered ethnographic national sym-

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55 From the German word *der Teich* (a pond).

56 Marián LICHNER – Elena KAŠIAROVÁ – Ján NOVÁK, *Banskoštiavnické tajchy*, Banská Bystrica 2005, p. 32, 106.

57 Pavol DOBŠINSKÝ, *Prostonárodne obyčaje, povery a hry slovenské. Tlačou kníhtlač. Účastinár Spolku*, Turčiansky Svätý Martin 1880, p. 114.

bols. For example, I mention the wooden vessel-cup called *črpák*, the shepherd axe *valaška*, the *fujara*, etc. In this sense, the 'revival of material production – as Zdena Krišková asserts – is a solid pillar of the identity. There are various festivals of traditional crafts, days dedicated to specific products, but also the presentation of traditional

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Figure 8. Craft products of the shepherd's axe *valaška* and wicker baskets. Photo: © Dorina Dragnea 2020.

jobs (the days of *bryndza*, the days of *gruľove*, the days of *drevorubačské*, the days of *furmanské*).<sup>58</sup> Thus, the material evidence of the past activities printed on the landscape is used for contributing to human well-being,<sup>59</sup> and to re-articulate the aesthetic landscape values.<sup>60</sup>

**The intangible elements** consist in the ephemeral traces of the calendar feasts and customs, social community festivities, beliefs and knowledge about nature and the universe, ritual and ceremonial practices, folklore, etc., on the landscape. The examples, provided by me were selected to be interconnected with the tangible culture and natural environment. Assigning the preindustrial patterns, the people used the ritual props believing in their magical power and their actions performed in a chosen time and place. Adopting a ritualized behaviour and a familiar or community social framework, the individuals have included the resources of the landscape and it entirely as "*part of the ritual process*".<sup>61</sup>

In the socialist period, modifications of way of behaving in relation to calendar holidays have happened. For example, the celebration of cooperative harvest festivals was adopted, like the picking of grapes, the end of the gathering of sugar beet and corn, end of sheep pasture season, the feast of the fish. Many of them were celebrated at the headquarters of the JRDs, causing in such a way the transgression of the significance and place, for what and where the holiday is celebrated. Therefore, the social and professional identification with the local co-operative appeared in the feeling of belonging of the inhabitants. Also, during this period, dance parties were organized in the culture houses. These were not just buildings as foci of the socialist regime; they functioned as social adjusters for creating a collective identity and type of belonging to a social community.

In my outcomes, based on the field observation, and discussion with the residents, I chose several ethno-folkloric practices, whose functions have transgressed in recent decades to other forms like leisure, festivalization, commercialization, or some of them have lost many of their original features. They attach people to the place through

58 Zdena KRIŠKOVÁ, *Ekologicko-kultúrne aspekty tradičnej výroby a identita*, Etnologické Rozpravy 20 (1–2), 2013, p. 162.

59 Brenda Maria ZODERER – Erich TASSER – Steve CARVER – Ulrike TAPPEINER, *An Integrated Method for the Mapping of Landscape Preferences at the Regional Scale*, Ecological Indicators 106, 2019, Art. 105430.

60 Uta SCHIRPKE – Erich TASSER – Ulrike TAPPEINER, *Predicting Scenic Beauty of Mountain Regions*, Landscape Urban Planning 111, 2013, p. 1–12; Uta SCHIRPKE – Florian TIMMERMANN – Ulrike TAPPEINER – Erich TASSER, *Cultural Ecosystem Services of Mountain Regions: Modelling the Aesthetic Value*, Ecological Indicators 69, 2016, p. 78–90.

61 Howard MURPHY, *Landscape and the Reproduction of the Ancestral Past*, in: Eric Hirsch – Michael O' Hanlon (eds.), *The Anthropology of Landscape. Perspectives on Place and Space*, Oxford 1995, p. 197.

emotion and ritual behaviours, produce memories and develop intangible connections that preserve the sense of belonging.

For example, at the spring equinox ceremonies, groups of girls still execute the straw silhouette, called Mo(a)rena, Marmu(o)riena, Muriena, as well Smrt', Hejhana, Kyselica (the male version is called Dedko). According to tradition, this substitute of the human figure made from sheaves of straw, hemp, pieces of wood and dressed in women's clothes, mythologically has symbolized the female divinity associated with death, disease, night, and winter. One narrative in the ethnographic fieldwork tells that this figure "was carried by young girls (teenagers) out of the village, where it was burned and drowned in the stream. After this ritual death, the girls returned to the village and sang carols. In return, they have received eggs, flour, or money to prepare the funeral feast" – Eva narrates, a woman of fifty. Today this habit is more performed as an act of revitalization, being staged by pupils under the guidance of teachers within curricular activities.

