

THE FRAGILITY OF NARRATIVE HERITAGE TRANSMISSION: VULNERABILITY OF AN INTANGIBLE RESOURCE IN A RURAL COMMUNITY IN KALOTASZEG, TRANSYLVANIA

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ABSTRACT. *The Fragility of Narrative Heritage Transmission: Vulnerability of an Intangible Resource in a Rural Community in Kalotaszeg, Transylvania.* Narrative heritage, understood as the stories a community uses to interpret its past and sustain its identity, remains insufficiently documented empirically in Romanian villages, where research has concentrated either on the conservation of material culture or on the tourism development of intangible heritage. The article analyses local narratives in Sâncraiu (Kalotaszeg, Cluj County), a predominantly Hungarian rural community, along three lines: which narratives circulate at local sites, the extent to which these rest on narrative supports and the mechanisms by which they are transmitted, and how far they reach the visitor. The research was designed as a qualitative, exploratory multiple case study, on three purposively selected sites: the Reformed church, an agritourism guesthouse and a local artisan ice cream producer. The data came from three semi-structured interviews, from direct observation and from 684 public reviews extracted from Google Maps (2016-2026), of which 291 contain text. The unit of analysis was the narrative sequence, including small stories; the thematic analysis identified 77 sequences, organised into 17 codes and four thematic families, one of them emergent and concerning authenticity and transmission. The results suggest that the narrative resource described here is available and rests on identifiable supports, but that

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its transmission structure is fragile. Three distinct regimes of narrative support emerged. At the religious site, the narrative rests on dated material elements and on recurrent institutional frameworks. At the guesthouse, it rests on a visitor route through the homestead but depends on a single bearer. At the economic site, it rests on the person of the producer rather than on the settlement. Comparison with the reviews shows that elements placed by respondents at the centre of their accounts appear rarely in visitor discourse, whereas the relationship with the person who mediates is the component most consistently retained.

Keywords: narrative heritage; small stories; rural tourism; authenticity; user-generated content; Transylvania

1. INTRODUCTION

Local knowledge is a resource for the sustainable development of local communities and can be converted into cultural capital for rural tourism (Reyes-García et al., 2022; Zhong et al., 2026). Part of this resource has a material support (vernacular architecture, artefacts, built landscape) and contributes to defining a community's identity and its capacity to adapt to change (Reimão Costa et al., 2022; Hidalgo Zambrano et al., 2023). Another part consists of the stories a community uses to interpret its past and sustain its sense of belonging, a component referred to below as narrative heritage and corresponding to the category of oral traditions and expressions in the UNESCO classification (2003). The distinction from material heritage lies in the nature of the heritage object, not in any absence of a link to objects or places. The heritage object here is the act of telling the story, of listening to it and of transmitting it (Qiu et al., 2022; Lee, 2023). This act is carried out through interpretation, participation and interaction, processes that link the tangible dimension of heritage to its intangible meanings (Doğan & Kan, 2020; Hodsdon, 2020).

The transmission of this type of heritage is vulnerable. Local communities are the principal bearers and custodians of this heritage, yet they face pressures generated by globalisation, modernisation and accelerated socio-economic change, which can lead to the degradation or even the disappearance of cultural forms (Aziz, 2017; Ardren, 2018; Ferreira, 2018). Rural tourism adds to these pressures, and recent literature treats it at once as an instrument for revitalising traditional villages and as a factor that can disrupt the life of local communities and erode the cultural forms it makes use of (Li et al., 2024; Soták-Benedeková et al., 2025). Globally, one in five manifestations of intangible cultural heritage is directly threatened by a lack of practice and transmission, against a background of socio-economic pressures (Falk & Hagsten, 2025). In Romania, the decline has also been associated with a reconfiguration of identity. Rural memory has been described as 'counter-memory' (subaltern or defensive), with the local histories of villages marginalised or rewritten by the official

narrative of the communist state (Light & Young, 2015). In post-socialist landscapes, the disappearance of the traditional way of life makes the oral history of rural areas particularly vulnerable (Boršić & Šuligoj, 2023). Under these conditions, the transmission of Romanian rural narratives is exposed to discontinuity, and the phenomenon remains insufficiently documented empirically.

Against this background, initiatives have emerged that reactivate heritage by recontextualising it in the physical landscape, through projects such as 'Poteci cu povești' (Asociația Plaiuri Noi, 2026), which propose an affective mapping of the landscape (Schriek, 2019). The revitalisation of cultural narratives supports historical continuity, and narrative trails make use of the intangible elements of heritage (Rățulea et al., 2023; Cao et al., 2025). By engaging the imagination, stories turn inconspicuous or forgotten geographical landmarks into experiences perceived as authentic and contribute to the reconstruction of a sense of belonging (Derbaix & Gombault, 2016; Lee, 2023; Simons & de Waal, 2025). Such interventions, however, implicitly treat the material marking of a narrative support as equivalent to its mediation to the visitor. The presupposition is rarely tested empirically: the literature documents the production of narratives and their supports, and far less their mediation at site level and their actual reception. Two strands are well represented in research on rural Romania: one that privileges the conservation of material culture (Maxim & Chașovschi, 2021) and one that approaches intangible heritage through tourism development or spatial regeneration (Rățulea et al., 2023). User-generated content (UGC), and public online reviews in particular, offers a route of access to this last dimension. Reviews can be treated as expressions of visitor experience, in which selections, reformulations and interpretations of the elements encountered at the destination appear (D'Orazio et al., 2025), and they make it possible to examine tourist experiences, perceptions of sites and the features that attract visitors' attention (Cuomo et al., 2021).

This article addresses that gap through an exploratory case study of Sâncraiu (Kalotaszeg), a predominantly Hungarian rural community with a strong tourism profile. It pursues three research questions: (a) which narratives circulate at local sites; (b) which identifiable supports (material, spatial, institutional or personal) these narratives rest on; and (c) by which mechanisms they are mediated and how far they are received by the visitor. The methodological contribution lies in using UGC as an instrument for checking transmission and not as a source of information about the sites. Narrative support and transmission can therefore be documented separately. The study is exploratory and descriptive. It documents the availability and the transmission structure of a narrative resource, without testing the effects of that resource on community cohesion.

2. NARRATIVE HERITAGE: SUPPORT, MEDIATION, RECEPTION

2.1. From intangible cultural heritage to narrative heritage

The conceptual development of heritage underwent a paradigm shift with the adoption of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which moved from the exclusive protection of material culture to the valuing of human expressions and oral traditions (UNESCO, 2003). The Convention defines intangible cultural heritage as the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their heritage, together with the instruments, objects and cultural spaces associated with them. Of the five domains set out by the Convention, this study relates exclusively to the first, oral traditions and expressions, including storytelling.

The literature distinguishes between archived, musealised, statically conserved heritage and heritage that is practised, performative and living (Taylor, 2003). The distinction has consequences for the study of rural communities: beyond its status as an object of conservation, heritage operates as a social practice that communities use to negotiate their belonging, their values and their continuity. From this perspective, authenticity is relational: it arises from the relations among bearers, contexts and forms of transmission (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004; Li & Qu, 2022).

Narrative heritage places the emphasis on the stories, myths, memories and explanations that communities use to interpret their past and construct their identity. Here, it is understood as a form of intangible cultural heritage made up of sequences of discourse through which a bearer associates an event, a practice, a person or an object with the identity and the memory of a place. The category covers accounts that are recognised by the community, tied to an identifiable reference point and transmissible in interaction with visitors. The definition therefore excludes information about the past that does not meet these conditions (Qiu et al., 2022; Reimão Costa et al., 2022; Türker, 2026).

