

# Preservation of HNV farmland cultural landscapes in Transylvania

*A case study on two small scale farmer communities*

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Science

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## Abstract

High Nature Value (HNV) farmland landscapes are home to many habitats of Community importance and as such, play an essential role in achieving EU's 2020 Biodiversity Strategy. In Transylvania, small scale farmers are still maintaining a HNV farming system that is not only environmental friendly but also culturally rich. Nevertheless, here like in most of Europe, these farming systems are currently at threat from agriculture intensification or land abandonment. The major socio-economic changes that occurred in rural communities across Transylvania after the fall of the Soviet Union continue today, nearly a decade after Romania's accession to the EU, with adverse effects on the viability of small scale farming. Such changes impact on the landscape perception of rural communities and the wider bureaucratic apparatus, leading to conflicting views on land-use between various stakeholders. In part, this is due to a clash in discourse on agrarian policy between Bucharest and Brussels. However, root causes on the ground are more complex and can be traced to identity issues between small scale farmers and the wider Romanian society on one hand and small scale farmers and Europe on the other hand. The way in which policy will be implemented in the next decade is decisive for the fate of HNV farming systems, as a change in rural generations can mark a change in the role of small scale farmers and a transformation of the way in which HNV farmland landscapes are preserved.

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## List of Abbreviations

ACP – Agricultural Cooperatives of Production  
ANC – Area of Natural Constraint  
APIA – Agency for Payments and Interventions in Agriculture  
AES – Agri-Environment Schemes  
DLG - Government Service for Land and Water Management of the Netherlands  
EU – European Union  
EUR - euro  
CAP – Common Agricultural Policy  
EEA – European Environmental Agency  
ENRD – European Network for Rural Development  
EFNCP – European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism  
EVZ – Day’s Event News (Evenimentul Zilei)  
FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization  
FiBL – Research Institute of Organic Agriculture  
HNV – High Nature Value  
HRH – His Royal Highness  
IEEP – Institute for European Environmental Policy  
INS – National Statistics Institute of Romania  
LFA – Less Favoured Area  
MADR – Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Romania  
MFA – Multifunctional Agriculture  
MS – Member State  
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization  
O.U.G. – Emergency Governmental Ordinance  
PEBLDS - Pan-European Biodiversity and Landscape Strategy  
UAA – Utilized Agricultural Area  
UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme  
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization  
UVM – Unitate Vita Mare (Big Cattle Unit)

## 1. Introduction

When it was released in 2011, the first part of a documentary trilogy on Romania entitled “Wild Carpathia” was received with great enthusiasm by both national and European audience. Among other interesting aspects of the country, such as pristine nature and the existence of a large proportion of Europe’s large mammals, the documentary described at length the High Nature Value (HNV) systems of Transylvania. The audience was immersed in a medieval world, an untamed corner of European wilderness where rural communities have been living for centuries in relative isolation, managing to retain their tradition and environmental assets. Unlike most materials about Transylvania, this documentary did not focus on Bran Castle (popularly known as Dracula’s Castle), but instead detailed the restoration actions of HRH Prince of Wales on his new properties from Miclisoara and Viscri, places that had until then not been on the tourist map. Acknowledging the vanishing of small scale farming as a great threat to the preservation of HNV farming systems, Wild Carpathia is perhaps the first attempt to mainstream the importance of Transylvanian HNV farmland landscapes and their associated stewards – the small scale farmers. Motivated by the international recognition of Bran and Viscri as two of Transylvania’s landmarks of immense natural beauty and cultural richness, this research looks at the complex socio-economic dynamics that govern the two rural communities nearly one decade after Romania’s accession to the European Union (EU).

In the following chapters I will review in detail the importance of HNV farmland landscape for the preservation of European biodiversity and European culture and show that numerous habitats of Community importance depend on HNV farming systems. Crucial for the achievement of EU’s 2020 Biodiversity Strategy, HNV farmland landscapes are also places of

rich culture and diverse traditions. These characteristics make Transylvania unique in Europe, as one of the few – and perhaps the largest – regions where HNV farming systems are still embedded in the rural space. The fundament of these systems, however, are small scale farmers who over centuries have created a landscape mosaic of interconnected meadows and patches of forests. In doing so, they used traditional, labor-intensive farming methods that resulted in the present low-intensity extensive agricultural systems characterizing Transylvania.

Nevertheless, despite making the bulk of Romania's farmer community, small scale farmers are subject to a series of complex socio-economic dynamics that since the fall of socialism have led to uneven rural development. While Bucharest officials prefer large farms and consider small scale farmers an impediment to development, the EU sees them as the backbone of European agriculture, a segment of European society that needs to be supported. This clash in discourse has left small scale farmers with controversial perceptions and feelings towards the EU, whom they see as taking the same stance as their own unfriendly government.

In the analysis chapters, which are based on a three week fieldwork in Viscri and Bunesti parishes, I will show that the preservation of HNV farmland landscape is dependent on the way in which small scale farmers and other stakeholders such as local NGOs, academics or local and regional authorities perceive and relate to the surrounding landscape. I will argue that perception is guided by several key factors such as access to information, living standards or access to services but also on the way in which EU policies are tailored for regional and local implementation. Differences in landscape perception translate in conflicts of interests, for instance between NGOs and biodiversity experts who want to maintain the low-intensity HNV farmland landscapes and small scale farmers who would prefer agriculture intensification in order to earn a decent living. At the same time, I highlight the dissimilarities between Bran and Bunesti, topic on which I return to throughout the analysis.

Next, I examine the role social identity plays in the preservation of HNV farmland and show that far from identifying themselves with the European community, small scale farmers and local and regional authorities exhibit a nostalgia for socialist times. This has severe implications on the implementation results of EU policies directed to preserving HNV landscape, as the underlying assumptions, values and principles of those policies are shared neither by the implementing bodies nor by those subject to the policies. Nevertheless, in places like Bran, where small scale farmers experienced a period of relative socio-economic stability, income diversification opportunities make small scale farmers less dependent on the way in which these policies are implemented.

Finally, I conclude that at the moment small scale farming is a generation process in many of Transylvanian villages similar to Bunesti. This is due to an ageing rural population, little or no income diversification opportunities, lack of access to information and a misinterpretation of EU policies or the functioning of the EU altogether. As a consequence, the role of small scale farmers in the preservation of HNV farmland landscapes here could diminish significantly in the future, although this does not necessarily mean the landscapes will cease to be maintained. Yet, this would imply that the cultural aspect of these landscapes, which depends on the continuation of HNV farming systems, will also be diminished or lost. On the other hand, Bran is a symbol of stability, relative wealth and to some extent successful rural development. Here, the HNV farming system is marketed product through tourism, which in turn is a much needed income source for small scale farmers. The differences in the two locations and the dynamics that govern their development have broader implications for the preservation of Romania's cultural heritage, traditions and environmental assets.

## 2. Literature Review

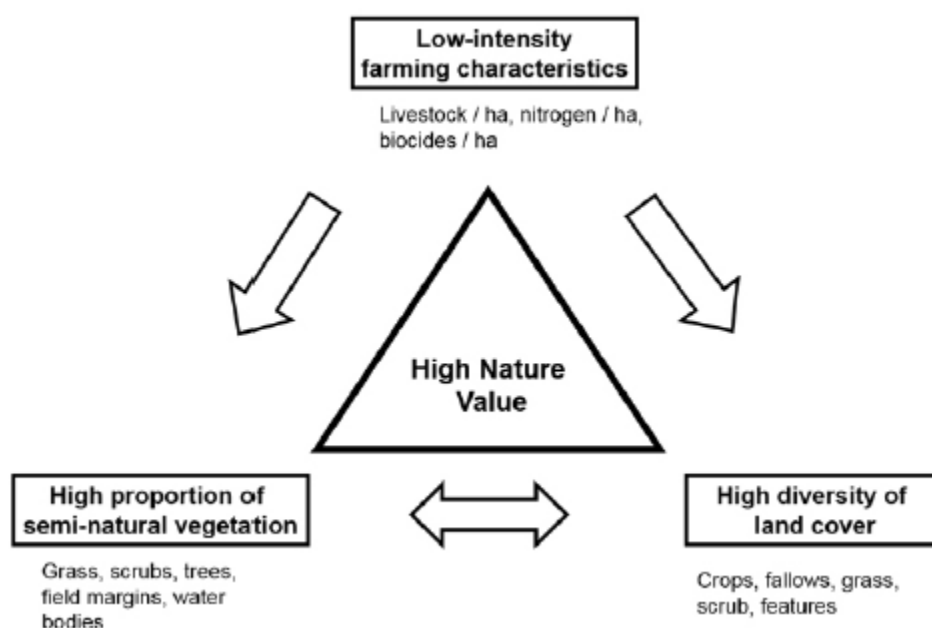
### 2.1 The High Nature Value Farming concept

“High Nature Value farming” is a recent term coined in early 1990s and used to explain the idea that maintaining low intensity agricultural systems over large surfaces in the rural areas is essential for the preservation of European biodiversity. HNV farmland consists of great habitat and species diversity, which has developed over centuries or even millennia as a result of co-habitation between humans and nature in low intensity farming systems (Baldock *et al.* 1993; Beaufoy *et. al* 1994; Bignal and McCracken 1996; Oppermann *et al.* 2012). According to Pienkowski (2011), such farming systems are usually low-input but labour intensive, characteristics that make them sustainable from an ecological point of view. A common definition forwarded by Andersen *et al.* (2003) and adopted by the European Environmental Agency (EEA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) considers HNV farmland as:

“Those areas in Europe where agriculture is a major (usually the dominant) land use and where that agriculture supports, or is associated with, either a high species and habitat diversity or the presence of species of European conservation concern, or both.”

(Andersen *et al.* 2003)

Conceptually, HNV farmland areas can be seen as a composition of three key elements: low intensity farming characteristics, high proportion of semi-natural vegetation and a high diversity of land cover (see Fig.1).



*Fig. 1) HNV concept, reproduced from Plieninger and Bieling 2012*

More specifically, this means low or no inputs of agro-chemicals, machinery work and livestock per hectare; high plant diversity on habitats such as unimproved pastures; and presence of a mosaic of land cover with crops, fallow land, grasslands, scrub and landscape features. Generally, these three key elements are supplemented by the presence of natural vegetation cover such as woodlands patches, an important component of ecosystem connectivity and therefore vital for habitat connection (Farina 2000). In Europe, examples of such areas are mountain hay meadows and pastures, extensively grazed uplands, low intensity olive groves, traditional orchards or the steppic areas of the eastern and southern part of the continent, most of which can also be found in Romania (see Fig.2). It is estimated that 75 million hectares or 32% of EU's farmland is of High Nature Value, a percentage which is similar for Romania (Paracchini *et al.* 2008).



*Fig. 2) Examples of HNV farmland (from upper left to lower right): a) Traditional hay meadows and pastures in the Saxony region of Romania; b) Low-intensity, small-scale farming/grazing in Castilla-La Mancha, Spain; c) Traditional orchards with permanent semi-natural understory in Southern Germany; d) Mediterranean dry olive crops on Lesbos Island, Greece. Courtesy of Tibor Hartel (a), Berta Martin Lopez (b), Ursel Maichel-Schimtt (c) and Thanasis Kizos (d). Reproduced from Plieninger and Bieling 2013*

## 2.2 HNV and Biodiversity

The mosaic of habitats created through traditional farming management has been important for the species diversity across the whole continent (Tubbs 1977; Plachter 1996). While prior to the rise of industrial, intensive farming all agricultural systems in Europe are assumed to have been HNV (Oppermann et al. 2012), over the last two centuries they recorded a steep decline, so that HNV farmland landscapes have mostly disappeared from Western Europe (Keenleyside

et al. 2014). The concept of HNV farming can be framed within the concepts of ‘multifunctional agriculture’ (MFA) and ‘post-productivism’, which are a recognition that agriculture has more than the role of producing food and fiber and its functions also include management of renewable natural resource, biodiversity conservation, preservation of the cultural heritage, or maintaining the sustainability of rural areas and poverty alleviation (Bresciani et al. 2004; Wilson 2007; Renting et al. 2009). Nowadays, there are estimates that half of all European species - some of which are endemic or threatened – depend on agricultural habitats (Kristensen 2003). 57 semi-natural habitats of Community importance and subject to the Habitats Directive are said to depend on specific, low-intensive agricultural practices and are therefore considered of HNV (Keenleyside et al. 2014), while the existence of 63 habitats of European conservation interest depend on the long-term continuation of HNV farming management (Halada et al. 2011). Although some of them are preserved through the Natura 2000 ecological network, there are still large areas of HNV farmland outside the network.

There is agreement that whether inside the ecological network or in the wider rural landscape, HNV farmland and its related semi-natural habitats are at threat from changes in land use and harmful farming practices, which makes the achievement of EU’s 2020 Biodiversity Strategy targets doubtful (Keenleyside and Tucker 2010; Poláková 2011). In particular during the last decades, intensification of production, increase in farm size and mechanization particularly in Western Europe led to the homogenization and simplification of the landscape and a loss of the biodiversity rich habitat mosaic (Jongman 2002; IEEP 2006). On the other hand, farmland abandonment across the EU caused by socio-economic transformations or climatic and topographic handicaps also contributed to this process, as most of the HNV farmland systems need to be actively managed in order to be maintained (DLG 2005). Farmland abandonment occurs predominantly in poorer or isolated rural areas and is particularly marked in mountain areas, where a failure to adjust the agricultural sector through changes in farming practices and

farm structure means less or no income is generated for businesses and households (MacDonald *et al.* 2000).

Indeed, the Pan-European Biodiversity and Landscape Strategy (PEBLDS), the Bern Convention and the European Landscape Convention, all set objectives to halt the loss of farmland habitats of High Nature Value. The studies commissioned or carried out by the European Commission (IEEP 2006; Beaufoy and Cooper 2009; ENRD 2010; Keenleyside *et al.* 2014) also highlight the inextricable connection between HNV farmland and European biodiversity and generally look for indicators to monitor the status of these habitats, a process that takes places across the whole EU (Morelli *et al.* 2013) and to an increasing extent also in Romania (Rákossy 2012; Akeroyd and Badarau 2012). The loss of all large scale natural habitats in Europe (Halada *et al.* 2011) also means that preserving HNV farmland habitats is a centerpiece of EU biodiversity conservation.

### 2.3 Cultural Value of HNV landscapes

While quintessential for the preservation of numerous species and habitats of Community importance, HNV farmland provides a number of other benefits. This includes the production of higher quality foods; conservation of the genetic pool of local livestock breeds; soil quality regulation; water purification; pollination services; and multiple cultural services such as rural heritage, recreation or ecotourism (Oppermann *et al.* 2012). The long period over which HNV farmland landscapes were created means that preserving them implies keeping HNV farming systems that use a series of specific, traditional agricultural practices. According to Oppermann *et al.* (2012), the characteristics of HNV farmland landscapes make them central to European identity and culture. Following these characteristics, HNV farmland landscapes are considered,

at least throughout Europe, cultural landscapes (Plieninger and Bieling 2012) and are congruent to UNESCO's definition of organically evolved cultural landscape, which:

“results from an initial social, economic, administrative, and/or religious imperative and has developed its present form by association with and in response to its natural environment. Such landscapes reflect that process of evolution in their form and component features.”

(UNESCO 2008)

In particular during the last decade, the HNV farmland landscapes and systems of Romania with their century-long traditions have been subject to increased public exposure and recognition, mostly abroad and to a lesser extent at a national level (see Fig.3). This has nevertheless transformed into an ever-expanding campaign to save Romania's HNV cultural heritage. One of the representative landmarks of this campaign is perhaps the continuous effort of HRH Prince of Wales to restore and conserve traditional Transylvanian villages through his lobby with Romanian authorities and the various trusts and organizations he is patronizing or financing. His recently bought residences in Viscri and Miclisoara and his numerous speeches in support of Romania's traditional villages and farming systems certainly contributed to raising awareness on the issue. During his latest speech at the Bucharest University earlier this year, HRH Prince of Wales declared that he loves Romania because of

“its unique and unspoilt natural beauty, its fascinating patchwork of landscapes and rural communities, each with their own diverse customs, together with the astonishingly rich and varied biodiversity of a countryside that is truly a European and international treasure. (...)”

(HRH Prince of Wales 2014-05-31)

Moreover, he emphasized that the traditional lifestyle is at great threat today and that the Romanian people “have much to be proud of, and this pride should lead [them] to do everything possible to protect [their] traditional way of life (...)” (HRH Prince of Wales 2014-05-31).