On 1 May, the 'Maypole' tree decorated with colourful ribbons is erected at the house gate, in the middle of the village or the main square to protect the community from evil spirits, illnesses, and decorative purposes. According to the most spreader practice, in the past, this expression of vegetal hierophany was placed by the lad in front of the girl's home, near the window to show his interest in her. The beauty of the tree shows the prestige of the young man and was an honour for the girl.<sup>62</sup> A young man from Oravský Biely Potok (Tvrdošín District, Žilina Region) told me, that in the spring of 2021, he and his friends brought decorated trees to the houses of girls from his settlement and the neighbouring village, in Podbiel. The girl, to whose house they were going to go, was chosen to take into account the fact that she was liked by or had a relationship with one of the boys in the group. The young man states that this custom is alive in the village and the young people practice it to have fun. When I visited these two villages for the second time, on 16-25 May, the numerous decorated trees could be seen erected at the gate or near the door of the girl's house (Figure 9). Also, on my train journey through the villages of the Liptov region, such trees could be seen as well. These arose above the heights of the houses, creating an iconographic image of the landscape. In some villages, this tree was erected in the kindergarten or school' yard, and community centre (e.g., Veľké Leváre), or as evidence of tradition preserving in the UNESCO protected settlements (e.g., Vlkolínec). The fact shows the shift from common practice and makes this ritual object into a subject of heritage education.

62 Ján BOTÍK – Peter SLAVKOVSKÝ (eds.), *Encyklopédia Ludovej Kultúry Slovenska*, Vol. 2, Bratislava 1995.



Figure 9. Maypole, erected at household's gate, Oravský Biely Potok, Orava Region.  
Photo: © Dorina Dragnea 2021.

On the night of the feast of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist (23-24 June), the pre-Christian custom of celebrating the summer solstice and the sun has been preserved, by burning the so-called St John's Fires (Jánske Ohne – the Midsummer Bonfire). In the past, the people threw burning brooms and torches up into the air, as an imitation of the storm needed to develop vegetation and ensure a wealthy harvest. These midsummer fires were lit to protect against evil spirits. In the past, *“the fires were burned on elevated places, on hills, on slopes, or even on sticks and on hills by shepherds and on mountains by loggers”*.<sup>63</sup> Nowadays, the fires lit on this day are occasions for community members to meet in a symbolic space within or outside of the village. During the ritual, the locals and their relatives, the young people socialize, have fun, and renew and validate their social relationships. Saint John's Fires are organized by folkloric groups with the financial support of the public authorities. The feast is like a spectacle, consisting of recitals of songs sung by women, dances around the fire, and jumps over it made by men.

These folkloric traditions express a synergetic construct, that initially began their roots in mythological beliefs and deities which were subsequently integrated into part of the Christian customs. Their function has also shifted from utility and practice, still closely linked to faiths, to concerns and tools for returning to the identity and cultural affirmation of the contemporary rural communities.<sup>64</sup> Examples in this sense are the *Fujara Festival* in Čičmany (Žilina region), *The Folklore Festival Podroháčske folklórne* held in the village of Zuberec and in the Museum of the Orava Village. Another example is the *Hontian Parade Festival*, which is organized by the village of Hrušov (Banská Bystrica Region) since 1996.

The regional and local communities are trying to recover these cultural practices by promoting them as an economic, social, and cultural good. It is necessary to mention that the features of ritual and ceremonial facts have been filtered by globalization trends. This phenomenon is happening as well as a result of the aging of the rural population and depopulation, of the migration vectors towards the main cities or abroad, the adoption of the urban lifestyle in rural areas that ensure comfort and access to goods, the attempt of the young generation to get rid of the feeling of provincialism, etc. However, the identity built by them remains an instrument for adapting the individuals into the cultural global convergence and finding himself/herself in a culture familiar to them, and that can offer them a feeling of security.

63 Pavol SOCHÁN, *Svätojánske ohne na Slovensku*, Bratislava 2015.

64 See more at J. DARULOVÁ – K. KOŠTIALOVÁ – Z. KRIŠKOVÁ, *Vidiek tradičný, moderný a inšpiratívny*.



## Conclusion

In the article, the continuities and discontinuities of the tangible and intangible ethnographic elements, with symbolic and real identity values, expressed on/in landscapes, synchronically and diachronically were revealed and interpreted. Examples were given from various regions in Slovakia, especially from eight rural sites, where I observed the manifestation of the modern rurality, in which the rural communities re-evaluate, diversify their roles, and re-brand their past, landscapes and heritage elements. The identity feelings of the countryside communities from the mountainous area, as well from the Danube Valley are symbolically, economically nurtured by nature and the local cultural heritage, safeguarded and capitalized using investments for the complex needs of the contemporary people.