2.2. Narrative support: from *lieux de mémoire* to bearers

As used here, narrative support denotes the material, spatial, institutional or personal element that allows a narrative to be located and recognised. Such a support may be a dated object, a building, a homestead, a route, a religious practice, an economic activity or the person who holds and transmits the story. The notion is therefore not reducible to the existence of a material object, since a narrative may also be tied to a route, to an institutional framework or to the biography of a local actor (Doğan & Kan, 2020; Ginzarly et al., 2021).

This narrative dimension connects directly to the concept of *lieux de mémoire*, established by Nora (1989). Pfister (2011) and Marschall (2013) hold that *lieux de mémoire* emerge when the living environment of memory is threatened by forgetting. In post-socialist states, the conceptualisation of *lieux de mémoire* acquires new dimensions. Boršić and Šuligoj (2023) propose the paradigm of competitive *lieux de mémoire*, explaining that in these geographies spaces carry superimposed and at times contested layers of memory. At the same time, Zubrzycki and Woźny (2020) show that in identity politics these sites amount to considerably more than mere recollections and become active instruments for legitimising the community and its worldview. Extrapolated to rural Romania, the concept suggests that a *lieu de mémoire* does not require public monumentality. Chelcea's (2003) analysis of domestic groups in socialist Romania does not address memory directly, but it shows that the household functions as a unit of family continuity; by extension, it can be treated here as a possible narrative support. The present analysis therefore follows small-scale reference points (an old house, an item of household inventory, a crossroads) whose heritage status comes from the accounts attached to them and not from their architectural value.

In small communities, narratives sustain memory and at the same time constitute the social bond. Somers (1994) describes this mechanism through the concept of narrative ontology: individuals construct their identity and their social ties by integrating their own lives into a network of collective narratives, beyond geographical proximity and economic interests. Stories sustain social ties and mutual recognition, and their symbolic component produces a sense of place. Community cohesion thus appears as a multidimensional construct, sustained through narrative capabilities (Masungu et al., 2025). More broadly, Reimão Costa et al. (2022) argue that in rural territories the protection and practice of intangible heritage is a precondition for sustainable community development.

2.3. Mediation and reception of the narrative

The literature on immersive experience at heritage sites treats the relation between narrative, interpretation and the construction of meaning as part of the visitor experience. In this study, mediation is understood as the process through which a material element, a space, a practice or a person is connected to its cultural and narrative meanings. Mediation may take place in conversation with a local resident, or through guiding, an institution, a thematic trail, the arrangement of objects, an explanatory text or a digital device (Doğan & Kan, 2020). Research on the co-design of the tourist experience shows that big social data and user-generated content can supply information about tourists' experience and can support the analysis of how that experience is designed and managed (Cuomo et al., 2021).

Reception denotes here the extent to which narrative elements mediated at the site reappear in the public discourse of visitors. It is operationalised through user-generated content. The use of online reviews to analyse perceptions of heritage is also supported by recent research based on Google Maps (D'Orazio et al., 2025). An analysis of TripAdvisor reviews of Tintagel Castle shows that visitors respond differently to the relation between the material ruins, history and legend. Some reviews integrate the ruins into a historical narrative and stimulate visitors' imagination, whereas other elements of the site do not produce the same interpretive effect (Hodsdon, 2020).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Study area

Sâncraiu is one of the constituent villages of the commune of the same name, alongside Alunișu, Brăișoru, Domoșu and Horlacea, and lies within the Kalotaszeg ethnographic region (Romanian Order of Architects, 2016), in Cluj County (Fig. 1, Table 1). At the 2021 Population and Housing Census, the commune had 1,558 inhabitants, of whom 321 were Romanians and 1,191 Hungarians. The analysis focused on three sites representative of the Hungarian community: the Reformed church, Pensiunea Episcopul and Înghețata Adam. The village lies at an altitude of around 600 m.

Table 1. Population of Sâncraiu commune by ethnicity and religion

Ethnicity	Inhabitants (no.)	Religion	Inhabitants (no.)
Total	1,558	Total	1,558
Romanians	321	Orthodox	271
Hungarians	1,191	Roman Catholic	19
Italians	3	Reformed	1,122
Other ethnicity	6	Greek Catholic	24
		Baptist	50
		Evangelical Christian	9
Data not available	37	Data not available	63

Source: Population and Housing Census (2021)



Fig. 1. Location of Sâncraiu in its territorial context

The commune recorded 4,114 arrivals in tourist accommodation establishments in 2025, down from the 2015 maximum of 8,251 arrivals. One licensed local travel agency, Davincze Tours, operates in the village and markets an offer built around rural tourism. Within the administrative area of Sâncraiu village, 44 accommodation units hold official classification, mostly agritourism guesthouses followed by rooms to let, together with one food service establishment (General Directorate for Tourism, 2026a, b). Local accessibility is completed by the Huedin-Călățele cycle path and by proximity to the Negreni fair.

3.2. Data and methods

The research was designed as a qualitative, exploratory multiple case study. The study area was the Hungarian rural community of Sâncraiu, and the cases analysed comprised three local sites: the Reformed church, Pensiunea Episcopul and Înghetata Adam. The narrative sequence was chosen as the unit of analysis so as to allow cross-site comparison independently of the number of interviews conducted. The study set out to identify the narratives present at the sites analysed and to assess the type of support these narratives rest on, together with the way in which they are transmitted within the community. The sites were

selected through purposive sampling, on the basis of four criteria: coverage of three categories of attraction (religious heritage, tourism and economic activity), differing longevity of the activity (twelfth–thirteenth centuries, 1996 and 2006), the availability of a volume of reviews that allows triangulation (Table 2), and membership of the Hungarian community.

Primary data were collected through three semi-structured interviews, conducted on 18 May 2026 with respondents who know the site under analysis best: the Reformed pastor, the owner of the guesthouse and of the local travel agency, and the owner of the ice cream workshop. The interviews were complemented by direct observation, recorded in unstructured form and used contextually, to describe the sites. Secondary data drew on (a) statistical sources: General Directorate for Tourism (2026a, b, c), that is, the list of licensed travel agencies, the list of tourist accommodation establishments and the list of food service establishments; the National Institute of Statistics, Tempo online database, tourist flows; and the Population and Housing Census (2021), population structure by ethnicity; and (b) user-generated content (UGC) in the form of 684 reviews, extracted manually from Google Maps between 19 and 24 July 2026 (Table 2).

Table 2. Temporal distribution of the reviews associated with the case studies

Year	Pensiunea Episcopul	Reformed church	Înghetata Adam
2016	0	1	0
2017	6	1	0
2018	19	6	0
2019	18	40	14
2020	12	37	34
2021	12	1	66
2022	14	4	80
2023	15	0	78
2024	22	6	73
2025	20	7	69
2026	6	2	21
TOTAL	144	105	435

Source: Google Maps

The interviews followed a common interview guide (Appendix 1) covering three main themes: the story of the place, that is, the identity of the place; the individual story of the site; and the way the site, and by implication the village of Sâncraiu, is perceived by others. Respondents were designated by codes (I1–I3) and are not named, and verbal informed consent was obtained from each

respondent before recording. Anonymisation is not achievable, since the sites are unique units in a named village, and the role associated with each code (Table 3) allows a reader familiar with the community to identify the person. The codes therefore serve as a reference device in the text; they do not constitute a measure of identity protection. The interviews were conducted in Romanian, a second language for all three respondents, who are native speakers of Hungarian (Table 3). This followed from the language skills available in the research team and is an acknowledged limitation. The quotations reproduced in the results section were subject to minimal editing, without alteration of content. The audio recordings were transcribed using the online automatic transcription service TurboScribe (<https://turboscribe.com>). The Whale transcription mode was used, with speaker recognition enabled. All transcripts were subsequently checked and corrected manually against the original recordings before analysis. The text was retained in spoken form, without stylistic normalisation. The content was then coded and interpreted. Because many of the narratives produced by the interviewees did not fit the standard questions of the interview guide, the study drew on small stories (Georgakopoulou-Nunes, 2022), which were subsequently integrated into the analysis.