*Fig. 3) HNV farmland landscapes have a strong cultural side. Above is Viscri's fortified church, a UNESCO world heritage site. Source: Personal archive*

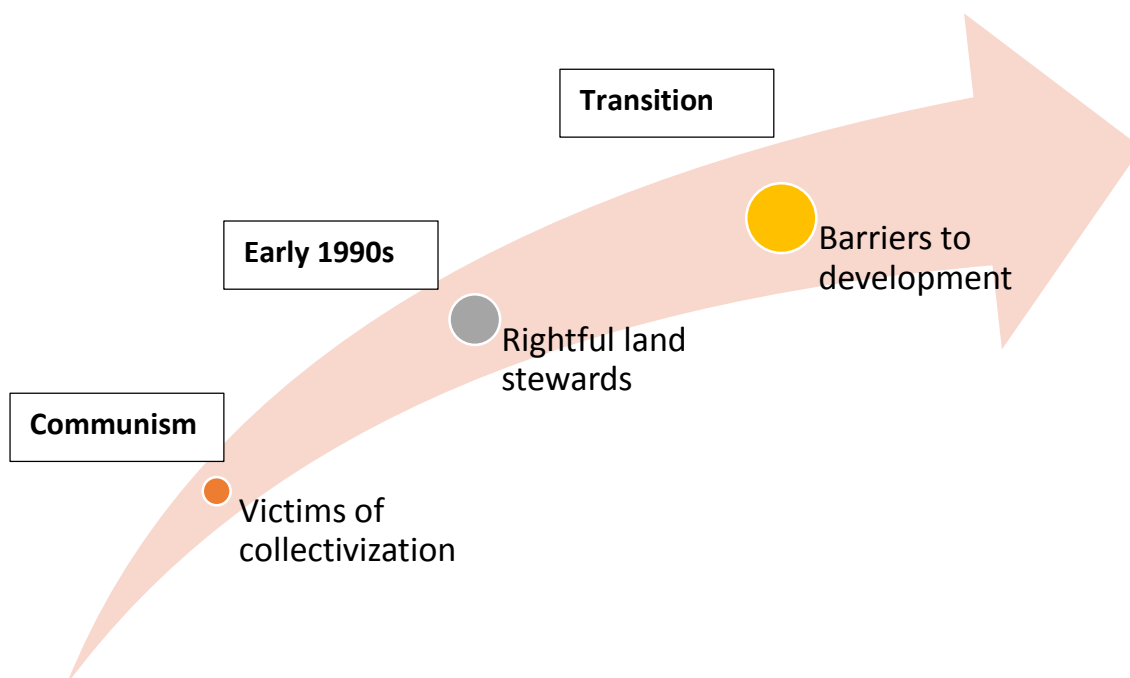
The ideas governing this speech are also mirrored in another landmark of the cultural heritage preservation campaign, namely a three part documentary on Romania. Entitled 'Wild Carpathia', the TV Channel production was funded by and has the contribution of HRH Prince of Charles. Other preeminent characters are a Transylvanian Count and various conservationists, ecologists and botanists who are explaining the value of Romanian's HNV farmland landscape and its traditional rural systems. In this way, the HNV landscapes of Transylvania are romanticised and framed in a location described as the 'world's only surviving medieval landscape' and 'Europe's last untamed wilderness' (Travel Channel 2011).

## 2.4 HNV landscapes and small scale farmers

Throughout Europe, HNV farmland is associated with small scale subsistence and semi-subsistence farmers, whose farm structure and traditional practices have created and maintained the biodiversity-enhancing landscape mosaic (Emanuelsson 2009; Knowles 2011). While in the EU the number of farm holdings below 2 hectares accounted for roughly 6 million in 2010, half of them or 2.9 million were found in Romania (FAO 2013). This means that 74% of Romania's 3.85 million farms (EU Commission 2014) are small subsistence farmers, while a great share of the rest are semi-subsistence (Szocs 2013-11-29). Indeed, while the EU farm average is 12 hectares, an average Romanian farm has 3.45 hectares (MADR 2013:22). Moreover, over 90% of the farm holdings are below 5 hectares (EU Commission 2011). It is acknowledged that the high predominance of small farm holdings in the country has led to the biodiversity-rich, densely parceled mosaic landscape (Page *et al.* 2011; Dahlström *et al.* 2013; Sutcliffe *et al.* 2013).

Romanian small scale farmers are subject to similar processes taking place in most of post-socialist Central and Eastern European MSs. Here, small scale semi-subsistence farmers were established as a well-defined category once decollectivization took place and land was returned to private owners in early 1990s (Juska *et al.* 2005), although Poland is a notable exception where small scale farmers occupied 80% of the country's UAA before 1990 (Chaplin *et al.* 2005). In the Baltic States, for instance, these type of farmers established an informal food economy, in which they sold their products to urban dwellers, earning a necessary income (Mincyte 2012). In the first years after the Soviet Union's dissolution, land privatization and the creation of independent subsistence and semi-subsistence holdings was welcomed as the normal state of affairs in the new sovereign and democratic states, with farmers taking their

role of rightful land stewards (Schwartz 2007; Aistara 2009). Just like in Romania, this phenomenon was linked to an ownership syndrome that gripped post-socialist nations and gave to long-suppressed populations a tangible form of freedom. In Hungary, for example, returning ownership to small scale farmers was seen as a necessity, with demands for the relationship between small and the previously dominating large scale farms to be based on mutual interests and equality (Juhász 1991). However, once former socialist states joined the market liberalization movement that took over most of the world by mid-1990s, public discourse on small scale farmers took a U-turn. In part, this was due to the productivist, intensive, large-farm approach to agriculture adopted by governments in order to compete with more efficient and lucrative Western agricultural sectors (Van Zyl et al. 1996; Knight 2010) but also because in the perspective of European integration, reforms on rural development were implemented without taking into account realities on the ground (Aistara 2009; Mincyte 2011).



*Fig. 4) Evolution of small scale farmer status in Romanian and other post-socialist Central and Eastern European states from communism through early 1990s and the subsequent transition*

This determined governments to redefine small scale farmers. In Lithuania they were described as “the most serious weakness”, “a serious obstacle”, “backward”, “inefficient”, “unproductive”, “dirty” and risky” (cited in Mincyte 2011: 102,106, 110). Similarly, Romanian small scale farmers have long time ago stopped being seen as the stewards of the environment and guardians of Romania`s valuable cultural heritage by authorities and policy-makers (see Fig.4). 38% of the country`s UAA is located within 0.2% of farms over 100 hectares in size (Cionga et al. 2008) and this net domination of the agricultural sector by the large farms is believed to be encouraged by the state, who provides more support for big farms while “pushing small farmers off the land” (Knight 2010:10). In the previous National Rural Development Plan, which by 2012 had been changed 11 times (Popa 2013-07-04), small scale farmers were regarded as an impediment to the development of agriculture in the country, because they lack capacity or willingness to comply to EU-wide regulations and standards (MADR 2008: 22, 32). The governmental point of view appears to be shared by other relevant agencies and extension services in the bureaucratic apparatus. Indeed, small scale farmers are not seen as “real farmers” by regional development bodies and extension services because they are not “economically viable” and thus constitute a “barrier to regional development” (Mikulkak et al. 2013: 132). Based on a centralized top-down policy making and implementation approach, the Romanian agricultural policy is left with very narrow channels for feedback loops and little perspectives for cooperation between the millions of farmers in the field and the policy makers in Bucharest or regional centres (Mikulkak et al. 2013; Sutcliffe et al. 2013). It is then unsurprising that small scale farmers do not trust the authorities, whom they perceive as corrupt and unsupportive (Knight 2010).

## 2.5 Preservation of HNV landscapes: the biodiversity perspective

Despite availability of agri-environment schemes (AES) for various environmental services – but in particular grasslands – inflexibility of CAP regulations can sometimes force small scale farmers to make environment unfriendly decisions. For instance, there were numerous cases when farmers cut down trees on their parcels out of fears that controlling authorities might find the number of trees not eligible with the AES for grasslands (Popa 2013-07-04). Mowing periods are also reported to be uniform for all regions despite significant differences in climate, topography and soil characteristics. This may sometimes have adverse effects on biodiversity – invertebrates tend to be dependent on the sward structure and so delaying mowing from early summer to later in the season was found to impact negatively on invertebrate species (Humber *et al.* 2012). Despite its intention to protect ground-nesting birds, the regulation of imposing one mowing date across the country was found to damage the mosaic pattern of high and low grass, which is valuable for other species such as storks (Page *et al.* 2011). Moreover, in the case of corncrake hotspots, the mowing day prescribed in AES for grasslands important for birds was moved from early June to after July 31<sup>st</sup>, although the corncrake has thrived in the traditionally managed HNV farming systems. Therefore, such a major change in the mowing date for the corncrake is dismissed by biodiversity experts, who see no benefits for corncrake, but possible harm to other fauna and flora species and a lower hay quality (Demeter and Szabó 2005; Page *et al.* 2011).

Grazing is yet another delicate process entering the sensitive equation of HNV farmland preservation. Numerous studies show that intermediate levels of grazing foster the greatest diversity of plants, while both under- and overgrazing have detrimental effects on upland biodiversity (Hester 1996; Grant and Armstrong 1993; Kramm *et al.* 2010). Because in

maintaining the pastures and meadows farmers are given the choice of sheep grazing or mowing manually – which is more labour intensive and costly – overgrazing has been identified as a recurrent biodiversity threat in HNV meadows (Popa 2013-07-04). This is due to the fact that sheep tend to graze selectively and also cut the grass at a lower level to the ground than horse or cattle, thus negatively impact on the flora diversity of meadows (Brak et al. 2004; Swales et al. 2004). As a consequence, mixed grazing systems are recognized as the optimal management system for maintaining the floristic upland biodiversity (English Nature 2001).

## 2.6 Preservation of HNV landscapes: the socio-economic perspective

One of the main challenges with the preservation of the low-intensity HNV farmland landscapes is the incongruence between supporting conservation policies and the present farming systems, which are not an adequate substitute (Webb 1998). O'Rourke and Kramm (2012) observed that the current European policy designed to preserve HNV farmland reflects a vision of low-intensity farmers as “custodians of the landscape and instigators of the new multifunctional rural development model rather than as food producers” (O'Rourke and Kramm 2012:116). In other words, low-intensity farmers are now producing biodiversity and ecosystem services and are being paid from public money to do so, as policies are increasingly acknowledging the positive externalities of these products. Nevertheless, because there is no economic quantification or market for such services – something that Nowicki (2004) calls ‘missing market phenomenon’ – delivery of these environmental public goods usually needs to be supported by the state. Agri-environment payment schemes have so far been the main EU and state level instrument in this sense, however, there is a lot of skepticism with regards to what has been achieved and a number of studies outlined the narrow impact of these policies

(Finn *et al.* 2009; Primdahl *et al.* 2010; EFNCP *et al.* 2010). Perhaps the main criticism of such supporting instruments is the lack of a resilient approach, which would trigger sustainable economic, social and environmental adaptation. Main long-term management practices that support HNV farmland, such as transhumance, shepherding, traditional haymaking and controlled burning (Baldock *et al.* 1996) have historically provided a multiple of benefits, with biodiversity as a by-product. Nowadays, they are being increasingly unprofitable, as biodiversity – a ‘missing market’ product – is expected to be the main output (O’Rourke and Kramm 2012).

Romania is no exception to the issues related to HNV landscape preservation. While the introduction of payments through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was seen by small scale farmers as a great development opportunity, Romania’s designation as one of the EU Member States soon turned sour. The integration process brought not only difficult to access agriculture funds but also major social and economic structural changes in the farming communities across the country (see Knight 2010; Sutcliffe *et al.* 2013; Dahlström *et al.* 2013, also Buzogány 2009). Because of parcel size requirements, small scale farmers have sometimes had to group into associations in order to be eligible for CAP payments (Dahlström *et al.* 2013; Sutcliffe *et al.* 2013; Knight 2010). In turn, there are allegations that some farmers “build houses they don’t need, get susceptible to bribery, and burn their fields to pretend working their land for EU funding” – these are sometimes called ‘fake farmers’ (Mikulcak *et al.* 2013:134). Furthermore, there is an increasing recognition that farmers have become dependent on subsidies in order to continue their HNV farming practices, which would otherwise be unprofitable (Knight 2010; Dahlstrom 2013; Mikulcak *et al.*; Sutcliffe *et al.* 2013).

Rural areas in Romania deal with other significant socio-economic changes though. Here, subsistence and semi-subsistence farming systems that support HNV farmland are generally

the only way to fight poverty and avoid government taxation (Knight 2010). Furdui et al. (2011) considered that in Romania, the interaction between rural and urban areas will always have a winner a loser and judging by the current economic, social and geographic circumstances, rural areas are too uncompetitive to win. This includes disputes over land use, for which urban sprawl has created a high demand in recent years (Furdui et al. 2011). With high unemployment and no real job opportunities, young people and the middle aged leave to the cities or abroad to Southern and Western EU MSs in search of a decent lifestyle, although this usually means that they provide unskilled work for minimum wages (Knight 2010). The lack of perspectives and opportunities in rural areas that drives the young away and the lack of new skills for senior rural residents who are deeply rooted in traditions (MacDonald et al. 2000) contribute to a great extent to an ageing process in Romania`s villages. Indeed, in 2010 38% of the farm holders were aged 64 or above, while only 7.3% were 35 years old or younger, decreasing from 8.9% in 2003; the overall decrease in total number of farmers was 16% for the same period (EU Commission 2014). While in 2012 agriculture was still providing employment for almost 31% of the active population, compared to a 5.2% average for EU-28, salaries in this sector were 70% lower than those in construction, industry or services (EU Commission 2014). Similarly, the balance between output prices and input prices in the sector is negative, reflecting the inefficiency of Romanian agriculture and its incapacity to compete on the EU market. In addition, more than half of the agricultural exports to EU countries are commodities and intermediate products, while 62% of agricultural imports from the EU are final products (EU Commission 2014).

## 2.7 Gaps in Literature

As shown in previous sections, most of the available literature deals with the biodiversity-richness of HNV farmland landscapes and the ecological importance of preserving HNV farming systems. There is an increasing amount of research dedicated to setting biodiversity monitoring indicators for HNV farmland and at the same time to tailor CAP and other EU policies for a better integration of biodiversity concerns. Nevertheless, less efforts are made in creating synergies between HNV farming and socio-economic policies that would improve the livelihoods of HNV farmers (O'Rourke and Kramm 2012), which is a crucial factor in making the multifunctional agriculture concept sustainable (Kristensen *et al.* 2004). According to Jones (2008), it is imperative to design methods that would make biodiversity-friendly farming socially respectable and financially viable. O'Rourke and Kramm (2012) believe that one main research direction in this sense would be to identify the underlying reasons that motivate farmers to continue traditional farming. This last concern is integrated in this paper, which seeks to determine the relationship between small scale farmers and the landscape around them. In doing so, following sections will address the perception of landscape, dynamics of social rural identity and eventually the role of small scale farmers in the Romanian agriculture, society and efforts to preserve HNV farmland landscapes. Therefore, this research will look at the preservation of HNV farming through double subjective-objective lenses and therefore create bridges between socio-economic realities and biodiversity concerns.

## 2.8 Theoretical framework

It was shown in previous sections that the HNV farmland landscapes of Romania are recognized not only as cultural landscapes but as sites of worldwide importance because of the traditional farming systems and the intertwined nature of built environments and nature. The underlying assumption on which this study relies is Eric Hirsch's theory of cultural landscape. Hirsch (1986) argued that a cultural landscape is double-framed: first, objectively through the simple presence of a person or group of persons within a defined area and second, subjectively through how the person or group of persons relate to, interact with and perceive their landscape. This was simpler put by von Humboldt's, according to whom "in order to comprehend nature in all of its vast sublimity, it would be necessary to present it under a twofold aspect, first objectively, as an actual phenomenon, and next subjectively, as it is reflected in the feelings of mankind" (cited in Saarinen 1976:255-256). This research paper is connecting the landscape perception theory with the reference frameworks of Bloch (1995) and Frake (1996) in landscape anthropology.

Bloch's work pattern is similar to Hirsch's framework in the sense that upon doing research inside the Zafimaniry tribe of Madagascar he manages to identify the gaps between the objective and subjective frames of landscape projection. This gap is most clearly reflected in the desire of Zafimaniry tribe to modify the landscape (through slash and burn activities) in order to reach the development stage of their neighbouring tribe. In doing so, Zafimaniry proudly identified with the modified landscape, which meant on one hand deforestation but on the other hand rice production. Therefore, in this case deforestation as an objective cause for alarm is a great step towards progress from a subjective point of view. The same logic guides the relationship between small scale farmers and other stakeholders in Romania, as far as preservation of HNV farmland landscape is concerned. Solyomosi (2011) has looked at how

local farmer communities from a mountainous community bordering Transylvania changed their landscape and farming practices in order to reflect the expectations of foreign tourists. With the advent of tourism, some of these farmers decided to continue or return to the unprofitable HNV farming because this was perceived by foreign tourists as the specific of the area. To build on this, Lynch (1971) considers that inhabited landscapes are not only ecological systems but also communication channels, in that the way in which a landscape is managed and maintained provides information about the inhabitants themselves. Using this theory and Bloch's research framework, the study looks at how different stakeholders perceive certain practices required for the preservation of HNV landscapes, such as extensive grazing, non use of agro-chemicals, limited use of machinery and low-intensity production and seeks to identify whether there are conflicting stances.

Frake's framework in analyzing landscape and rural identity in East Anglia is applied to identifying how stakeholders relate to the past versus present and how this impacts the future of landscape. Frake observed the rural communities of East Anglia and concluded that people assume past identities, although the present has brought significant changes in their lifestyle. At the same time, he investigated the onomastics of the area and discovered that names of places were to a great extent related to past agricultural production or past landscape features which now have disappeared or relocated. Quite distinct from the rest of the country and still preserving a nostalgia for the past rural population in East Anglia, Frake considered, has a "sheltered identity", with an air of open-air museum. Also, Frake's sheltered identity is mostly triggered by an internal mechanism run by locals. In Romania the romanticized view of Transylvanian small scale farmers as part of a still medieval rural society of Europe has since now been the product of external marketing (see section 2.3). The research will look at how and if small scale farmers are changing their identity in relation to external factors – in other words, if they are re-branding themselves and if this re-branding is somehow part of a shared

identity in their communities. Also, another pillar on which the research will build is the relationship between small scale farmer communities and Europe on one hand and small scale farmer communities and socialism on the other hand. This latter aspect has been referred to as ‘communist nostalgia’ (Balazs 2007; Velikonja 2011) and is commonly occurring throughout the post-socialist countries from Central and Eastern Europe, reflecting the identity crisis subsistence and semi-subsistence farmers are experiencing. Ekman and Linde (2005) observed that during the last decade communist nostalgia soared in post-socialist EU countries, in particular within the ageing segment of the population. For Romania, this details is very important, as most of the farmers still engaged in HNV farming systems are middle aged or senior citizens. The youth has left to the cities or, mainly, to external labour market in other European Member States not because of higher prestige, but out of a search to broader horizons for their transformation into adults (Horvath 2008).