The ethnographic examples related to the building infrastructure of the rural areas given in the article show that nowadays their image and identity value of them have been modelled and even shifted by the ideological, economical programmes, and rural design plans implemented during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the trends of the globalist era, rural development under the patterns of neoliberalism has been influenced in such a way that the living space of the locals has become accommodation rooms for tourists as well. In this way, the Goral farmsteads from Osturňa and Ždiar, the dwellings painted with folk ornaments in Čičmany, the preserved architecture and lime-pictured colourful houses in Vlkolínec, the rock underground dwellings in Brhlovce are all ethnographic markers and reveal the long functional and aesthetic relation between the local communities and their environment. In addition, their framing and arrangement in the built-up area of the village, re-conditioning interventions or poor conditions, their mixing with new economic buildings (factories and workshops, commercial buildings, agricultural farms), infrastructure system (national and locals roads, bridges), recreational facilities (swimming pools, ski slopes, eco-tourism itineraries, and hiking paths, terraces, and restaurants, private and state museums, etc. ) show that the cultural landscape, which they create, is simultaneously a scene of the crises and a testimony of prosperity. It reveals the evolution of the society and its adaptation to current processes like rural urbanization, migration, capital investment, and social fractures.

The buildings with spiritual functions and their surrounding elements, and places reveal the denominations of the people and their materiality, daily practice, and particular processions imprinted on the landscape. The vibrant acts of devotion performed by the locals, observed in the field, show two aspects. The first reflects a high degree of religiosity, the popular and official ones, a feeling

that preserves social patterns, stimulates or inspires popular phenomena. The second shows the consistency of the practitioners in reconditioning and rehabilitating the good condition of the holy monuments to preserve and symbolically claim their identity.

In the researched localities, I found that the economic activities of the inhabitants, on the one hand, are in line with the previous models, using the local resources and production of the goods, for them to be consumed or for trade. On the other hand, their activities are more oriented towards services, like agro-tourism – e. g. wine production in Brhlovce (Levice District, Nitra Region), eco-tourism, accommodation services in Podbiel and Oravský Biely Potok (Tvrdošín District, Žilina Region), or Vlkolínec (Ružomberok District, Žilina Region), Osturňa and Ždiar (Kežmarok District, Prešov Region), and Špania Dolina (Banská Bystrica District and Region), handcrafts – e.g., in Čičmany (Žilina District and Region) and Veľké Leváre (Malacky District, Bratislava Region). Adapting occupations to market requirements and providing the original goods involve capitalizing on local conditions, such as transforming old economic shelters into workshops (e. g. for artistic wood processing) for visitors or building other edifices (e.g., houses, and cottages) inspired by vernacular architecture. The residents are aware of and recognize the value of nature, and the state of well-being ensured by the surrounding landscape, which interferes with local development and access to various economic possibilities. Thus, elderly persons are more nostalgic and attached to the place, while young people leave the villages or launch their tourist businesses, offer accommodation services for re-building that rural paradise for travellers. In such a way they convert the crisis, taking advantage of the natural landscape's benefits. The private farms mix the traditional and identity occupations (like in agriculture, pasture, vinification) with alternative activities, or transgress them towards agro-tourism. The sources of the cultural landscape and the landscape itself are perceived as a conglomerate construct used as an industrial, agricultural, touristic, and heritage product.

My personal findings referring to the level and form of how the intangible elements express and made the landscape are based on the following ideas. The significance of the selected ritual and ceremonial practices (Morena, Maypole, and St. John's Fires) associated with the seasonal religious and folk feasts are preserved by the collective memory, they are respected and consciously performed by the individuals (e.g., the Orava Region) from their own initiative. As well, in the majority of cases, the performance of customs and ceremonies are initiated and managed by individuals under the auspices of the schools,

local centres of culture, and NGOs. In addition, community members continue keeping certain customs due to the fact that they perceive them as nostalgic reminders of the past, mechanisms for leisure, and diversification of the entertainment types. These local cultural practices enrich and beautify the surrounding scenery and so together set up touristic resources, and ensure an inclusive life for all members of the community, being excerpts of and re-enactments from genuine performances.

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### **Summary**

In the article, focused on the rural area in Slovakia, the author provides ethnographic insight into the re-contextualizing forms of the identity marks and the ways of re-shaping the landscape's elements, having an emic and etic approaches. The research introduces the perspective of the non-native researcher with the selected cultural terrain and group. Attention is directed to the contemporary aspects of the landscape and its ethnographic elements, as they were noticed in situ, the synchronic and chronologic views of them are considered as well. Various examples of the units (the building elements, the economic activities, and the intangible elements), with symbolic and real identity values, are given from eight rural sites, where ethnographic field research was carried out. The study analyses them in order to follow how these elements are

imprinted on the landscape, and how it itself is appreciated, and shaped by the community. In such a way, it is noticed that the elements of the cultural landscape in selected rural sites are ambivalent scenes of the crises and development; of economic, political ideologies and cultural patterns; of collective choices and actions; of the identity articulation, and of its pursuit.