Table 3. Data associated with the interviews conducted

Interview code	Interview duration	Interviewee details	Location
11	43'	Owner of guesthouse and of Davincze Tours travel agency, over 60, male	Pensiunea Episcopul (Püspök)
12	12'	Pastor of the Reformed church, over 50, male	Reformed church, Sâncraiu
13	12'	Owner of Înghetata Adam, over 50, female	Înghetata Adam

The unit of analysis was the narrative sequence, defined as a fragment of discourse in which the respondent recounts an event, a state of affairs or a practice. Both extended accounts and short, fragmentary narratives arising spontaneously outside the guide questions (small stories) were retained (Häyrynen & Hämeenaho, 2020; Saint Arnault & Šinko, 2021). Coding, which followed segmentation, was carried out in Microsoft Excel: the transcripts were read in full, and each sequence identified received a code, with the source interview marked (Table 5). On the basis of the coding, a deductive thematic analysis was carried out, with three code families established a priori by correspondence with the themes of the interview guide: the identity of the place (C1), the individual story of the site (C2), and external perceptions of the site and of the village (C3). The deductive approach allows systematic comparison between sites without precluding the identification of sub-themes emerging in the

course of coding (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Byrne, 2022; Naeem et al., 2023), as was the case with the fourth family, concerning authenticity and transmission (C4), which was constituted across the three sites. The distinction is marked in Table 5 by code type (G, derived from the guide; E, emergent). Coding generated 44 codes, reduced to a final 17 by merging those with overlapping content and eliminating those supported by a single sequence with no counterpart at another site or under another theme. The initial assignment of codes was produced with Claude (Anthropic), starting from the code families established a priori. All sequences and assignments were subsequently checked manually by the authors against the transcripts, and the consolidation of the final scheme and the interpretation are the authors' alone.

The user-generated content consisted of all reviews publicly displayed on Google Maps for the three sites (N = 684, of which Pensiunea Episcopul N = 144, Reformed church N = 105, Înghețata Adam N = 435). For each review, the textual content, the rating given, the year of posting, the language declared by the platform as the language of the original content, and the number of likes and shares were recorded. The data were organised in Microsoft Excel. The analysis was carried out in two stages. In the first, the annual distribution of reviews (Table 2), the distribution of ratings by score class (Table 4) and the distribution of languages of composition (Table 4) were calculated. In the second stage, the textual content was read in full, and mentions of the narrative elements recounted in the interviews were extracted from each review, together with narrative elements appearing in reviews with no counterpart in the interviews. The result is presented as a matrix of correspondence between the two discourses (Table 6). The reviews were treated as expressions of visitor perception, comparable with the respondents' accounts on the same themes, and not as sources of factual information about the sites. Reviews written in languages other than Romanian were consulted in the automatic translation publicly displayed by the platform. This option limits the linguistic analysis; its effect on thematic coding, carried out at the level of content, could not be assessed. The extraction of mentions from reviews was carried out entirely manually, without automated assistance, and was checked through a second reading of the textual corpus by a second author, with no discrepancies reported.

Of the 684 reviews, 291 (42.5%) contain text, and this proportion differs between sites: 52.8% at Pensiunea Episcopul (76 of 144), 41.4% at Înghețata Adam (180 of 435) and 33.3% at the Reformed church (35 of 105). The remaining 393 reviews (57.5%) are ratings without content. The language analysis was carried out exclusively on these 291 reviews (Table 4). The distinction matters because the platform also assigns a language to ratings that lack textual content, on the basis of the user profile, and including them would produce values that are not comparable between sites. The linguistic profiles are distinct. Pensiunea Episcopul has the most international structure: Hungarian (36 reviews, 47.4%)

and English (31, 40.8%) are the dominant languages, with Romanian appearing in only six reviews (7.9%). The Reformed church shows the reverse structure: 28 of the 35 reviews with text (80.0%) are written in Romanian, followed by six in Hungarian (17.1%) and one in English. Înghetata Adam has an intermediate profile, dominated by Romanian (128 of 180, 71.1%), with 34 reviews in English (18.9%) and 14 in Hungarian (7.8%).

Table 4. Distribution of the reviews associated with the case studies, by rating and language

Tourist attraction	Rating Distribution (Score Breakdown)					Top Languages Breakdown					
	1*	2*	3*	4*	5*	With text	Romanian	Hungarian	English	Other languages	Without text
Pensiunea Episcopul	4	1	3	19	117	76	6	36	31	3	68
Reformed church	1	2	6	7	89	35	28	6	1	0	70
Înghetata Adam	5	5	9	23	393	180	128	14	34	4	255
Total	10	8	18	49	599	291	162	56	66	7	393

Source: Google Maps

The reviews constitute public content, accessible without authentication. The authors quoted in the results section were designated by the initials of the displayed user name and the year of posting; no other personal data were collected, and no full names, photographs or profile elements were reproduced.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Community reference points in Sâncraiu

The cross-site analysis of the three interviews brought out a set of reference points through which respondents define Sâncraiu as a settlement, beyond the site each of them represents. Reformed confessional affiliation and the Hungarian language formed the frame of reference of all the accounts. According to I2, the Reformed community in Sâncraiu numbers 720 people, and services are held in Hungarian. According to the 2021 Census, the number of officially registered Reformed inhabitants is 1,122 (Table 1). The two figures are not directly comparable: the first refers to declared parish membership at the level of Sâncraiu village, the second to religious self-identification across the whole commune, including its constituent villages. The respondent situated this affiliation within the Kalotaszeg ethnographic region, where the churches are Reformed, a single locality in the entire region having remained Roman Catholic; in his account, the confessional allegiance of the villages was determined in the Middle Ages by the choice of the count, in this region the Bánffy family. Alongside the Reformed community, I2 noted a small Baptist community and an

Orthodox community of approximately 100 people, together with the present absence of Roman Catholics. I2 reported attendance of 130-150 worshippers at the Sunday service and of approximately 300 at Easter. Confessional affiliation was also invoked away from the religious site: asked about the walking pilgrimages to Șumuleu Ciuc, I1 delimited the community by reference to religious practice (*'We don't go, because we're Reformed'*), without this excluding the village's role in the pilgrimage circuit. I1 stated that groups from western Hungary on pilgrimage to Șumuleu Ciuc use the village as a first stop, with an overnight stay.

The only dated reference point through which the village's tourism profile is marked in time is the year 1991, mentioned solely by I1. I1 associated the first edition of the International Folk Dance and Music Camp (Tabăra Internațională de Dansuri și Muzică Populară) (Pop, 2014), held in the first week of August, with the arrival of the first tourists and with the formation of a nucleus of approximately 15 families who accommodated participants. This nucleus was described as a pre-existing base for the development of agritourism after 1996 (Radio Vacanța, 2024).