Building on the work of Verdery (2003), whose extensive research from 1990 to 2001 in a Transylvanian farmer community showed the complex faces of Romanian transition, this research follows up on the odyssey of Transylvanian small scale farmers in a post-European integration context. Verdery specifically looked at the outcomes of the decollectivization process and observed the mismatch between the global neo-liberal pressures and the complex dynamics of a socialist mentality based agricultural sector in transition. For small scale farmers who became private owners of land after the fall of the Soviet regime, this inflexible top down policy-making approach combined with the very nature of Romanian institutions built on socialist structures soon translated into a fast devaluation of land and the emergence of new farming classes such as large land tenants. Throughout the decade Verdery carried out the research, land changed its function, value and meaning for small scale farmers – this will be looked at from the current perspective of post-EU integration and how small scale farmers perceive the land and the wider landscape at the moment. Also, it will be linked to the clash in

discourse between EU and national authorities on the role and significance of small scale farmers. Mikulkak *et al.* (2013) has recently looked at how small scale farmers are perceived at EU level vs. local and national level (see section 2.4) in Transylvania, focusing on local and regional authorities. Knight (2010) also wrote a fairly critical report denouncing the marginalization of Romanian small scale farmers despite their essential role in HNV farmland preservation. Building on this, the study is bridging the future perspectives of small scale farmer communities and the relationship between preserving HNV farming systems and therefore their assumed cultural values and preserving HNV farmland landscape without their supporting cultural systems. In doing so, it aims to identify the gaps and conflicts between the subjective and objective framing of cultural HNV landscapes and building on perception, identity and role of small scale farmer communities, it provides a future scenario on the preservation of such landscapes.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Study Location

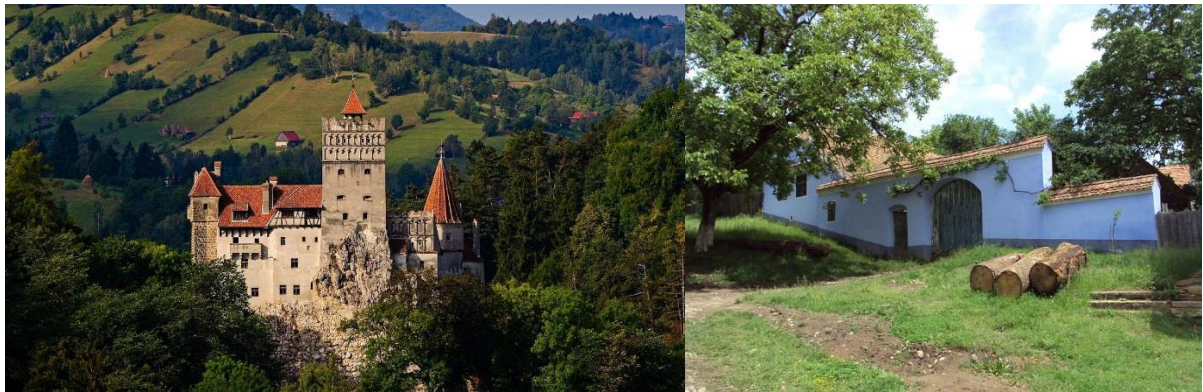
The two research locations chosen for this thesis were Bran and Simon villages from Bran parish in the southernmost part of Transylvania and Bunesti and Viscri villages from Bunesti parish in southeast Transylvania (see Fig. 5). Bran parish (green circle in Fig.5) comprises four villages: Bran, Simon, Sohodol and Predelut. It had a population of 5412 in 2013, with a slight 4% decrease from its 1990 levels. 20% of the parish population was aged 65 or above in the same year, compared to 13% in 1990 (INS 2014). Bunesti parish (blue circle in Fig.5) comprises five villages: Bunesti, Crit, Mesendorf, Roades and Viscri.



Fig. 5) Map of Romania and the two study locations. Source: Ezilon maps 2014)

In 2013 it had a total population of 2550, from 2613 in 1990. 9% of its population was aged 65 and above compared to 10% in 1990 (INS 2014). First, these two places were chosen because

of their position in Romania's most iconic region, Transylvania, whose invaluable HNV cultural landscapes are acknowledged throughout Europe. Second, the choice was influenced by the romanticized vision the two places earned in recent times. Bran is home to the Bran Castle (popularly known as 'Dracula Castle', see Fig.6) which is attracting numerous tourists every year, mostly foreigners. The castle itself has been subject to numerous press articles in international media, where platforms such as The Huffington Post, Daily Mail, The Telegraph, Business Insider or People related the structure and its surroundings to Dracula, vampires and a mystical land. Bunesti has recently been placed on Europe's map as one of HRH Prince of Wales residences and this has too brought many foreigners to the place (see Fig.6).



*Figure 6) The emblematic Bran Castle with its HNV farmland landscapes (left ) and a traditional restored Saxon house in the village of Viscri (right). Sources: bran-castle.com 2014 (left), personal archive (right)*

The region and particularly the village of Viscri, is described at length in the first part of Wild Carpathia documentary as 'a vital part of Romanian identity' and a 'lucky village where the members of the community have banded together to preserve their architecture and traditions' (Wild Carpathia 1), something that will be a key focus to next sections. Thirdly, the differences in landscape and topography between the two regions was another choice factor. Both places are classified as Less Favoured Areas (LFAs) - re-named as Areas of Natural Constraint (ANCs) through the newly reformed CAP, which means that due to the acknowledgement that their topography does not allow for optimal agricultural production, farmers here receive higher

subsidies and the livestock threshold for CAP payments eligibility is lower than in regions that are not ANCs. However, from this paper's perspective, the two locations are interesting because their landscape features and topography make them different in terms of what farming practices can be carried out. Thus, Bran is a mountainous area where livestock rearing is the main farming activity, as very little land can be cultivated due to the steep sloping landscape transected by narrow river valleys. Mainly because of this, Bran did not undergo collectivization during communism. On the other hand, Bunesti is a hilly area towards the centre of the Transylvanian Plateau and although there slope features do exist to a great extent, there is much more land available for cultivation: in 2007, the arable land accounted to 30% of the total surface of the parish. Here, collectivization was fully implemented. All this made the research more interesting and helped to identify if there are any dissimilarities in how small scale farmers and other stakeholders perceive the HNV farmland landscape. Finally, in choosing the two study locations I took into consideration the ease of access the local communities: Bran is close to my hometown and I already knew farmers who later introduced me to the community, while in Bunesti I was guided and introduced by a local NGO (see Table 1 below).

<i>Bran</i>	<i>Bunesti</i>
<i>Transylvania</i>	Transylvania
<i>Less Favoured Area</i>	Less Favoured Area
<i>Famous for Dracula</i>	Famous for, HRH Prince of Wales, Wild Carpathia
<i>Mountainous Area</i>	Hilly, plateau area
<i>Introduced by farmers</i>	Introduced by NGO
<i>No collectivization</i>	Collectivization

*Table 1. Similarities and differences in the two study locations*

### 3.2 Research Methods

Research for this paper has three main constituents: literature review, in-depth and semi-structured interviews and visual observations in the field. The literature review is used to provide a background to the research and define High Nature Value farmland landscapes and their characteristics at an EU and national level for Romania. It is here, therefore, that information about key elements in the preservation of HNV landscape in Europe and Romania is given, alongside with details on the current situation in the country and findings of previous research studies. Moreover, this section also identifies current gaps in the literature and as such, lays down the main untapped research channels that will constitute the focus of the other two research tools.

The in-depth and semi-structured interviews were carried out simultaneously with visual observations during a three week long fieldtrip in Bran and Bunesti areas and constituted the bulk of the fieldwork. These two research tools were used to acquire an insight into the “explicit culture” of the communities, which is “a part of what people are able to articulate about themselves” DeWalt and DeWalt (2010:1), or in other words ,the “level of knowledge people can communicate about with relative ease” (Spradley 1980:7), the way in which they identify within the society and their landscape perception. Because of the research focus, in-depth interviews targeted small scale farmers, while semi-structure interviews were addressed to NGO representatives, biodiversity experts, local/regional authority representatives and the industry. In this paper, small scale farmers are not necessarily defined by the parcel size they owned or farmed. Instead, they are defined as the subsistence and semi-subsistence farmers who fulfilled certain criteria, most of which is in line with attempts from the EU Commission

to find a common denominator for the small scale farmers of the Member States (EU Commission 2011). Consequently, small scale farmers here are those farmers who:

- i) did not carry out intensive agriculture;
- ii) had their farms centered around family, who at the same time satisfied most of the labor needs;
- iii) consumed a significant part of the farm's outputs such as dairy products, meat or vegetables; and
- iv) had a farm that matched the definition of micro-enterprise according to Romanian and EU legislation, which means it had less than 10 employees and an annual turnover smaller than 2 million euros.

The exact number of interviewees is presented in table 2 below. On one occasion, in Viscri, I was able to form a focus group of four farmers and therefore obtain a more detailed perspective about the issues they confront with and their related ideal solutions.

	<i>Interviews</i>	
	<i>Bran</i>	<i>Bunesti</i>
<i>Small scale farmers</i>	14	15 (4 in a focus group)
<i>NGO representatives</i>	0	2
<i>Local authority representatives</i>	0	2
<i>Regional authority representatives (APIA)</i>		2
<i>Biodiversity experts</i>		2
<i>Industry representatives</i>		4

*Table 2) Number of interviewees in both locations by category*

Length of interviews varied from half hour to two and a half hours, with an average of one hour and a half. In all cases, I had the oral consent of respondents to carry out the interviews and use

the data they provided while protecting their identity. In the case of two farmers from Bran, three from Bunesti and the local and regional authority representatives, I was not able to record the interviews.

It can be observed from the table that the total number of interviewees in Bran was smaller than in Bunesti. This is due to the fact that although I had good connections within the farmer community, it was very difficult to obtain information from local authorities and could not identify a relevant NGO for the purpose of the study. When asking for information at the town hall in Bran, the employees showed great reticence and they seemed to even fear my questions or that they might be overheard by others in the building. Finally, I was redirected to a representative of the Agency for Payments and Interventions in Agriculture (APIA) in the nearby Rasnov, who was supposed to allegedly offer the information I was looking for. However, after unsuccessfully managing to meet due to his busy schedule, he answered me via email that my questions should be asked to Bran town hall, as he was new in managing Bran and could not find appropriate answers. In the end, I received an answer from a local authority representative of Bran three weeks after my inquiry, in which he granted me an interview. Nonetheless, despite my numerous attempts to find a convenient date, he avoided a precise date and in July he finally informed me he had holiday plans and would be able to take part in my interview only in August.

On the other hand, it was much easier in Bunesti, where my fortunate connections with Fundatia ADEPT, a very active NGO, provided me with access to biodiversity experts and regional authority representatives. ADEPT has been working to preserve the HNV farmland landscapes in the Tarnava Mare region and their associated farming systems for 10 years, during which it won multiple EU awards for its contribution in bringing innovative tools to provide better opportunities for small scale farmers. The NGO team introduced me to the region

and provided me with a regional socio-economic background for their work. Through ADEPT, I was able to talk to the biodiversity experts working for or with their team and it was the NGO that introduced me to the APIA representatives for an interview. This was important because when trying to interview regional APIA representatives for Bunesti, I was confronted with the same attitude from Bran and was told they are not allowed to divulge any information. I had to deal with a similar situation when approaching town hall representatives from Bunesti but in this case, I was finally granted an interview due to my innocent student look.

Last but not least, visual observations in the field were used to determine not only the social, economic and cultural context of the study locations but also to verify some of the claims made during interviews by various stakeholders. This involved a process of so-called ‘passive participation’, where the researcher has mostly the bystander role (Spradley 1980). For instance, the issue of overgrazing was visually confirmed during a field visit with biodiversity experts, although APIA representatives felt strongly that overgrazing was not a problem. Also, afforestation of meadows could also be observed in both locations, in line with the statements made by a number of interviewees. In terms of context, visual observations allowed for determination of factors such as the social structure of the communities, the age of residents, their habits or the structure and location of the farms (see Fig.7). On one occasion, for instance, I surprisingly found myself more than 40km away from the household of one of my interviewees in order to visit his farm. It soon appeared that due to land ownerships problems and a corrupted process of land lease partition, Bran farmers were not able to acquire land closer to their homes or on a longer than one year contract basis.



*Fig. 7) Household structure in Bran, with adjacent hillslope land for haymaking (left) and typical biodiversity rich HNV meadow in Bunesti-Viscri used for pasture and haymaking (right). Photo courtesy Mariana Mata Lara*

Nonetheless, visual observations were usually accompanied by questions to farmers or other members of the community (e.g. shop owners, people offering me a car ride or guesthouse owners) in order to correctly identify the root cause of observed processes. For instance, in Bran I observed an election campaign banner with some of the country's referential political figures stating "Agriculture is Romania's chance". Upon bringing this into discussion with various people I interviewed or simply talked to, I not only found that they did not trust authorities and they deemed them corrupt (something I expected to hear) but also that they did not make the connection between agriculture and their farming practices, because they saw agriculture as crop cultivation on extensive areas of land rather than their own small parcels.

### 3.3 Limitations

The inability to interview a similar number of experts and representatives of NGOs and authorities in Bran is one of the main limitations of this paper. Judging from the experience in Bunesti, having a point of entry with multiple connections – in this case an active NGO – is a prerequisite for obtaining the whole picture of stakeholder interaction in the community and

how this impacts on the research focus. Nevertheless, I was able to compensate this by interacting with a number of other members of the community or simply overhear conversations and gain an unpredictable amount of useful information. For instance, during a bus ride from Bran to Brasov I overheard two senior residents discussing the “hardship” they had to endure in order to register with Agency for Payments and Interventions in Agriculture (APIA), which meant entire days in a queue and being sent back for more documents as their file was not complete.

Another limitation of the study is the lack of time for the research. Although carried out during three weeks, the fieldwork implied a lot of travelling around the communities and to the offices or regional or local authorities, in many cases without positive results. While this is connected to the first limitation and a better access point in the first location would have signified a more efficient and productive use of time, it is nevertheless true that more time would be needed for the formulation of more specific policy recommendations. For instance, I initially planned to volunteer for a few days in a farm, but the amount of time I needed for travelling and interviewing at length did not allow me to carry it out with success. There is no doubt that volunteering and conducting an active participant observation on-farm would have signaled some the practical issues farmers deal with every day, many of which are related to how policy is designed and implemented on the ground.

Lastly, the hesitation of some interviewees – to be recorded meant that I had to take notes and lose some of the information they provided. This was particularly true with authorities, who remained skeptical even at me taking notes. However, I did my best to write down the main ideas and their opinions, many times with referential quotes. I also made sure to revisit my notes as soon as the interview finished in order to detail the notes.

All in all, despite the limitations of this research, the amount and quality of the information gathered, as well as its resonance in the already existing literature, makes this study consistent and relevant not only in understanding small scale farmer communities but also in providing sound information in HNV farmland preservation for policy-makers and local and regional stakeholders so that implementation of various initiatives are better tailored to local communities.

## 4. Results and Discussion

This chapter summarizes the findings from the three week fieldwork carried out in Transylvania, Romania, and details to what extent they are reflected in the existing literature. It is divided in three subchapters, mirroring the main research topics approached in the field: farm structure and landscape perception, social identity and the role of small scale farmers in the preservation of HNV farmland landscapes. By detailing resonances in or conflicts with the existing literature, this chapter is discussing a HNV landscape preservation scenario.

### 4.1 Farm structure and landscape perception

Nassauer (1995) observed that there is a danger for remnant landscapes that are important for biodiversity conservation and provision of ecosystem services not to be preserved if people have an apparent tendency not to care about the landscape. This can be integrated into Lynch's (1971) framing of landscape, according to which the defining characteristics of people can be drawn from the way in which they modify and manage their surrounding landscape. For HNV farmland landscapes this is particularly true, as they have been subject to long-term continuous human intervention and the way in which people organize and manage their land derives from inherited traditions and land management habits (see section 2.1). Therefore, taking a look at the farm structure in the two research areas allowed an analysis of multiple socio-economic and cultural factors, such as the average size of a farm; the average size and age structure of a small scale farmers' family; the current and past functions of building annexes; on-farm human capital; land-use, land characteristics and land location; on-farm economic activities; and comparisons between two farm structures in one region or general farm structures in different

regions. This helped creating a location-specific context before starting the interviews and provided a better channelization of questions.

The relationship between the way in which people perceive the landscape and strategies developed for landscape preservation is a determining factor in the success or failure of policy-making, as conflicting views on land use, design and planning between stakeholders can severely impede policy implementation on the ground. In Romania, research on landscape perception is mostly dealt with in areas such as urban planning (Loja *et al.* 2011), traditional ecology knowledge (Babai and Molnar 2014) and international tourism (Vaughan 2007) although Solyomosi (2011) compared the cause for decline of agricultural systems that created cultural landscape features in both Las Hurdes, Spain and Gyimes, Romania. The author concluded that in both regions, the landscapes suffer because these systems lost their income-generating role and new systems are fine-tuned to tourism demand, the new income source for the locals, which is replacing the already archaic labour-intensive, unprofitable agricultural activity.

In the following section I relate to the existing literature on landscape perception to analyse what I found in the field. I first make the connection between farm structure and the organisation of landscape on one hand and what these aspects tell about the priorities, preoccupations and processes governing small scale farmer communities. I show that farmer communities from Bran were more sheltered from the socialist regime and kept a relative independence, reflected in the way in which they preserved their traditional preference for livestock rearing, their higher living standards and their willingness to preserve a fragmented biodiversity-friendly landscape to a consolidated, intensified crop-production oriented one. On the other hand, farmers in Bunesti experienced collectivization to the fullest and the process of land devaluation and rising cost for production (see Verdery 2003) that characterises many similar places is evident. Their farms are distinguished by poor technological assets, low

productivity, land fragmentation and little or no income diversification. In turn, these aspects translate into a preference for productivism and land consolidation, although their immediate priority is subsistence rather than profit.

I also look at how and if traditional farming practices are still embedded in the way farms are structured and landscapes are maintained. In this way, I acquire a comprehensive stance on landscape perception for small scale farmers. Finally, I examine differences in landscape perception between small scale farmers and other stakeholders involved in the preservation of HNV farmland landscape, such as NGOs, local and regional authorities, the industry and biodiversity experts. I maintain that there are a number of differences in landscape perception between these stakeholders, which translate into attempts to implement an inefficient landscape preservation tool with unsustainable consequences on the local communities. This is because divergent perceptions on the landscape mirror conflicting interests and an informational-educational gap, which in turn erode the prerequisites for a personal motivation to preserve the landscape.

#### 4.1.1 Farm structure and Functions

In general, there were a number of differences in the farm structure of Bran compared to those in Bunesti. For one, the former location had a mountainous topography, while the latter was hilly with broader valleys and meadows. In Bran, the built areas mostly concentrated along narrow valleys, although some houses were also present on the slopes. The majority of farms had a relatively small courtyard (somewhere around 500-1000m<sup>2</sup>), which were usually continued uphill by a larger land parcel used for haymaking. This parcel also had a barn where animals were kept and fed during winter. Because of the intensive tourist activity, almost all farm houses also served as guesthouses and had various facilities for tourists within the

premises, such as pavilions. Finally, annex buildings were present on the farm site, used for storage or to keep animals – especially chickens or young calves (see Fig.8).



*Fig. 8) A typical farmer's house structure in Bran. Photo courtesy Mariana Mata Lara*

In Viscri, village structure also followed the minuscule valley of a rather underground rivulet, while in Bunesti houses concentrated both along river valleys and the national-European road E60 (see Fig.9). Here, however, courtyards were larger, ranging on average from 0.5 to 1 hectare. This influenced subsistence crop production, insignificant in Bran where courtyards have a rather fruit orchard role but much more developed in Bunesti, where potatoes, cabbage, tomatoes or onions were usually cultivated. Also, unlike in Bran the land available for haymaking was generally not located next to the farms but on the hills around. In both locations, farmers with animals usually participated in auctions at the town hall in order to lease land for pasture. However, in Bunesti common pastures were available for farmers, while this was not the case in Bran, mainly due to the topographic conditions of the area. Also, the pasture places won through auction were much closer to a farmer's village in Bunesti than in Bran due to land availability issues.



*Fig. 9) Village structure in Bunesti. Source: Google Maps 2014*

Although topography did play an important role in this, farmers in Bran complained that auctions were unfair and good, closer land was given to individuals authorities were friendly with rather than to those who needed it most. Auctions were organized by the town hall every year for both publicly owned and privately owned land available for lease, in many cases just for a period of one year. Only on two occasions farmers told me that they were managing to keep the same parcels because they managed to establish a long-lasting relation with land owners and they were leasing their land directly without taking part in auctions. Surprisingly, many farmers from Bran had to travel 20-40km to the land parcel where they were keeping their sheep flock and their cattle herds. These parcels were large by the region's average – somewhere around 40 hectares, but in one case I interviewed a farmer who was leasing 150 hectares for his sheep and cattle, although his private land in Bran accounted for only 5 hectares. It is worth mentioning here that during my talks with industry representatives and with larger farmers from other parts of Romania 150 hectares is seen as a small, insignificant extent of land. When asking about the surface they are cultivating on, farmers from the eastern

or southern part of Romania would answer “not much, only 650 hectares” or even “only 800 hectares”. It appears that a “serious” farm should have at least 1500 hectares and “real farmers” are those who have 3-4000 hectares farms, although some of these large-farm dominated regions in eastern Romania are similar in topography with Bunesti and are also classified as LFAs. This idea of “real farmers” surfaced during talks with regional or local authorities and farmers themselves: indeed, the definition of “real farmer” is first and foremost connected to the surface of farmed land (see section 2.4). The conflicting definitions of “real farmers” signaled a gap between the objective and the subjective perceptions on the management units of landscape – small scale farmers as landscape and agriculture custodians vs. large farms as the norm for agricultural landscapes. Farmers in both locations highlighted this during interviews:

[a farmers in Bran, on being asked how they see their future as small scale farmers] “small scale farmers? But we are not small scale farmers, small scale farmers are those who have a lot of land, here we mostly raise cattle and sheep. Those in the lowlands, they are small scale farmers, they have a lot of land, they grow crops...”

[a farmer in Bunesti, on being asked about the state of agriculture in the area] “Agriculture? Here? We don’t have agriculture anymore, only some very few big farms here, the rest of us just try to survive.”

Similarly to Bran, the problem of land availability was reported in Bunesti as well, although here the issues were mostly related to the price of leased parcels and the quality of land. The town hall was organizing auctions for land lease every year and small scale farmers complained that the prices were too high and unless they had relations in the town hall administration or were sympathizing the majority party, the land they were attributed would be of poor quality. Farmers here also voiced their discontent with the fact that lease contracts were commonly

made for only one year, however, upon researching the legislation I found that a new governmental ordinance from 2013 stipulates that lease contracts must be made for five years (MADR: O.U.G. 34/2013). None of the farmers seemed to be aware of this, which highlights the poor access to information, a poor information flow in the community or inappropriate legal compliance by local authorities and private land owners. Another common discontent in both locations was that subsidies were taken by owners rather than small scale farmers themselves, who were the genuine active farmers. Even though in most of cases small scale farmers with animals would agree to pay the lease and leave the subsidies to the owners, there were cases when they gave up livestock rearing altogether. For example, in Bunesti the number of cattle decreased from 300 in 1990 to 100 today. There are multiple reasons behind this decline, including lack of trustworthy people to take care of the animals, increase in the costs of livestock rearing and decrease in the prices for dairy products or wool. In this context, not helping small scale farmers by paying them subsidies becomes a disincentive to continue livestock rearing with increasing cost – this was brought into conversation several times during interviews with both Bran and Bunesti farmers.

Farms analysed during the fieldwork were diverse, ranging from only 0.5 or one hectare of crop cultivation, one pig and several chickens to 25 cows and 100 sheep, although most farmers had on average one or two cows, two to three hectares and, if the case, around 10 sheep. The number of animals per farm was significantly lower in Bunesti and a simple visual analysis showed that farms in Bran looked more plentiful. This can partially be explained by the well-developed tourism industry in Bran and the better infrastructure, which offered income diversification opportunities for the region's small scale farmers (see Fig.10). The importance of infrastructure for the development of rural tourism, agro-tourism and eco-tourism has also been highlighted by Chiritescu *et al.* (2010) for the prolongation of Bran-Rucar-Dragoslavele region, which is located in Brasov and Arges counties.



*Fig. 10) Unpaved roads and poor drainage systems turns Viscri's roads into mudflows during rainy episodes (left). Bran benefits from modern facilities, including a functional sewage system, river drainage, paved roads and utilities (right). Sources: Personal archive (left) Photo courtesy Mariana Mata Lara (right).*

Usually, the farmer's home here had the function of guesthouse too, where tourists could find accommodation and enjoy home-made food with home-grown ingredients. On many occasions, in front of the house there would be a pavilion for tourists to relax or eat, while at the back of the house there would be a barn for animals such as pigs, chickens or calves and a very small plot for crop cultivation accompanied by fruit orchards, all of which tourists would describe on online forums or on TV as "very traditional" or "like in the countryside" (see Fig 8). Apart from the necessary tourist conditions in the farmhouse and some amenities in the yard, farmers did not modify their farm structure but they do use terms such as "traditional", "natural products" or "picturesque" to define their home, products and outer environment. Many farmers told me this, but perhaps the best all-inclusive thought came from a farmer who told me that

"[...] tourists come here for our traditional products, we have only natural products, we don't use any of those poisons they put in supermarket products. There is only one supermarket chain here who is serious about its stuff, when I get to sell some of what I make I sell to them [...]"

And of course they [tourists] like this rustic, picturesque landscape, they have fresh air here, not like in Bucharest!”

On the other hand, in Bunesti, the farmer`s home is generally used solely for farmer`s family, although some guesthouses did exist in Viscri and a handful of people were offering accommodation in Bunesti. Tourism, however, is not as developed as in Bran and, as following sections will show, not evenly distributed. A cause for this was also the poor infrastructure, despite the fact that E60 runs through the middle of the parish`s administrative village, Bunesti. From there to Viscri on some 9km, the road lost its asphalt gained years ago and makes transportation very difficult and highly unpleasant for tourists, while Viscri itself has unpaved roads that become extremely muddy during rainy episodes. The disadvantages of the region`s poor infrastructure was confirmed not only by all interviewees regardless of their occupation, but also by taxi drivers from around the county – their first reaction upon hearing the word ‘Viscri’ was “bad roads”, seconded by “Prince Charles”. Indeed, it seemed that the rift between the subjective perception of Viscri-Bunesti as a wonderful corner of pristine medieval European landscape (see section 2.3) and the actual situation on the ground was quite significant.

Equipment used on farm was also different in the two regions. Farms in Bunesti were more oriented towards crop production and therefore some of the bigger, wealthier farmers had tractors and combines, which they sometimes lent to smaller farmers. Most of the machines however, looked old and rusty. On one occasion, I visited the premises where a farmer was making bread in order to sell it directly on the market in nearby city of Sighisoara. The location was a poorly maintained building relatively far from his home in the village and literally a ruin, but had a spacious courtyard that the farmer used for haymaking. The premises had an old

oven, which he heated up using firewood and had some women from the nearby village to help him bake the bread, nonetheless, it was hard to imagine he would be able to pass an official hygiene control. As he later told me, the bread was only sold to a couple of mini markets with whom he had a long-established business relation and in the market in Sighisoara, where he had already made his customer network. Indeed, the bread was very tasty and the business seemed to work reasonably well, providing for some important income diversification. This situation is very similar to what Aistara (forthcoming) described for Latvia, where an “unofficial” family-run bread baking business was directed towards an already established network of customers. In Latvia, hygiene inspectors fined the business owners because they were not complying with expensive EU hygiene regulations and so the family modernized its bread making facilities out of fear that they would be closed down.

Similarly, it is hard to believe that the farmer I interviewed will manage to keep running his business in the near future without any significant investment in aligning with EU hygiene standards. For many like him, being an EU citizen means having to comply with many purposeless regulations, which hinder business development and therefore income diversification. To put it in the words of farmer from Bran, who referred to the relative ease of doing transhumance before Romanian joined the EU:

“It was better before [the EU integration], you could do pretty much what you wanted, there was a lot of abandoned land or land that was not fenced – all there for you to use. Now everyone fenced everything and you’re not even allowed on the road with a horse cart, not to mention your sheep...”

[on talking about a transnational Carpathian project on reviving transhumance] “What they did now with that transhumance at the TV...come on, that’s not how you do it, that’s just something to be trendy, that’s not shepherding.”

In the same way that the decade after the fall of communism represented the rise of previous ACP leaders with wider connections who soon became large land tenants (see Verdery 2003), nearly one decade after Romania’s EU integration the trend is continuing, as only medium to large farmers can afford compliance with expensive EU regulations. With better land value and income opportunities and with a focus on livestock rearing, farmers in Bran have been more likely to adapt and modernize, contrasting rural communities like Bunesti, although the latter mirrors the situation in most post-collectivization Romanian villages.

#### 4.1.2 Land fragmentation vs. task fragmentation

The case of the bread-baking and hay making property explained above was also one more example of farmer property fragmentation in Bunesti, where after the post-communist land appropriation the land a farmer would receive back from the state would not all be located in one place. The trend has been observed in most transition countries from Central and Eastern Europe by FAO (2003), who called for a land consolidation strategy to advance rural development. However, van Dijk (2007) argues that although such a strategy has by now been implemented with success in countries like the Netherlands, Germany or France, implementing a similar initiative based on experience exchange between Western and Eastern Europe would not work in post-socialist MSs because of the low acceptance populations have of the government and scarce financial resources. At the moment, it seems that in Central and Eastern Europe land consolidation is in its infancy. Pašakarnis and Maliene (2010) detailed the

perspectives of land consolidation in Lithuania, where the initiatives comprise several pilot projects. The projects are already seen as a tool to address the problems of land fragmentation and small average farm sizes, which impact on agricultural production, environmental protection or employment.

Expressed in other words, the idea of land consolidation was voiced by a lot of farmers, in particular those in Bunesti. Although in Bran it was also the case that farmers would happen to own 3-4 parcels located in different locations, here this was due to other reasons. Collectivization and loss of land never really happened in the region but land fragmentation was taking place mostly due to land inherited through family union or simply because farmers bought more land for haymaking. One farmer for instance, had three locations for its small-sized land parcels, the furthest being at around 6km from his home, higher on a mountain's slope. There were, however, no complaints about fragmentation of agricultural land and this is because farmers did not connect the land to productivity and found it just fine to move 2-3km to mow the grass few times a year on parcels that generally have the same land quality - this was just the tip of their work iceberg (see Fig.11).

On the other hand, in Bunesti farmers complained that they have "one hectare here and one right down next that valley over there. What can I do with that? How can I work it?" Not only some parcels would be on slopes and therefore more labor intensive as available machines (if any) were not adapted to hills, but also having only one hectare in plain areas did not meet the costs of owning machines to work the land.

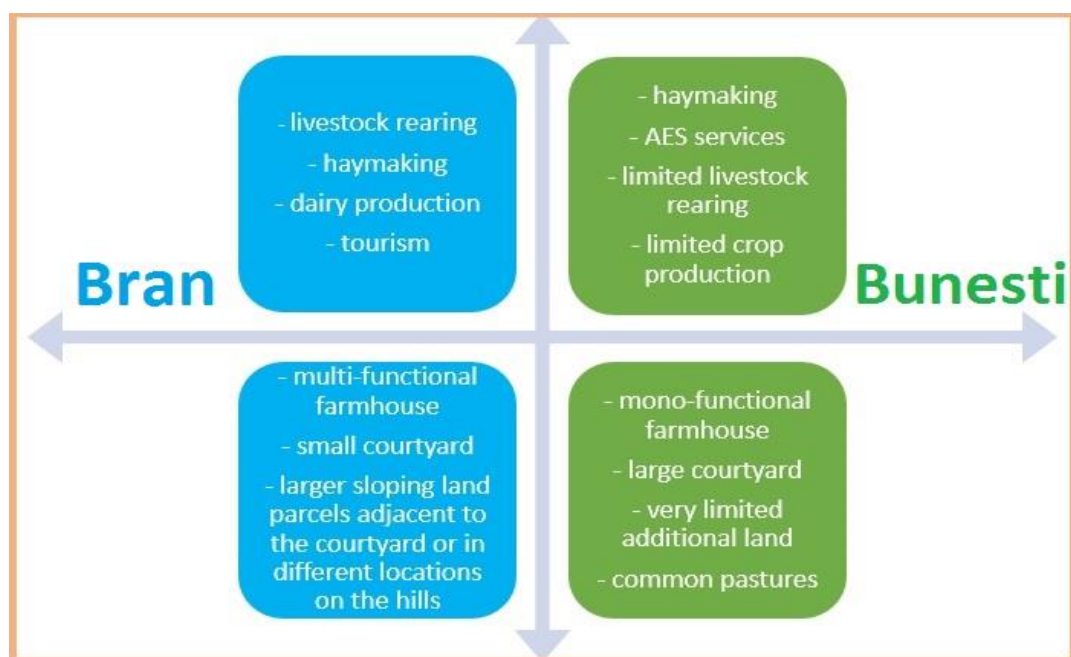


Fig. 11) Summary of farm structure and main activities for farmers in Bunesti and Bran

During one presentation of the botany expert I also talked to, I found out that good quality, environment-friendly, efficient mowing machines adapted to hills were on the market and they successfully tried one in the area. Nonetheless, the price for such a machine is very high, around € 25,000, many times the annual income of an average farmer in Bunesti. One small scale farmer from Viscri told me that he had two parcels, one on the hill and one in the lowlands of the village. He was too small to afford machinery and told me that he could not even ask someone with machinery to come and work his land: “how do you think they could come with that big machine for my small parcel on the hill? I can hardly convince them for that one below”. This reminded me of one of the farmers in Eastern Romania who was complaining she was farming “only 800 hectares”. In her premises she was very well equipped with modern machinery and told me that “I just had this woman coming to me and asking if I could plough her land as well, but with that blue modern truck of mine [she laughs]. Come on, you cannot even turn that machine on her narrow one hectare parcel!”