In I1, the description of the village for an outside visitor was constructed by denying the existence of an attraction resource and by invoking geographical position. The respondent explicitly stated the absence of a differentiating element of the resource type (*'we don't have salt baths like at Praid, or a salt mine'*), attributing the village's distinctive character to hospitality, to its position on the route between Budapest and Székely Land, and to its status as 'gateway to the Apuseni Mountains'. His recommendations for visitors concerned, for the most part, attractions outside the village: the Răchițele waterfall, the Beliș dam, the church at Văleni, the riding stables at Călata, the trails towards Muntele de Piatră (Bogdan peak, ~1,150 m) and Vlădeasa, and the Huedin-Călățele cycle path. Within the village, three attractions were indicated: the Reformed church, the folk costume presentation and the museum set up in the respondent's old house. In institutional terms, Sâncraiu was awarded the title of European Youth Village for 2025 and 2026 (Ministry of Labour, Family, Youth and Social Solidarity, 2025).

Seasonality was invoked by all respondents as the structuring feature of the activity, with explicit calendar thresholds. I1 delimited a seven-month tourist season. I3 reported a comparable cycle of approximately six months of tourism activity, with a fixed opening on 15 April and a weather-dependent closure in November. At the religious site, seasonality takes the form of variation in attendance, with a maximum at Easter. In I1, seasonality was accompanied by an observation on changing winter conditions. The respondent placed the last winter with snow cover sufficient for sleigh rides in 2016, noting that the New Year's Eve programme was subsequently reconfigured by replacing the sleigh with a cart. The respondent recounted the change as a loss in the quality of the experience (*'a cart ride isn't the same feeling'*), and not as a logistical adaptation.

The village's tourism activity is structured by a calendar of events with fixed dates, listed in I1: the international folk dance and music camp in the first week of August, the Grape Ball in autumn, the Negreni fair as a generator of external demand, and the Rosehip Festival in the third weekend of October, described explicitly as the closing moment of the tourist season. The Rosehip Festival was recounted as a collective undertaking of the guesthouse owners, and not as an individual initiative.

Intergenerational discontinuity was the theme common to all three interviews, with a single exception. I1 reported a fall in the number of operating guesthouses from a maximum of 45 to approximately 20. The same respondent attributed the withdrawals to the owners' age (over 70), to the introduction of mandatory cash registers and to the COVID-19 pandemic. Independently of this explanation, officially recorded arrivals followed a downward trend over the same period (Fig. 2). The absence of young people who might start new activities was noted, as was the difficulty of recruiting labour for a seven-month season. The number of operating units declared by I1 differs from the 44 classified accommodation units recorded by the General Directorate for Tourism (2026a), cited in Section 3.1. Discontinuity was reported both in economic activity and in the cultural repertoire.

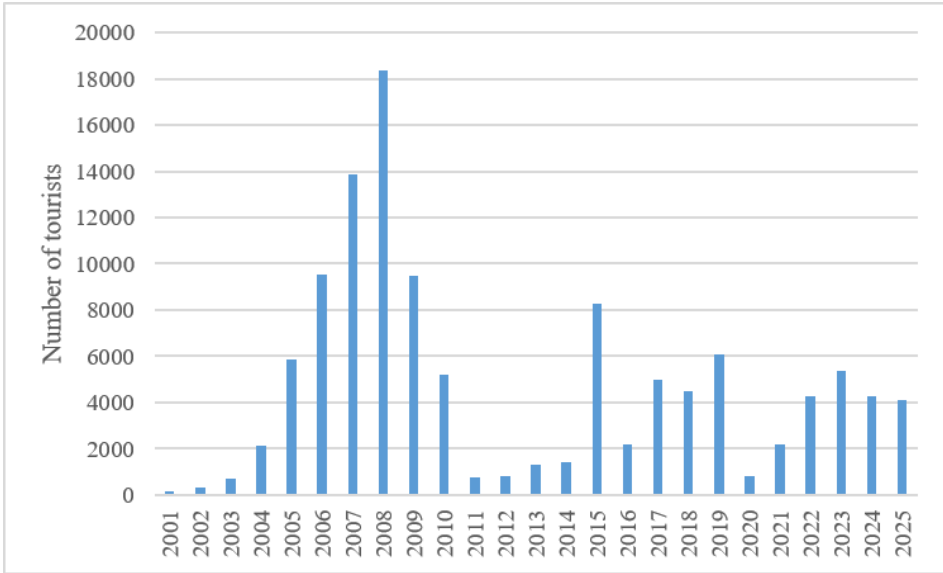


Fig. 2. Tourist arrivals in tourist accommodation establishments
Source: National Institute of Statistics – Tempo online

4.2. Analysis of the narratives by site

The site-level analysis followed the three themes of the interview guide (the identity of the place, C1; the individual story of the site, C2; and external perceptions of the site and of the village, C3), to which was added an emergent code family, constituted across the three sites, concerning authenticity and transmission (C4). The coding identified 77 narrative sequences, unevenly distributed between sites (Table 5). The absence of a code at a site is recorded as a result and indicates that the theme was neither activated spontaneously nor produced by the guide questions. In Section 4.1, the accounts were treated as a source of information about the settlement. Here the unit of analysis is the narrative sequence itself, together with the form in which the story is told, the support it rests on and the framework through which it is transmitted. Code definitions and illustrative quotations are given in Appendix 2.

Table 5. Distribution of narrative sequences by code and site

Code	Name	Type	Distribution of narrative sequences (no.)			
			I1	I2	I3	Total
C1	Identity of the place	G				
C1.1	Local roots	G	2	0	1	3
C1.2	Distinctive character derived from belonging to a wider framework	E	6	2	0	8
C1.3	Normative attachment to inherited practice	E	2	0	0	2
C1.4	Recognition attached to the person, not to the place	E	0	0	2	2
C2	Individual story of the site	G				
C2.1	Origin of the activity: trajectory and external trigger	E	3	0	2	5
C2.2	Continuous external orientation	G	2	0	1	3
C2.3	Compliance with regulations and conversion of spaces	E	5	0	0	5
C2.4	Development of the offer	G	2	0	4	6
C2.5	Vulnerability to external factors	E	2	0	1	3
C2.6	Seasonality and labour	G	2	0	1	3
C2.7	Continuity of the activity and succession	G	3	1	1	5
C3	External perceptions of the site and of the village	G				
C3.1	Mediation of heritage for the visitor	E	4	4	0	8
C3.2	Promotional effort (active or absent)	E	2	0	2	4
C3.3	Recognition and customer loyalty	E	4	0	3	7
C3.4	Recommendations for visitors	G	2	1	0	3
C4	Authenticity and transmission (cross-site)	E				
C4.1	Asserted authenticity	E	5	0	1	6
C4.2	Eroded authenticity	E	4	0	0	4

Note: G, codes derived from the structure of the interview guide; E, emergent codes arising from the interviews

4.2.1. The Reformed church

The religious site produced the narrowest thematic repertoire of the three: four active codes out of seventeen (C1.2, C2.7, C3.1, C3.4). In the absence of an individual story, the identity of the place was constructed entirely through chronology: the construction of the church in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, with the uncertainty of the dating explicitly acknowledged; the fifteenth-century extension; and the shift to the Reformed confession in the sixteenth century. This chronology is organised around a single threshold, the fire of 1848 during the Revolution, which separates the building visible today from the medieval one: the 1850 restoration allowed services to resume but did not reinstate the coffered ceiling, replaced at that point with a plain whitewashed ceiling (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. The Reformed church, Sâncraiu