It became evident from the analysis of farm structures that communities in the two regions based their perception of the landscape around on different aspects, which defined them. In Bran, small scale farmers had never experienced collectivization during socialism and their main occupation remained livestock rearing and haymaking. According to one senior farmer I interviewed in Bran, animals both wild and domestic characterize and in a way protected this area, because Ceausescu allegedly avoided to collectivize the area due to his passion for hunting: “I tell you something...we were lucky here in this region because our comrade [irony] didn’t collectivize us like he did in the south. He loved hunting and he kept this whole place for his own hobby. I know this, I was going hunting too with some guys from the Securitate<sup>1</sup>”. It seems in this way, the mosaic of small land parcels on the hills and the traditional structure of farms was kept largely untouched throughout Communism and locals managed to keep their practices and regard the HNV farming system as the normal state of affairs. Even though in the last decade tourism developed aggressively, there are still many farmers engaged in this farming system and the realization that their families cannot live out of this volatile service sector brought some essential changes in farm structure (e.g. farmer’s house was multifunctional) but not in the landscape. Contrary to the findings of Solyomosy (2011) in Giymes, small scale farmers in Bran did not have to change their landscape for neither national nor foreign tourists, although an outsider’s perception of Bran as a mystical medieval place is very different from how small scale farmers see their home region. In Bunesti, though, a lot was made in order to “sell” the Saxon villages to the tourists and perhaps the most noticeable is the restoration of more than 100 houses in the last decade through one of the active NGOs patronized by HRH Prince of Wales and the implementation of restoration guidelines for locals, so that they preserve the local architecture and avoid more modern options.

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<sup>1</sup> Securitate was the name given to Romania’s secret police during the Communist regime

#### 4.1.3 Landscape perception and the discourse on production

In Bunesti, perception on landscape was tightly connected to agricultural production. Small scale farmers here found it important that the land would be used for production, in the same way it used to be during communist times. They strongly believed that meadows and pastures are important for hay production, but being able to provide your most basic food products is a necessity, which at the moment seems luxurious. For them, prices for inputs such as machinery, fertilizers or gasoline far exceed their savings and profits deriving from the little agricultural production they might have. Negative cost benefit balance for small scale farmers was also highlighted by Verdery (2003) in a Transylvanian community for the period of 1990-2001 (see section on theoretical framework) and it seems that EU integration did not reverse this trend. In the eyes of one town hall representative from Bunesti who happened to be an agronomic engineer, farming was extremely expensive now not only because of the price of machinery but also because of the gasoline price:

“before 1990, one liter of gasoline had the same price with one liter of milk or one kilogram of grains. Now one liter of the cheapest gasoline is 6 [lei] and one liter of milk is 1 [leu]. How do you expect farming to be productive?”

Indeed, an issue voiced by nearly all interviewees in Bunesti was the steep decline in agricultural production and a medium to strong nostalgia for communist times when Romania was Europe's `bread basket`. Unlike in Bran, the landscape farmers in Bunesti were living in now was totally new to them. When asking one farmer how she thinks the landscape around her changed in the last two decades or so, she came back to the collectivization topic and how the land was very well taken care of – that is, how the land was intensively worked and produced a rich harvest. She said “I went up the hill some days ago, on a parcel I used to work

on. I can't even tell you how bad it looked, with all these thorn bushes, they grew so high...it was heartbreaking, I felt like crying". When I asked one farmer of how he feels about agriculture in general he answered me "What agriculture? Look around, do you have any idea how these fields looked like during the ACPs?<sup>2</sup> We were producing so much here, there was plenty for everyone! I was getting five big bags of sugar every year, I didn't even have what to do with that much. The attic was full of crops when the winter came. And now? Nothing!" This state of melancholia was persistent in the community, generated by the disappointing contrast between the productive landscapes of Communism and the desolating image of an ageing, poverty-dominated community today.

There was general agreement that not being able to produce on one's own land significantly increases the costs for livestock maintenance as well as own consumption; in turn, this contributed to the decrease in livestock breeding recorded among small farmers in the last two decades – it was shown earlier that in Bunesti cattle heads decreased from 300 in 1990 to 100 today. Indeed, it seemed that the paradox of caring for the land and at the same time deploring collectivization – which the small scale farmers perceived as a very efficient process of land consolidation – was connected to a reverse in a Maslow-like pyramid of landscape perception (see Fig.12).

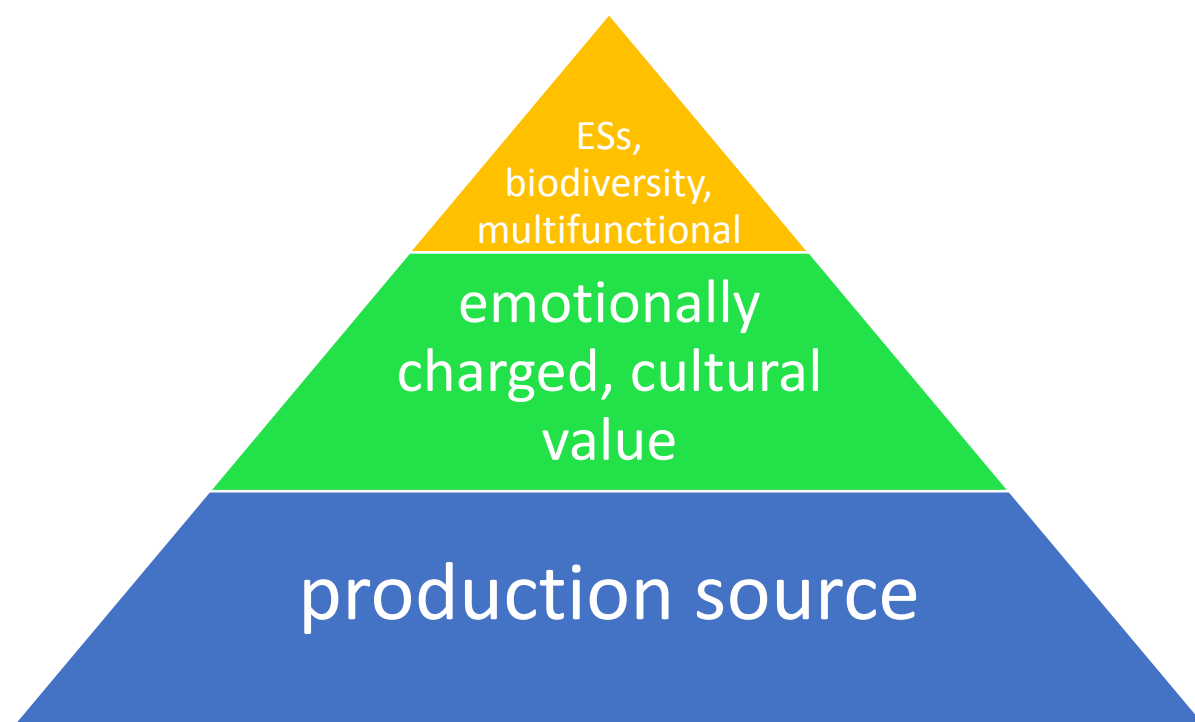
### *Level 1 – productivism*

The pyramid is a useful tool to explain the relationship between different views on landscape among small scale farmers and other stakeholders. At the very bottom of the pyramid, is the traditional view about Romania's most basic need in the agriculture sector: production to satisfy internal market. In APIA's case, for instance, a great dissatisfaction within the agency seemed to be the EU incentive of subsidizing lack of production rather than production. One

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<sup>2</sup> ACPs (Agricultural Cooperatives for Production) were the large state-owned farms during Communism

APIA representative said that the simple fact that one receives 400 euros/ha only to take care of the land and not produce while whoever produces receives 140 euros/ha shows that Europe wants us to import more and produce less (which was something voiced by the others as well).



*Fig. 12) Pyramid of landscape perception by all stakeholders*

He claimed that it was much better before when the focus was on production than now, when EU policies are “discouraging production so they can sell their stuff here”. Town hall representatives also complained about how Romania became a selling market for the rest of Member States, stating that during communism we had much better technology: “[...] and technology? My goodness, you don’t know what technology we had, we had technology that Western Europeans didn’t have, and we were selling them all kind of things. We had great technology in agriculture, you can’t compare that to what Europeans want to sell us now”. There were assertions that the CAP has negative effects on Romania’s internal food security and makes the country a buying market for the other Member States. Decoupling subsidies from production, the representative continued, was a mistake and it is not working for Romania.

The ideas voiced by APIA and town hall representatives reflected what small scale farmers from Bunesti complained about.

*Level 2 – Amenity and emotional attachment*

The next level on the pyramid is shared by some small scale farmers from Bran who said they were emotionally connected to the landscape around. Although they did not have the terminology of HNV farmland embedded in their vocabulary, small scale farmers from Bran did talk about the landscape around as a whole, unfragmented environment to which they were emotionally linked, mentioning the aesthetic value of the mountainous landscape around:

[one farmer from Bran, relating to others selling their land and houses] “How can I leave from here? Look around, at the mountains, it’s a real beauty. And where to go? In the city? It’s all polluted and chaotic there, why do you think they come here to relax and enjoy the peacefulness of our places”

[another farmer from Bran talking about the landscape around] “they [urbanites and locals] built a lot but all those hills and forests haven’t changed much. Look how much forest we have, how beautiful our hills and mountains are. Why leaving this place?”

It appears that when asked what has changed since their childhood, small scale farmers from Bran could not point to significant physical transformations around, apart from the increase in community size, improvement in infrastructure and many new guesthouses being built (unlike farmers from Bunesti). This “advancement” in landscape perception might come as farmers in Bran are generally experiencing higher living standards, a better preservation of traditions and a relatively undisturbed history of co-habitation in their specific landscape.

### *Level 3 – The experts*

The third and last level of the pyramid is the acknowledgement that HNV farmland landscapes deliver multiple social, economic and environmental benefits. For instance, NGO representatives saw these landscapes as sites of rich biodiversity worth to preserve, especially because there are very few places in Europe similar in nature and there are valuable ecosystem services being delivered in HNV farmland:

[talking about a meadow near Viscrì] “We’re now in a typical down lowland hay meadow, which is probably the most threatened kind of habitat in the whole of Europe today. They existed around villages in Western Europe and Eastern Europe and really, they’ve only survived in Eastern Europe. Here, just in this square meter where we’re standing, in the beginning of June there will 60 different flower species in every square meter. The diversity of the flowers is just absolutely unbelievable and that’s because this has never been fertilized and it’s never been sprayed and this kind of landscape is of fantastic European importance [...] and we’re not talking only about flowers here. There are between around 100 and 200 species of butterfly that have survived because of lack of spray...”

Thence, their view echoed the vast amount of literature available on HNV farmland landscapes and their key role in biodiversity conservation (see section 2.2). Similarly, some farmers from Bran mentioned the role of nature conservation in providing ecosystem services such as soil quality, prevention of soil erosion and landslides, clean air, high nutrient quality and a higher quality of end dairy or meat products. On being asked about the relationship between nature and farming in the region, farmer told me that

“Here we’ve been lucky that we didn’t have much deforestation. Forests keep the soil in its place and give us clean air and others come here for our air because others lost their forests”

Another one said that

“all we take we take from mother nature. That’s why the milk and cheese from our animals is good, that’s why their meat tastes so good. Everything we produce here is natural, is based on what nature gives us”

Although clearly focused on the need for production, APIA representatives did consider the continuation of HNV management benefic for the quality of grasslands and therefore the nutrient load for sheep and other grazing livestock. They also mentioned the fact that there is a better quality of sheep wool because there are no thorn bushes, although many farmers from both Bran and Bunesti complained that selling sheep wool has become highly unprofitable. Finally, APIA claimed that the quality of end products such as milk or cheese was said to be higher and the maintenance costs for the livestock lower (e.g. less disease outbreaks).

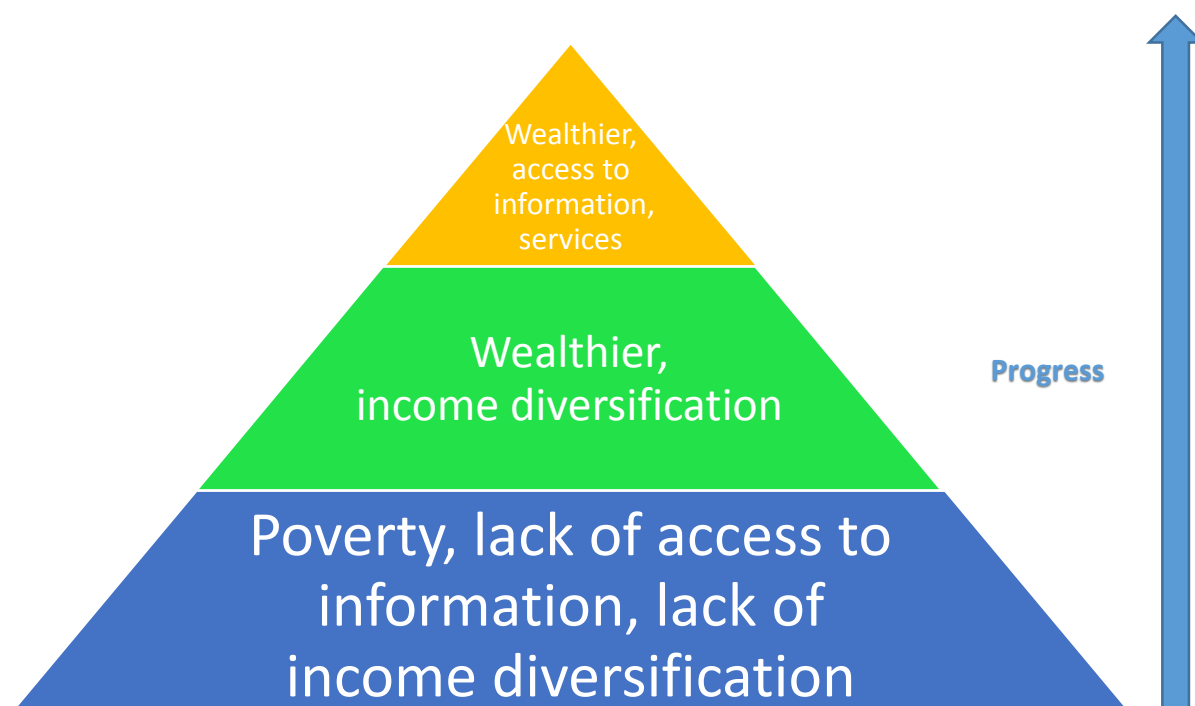
#### 4.1.4 Subjective vs. Objective

An example of how the difference between the pyramid’s levels of landscape perception are reflected on the ground is the position of stakeholders with regard to the use of agro-chemicals. In Bunesti, there was strong support for using agro-chemicals for a better maintenance and higher productivity of agricultural land (and the disappointment that there is no money for this and diesel), while in Bran interviewees were strongly against agro-chemicals, arguing that this would “poison the ground”. In the case of Bunesti farmers, their pro agro-chemical standpoint can be framed in Bloch’s (1995) analysis of the Zafimaniry tribe: although generally agreed by NGOs and APIA and highlighted through EU law as harmful for the environment, agro-chemicals are seen by farmers as a tool for development and progress. The Zafimaniry tribe was relating to the next, more developed tribe who used deforestation to clear fields for cultivation, although in the West deforestation is generally discredited. They perceived the landscape as something on which they need to leave their mark, a mark that would indicate

what degree of development they reached. Farmers in Bunesti relate to the collective agriculture community during communism as a symbol of production, stability and progress. Nevertheless, while the Zafimaniry looked forward to the future, farmers in Bunesti look back to the past and instead of transforming the landscape to something new, they want to restore it to a previous productivist form. In other words, small scale farmers in Bunesti perceive the current aspect of the landscape not like a continuous path to progress but as a remnant of a development climax, which has already passed.

As mentioned before, small scale farmers in Bran not only had a traditional connection to the HNV farmland landscape but were also aware of some of the benefits deriving from it, knowledge they inherited from within family or developed through observations. APIA and NGO representatives were against the use of agro-chemicals too, even though APIA disagreed with the prohibition of overseeding the meadows with gramineaceous seeds, which they saw as necessary for keeping the soil and nutrient quality high. Nevertheless, this conflicting opinion on how to manage the land shows on one side the economically deprived, uninformed small scale farmers from Bunesti used to intensive agricultural production and wealthier, knowledge-rich small scale farmers in Bran, together with experienced NGO and APIA representatives on the other side. In consequence, this relationship offers a glimpse into the processes governing the root-causes of pyramid structure (see Fig.13). The pyramid structure also reflected in the way arguments were made: bottom up or top down, subjective or objective. For instance, in Bunesti town hall representatives and farmers considered that the land is not being taken care of properly and there are a lot of thorn bushes around. However, APIA and NGO representatives and biodiversity experts saw an improvement in landscape management, with less woody and thorn bushes during the past 4-5 years. While the former only sustained their argument by returning to the production issue, the latter provided scientific arguments

(presence or re-colonization of specific plant species) or showed access to information (evolution of landscape management using remote sensing, field monitoring reports, etc.).