Photo: Radu-Mihai Tamasi

The narratives of the site rest on visible and dated material elements. The plain ceiling next to the coffered one functions as a trace of the fire only once it has been explained, and the bright colours of the coffering become an argument for dating (the painting is from 1994) only by comparison with churches that have kept their original coffering, where the tones are paler. The clearest case is the wheat-ear decoration: the sequence emerged only after a request for clarification; the research team had initially taken the object for a lighting fixture. The explanation offered, that it is a sign of thanks addressed to God in an economy in which every family grew its own wheat for bread and the harvest depended on the weather (*'if the weather wasn't good, there was no point sowing'*), makes an otherwise opaque decorative object intelligible by linking it to a vanished agrarian practice. The same organising logic is found in the interior space: the traditional segregation by sex in the nave, with the exception of families who choose to sit together in the chancel, and the allocation of separate pews for the girls being confirmed, for the boys and for the pastor's wife (C1). The dated repertoire recounted by I2 is, however, selective: it covers the construction, the

fifteenth-century extension, the shift to the Reformation, the fire of 1848, the restoration of 1850, the 1994 coffering and the pulpit crown, dated 1867 and physically pointed out during the visit. The tower, the organ and the bells were not mentioned, although these do appear in visitors' reviews (Section 4.3).

Transmission here depends on recurrent frameworks and not on an individual bearer, as it does at the other two sites. The service, confirmation and guided visits periodically reactivate the same repertoire, and the musical practice is participatory: the whole community sings, the choir intervenes only at festivals, the organ is used at every service, and the hymns are collected in a dedicated volume. The continuity of these frameworks is nonetheless reflected in low figures: five people confirmed in the current year and ten expected for the next.

The vulnerability of the site therefore does not follow from the disappearance of a narrator, but from the contraction of the group taking part in transmission. In keeping with the institutional register, the only recommendation addressed to visitors concerned the site itself, through its dated components; the village as a whole was not mentioned. Transmission nevertheless remains conditional on the availability of a particular person at a particular moment: access to the building outside services is not regulated through published visiting hours, and mediation is provided in turn by the pastor, by the caretaker or by a person who gives presentations to groups (Section 4.3).

4.2.2. Pensiunea Episcopul

The identity of the place is constructed through negation and relational positioning (C1.2, six sequences; the content is described in Section 4.1). Set against this construction is a normative attachment to inherited practice (C1.3), formulated prescriptively and not descriptively: *'not a single skirt should be sold', 'concrete and steel have no business in the countryside'*. C1.3 occurs at this site alone and marks the shift from heritage as inventory to heritage as a rule of conduct.

The origin of the activity (C2.1) is recounted as an enforced change of course. The sequence articulates three successive moments: the change of profile of the industrial secondary school in Huedin, the bankruptcy of the import-export firm, unemployment in 1996, and an external trigger (*'someone came up with this idea'*), against the background of a pre-existing base formed by the families who accommodated participants in the dance camp. The refusal of mobility (*'I don't want to move even to the city, let alone leave the country'*) functions as the premise of the whole trajectory. The same structure organises the later sequences on the development of the tourism offer: the Rosehip Festival is attributed to a question put by a professor from a university in Hungary, and promotional practices to observing competitors at international fairs (C2.2). Initiative is consistently

presented as a response to an external impulse, even where the implementation of the ideas is local.

The spatial support is the most developed of the three sites. The narrative follows an itinerary within the homestead: the barn where the hay cart was once driven in, now the dining room; the upper floor converted into guest rooms; the new T-shaped building, put up to house a compliant kitchen; the old house turned into a museum, with the room of hand-painted plates predating the First World War, the dowry chest dated to the nineteenth century, and the best room ('camera curată'). The collection also includes items of folk costume, among them a series of crowns, and a painting of Francis II Rákóczi, Prince of Transylvania. The VIP corner is organised around dated visits: Prince Nicholas, in October 2020, dressed by the host in folk costume, and an earlier visit by the President of Hungary. Every narrative sequence has a material element that can be visited, and the account and the visitor route coincide: the account unfolds as the visitor moves through the homestead (Fig. 4). Space conversions are consistently linked to legal compliance: the travel agency Davincze Tours was set up for legality, the association for access to county funds, the kitchen to meet sanitary requirements (C2.3, five sequences).

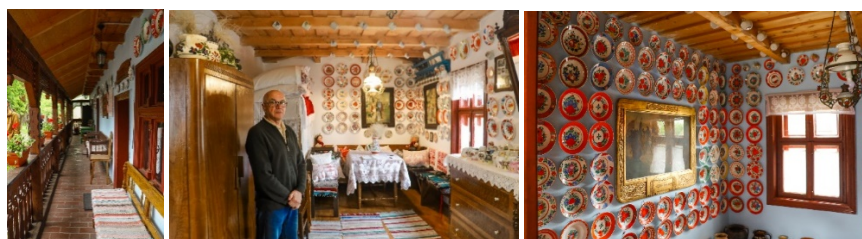


Fig. 4. Views of Pensiunea Episcopul, Sâncraiu
Photo: Radu-Mihai Tamasi

This is the only site at which the mediation of heritage is both performed and monetised (C3.1). The 'farewell evening', which consists of a presentation of the folk costume from the crown down to the boots, followed by a suite of dances, is described as a cultural entertainment product. The heritage is claimed as authentic by the respondent ('we present what we are and what we have inherited'). The same adaptation to demand appears in the New Year's Eve programme, where the music chosen by the tourists replaces the traditional repertoire. The tension between asserted authenticity (C4.1) and eroded authenticity (C4.2) is concentrated at this site. Erosion is recounted through the replacement of the orchestra by recordings, the contraction of the group that knows the repertoire, and the limits of the infrastructure, with two horses left in the village.

Succession is only partly assured (C2.7): the son has returned from Cluj and co-manages the agency, but the services component and the mediation repertoire remain with the current generation, so that transmission depends on a single bearer.

4.2.3. Înghețata Adam

At this site the narrative rests on a person, the only configuration of this kind among the three. Asked about her attachment to Sâncraiu, I3 treated the association of the product with the village as uncertain (*'I don't know whether the ice cream is associated with Sâncraiu'*), and attributed recognition to the person and not to the place (*'wherever I go, people know me'*). Alongside the workshop in Sâncraiu, the business operates a second point of sale, in the form of a mobile kiosk, at Valea Drăganului, with two employees. The respondent explained how this operates through pre-existing personal recognition (*'it works there because people know me directly from here'*), and not through the transfer of an identity tied to Sâncraiu, while also formulating her uncertainty in relation to a greater distance (*'I don't know whether I'd go any further'*). Spatial expansion has already taken place, and it follows the person of the producer.

No sequences were generated at C1.2, C1.3, C2.3, C3.1, C3.4 and C4.2. The site does not take part in the narrative construction of the village as a whole: it is located in Sâncraiu, but the narratives produced here do not take the village as their object. The activity began in Hungary, where the idea arose from a conversation with a person who already ran a similar business, in a context in which the product was locally unavailable (C2.1). The connection with the outside is maintained to this day through the supply of raw materials from Italy, via Hungary, and through attendance at a few seminars a year (C2.2). Unlike I1, here the outside is not only a source of ideas but also of supply and training; the activity remains tied to elsewhere. The business opened in 2006 and had been running for twenty years at the time of the interview. The product range is stated at 200-300 varieties, with daily rotation depending on the weather, and includes lactose-free and gluten-free versions (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Views of Înghețata Adam, Sâncraiu
Photo: Radu-Mihai Tamasi

The vulnerability sequence (C2.5) arose spontaneously, outside the guide. The critical threshold is placed in 2011-2012, when closing the firm was considered because it was little known, and the recovery is attributed to a torrential rain that damaged a bridge on the main road towards Călățele and redirected traffic past the premises. The attribution is formulated providentially (*'God gave us a torrential rain'*). At Pensiunea Episcopul and at Înghețata Adam, respondents attribute a greater role to external factors than to their own decisions in the trajectory of the activity.

External perception appears here only through individual recognition and customer loyalty (C3.3): customers who ring ahead for a particular variety, visitors from other countries, and customers of widely differing ages. Recognition is tied to the personal relationship with the customer, and not to the reputation of the place. Promotion, by contrast, is almost absent: there is no social media page, and this absence is not explained (C3.2). Although no promotional strategy is stated, the site has the largest number of online reviews in the set analysed (435, Table 2). The site's public visibility is therefore built by users.

The development of the offer (C2.4) extends beyond the existing unit, through four future-oriented sequences: a second mobile kiosk, a presence at large-scale events, a possible outlet in Cluj, courses for third parties, and delivery. All are formulated conditionally, as undecided options, dependent on investment or on a family decision. Succession, by contrast, is asserted without reservation and constitutes the single exception to the intergenerational discontinuity reported at the other two sites (C2.7). Authenticity appears here in a different register from the other two sites: it has to do with the way the product is made, and not with an inheritance (*'if you do it with love [...] that is where the secret lies'*, C4.1). No sequence about the loss of authenticity occurs at this site, in keeping with the absence of a claimed heritage.

4.3. Visitor perceptions: analysis of the online reviews

The 684 reviews extracted from Google Maps are produced by visitors and are independent of the respondents' accounts. Unlike Section 4.2, where narrative heritage is described from the perspective of those who hold and transmit it, here it is described from the perspective of those who receive it. The reviews cover the period 2016-2026, wider than the single moment of the interviews, and allow two things to be checked: whether the narrative elements recounted by respondents reach the visitor, and whether visitors in turn produce narrative elements absent from the respondents' accounts. The temporal distribution of the reviews is strongly asymmetrical at the religious site: 77 of the 105 ratings (73.3%) were posted in 2019 and 2020, and the remainder of the 2021-2026 period totals fewer than ten entries a year.

Comparing the two discourses shows that transmission to visitors is selective at all three sites, but in different forms (Table 6). At Pensiunea Episcopul, thematic correspondence exists but is strongly asymmetrical. The elements that I1 places at the centre of the account (the museum set up in the old house, the conversion of the barn into a dining room, the hand-painted plates, the folk costume) do appear in reviews, but rarely: four mentions for the museum and one each for the other three. The elements that do transmit in appreciable numbers are the gastronomic dimension (21 reviews) and the person of the host, named as a source of information about the area (17 reviews). The visitor route through the homestead, which in the interview organises the entire narrative, does not structure the visitor's account. What remains in the reviews is the relationship with the host, not the material repertoire that the host mediates.

Table 6. Correspondence between the narrative elements recounted in the interviews and in the reviews

Site	Narrative element	Mentioned in interview	Reviews mentioning it (no.)
Reformed church (n=35)	The fire of 1848 / the restoration of 1850	Yes	2
	The coffering of the ceiling (1994)	Yes	2
	The pulpit crown (1867)	Yes	1
	The wheat-ear decoration	Yes	0
	Segregation by sex in the nave	Yes	0
	The tower	No	1
	The organ	No	1
	The bell	No	2
	Human mediation (pastor/caretaker)	Yes	4
	The village and the community	No	9
Pensiunea Episcopul (n=76)	The museum in the old house	Yes	4
	The conversion of the barn into a dining room	Yes	1
	The hand-painted plates	Yes	1
	The folk costume / suite of dances	Yes	1
	Traditional gastronomy	Yes	21
	The host as mediator and source of information	Yes	17
	The family character of the business	Yes	4
	The product (varieties, flavours, quality)	Yes	32

Înghetata Adam (n=180)	Personal recognition of the producer	Yes	5
	The village of Sâncraiu	No	14
	The cycle path	No	7

At the Reformed church, transmission to visitors takes the form of a chronological inventory and is concentrated in two reviews out of 35. The dated factual repertoire (the fire of 1848, the restoration of 1850, the coffering of the ceiling in 1994, '*220 coffers, using traditional floral motifs from the Călata area*' (I.R., 2024), the bell of 1481) appears in full in the reviews of two authors, both in 2024, in texts structured like a monument record. The remaining reviews retain at most the coffered ceiling, without dating. The repertoire reproduced in the reviews in fact exceeds the one recounted by I2, including the tower (1762), the organ (1876) and the oldest bell (1481), elements not mentioned in the interview (Section 4.2.1). The same category of sequences also records the limits of mediation: one review explicitly notes that the presentation was not given in Romanian for a group that had stated it spoke only Romanian (T.L., 2025). In addition, a quarter of the reviews containing text (9 of 35, 25.7%) refer to the village and the local community and not to the building. The visitors' vocabulary is close to that of living heritage: the community is described as 'villagers gathered in the church, surrounded by living history' (B.T., 2024).

At Înghetata Adam, the correspondence confirms the central finding of Section 4.2.3, with one qualification. Visitor discourse is centred on the product (varieties, texture, price, queuing), and the village is mentioned in only 14 of the 180 reviews containing text (7.8%). Where the village is mentioned, it is assessed positively and in its own right, through order, cleanliness and the upkeep of the homesteads: 'Sâncraiu is a very neat, orderly, clean village' (R.C., 2025). Seven reviews associate the visit with the cycle path, confirming as a vector of access an element invoked by I1 outside this site.

4.4. SWOT analysis

The results are synthesised in Table 7, in the form of a SWOT analysis centred on the narrative heritage of Sâncraiu as a resource for community development. Strengths and weaknesses refer to characteristics internal to the community and to the sites analysed; opportunities and threats refer to external factors over which local actors have no direct control.

The distribution of the elements in Table 7 indicates a concentration of strengths in the area of available narrative content and of weaknesses in the area of the transmission structure. The narrative resource depends predominantly on individual bearers, in the absence of a mediation device independent of them. The threats identified act both on the group that produces the narratives (the

withdrawal of owners, the low number of confirmations) and on the group that receives them (the contraction of tourist flows).

Table 7. SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Narratives supported by dated material elements that can be visited; • Demonstrated local organisational capacity: the licensed travel agency, the agritourism association, the Rosehip Festival organised jointly with the guesthouse owners; • Online visibility concentrated at site level (Înghetata Adam); • A calendar of events with fixed dates, usable for extending tourism activity: the camp in the first week of August, the Grape Ball, the Rosehip Festival in the third weekend of October; • A private museum collection with dated objects and a visitor route in which the account and the spatial progression coincide; • Sâncraiu as European Youth Village in 2025 and 2026.	• The description of Sâncraiu as a stopover on tourist circuits and not as a final destination; • High tourism seasonality and a shortage of labour in the tourism sector; • The absence of published visiting hours at the religious site; • The absence of dedicated digital promotion at Înghetata Adam.
Opportunities	Threats
• Replicable models of thematic tourist trails available nearby: 'Poteci cu povești' (Bonțida); • The route of the pilgrimages to Șumuleu Ciuc and the Budapest–Székely Land route; • Status as gateway to the Apuseni Mountains and proximity to notable attractions (Răchițele, Beliș, Văleni, the Negreni fair); • The Huedin–Călățele cycle path, documented in reviews as an effective vector of access to the site.	• A decline in tourist flows and in the number of operating accommodation units; • The risk of erosion of local authenticity; • Climate variability, through reduced snow cover.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Support, mediation and reception: how narrative heritage works at site level