*Fig.13) Root causes for pyramid structure*

On the occasion when APIA representatives complained about the prohibition on overseeding, their argument showed some expert knowledge: their claim is embedded in literature, which states that sheep do graze selectively and this impacts on the flora diversity. However, negative impacts on flora are only true in the case of overgrazing (see section 2.5), something on which APIA on one hand and NGOs and biodiversity experts on the other hand had conflicting views. Overgrazing was deplored by experts in ecology and botany, who said that the process seriously disturbs the meadow flora and negatively impacts on soil quality. APIA representatives, nonetheless, believed that such a process cannot take place on the meadows and pastures simply because there is not so much sheep and the animal quota per hectare is very low. For instance,

meadow owners are obliged to ensure at least 0.3 UVM<sup>3</sup> per hectare. This is equivalent to a calf during his first months or 2.5 sheep per hectare. The maximum animal charge per hectare in Bunesti was 1 UVM, whereas by comparison this was 3.5 before entering the EU according to a town hall representative. 1 UVM would be approximately 8 sheep, however, during the field investigations I was sometimes able to identify two or three sheep flocks grazing over relatively small areas and fairly close to each other. Small farmers (who shared the opinion of NGO representatives) told me that this was because shepherds did not really care about where the flock should graze and did not differentiate between HNV managed parcels, common pastures or land managed individually (e.g. in some cases people decided to rather mown their parcels whenever they thought it would be better and more productive than taking part in AES and mowing according to strict regulations, after 1<sup>st</sup> of July). The disagreement illustrates the trend observed at a macro scale by Verdery (2003) in the 1990-2001 period. Whereas Verdery criticized the way in which agrarian, land property and privatization policies in Romania were blindly following a neo-liberal model imposed by supra-national institutions like the World Bank or the IMF, the issue of overgrazing or the mowing dates reflects the gap between how EU and national authorities perceive and define the rural space and how the rural space actually functions at a local level (see Gray 2000).

Something that everyone agreed to was that without subsidies, there would be very little HNV farmland landscape taken care of. Similarly, without any subsidies the number of small farmers would be less than half (according to small farmers) or would only be maximum 20% of the current number (according to APIA). These observations have already been noticed in the literature (see lit review section 2.6) and support the studies presented in the beginning of this section, which stress the loss of viability for HNV farming system and how apparent lack of

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<sup>3</sup> UVM (Unitate Vita Mare) = Big Cattle Unit, is a standard method of measuring the animal charge on land by the amount of nitrogen contained in their manure.

care for the wider landscape decreases preservation chances, leaving this process dependent on subsidy-based policies.

Throughout conversations it became clear that small scale farmers, APIA representatives and town hall representatives would prefer a rather uniform, productive agricultural landscape to the current haymaking-predominant HNV farmland. This perception of a uniform landscape with larger parcel sizes is also shared and preferred by the industry, who perceived this change in Romanian rural areas as inevitable. However, Transylvania was not seen as a target zone because of its less productive geographical characteristics when compared to the Romanian lowlands. Therefore, small scale farmers – who have the symbolic role on environmental stewards – base their landscape perception on agricultural productivity and on satisfying their basic needs. APIA representatives also share this view to a great extent but they do not depend on farming for a living, they are wealthier and have access to services and information. For farmers production is survival and farming provides for most of their income. For APIA representatives, favoring production reflects the discontent with the current EU policies which are not well tailored for their region. At the same time, it signals a warning that in their current form, EU subsidies for maintaining HNV farmland landscapes are unsustainable and do not tackle the root cause behind the disappearance of HNV farming systems, which is their position outside the market.

#### 4.1.5 Conclusions

This section showed that farm structure reflects agricultural practices, which in turn shape the preferred farming systems in each location. In Bran, farm structure has suffered only minor modifications in the last century and the most notable change is the multifunctionality of farmer

houses, which adapt to income diversification through provision of tourism services. The farm structure also reflects a stable, relatively wealthier farmer community in Bran, with good built infrastructure, which is important for potential economic opportunities and which has not led to a substantial change in the landscape for touristic purposes like in other similar places (see Solyomosi 2011). On the other hand, the last two or three decades have brought major changes in farm structure in Bunesti, from forcedly collectivized farms based on production during socialism to small scale private farm holds since 1990. The current farm structure reflects a more production-oriented farmer community, which is a characteristic inherited from Communist times. The persistence of this productivist-oriented farm structure and landscape perception in Bunesti has also been favoured by limited economic opportunities and poor infrastructure, which characterize the transition period of Romania. For the small scale farmers here, the collectivized past is a development climax similar to what Boch's (1995) Zafimaniry tribe feels about a modified future landscape. This framing of landscape perception also indicates a rift in the subjective and objective perceptions on landscape. While in Bran traditional HNV farming practices have been continuously embedded in the farm management of communities, even during Communism, in Bunesti a return to such low-input labor intensive practices was the only choice, as the whole agro-industry sector in the area collapsed after 1990. For NGOs and Western European media or personalities Bunesti-Viscri is a pristine corner of medieval Europe (see lit review section xx) with invaluable HNV farmland landscapes, immensely important for biodiversity conservation. On the other hand, for farmers in the community as well as local and regional representatives, intensive agricultural production remains the main function of the landscape, which is perceived only in the context of being worked and for ensuring local food security. This rift reproduces a landscape perception pyramid in which pro-HNV landscape NGOs and scientific experts have the information, wealth and access to services, while most productivism oriented farmers lack all

these factors. Also, the pyramid replicates a paradox, in that local and regional authorities are on the same level with NGOs and biodiversity experts but have conflicting views on the landscape. This mirrors the clash in discourse on the role of small scale farmers (see section 2.4), which can be framed within the differences in perception of the rural space between national and supra-national policy and the day to day realities on the ground (see Gray 2000; Verdery 2003). The pyramid shows how the implementation gap between EU and national biodiversity targets and declining HNV farmland landscape is due to badly tailored policies that led to conflicting views on landscape and in turn to conflicting interests over land use between stakeholders. The root of these conflicts is the lack of financial viability of HNV farming system (see section 2.6). Thus, to a lesser extent in Bran but to a higher extent in Bunesti, HNV management is no longer sustainable because farmers ceased to be the root-cause of HNV farming system existence but mere subsidy dependent land workers.

## 4.2 Social Identity

“[...] The heavy soil had stuck on his hands like funeral gloves. He inhaled the fragrance. [...] Then slowly, piously, [...] he bent on his knees, he lowered his forehead and he voluptuously glued his lips on the wet soil. And in that hurried kiss he felt a cold, dizzy thrill [...] and it seemed like the earth was leaning, was bowing in front of him”

(Fragment from ‘Ion’, when the protagonist finally acquires his own parcel of land)

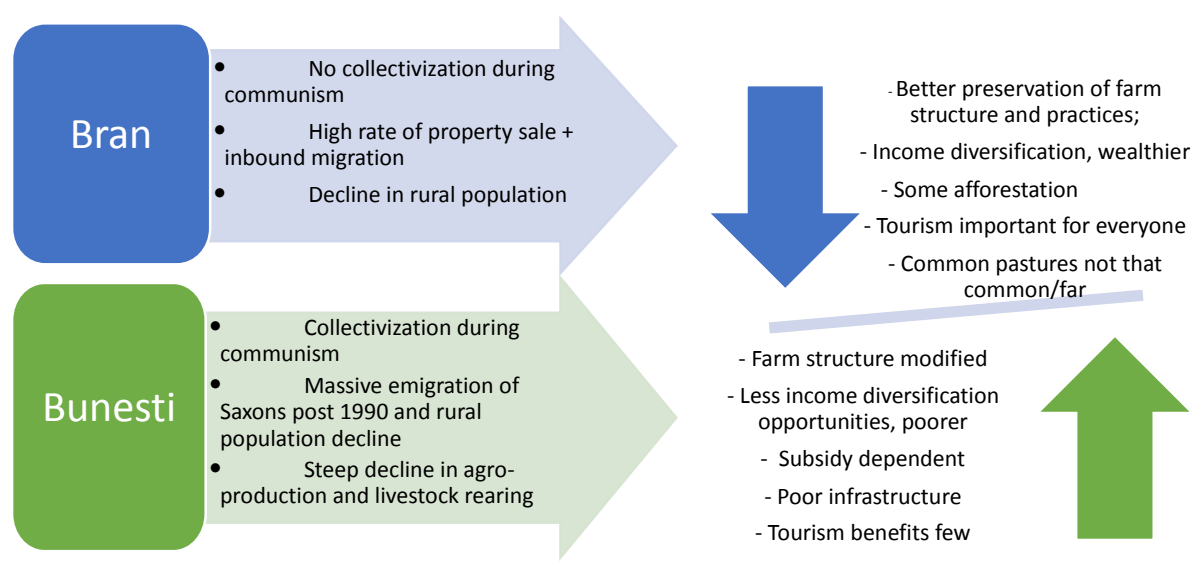
In this section, I will look at the major structural changes the two communities experienced after the fall of Communism and examine how this influenced their activities and lifestyle and therefore their identity, the way they define themselves. I argue that differences in the extent to which communities were changed after Communism are essential in shaping a social identity

frame. Further, I show that small scale farmers are currently experiencing an identity crisis, generated by two driving forces: a rural paradox on land ownership and a communist nostalgia. The two forces are root-causes for differences in landscape management, in particular for the continuation of HNV farming practices in the two locations and are triggered by the discourse on EU integration, uneven rural development and poor public services.

#### 4.2.1 Structural changes after 1990

Social identity influences the way in which people relate to their communities and the way in which communities relate to the surrounding environment (Daniels 1993; Frake 1996). After the fall of the communist regime in the country, rural areas from Transylvania witnessed a number of major structural changes during the transition period. Both areas were subject to changes that affected the wider Romanian community and a notable phenomenon was the accelerated depopulation of Romanian villages manifested amongst all ethnic groups but most visible within minority groups such as Germans (Saxons), Hungarians, Roma and Jewish (Axmann 1998; Sandu 2005). For the Romanian majority, the collapse of industry that led to high levels of unemployment together with land restitution meant that in a first phase many unemployed workers returned to the countryside and worked the land in order to escape poverty (Biertel and Turnock 2007). However, the harsh economic transition and opportunity to move freely in other states of the EU once Romania became a Member State, pushed a very large number of village residents to emigrate abroad in countries like Italy, Spain or France. For instance, the Italian Government estimated that in 2009 more than 1 million Romanians were in the country (Iorio and Corsale 2010). By comparison, this represents more than 5% of Romania`s current population.

Indeed, more than half of the small scale farmers I interviewed had relatives (especially children) who at the moment were abroad working and sending money back home. The rest of them could give me numerous examples of people in the village who were in the same situation. However, there were tangible differences between how the two regions changed after 1990 (see Fig.14).



*Fig. 14) Defining transition factors for Bran and Bunesti communities*

In the Saxon area of Bunesti, the structural change that occurred after the fall of communism was marked by a mass emigration of the German population, who, according to everyone interviewed in the region, were the engines of villages like Viscri and Bunesti. Saxons were described as “hardworking”, “efficient”, “well-planned”, “with a great vision” and as “taking good care of the land”. One farmer – an elderly lady – told me:

“we were unlucky after the fall of Communism because all the Saxons left to Germany. They sold their houses cheaply or even gave them away for free and off they went. I took this house in 1994 with 8 million lei<sup>4</sup> in two installments [...] the Saxons were great people, they built all

<sup>4</sup> According to BNR’s archive (National Bank of Romania), this would mean cca. 4830 US\$

these houses here, they were very hardworking and they were keeping a good living standard in the village”

Another small scale farmer – Romanian national – told me that

“the Saxons left after Communism. They left their houses and went straight to Germany. Indeed, what to do here? And in their place moved gypsies and Romanians. You just can’t compare...Saxons were taking good care of their households, they were working the land, and they built all this infrastructure. Romanians are not so hardworking, they are more negligent...you can’t compare...just look around, that street over there gets flooded every time it rains, look how many houses are degrading...with whom to do anything here?”

It seemed that the massive emigration of Saxons due to the economic crisis that gripped Romania in the last years of Communism and the guarantee of a better living standards in Germany by the German government is frequently used in explaining why the socio-economic conditions in Bunesti deteriorated. Just as Frake (1996) noticed in East Anglia, onomastics play an important role in defining past identities in Bunesti too. All names of villages come from German and this is reflected in the Romanian and/or Hungarian versions. For instance, Viscri comes from Weißkirch in German, which means white church. This is mirrored in the Hungarian version: Szászfehéregyháza, which means White Saxon Church. Indeed, the fortified church of Viscri is the main attraction of the village and of the area, concentrating the tourist flow. Bunesti comes from the German Bondendorf, whose Hungarian version of Szászbuda means Saxon Island. The village of Mesendorf, which is part of Bunesti parish, has mostly kept its German version, Meschendorf. It would then not seem unexpected that Saxon culture is still at the core of these communities.

All these dynamics led to a general agreement that communities are not as cohesive as before and people do not help each other as much as they used to do. All farmer interviewees

considered that the local community spirit is rather individualistic than collective. This phenomenon is in some cases referred to as “collective consciousness” by Alanen (2002), who conducted research with former kolkhoz and sovkoz workers in Estonia, Latvian and Lithuania. He concluded that collective consciousness was an effect of work collectives that have now disappeared and that the lack of alternative institutions or ideologies to replace the disappearance of collective work is a catalyzer for the propagation of this phenomenon. In Bunesti, this was certainly the case. On the other hand, in Bran it was clear that other, socio-economic factors, such as arrival of migrants to the community; re-orientation of some locals towards predominantly tourist services; migration of youth to urban areas; and depopulation were the root causes for this situation. Also, they complained about the lack of trustworthiness of people available to help them manage the holding or take care of the livestock, as well as the scarcity of such people, regardless of their seriousness. Here, the approach on the Roma population was interesting and common in both research locations. While farmers would usually claim they do not discriminate, all small scale farmers from Bunesti referred to Roma locals as a separate category, one that could not fully identify with the community despite all the self-depreciation observations they sometimes made about the Romanian majority (see the interview fragment above). In Bran the Roma community was insignificant but even when it did come into discussion it was accompanied by expressions of unreliability. For instance, one farmer from Bran told me he could not find a dependable person to take care of the animals on his distant farm and showed his disappointment by asking: “what can I do now, take a gypsy?”. The only Roma people I talked to were three children from Bunesti, who were happy to point me to their houses and explain me that their parents cultivate some small parcels and their family is responsible of the villagers’ cattle herd this year. It was easy to identify the households of Roma families, as they tended to be the ones showing the greatest degree of poverty. Indeed,

the village of Bunesti with its significant Roma population was looking poorer than Viscri, despite its better location at E60 and its status as parish's administrative center.

#### 4.2.2 The paradox of land ownership

All small scale farmers from Bunesti showed passion when talking about the land and about how much they would like to have more land for their animals or be able to work the land more productively. This reminded me of the protagonist from 'Ion', an emblematic non-fiction novel in Romanian literature about life in a Transylvanian village at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this story, Ion is a young peasant man with limited means, who lives in a village community marked by social tensions between those who have land (the 'richmen') and those who don't (the 'poor fellows'). Ambitious and hardworking, Ion sacrifices the love he had for a beautiful young girl in the village in order to cleverly force one of the richmen to agree in marrying him with his daughter in a process that finally gives Ion a great share of the richman's land. Although Ion finally dies in a tumultuous finale, every high school student in Romania will rightfully write in his exam papers that the symbolic climax of the novel is when he kisses the land he cleverly gained (see fragment at the beginning of this subchapter). Throughout the interviews, the same farmers who desperately cared about their land and wanted more were at the same time deploring the "golden ages" of Communism and collectivization, a period when they were deprived of many rights, including land ownership.

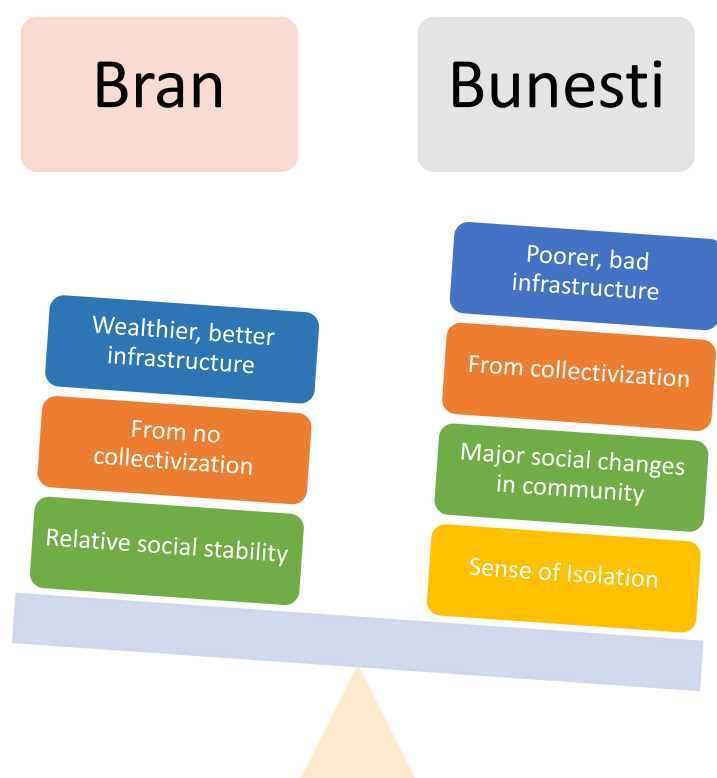
Back in 2000, one Romanian deputy recalled a story from his village located on the edge of Transylvania: "[...] this man was arrested three times by the Securitate people [...] just because he had been hardworking and had been rightfully chosen mayor for 26 years. After the tortures, he was brought back to the village with a horse cart, with broken ribs and was prohibited to say

a single word about what he experienced in Simleu prison [...] When collectivization reached the same village, Ioan Mudure a Sfăitarului<sup>5</sup> was beastly beaten and mutilated, quickly reaching his grave like many others” (Vetisanu 2000-03-07).

From this perspective, the platonic relationships between the small scale farmers of Bunesti and the communist era on one hand and the same farmers and land ownership on the other hand appeared like a great paradox. Nevertheless, both were connected to an identity crisis. As Velikonja (2009) pointed out, contemporary nostalgia can be explained as the impossibility to adapt to new socio-economic conditions and live in a “prolonged yesterday”, which connects to the findings of Dax et. al. (1995) and MacDonald et al. (2000) (see section 2.8). The author also considered that another justification for socialist nostalgia would be the need for personal preservation of identity and history, thus making the phenomenon a liberation tool with pronounced potential to emancipation. However, socialist nostalgia has also been described as a tool to bring critiques to the present conditions but without advancing any solutions or remediation plans by Balazs (2007). Ekman and Linde (2011) observed a soaring communist nostalgia in recent years in Central and Eastern European MSs and attributed it to “general discontent, motivated by a perceived output deficit” (2011:371). It did seem that abandoned by their authorities and with their land unproductive and prey to thorn bushes, small scale farmers in Bunesti were looking back to find a landmark of stability in their community, as they could not identify themselves with the current situation (see Fig.15). They shared the same degree of nostalgia for the Saxon emigration as they did for the fall of communism, for the same reasons: during socialism everyone had a job, the country had an agrarian policy and was producing plentifully, industry was performing well, technology and fuel were readily available and people could afford to live decently.

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<sup>5</sup> A farmer in the community



*Fig 15) Major structural changes in Bran and Bunesti led to an identity crisis in the latter*

In contrast, nowadays, the two villages in the parish were marked by an ageing population of Romanians, a Roma segment that had significantly increased since the communism (especially in the village of Bunesti), young and middle aged migrants abroad or in the cities and migrants coming from the city (especially Bucharest) and buying property. Indeed, as Velikonja concludes his analysis, “nostalgia for socialism in fact does not relate exclusively and precisely to past times, regimes, values, relations, and so on as such, but it embodies a utopian hope that there must be a society that is better than the current one” (2009:14). It is unsurprising then that small scale farmers were clinging on better memories. Everyone I interviewed, from small scale farmer to industry representative agreed on the decline of small scale farmers in the future. The farmers themselves had a grim vision on the future, complaining that with youth leaving the villages abroad there will be no one to take care of the farms. Life in the village is harder as it stands, they said, and there are no jobs and no future for the youth. This situation was more

acute in Bunesti than in Bran. For instance, many people in the Viscri were thinking about selling their homes, while many other had already done it and moved to the city with the younger members of their family.

Nonetheless, as it was shown by Ekman and Linde (2005, see lit. review section XX), communist nostalgia prevailed among the ageing rural population. In Bran, for instance, there was still hope. Talking to the young daughter of a farmer, aged around 16, I found that she was committed to staying there:

“Why should I leave? I know many girls in the village who left to Germany or Spain and now they came back jobless and with no money. And even so, life here is nice, I want to be a kindergarten teacher and take care of my family’s business at the same time with my sister [...] yes sometimes other colleagues laugh about me that I do farm work but I know they’re stupid. I don’t care, I do it for my family and I want to continue doing it.”

Although this girl is certainly an exception to the youth depopulation trend in both Bran and Bunesti parishes, the way in which small scale farmers from Bran generally talked about their work denoted a better identification with the current situation and less nostalgia for socialist times. Here, the structural changes were not as significant. They were extremely proud for being hardworking and owning a tidy, well maintained farm holding. One farmer told me:

“People say about us in Bran that we are close-fisted [and he pours me wine]. This is not true, they don’t understand that we’re hardworking and we know how to run our farms.”

#### 4.2.3 Foreign investment and the myth of double payments

The villages in Bran were also characterized by an ageing population and the youth going to cities or abroad, although to a lesser extent. A notable processes was the arrival of migrants from cities – mainly Bucharest or even foreigners – who had bought properties in order to build up guesthouses. After a period when many of the villagers were happy to sell their land or houses, the crisis in 2008 showed everyone that tourism alone was not the key to prosperity and the construction of new guesthouses or purchase of land stagnated. At present, land ownership was again valued dearly, especially by those who never sold any of their land and aversion towards foreigners for coming in the country and “unrightfully taking land they should work” was rising. On the occasion when I had to travel 40km to one farm, I was told by the farmer that he was finding it increasingly difficult to lease land in the area, especially because foreigners were coming in:

“There are many foreigners who come here and buy and lease land. What can we do? We are poor. I have two Germans here next to me who leased 600 hectares. One took 200 and the other 400. It’s easy for them to come here and get paid their subsidies twice. Whatever I can offer to the land owners they [the Germans] can easily overbid [...] I don’t know if half of the land in this country is still owned by Romanians really...”

In Bunesti, the situation was similar. Close to Viscri there was a big farm combining crop production with intensive livestock rearing. Several farmers told me that that farm used to be a collective state-owned farm, which after the Revolution was ceased to “someone with the right relations”. Also, close to the entrance to Viscri from Bunesti a farmer showed me a large parcel of cultivated land and told me it belonged to a German woman who also owned a large farm some 10km from Bunesti:

“[...] this is all owned by a German woman. You can see she takes good care of it, she knows how to work it! [...] but it’s all easy for people like her – they get money from their government and then they come here and get money from our government too. And you just can’t compare what they get there, they’re much better paid there”

The farm was also mentioned by town hall representatives as a good example of intensive livestock rearing, something that “used to be normal during socialism”. This phenomenon, however, surfaces throughout post-socialist countries from Central and Eastern Europe. Section 2.4 showed how semi-subsistence farmers are marginalized in Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Hungary and how their small sized parcels are seen as a backward factor for advancements in agriculture and rural development despite the fact that similar small low-input farms in Western Europe are seen as ecological trends of the future (Mincyte 2011). Juska (2010) reviewed the issues of foreign investment in the agriculture of countries like Latvia, Poland and Romania – in particular hog production. According to Juska, US and Western European based companies moved into these countries and bought large closed-down state farms, bringing a number of negative impacts on the environment and communities where the farms operate. Moreover, locals from these rural areas perceived these activities as a threat to their living standards and to their property. In Romania, mass media reported on numerous occasions various numbers for foreign occupancy of agricultural land, with the most recent being 30%: 1 million hectares owned and 2 million hectares leased from Romania’s total of 9.4 million hectares arable land (EVZ 2014). What is more, the process of land acquisition by foreign investors was in the limelight during the last year because of alleged plans from the Hungarian government to support land purchase in Romania by Hungarian ethnics living in Transylvania. Following protests from Romanian farmer associations and other civil society groups, a new law on the sale of agricultural land stipulates that when the owner decides to sell his land, priority is given to co-owners, neighbors, farmers who leased the land, locals and the

state. Nevertheless, this law is seen as extremely complicated, delaying the sale procedure through a sinuous bureaucratic process.

Small scale farmers seemed to be discouraged by these real estate foreign practices and further saw themselves marginalized and ignored by Romanian authorities because they allowed foreigners to come in, buy land and allegedly be paid double the subsidies. However, when asked where from they got this information, farmers stopped being so confident about their assumptions. As one farmer put it:

“Now I can’t tell for sure, I’m just telling you what I heard from others...”

The findings in Bunesti and Viscri resonate with conclusions from other studies carried out in Central and Eastern Europe. In Latvia, Dzenovska (2011) examined Latvian farmers’ concerns on double payments related to Danish investors buying land and establishing pig farms. She concluded that such concerns are in part only unverified rumours but also a way to criticize EU integration and the post-socialist capitalism that gripped agriculture. Indeed, according to EU rules, double payments are not allowed through the CAP (EU Commission 2013).

#### 4.2.4 In the EU, but EU farmers?

Even though farmers might not have been convinced by rumours on the double payment theory, it was clear during conversations about progress recorded since EU integration that the EU is regarded with skepticism by small farmers in both locations. Although they agreed that CAP payments are indeed helping, they also complained about the steep decline in national agricultural production, rise in imports and market prices which they cannot compete with. The EU seemed to be another world for small scale farmers, a world they did not have contact with. On a number of occasions, I heard this particular phrases:

“EU? What do we have to do with the EU?” or (asked about any changes)

“Changes? I don’t know, I don’t see any.”

Indeed, the myth of double subsidies and the reticence of small scale farmers towards foreign investors is another sign for the implementation gap of EU policy. While small scale farmers should be protected and supported to continue their role as the backbone of European agriculture (see section 2.4) the reality on the ground is very different. First of all, small scale farmers do not consider themselves Europeans – for them, Europeans are the Germans, Italians and other Western European nationals who come in Romania and farm large surfaces of land, “taking their subsidies twice”. If during Verdery’s (2003) research period large land tenants were former ACP leaders, with the 2007 accession, European citizens from Western MSs have added to this category. Far from feeling European, small scale farmers perceive this as an alienation of a land they rightfully deserve to foreigners. The term foreigner itself denotes, at least in the Romanian language, a clear detachment, a categorizing process that usually deprives the foreigners of any relationship with the locals. Therefore, although the EU takes pride in its 12 million family farms (see section 2.4), small scale farmers in Bunesti or Bran – and as a rule of thumb in whole Romania – would not perceive as normal to farm their land together with the other European farmers. Instead, the other European farmers are blamed for coming here to farm their [i.e. Romanian small scale farmers’] land.

In Bran, the relationship between EU and small scale farmer seemed to be passive. The farmers would carry on with their daily work and restrain from blaming EU for anything (this was reserved for local and national authorities). In Bunesti, however, both town hall representatives and small scale farmers would complain about EU policies, while at the regional level APIA would follow (see section on landscape and production). This confirmed findings from literature in Romanian and other post-socialist countries on the conflicts between how small

scale farmers initially imagined Europe and the actual situation (Aistara 2009; Knight 2010; Mincyte 2011). Having this conflict as a root-cause, small scale farmers felt isolated. In particular in Bunesti, this feeling was chronic, as the farmers felt ignored by both the government and the EU. As one farmer reflected:

“Who listens to us? No one! Politicians are busy stealing and promising stuff every election, after that they forget about you [...] This poor woman [he points out to his neighbor] is a mother of two [infants] who stays at home did not receive any social benefits from the town hall because her husband is a daily worker. He’s not even employed full time! [...] and the EU doesn’t care about us. How did the EU help us in any way? Look at our agriculture, we’re not producing anything anymore, we’re only buying tomatoes from Spain and God knows what else!”

Indeed, in line with findings from literature (Huband and McCracken 2011), small scale farmers did not see themselves as small scale farmers, a term which they reserved to holders of larger land owners who produced crops and sold them on the market. Although some of the farmers in the first location were selling a significant quantity of their produce on the market, they thought of themselves as simple livestock owners, providing mostly for their family and ‘struggling to survive’.

There were other reasons to feel isolated and marginalized for people of Bunesti and one of them was tourism. Tourism was seen as a great contributor for the situation improvement in Bunesti by NGO and APIA representatives. It was claimed by one NGO representative that tourist numbers boosted from 400 in 2000 to 15,000 in 2013. Indeed, many people in the two villages seemed to offer accommodation services and two women dealing with handicrafts acknowledged that for them, the situation improved significantly with the advent of tourism. However, they were not involved in any farming-related activity. On the other hand, small

scale farmers and town hall representatives stated that while this sector did indeed grow in recent years, it only benefits a handful of people (4 or 5 families). Field observations did confirm this on one particular occasion, during an NGO-organized festival. Although the village was flooded by tourists, the highest concentration of cars was in only one place, at the biggest guesthouse in the village. The villagers were calling the owner and manager of the place “Mihai the Bucharest man”, referring to his Bucharest origins. The accommodation conditions between Mihai’s place and the other guesthouses in the village were at least astonishing. Mihai’s place was a state-of-the-art luxuriously renovated complex of buildings with a large yard and an impressive barn tastefully reconverted into a kitchen. The cheapest room here during high season would be EUR 90 and I seriously doubted HRH Prince of Wales’ house could be better than this. Two or three other guesthouses in the village offered decent conditions, with all facilities – I was hosted in one of them and prices were around EUR 20. The rest of the locals who were offering to host tourists did not have optimal conditions and were not visible – to be visible in Viscri meant first and foremost to be present on social media and the internet, something that the ageing resident could hardly manage. Contextualizing this in Hirsch’s subjective-objective framework, the image tourists (locals and foreigners alike) get of the village and its locals only by staying in such a place is close to utopic. Nonetheless, many of the villagers have basic problems with electricity, transportation, sewage or provision of items as simple as school books for their children. What is more, implementation of EU AESs in Bunesti does not seem to have connected small scale farmers with EU visions of biodiversity preservation or to the previously lucrative HNV farming systems, which remain unprofitable at the moment.

In the first location, nonetheless, all interviewees complaint that tourism was not bringing the benefits they thought it will and since with the crisis, it is not profitable to have a guesthouse anymore. Tourism here developed partly because of the Bran castle and partly because of the

beauty of the landscape around. The sudden rise in tourist numbers less than a decade ago pushed many of the locals to either build guesthouses or sell their land to non-locals (many residents from Bucharest or foreigners according to the interviewees). Meanwhile, market saturation and the economic crisis meant that many of the guesthouses are not as profitable as before and people started to regret selling their land or focusing solely on tourism. The best way to survive, according to locals, is to diversify your income and not put all your hopes in tourism. Hardworking livestock owners who kept their land and relied more on farming than tourism, are taking big pride in this and appear to be more satisfied than the average local residents. Although facing serious socio-economic challenges, they do appear to be O'Rourke and Kramm's (2012:116) "custodians of the landscape and instigators of the new multifunctional rural development model rather than as food producers".

#### 4.2.5 Conclusion

Uneven rural development and the implementation gap of EU policies are root causes for social identity issues among Romanian small scale farmers and are implicitly endangering the preservation status of HNV farming systems. Differences in structural changes after the fall of Communism led to a different perspective on landscape preservation in the two locations. In Bran, an apparent social stability brought little change in the way small scale farmers managed their land. As they did not experience collectivization, Bran farmers never encountered intensive agricultural production and were at the same time able to keep their land. Although they have been dealing with common problems met in Romanian rural communities such as youth migration, falling prices and an ageing population, these inconveniences are not manifested with the same potency as in Bunesti and many other Romanian villages. Apart from

relative social stability, a key factor here might be the income diversification opportunities in the form of tourism and sale of traditional food products. This also ameliorated the impact of conflicting discourse on small scale farmers between Romania and the EU (see section 2.4). Without the air of an open-air museum despite being centered on one (the Bran castle), the farmer community here managed to keep its landscape, work practices and customs throughout communism. All these factors contributed to the creation of a dynamic identity as opposed to Frake's (1996) sheltered one. Small scale farmers in Bran retain their characteristics obtained throughout decades if not centuries and add minor adjustments to their life – multifunctionality through tourism is one of them. Oppositely, small scale farmer in Bunesti are at the other end of the scale. Having experienced a complete collectivization process, they were caught in the middle of the discourse of small scale farmers that governs most post-socialist countries (see section 2.4). While Frake's open-air museum in rural East Anglia is triggered by an internal mechanism run by locals, in Romania the romanticized view of Transylvanian small scale farmers as part of a still medieval rural society of Europe is to the greatest extent an externally induced phenomenon (see section 2.3), which is not shared by the small scale farmers themselves. Lack of trust in local authorities, poor public services, disconnection from the rest of Romanian society and the EU (exacerbated by physical disconnection through poor infrastructure), little or no opportunities and a general difficulty in adapting to new conditions, all mean that small scale farmers in Bunesti have not found their place in the current social setting. In their case, this has led to an interconnected relationship between communist nostalgia and land ownership. In the same way as Verdery (2003) pointed out, for small scale farmers in Bunesti land has been devaluating since 1990, as it became increasingly expensive to work it. Moreover, the integration in the EU brought little if any change for good in their opinion. On the contrary, small scale farmers now feel cheated by the EU free market and mobility internal mechanism through which other, wealthier, European farmers come in the

country to work large areas of land. EU therefore takes the form of Verdery's World Bank and IMF, which were quintessential actors in the privatization process of Romania's former socialist assets. Moreover, the EU policy mechanisms targeted at preserving the HNV farmland landscapes and habitats are inefficient as they only affect the symptoms of HNV decline and not the root cause (see section 2.6). In the context of maintaining the HNV farming systems, this means that the cooperation between the various levels of policy implementing bodies and small scale farmers is superficial and unsustainable – as a proof, everyone agreed that without subsidies HNV landscape management would suffer greatly and even stop altogether.

#### 4.3 Role and future of small scale farmers

In literature review (see sections 2.4 and 2.6) I pointed out the inextricable relationships between small scale farmers and HNV farming systems, highlighting the expert opinion that although HNV farmland landscape could theoretically be preserved without the existence of small scale farmers, this would be extremely difficult and would impact greatly on the cultural aspect of HNV landscapes. Also, section 2.4 described the clash in discourse on the role of small scale farmers between EU policy makers and the Romanian authorities. These two perspectives can be bridged by Gray's (2000) analysis, which concludes that at present there are differences between what rural means for academics and policy-makers on one hand and the farmers themselves on the other hand. In explaining this inconsistency, he cites Bourdieu, who reflected that rural theoreticians usually have a “remote, distant or, quite simply, non-practical, non-committed, non-involved vision . . . without anything practical at stake”, while for example “real relatives are not positions in a diagram, a genealogy, but relations that you have to cultivate, to keep up” (2000:48). Thence, in EU's case, the theories and definitions of

the wider agricultural policy have redefined the rural space in a way that is not congruent to the day to day life of millions of farmers, the rightful creators and the main actors of the rural. Although centred on preserving the lifestyle of these farmers and implicitly of the HNV farming systems they support, the EU policies have failed to provide a complementing sustainable market mechanism to fit its purpose. As mentioned in sections 4.1.4 and 4.2.4 this has led to a general rejection of EU policies by small scale farmers and implementing authorities, as EU policies did not provide the expected results in terms of rural development and increase in welfare. The process determined those stakeholders to refer to a previous level of stability and welfare, which has been identified as socialism. In this chapter I link these observations on the rural space with the wider cultural landscape theory and I argue that their root cause in the case of HNV farmland is the big gap between the subjective and the objective definitions of the landscape. Further, I provide details on the future of small scale farmers and in doing so, on the preservation scenario for HNV landscapes and on the changes in future significance for these landscapes.