The three regimes described below rest on one interview per site. They are therefore proposed as a descriptive typology derived from three cases, not as a classification tested across a sample of sites. The three questions set out in the introduction receive answers of different kinds. To the first (which narratives circulate), the answer is an unevenly distributed repertoire, organised into 17 codes and four thematic families. To the second (which narrative supports they rest on), the support takes three distinct forms, described below. To the third (through which mechanisms they are mediated and how far they are received), the answer is that mediation was present at all three sites, but that transmission to visitors was selective; in these three cases the selection appears to be made by the visitor rather than by the bearer. In the settlement analysed here, narrative heritage is structured into distinct support regimes. What differentiates them is the element that conditions transmission, not the content of the account. The three sites

analysed showed three such regimes: support on a dated object and a recurrent institutional framework, at the Reformed church; on a domestic route, at Pensiunea Episcopul; and on a person, at Înghetata Adam.

At the religious site, the narrative rests on visible and dated material elements, and the chronology is organised around a single threshold, the fire of 1848. The material support is not, however, self-sufficient: the wheat-ear decoration was initially identified by the research team as a lighting fixture, and its meaning emerged only on request for clarification. The case illustrates the problem described by Derbaix and Gombault (2016) as selling the invisible: the intangible component becomes accessible only through a device that renders it imaginable, and in the absence of such a device the object remains opaque even to an informed observer. In the terms of Taylor's (2003) distinction, the object belongs to the archive, but its activation belongs to the repertoire, and heritage value proves to be an effect of the operation of interpretation, not a property of the object (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004).

At Pensiunea Episcopul, the narrative support is not an isolated object but a route: the account and the spatial progression through the homestead coincide, from the old house turned into a museum to the barn converted into a dining room. The configuration confirms Chelcea's (2003) observation that a *lieu de mémoire* does not presuppose public monumentality, the household being able to function as an institution of memory in its own right, but it is closer to the landscape biographies described by Schriek (2019), in which meaning is constituted through spatial succession. The difference from the religious site is that the mediation framework here is personal, not institutional: the route becomes narrative only in the presence of the person who walks it with the visitor.

The case of Înghetata Adam qualifies a frequent assumption in the literature, which treats narrative as a mechanism for attaching identity to place (Masungu et al., 2025). The respondent explicitly stated her uncertainty about the association of the product with the village and attributed recognition to her own person, and the second point of sale was explained through pre-existing personal recognition and not through the transfer of a local identity. The configuration is better described by the relational and network approach proposed by Somers (1994) than by place-centred models, since spatial expansion follows the bearer. The absence of sequences at C1.2, C1.3 and C3.1 confirms that the site does not take part in the narrative construction of the village as a whole.

A comparison with the public reviews shows, however, that the existence of a narrative support is a condition for the production of the narrative, not a guarantee of its transmission to visitors. At Pensiunea Episcopul, the component that circulates most frequently is not the material repertoire mediated by the host but the gastronomy, a result consistent with the literature that treats food as a privileged vector of intangible heritage (Ardren, 2018; Lee, 2023). At the Reformed church, the dated repertoire reproduced in the reviews exceeds the one

recounted by I2, in a textual form that points to a documentary source. At Înghetata Adam, the mentions of the village concern the order and upkeep of the homesteads, that is, elements accessible through direct observation and not through mediation. The site produces contact with the settlement, but does not generate discourse about it.

The element most consistently transmitted at all three sites is the relationship with the person who mediates. Recent literature has raised the question of whose stories are told at heritage sites and who selects them (Simons & de Waal, 2025). The present data shift the question from production to reception: the final selection is made by the visitor, and its criterion appears to be the intensity of personal interaction, not the heritage value attributed by the bearer. The consequence bears directly on thematic trail projects (Asociația Plaiuri Noi, 2026; Rățulea et al., 2023): the material marking of a narrative support does not secure transmission in the absence of human mediation or of a functional equivalent.

The data show that authenticity is to be understood as a relation between bearer, audience and context, not as a fixed property of the object or the practice. This tension appears above all at Pensiunea Episcopul, where the same respondent upholds strict rules of conservation but also describes adaptations to tourist demand, from the replacement of the traditional repertoire with music chosen by tourists at New Year's Eve to the use of recordings in place of live accompaniment. This result confirms the relational perspective proposed by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) and the multi-actor model of Li and Qu (2022), with the difference that here the divergence appears within the discourse of a single bearer, not only between different actors. The result suggests that the negotiation of authenticity is a routine management practice, not necessarily a divergence between actors. At Înghetata Adam, authenticity is associated with the manner of production, and the theme of loss does not appear in the discourse. The same term therefore has different meanings for members of the same community, which may create difficulties for any local policy that uses it without clear definition. In addition, the normative position expressed by I1 on building materials coincides with the prescriptions of the reference document for the region (Romanian Order of Architects, 2016), which shows that this understanding of authenticity already has a local institutional counterpart.

The results open four **directions for research**. The first is testing the typology of the three support regimes on a larger number of sites and settlements, in order to establish whether personal support is a particularity of recent micro-enterprises or a distinct regime, under-represented in the literature precisely because it does not generate discourse about place. The second is extending the comparison between the discourse of bearers and that of visitors to a sample sufficient for testing the association between the presence of human mediation and the appearance of narrative content in reviews, and following the same site

before and after the introduction of a mediation device. The third concerns the construction of transmission indicators distinct from the inventory indicators currently used in assessing intangible heritage: the number of active bearers of a repertoire, the number of recurrent frameworks that reactivate it and the existence of a handover mechanism are measurable and comparable between sites. The fourth is applying a multi-actor design of the kind proposed by Li and Qu (2022) in a rural community, including the categories absent from this study (visitors, the younger generation, the local administration).

5.2. Practical implications

The recommendations follow from the correspondence between the elements of Table 6 and the results of Sections 4.1-4.3. They concern the transmission structure of narrative heritage and not its content: the analysis showed that the narrative resource is available, materially supported and already performed in public, but that it depends on individual bearers. The following are therefore proposed:

1. Full documentation of the narrative heritage of Sâncraiu, so that transmission no longer depends exclusively on the presence of one person. At Pensiunea Episcopul, the mediation repertoire belongs to a single bearer, and the services component has not been taken over by the next generation. At the Reformed church, mediation is provided in turn by the pastor, by the caretaker or by a person who gives presentations to groups, without a stable framework.
2. Connecting the three sites through a narrative trail. The results showed that local narratives rest on visible and dated material elements. This mechanism, which works at the scale of a homestead, has no counterpart at the scale of the village, which is described as a stopover on tourist circuits and not as a destination. The 'Poteci cu povești' model (Bonțida) offers a precedent that can be replicated nearby.
3. Access and the language of mediation at the religious site. Access to the building outside services is not regulated through published visiting hours, even though 80.0% of the site's reviews containing text are written in Romanian, and a quarter of them refer to the village and the community and not to the building.
4. Involving young people in collecting the narratives. Intergenerational discontinuity was the theme common to all three interviews, and the erosion of the repertoire was stated explicitly by I1, who includes his own son among those who no longer know the traditional songs. The title of European Youth Village, held for 2025 and 2026, provides an institutional framework for a time-limited collection exercise.

5. Extending the season by connecting to the existing calendar and flows. The calendar of fixed dates (the camp in the first week of August, the Grape Ball, the Rosehip Festival in the third weekend of October) delimits an already structured season; the Huedin–Călățele cycle path is documented in the reviews as an effective vector of access (7 mentions, Table 6); and the route of the pilgrimages to Șumuleu Ciuc was recounted as such by I1.

5.3. Limitations

The study is exploratory and limited to a single Transylvanian village. The number of narrative sequences per site partly reflects the duration of the interaction: interview I1 lasted 43 minutes and generated 50 sequences, whereas I2 and I3, of 12 minutes each, generated 8 and 19 respectively. The interviews were conducted in Romanian, which may in places affect how their meaning is rendered.

The selection of sites was purposive and covered three units that are in operation and visible online. The results do not describe the narrative heritage of the community as a whole, but that circulating at three sites. This limitation is all the more relevant given that the literature consulted insists on the effective inclusion of the community as a precondition for the validity of documented local knowledge (Reyes-García et al., 2022; Ladio, 2025; Tirivangasi & Kontinen, 2026). The reviews constitute a self-selected sample, strongly skewed towards the positive, and those written in languages other than Romanian were consulted in the automatic translation displayed by the platform; the language attributed by the platform was not independently verified.

The study did not measure community cohesion and cannot establish a relation of determination between narrative heritage and cohesion. Research reporting cohesion effects of heritage tourism relies on designs that include the non-specialist population and participation indicators (Syafrini et al., 2020; Masungu et al., 2025), which are absent here. The results describe the availability, the support and the transmission of a narrative resource; the link between this resource and community cohesion remains a hypothesis to be tested, and testing it is a possible extension of the topic.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The study documented the narrative heritage circulating at three sites in Sâncraiu (the Reformed church, Pensiunea Episcopul and Înghetata Adam). The narrative repertoire is available and publicly performed, but unevenly distributed: the religious site activated four codes out of 17, whereas the guesthouse activated the majority.

The narratives rest on identifiable elements, but through distinct regimes. At the Reformed church, the narrative support is a dated object, activated within a recurrent institutional framework; at Pensiunea Episcopul, a domestic route in which the account and the spatial progression coincide; at Înghetata Adam, the person of the producer, in the absence of any asserted association with the village. The coexistence of the three regimes in a small settlement suggests that material support, treated in the literature as the predominant form, is only one of the ways in which narrative heritage becomes transmissible.

Comparing the discourse of the bearers with that of the visitors shows that transmission to visitors does not follow automatically from the existence of a narrative support. At all three sites, transmission is selective, and the criterion of selection is not the heritage value attributed by the bearer: the elements that respondents place at the centre of the account appear rarely in the reviews, whereas the relationship with the person who mediates is the component most frequently circulated. The result shifts the problem of narrative selection from production to reception and has direct consequences for thematic trail interventions, in which the material marking of a narrative support is implicitly treated as equivalent to mediation.

The vulnerability of narrative heritage in Sâncraiu lies in its transmission structure, dependent on individual bearers and lacking a stable handover mechanism, and not in the unavailability of the resource. The recommendations set out in Section 5.2 concern this structure, not the narrative content. The study remains exploratory and limited to three purposively selected sites: it documents the availability, the narrative support and the transmission of a narrative resource, without measuring its effects on community cohesion or community development, which remain hypotheses to be tested through designs including the non-specialist population and participation indicators.

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CRedit authorship contribution statement

Cătălin-Valentin Popa: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Visualization, Writing – original draft; *Ainhoa-Naomi Cristurean*: Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft; *Magda-Catinca Cărăușu*: Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis; *Izabella-Maria Panaite*: Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis; *Maya Bunea*: Investigation, Data curation; *Ana-Maria Pop*: Conceptualization, Methodology, Visualization, Supervision, Writing – original draft.

Declaration of generative AI use

The authors used Claude (Anthropic, Opus 5) to produce an initial thematic coding proposal for the interview transcripts, subsequently verified manually against the transcripts by the authors (see Section 3.2), and to edit, restructure, and translate the manuscript. The authors reviewed and revised the content as needed and assume full responsibility for the final version of the publication.

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APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Date of interview:

Respondent's gender:

Respondent's age:

Respondent's occupation:

1. IDENTITY OF THE PLACE

- Why Sâncraiu and not another village? What ties you to the village?
- What sets Sâncraiu apart from other villages?
- How has the village changed over time?
- How attached are you to the place?

2. ABOUT YOURSELF

- How did you come to work in this place / to run this business? Where did you draw your inspiration from?
- What is the story of your business or activity? (when did you start, how, what does it involve, who comes through your door, what results do you have?) Who helps you? Where do you want to get to? Do you have someone to leave it to?

3. SÂNCRAIU FOR 'OTHERS'

- How do tourists, or those who visit you, perceive you? How much does it matter to you how others (tourists) perceive you?
- What would you recommend us to do or visit in Sâncraiu? (for someone who is not from here)

APPENDIX 2. Coding framework: code definitions and illustrative quotations

Code	Name	Illustrative quotations
C1	Identity of the place	
C1.1	Local roots	'I was born here'; 'my roots here are very deep'
C1.2	Distinctive character derived from belonging to a wider framework	'we don't have salt baths'; 'the gateway to the Apusenî'; 'in the Călata area the churches are Reformed'
C1.3	Normative attachment to inherited practice	'not a single skirt should be sold'; 'concrete and steel have no business in the countryside'
C1.4	Recognition attached to the person, not to the place	'I don't know whether the ice cream is associated with Sâncraiu'; 'wherever I go, people know me'
C2	Individual story of the site	
C2.1	Origin of the activity: trajectory and external trigger	'I was left unemployed'; 'I was away in Hungary for 3 years'; 'someone came up with this idea'
C2.2	Continuous external orientation	'put on a Rosehip Festival'; 'I go and do a seminar three or four times'; 'I saw how others work'
C2.3	Compliance with regulations and conversion of spaces	'so that everything would be legal'; 'where we used to drive in with the hay cart became the dining room'
C2.4	Development of the offer	'you need activities as well'; 'we'd need another trailer then'
C2.5	Vulnerability to external factors	'from 15,000 to 110'; 'God gave us a torrential rain'
C2.6	Seasonality and labour	'only seven months'; 'we work 6 months, we rest 6 months'
C2.7	Continuity of the activity and succession	'my son came home from Cluj'; 'we've gone from 45 down to 20'; 'only five'; 'yes, we have someone to leave it to'
C3	External perceptions of the site and of the village	
C3.1	Mediation of heritage for the visitor	'the farewell evening'; 'the costume presentation is one price and the dancing another'; 'that one is made of wheat ears'; 'a sign of thanks'
C3.2	Promotional effort (active or absent)	'I went to fairs and exhibitions'; 'I don't know why we haven't made [a page]'
C3.3	Recognition and customer loyalty	'they're coming for the fifth New Year's Eve running'; 'Prince Nicholas [...] I dressed him'; 'from Israel, Hungary, America, China'; 'they ring me [...] do you have pistachio ice cream?'
C3.4	Recommendations for visitors	'the waterfall at Răchițele, the dam at Beliș'; 'the Reformed church'
C4	Authenticity and transmission (cross-site)	
C4.1	Asserted authenticity	'we present what we are'; 'if you do it with love [...] that is where the secret lies'; 'rock and roll party [...] what the tourists choose'; 'these days it's done with a CD there too'
C4.2	Eroded authenticity	'my son [...] doesn't know these old songs'; 'we've only got two horses in the whole village'