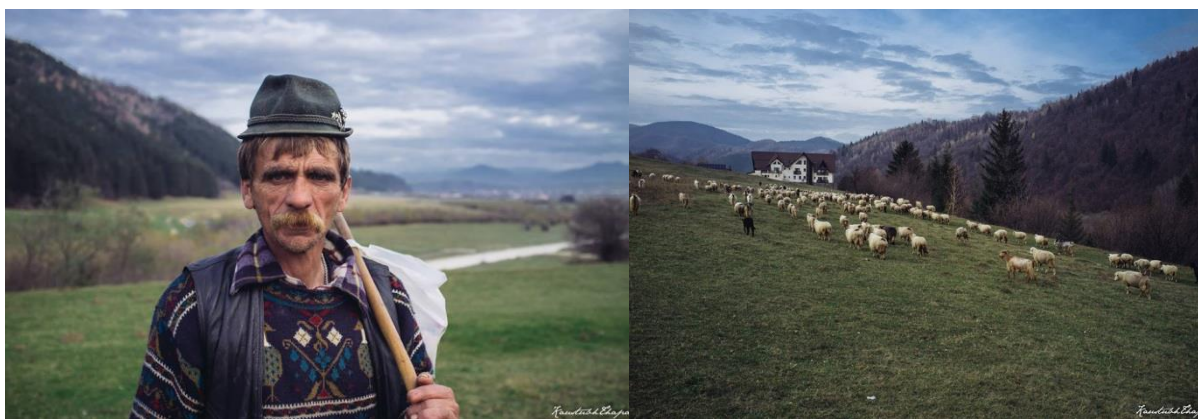
#### 4.3.1 A vanishing but much needed class

While small scale farmers are seen as stewards of the environment and the backbone of European agriculture at the EU level, Romanian authorities largely ignore the needs of more than 70% of its 3.9 million farmers who are carrying out subsistence or semi-subsistence activities. From the personal comments of biodiversity specialists operating in the field, it became clear that there is a shared vision amongst academics concerning the essential role small scale farmers have in preserving HNV farming systems. While it would theoretically be possible to preserve HNV farmland landscapes without small scale farmers, this would have a huge negative impact on the cultural aspect of HNV farmland landscape and moreover, it would

make it difficult to design a back-up HNV farming system because some factors are not easy to plan (Oppermann, R. personal comment). As it is, small scale farmers seem to have an untapped market potential, which has to some extent been exploited in Bran (see section 4.1.1). Making HNV farms profitable at a noteworthy scale is an extremely challenging thing to do and the example of selective tourism benefits in Bunesti proved this (see section 4.2.4). According to one NGO representative and biodiversity expert, this is perhaps the most pressing problem and an optimal solution would be to quantify, demonstrate and recognize the multiple ecosystem benefits derived from preservation of HNV farming systems so that it becomes profitable for small scale farmers. He concluded:

“There are two reasons [why HNV landscapes are at threat]: one is the need for farmers to make money so unless they would get value for the goods they produce in these conditions, they will be forced to intensify. And the other reason abandonment – if this land is left uncultivated it will degenerate into a low value scrub [...] so we’re trying to protect the biodiversity, the biodiversity depends on the people and is nurtured by the people so we’re also trying to protect these small scale farming communities. But the other most important long-term way of promoting survival [of small scale farmers] is helping them get a proper price for the goods they produce, bringing innovative market means to support traditional production methods. Let’s hope we can keep as much of it [HNV farmland] as we can”

This was shared by other NGO representatives, who saw small scale farmers as instrumental in maintaining the HNV farmland and therefore the rich biodiversity landscape (see Fig.16). They were strong in holding that small scale farmers should benefit from policy mechanisms, which would make HNV farmland maintenance financially viable as well.



*Fig. 16) A shepherd and its flock in the Bran region. Although shepherding is still a common site in Romania, there are increasingly fewer people willing to take on the job. That is why most of them are middle aged or older. Source: Photo courtesy Kaustubh Thapa 2014*

However, there was a general agreement that small scale farmers will be less in the future. Town hall representatives believed that the number of small scale farmers will decrease in the future:

“What are they expected to live from? Out of a miserable pension? They can barely survive and they are old”

Town hall representatives thought that small scale farmers should produce and be profitable but at the moment they are hindered from doing so due to a number of reasons: market liberalization and price fall, bad policies, corruption and lack of technology. Both they and the small scale farmers believed that one of the first thing to start with would be to have their diesel subsidized at past levels. This is once more reflecting the different pyramid level of landscape perception, with small scale farmers unfamiliar with the environmental and economic consequences of socialist-level use of fuel and local authority representatives rejecting the European vision of a sustainable agriculture based on fewer inputs and higher quality.

As for their role *per se*, farmers from Bran had different views than those in Bunesti. Thence, they considered that their role was to provide a healthier, higher quality food product to consumers, in response to the supermarket, imported foodstuffs, which have “many chemicals

and God knows what else”. At the same time, they were taking big pride in being seen as “honest”. In the second location, however, people seemed to be quite hopeless about their role and saw themselves too small to make a change or account for anything. Although in both locations small scale farmers thought they were victims of the Romanian bureaucratic system, in Bunesti this feeling was extremely acute. Despite annual tourist numbers raising from 400 in 2000 to 15,000 in 2013 and a somehow lucrative business with wool socks and bio-preserves by the women association in the village, people seemed to be doubtful about the actual impact of tourism in their region. Indeed, not many were benefitting from this industry and on both farmers and town hall representatives saw tourism as a sector benefitting only a handful of people in the village, people who already had had the money to invest and grow (see section 4.2.4). Once more, this echoes the marginalization of small scale farmers and the impractical, largely unusable state supporting mechanisms that should be directed towards making them competitive on the national and EU market. Moreover, it shows a limited interaction between small scale farmers and foreign tourists and reinforces the reticence of the former towards the latter. In doing so, it preserves Romanian-European identity separation among small scale farmers, although the number of foreign tourists is significant and has a noteworthy revenue potential.

#### 4.3.2 Small scale farmers vs. the EU

Inasmuch as EU policies are directed towards the protection of HNV landscapes, Gray’s observations were reflected in the way people perceived the CAP measures they were subject to. In Bran, a farmer illustrated this by manifesting his discontent with EU mowing dates:

“I don’t have anything to do with EU. EU wants me to mow my meadow too late. What do they know about what we need? Here the grass is much better if you mow in early June, even May, the hay will have a much better quality and the meadow will be more productive. EU wants me to mow in July. I want to mow when I know it’s the time to mow. That’s why my land is not with APIA, let the others go with APIA”

The clash in discourse on small scale farmers best illustrated here by the fact that a governmental institution was vocally against small scale farmers, indicated not only an understanding deficit between decision-makers and the objects of policy, but also between decision-makers themselves. Whereas on one hand Europe links small scale family farming with concepts of continuity, commitment and solidarity (EU Commission 2014), decision-makers in Bucharest dismiss small scale farmers, identifying them with obstacles for the development of Romania’s agriculture (see lit. review section xx). Although small scale farmers might be preferred by the EU, for APIA this was also a problem because of its incapability to monitor compliance with CAP requirements for the numerous small land parcels. This is not particular to Romania and it was indicated by others. For Lithuania, Mincyte (2011) concluded that "the problem of semi-subsistence farmers is not that they are unproductive, inefficient or backward but that they are too autonomous and effectively, ungovernable" (Mincyte 2011: 111). Such a situation created tensions between small scale farmers and local authority representatives. On many occasions I heard farmers complaining about the long hours, sometimes days they had to wait to file a dossier with APIA. On the other hand, APIA seemed to be severely understaffed for its purpose and coverage, so that its incapacity to efficiently carry out its bureaucratic purposes led to either frustration or stress within the institution and to ignorance towards small scale farmers’ needs and feedback.

For APIA representatives, subsidies for small farmers were a so-called “social aid”, given to senior small scale farmers whose only occupation was to make hay. Instead, money should only be allocated to farmers who produce, preferably medium or large, the only categories that have developed since the payments were introduced. As far as APIA was concerned, there was no future for small scale farmers, whose only chance was to unite in associations and manage larger areas of land, preferably larger than 5 hectares. This parcel size was not arbitrary. According to them, there were rumors that new regulations entering into force in 2015 would set a 5ha limit for subsidies, something which they considered inevitable in the near future (10-20 years). In contradiction to some of the literature (see Huband and McCracken 2011), small scale farmers themselves favored the creation of associations and did not seem to reject collective farming despite associating it to communism. As previous sections showed, this might be due to the pronounced communist nostalgia but at the same time a result of their struggle to survive. Verdery (2003) made similar observation during her research. She relates that while many farmers in her study locations had some of their land with a farmer association, others were reluctant to do so because they believe the association was just a relic of communism, run by the same people who managed the ACPs during socialism. In particular, one senior family with around 7 hectares felt very bitterly about the association and although during the decade Verdery (2003) carries out the research it became increasingly difficult to work the land only by themselves, they did not concede joining the association. Towards the end of Verdery’s observations, however, the senior couple was old and hardly able to survive from farming. Although the association collapsed, they confessed they would reconsider joining it if it were still functioning. It is probable that small scale farmers in Bunesti went through the same change of heart. At the EU level, there is also acknowledgement that farmer associations are essential in providing small scale farmers with a better market leverage and a decrease in risks and production costs. Specifically, the CAP stipulates measure 142 for the

setting up of producer groups in production sectors for potatoes, pig meat, poultry, milk, cheese, rabbits, honey and grapes for wine. However, in Romania, only 4% of the initially approved funds for setting up of producer groups were spent by 2012, because of impractical government eligibility requirements, such as high initial turnover and a large number of producers (CEEweb 2013: 34). I could not identify any producer group established through this measure in neither of the two locations.

The fact that CAP implementation in Romania has suffered has already been shown in the literature (Mikulcak *et al.* 2013; Sutcliffe *et al.* 2013; Dahlstrom *et al.* 2013; Popa 2013-07-04). However, this process is visible in statistics too: only 38% of the total funds for Pillar 2 payments during 2007-2013 were spent by the Ministry for Agriculture (EU Commission 2012). Moreover, measures directed towards training and information of farmers also underperformed: only 10% of the targeted farmers were ultimately included in the scheme (CEEweb 2013: 31). Last but not least, payments for modernisation of agricultural holdings were to their greatest extent absorbed by larger farms, as small family farmers could not afford to meet the 50% co-financing requirement (CEEweb 2013: 32). One farmer in Bunesti told me:

[on being asked if he considered applying to the EU modernization measure]

“What can I do with that? Come on, you need a lot of money for that, you need to put most of the money and you’re never sure with their requirements, you might have to give the money back. And then all that paperwork, all those invoices you need to keep, proofs of payments and I don’t-know-what for five years. If they come with a control and they find something then what? No, I just don’t think it’d work”

Another example is the measure on setting up of young farmers, which had unrealistic eligibility criteria. Farm holdings were expected to be of at least 6 Economic Size Units (ESU), which was virtually impossible for the majority of family farms (CEEweb 2013: 33). While in

Bran it could have been an option due to the relative high annual turnover for farmers, in Bunesti this could hardly have been the case. This only offers a glimpse of how policies tailored at the EU level affect the multifaceted, varied family farm landscapes and techniques in Romania and how the discourse of the Romanian government on family farms made funding for those extremely difficult to attain.

#### 4.3.3 Future

One pressing structural problem at the moment, however, is the fact that many of the small family farmers who did receive subsidies have become dependent on those for the continuation of their practices and this process has already been signaled in the literature (see section xx of literature review). To a lesser extent in Bran but representative for Bunesti, the phenomenon points towards a major structural change in the life of small family farm communities: whereas just recently they were an independent, self-sufficient segment of the population, they are slowly becoming subject to subsidy policies and are changing their farming techniques in order to adapt to new requirements.

APIA staff also said that “it’s 100% there will be larger exploitations in 10-20 years”. They agreed that the youth was leaving and only the elderly were staying behind. According to them, 30-40% subsidy applications were `social aid`, small parcels managed by old people who did not produce anything and were living off the subsidies. The industry was on the same page, guaranteeing that in the coming years all small scale farmers will either have to merge or disappear. In one of the biodiversity expert’s opinion, from a purely botanist’s point of view, however, the decreasing number of small scale farmers was not as problematic yet, because

meadows were still being well maintained, which meant a high flora diversity was still in place. This last point seemed to be shared by APIA representatives. From their perspective, ever since the agency was established, the land has witnessed a gradual change for better and many of the medium to large sized farmers were taking good care of the land. There seemed to be strong beliefs that small scale farmers should not be given subsidies, as they do not have any real farming activity and in many cases the only thing they do is mowing.

On the other hand small scale farmers and NGO representatives were hopeful about the high quality of food products deriving from HNV farmland, many of them organic. This was also reflected by a representative of a honey producer group located in the north-west of Transylvania (whom I met by chance). However, APIA said that while small scale farmers do indeed produce organically because there is no money for fertilizers and in some cases use of fertilizers is also prohibited, we do not stand high chances because we have no market to sell it on. On the other hand, the honey producer group representative was selling the products both in Romania and abroad and the semi-subsistence farmers I interviewed were managing to sell their products locally, although the market price they were given was becoming problematic. APIA's claims are also contrasting growth trend statistics for the organic sector in Romania, which grew from a mere 17,388 hectares or 0.1% of the agricultural land in 2000 to 288,261 hectares or 2.1% of the agricultural land in 2012. Also, the number of producers increased from 1,200 in 2004 to 15,315 in 2012 (FiBL 2013). The market value of exported Romanian organic products reached € 200 million in 2011, while in 2010 Romania had already entered the worldwide top 20 organic export countries (Biofach 2013).

Overall, it appeared that small scale farmers were, in the end, taking the one single role they could afford: staying alive and fighting poverty. With varied nuances of pessimism, this was encountered in both Bran and Viscri. In Bran, farmers saw agriculture as “what you eat tomorrow” and their role to work hard and first of all provide for their families. In Bunesti, a

visibly poorer region, most people had already lost their hopes in agriculture. Unable to adapt to new policies and new economic activities, they were depending not only on subsidies and pensions – if they were lucky enough to earn them – but also on their children, many of whom worked abroad or in the cities. Many other elderly farmers complained about their pension schemes and how difficult it was to survive. One farmer said:

“How could I live from my 300 lei pension?<sup>6</sup> I’m lucky I have this small yard here and we grow few crops [...] with this money I wouldn’t be able to buy food in a month, not to mention medication! I have my children who help me, but there are many in the village with no one to take care of them and only with this pension. And how much do old people earn in Germany or France when they retire? It’s a mockery, the government is just mocking us!”

The indignation of this farmer echoed the general communist nostalgia mentioned earlier. In line with Ekman and Linde’s (2005) study, this was most acutely manifested among the elderly. Also, it shows that compared to Verdery’s research period, the economic conditions worsened. While Verdery (2003) acknowledged that those who used to work for ACPs had unjustifiably low pensions, she also pointed out the essential role pensions of those who used to work in the industry played in maintaining a positive cost-benefit balance for small scale farmers. At the time I interviewed the farmers in Viscri, the role of these pensions had decreased to a subsistence aspect. Although little over the double of former ACP worker at somewhere around 700-750 RON, this was still less than the minimum wage of 900 RON. Moreover, the subsidies received through the CAP did not amount to much – most of them had on average two hectares. Moreover, the majority had few or no animals, which meant they could not access subsidies for livestock rearing, as the thresholds were of minimum 50 for sheep and minimum two for cattle. In this way, at least for the substantial class of elderly small scale farmers, CAP subsidies

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<sup>6</sup> 300 lei is cca EUR 70

where applicable and pensions had to be supplemented by some periodical help from children, most of whom worked abroad. The transformation of AES in what APIA representatives called “social aid” shows again the rift between the original purpose of EU policy and its implementation on the ground (see Knight 2010; O’Rourke and Kramm 2012). At the same time, it shows the marginalization of small scale farmers manifested throughout the post socialist MSs (see Aistara 2009; Mincyte 2011) and the failure to support a generation of small scale farmers that is perhaps of crucial importance to the preservation of HNV farming systems, at least in Romania.

The comparison of Romanian pensions with those in other European MSs shows how elderly small scale farmers separate themselves from similar social classes in the EU. At the same time, their subsistence incomes are usually complemented with money from their children who work abroad and although important for their survival, elderly farmers do not take lightly the fact that lack of opportunities in the country forced their children to leave far from home. In the end, one of the small scale farmers summarized the status of them, the ‘very small scale farmers’:

“We [the very small farmers] feel like stepping on thin ice, afraid that it will break any moment and we’ll die. Where will we be in 10 years? Under ice!”

NGO representatives were also skeptical about the future of small scale farmers:

“Who knows in ten years time...this might not be the same [talking about the HNV meadows around Viscri]”

From a biodiversity conservation perspective context, this means that EU efforts to halt the decline in biodiversity rich habitats dependent on HNV farmland are not sufficient to achieve the 2020 Biodiversity targets. Small scale farmers are creators and managers of diverse, low-intensity, mosaic-like landscapes, which are the very basis of HNV farmland habitats of

Community Importance. The question is whether a new class of HNV farmland landscape stewards will emerge in the near future, taking over the current role of small scale farmers and how this will impact on the cultural aspect of these landscapes.

#### 4.3.4 Conclusions

Small scale farmers are quintessential for the preservation of HNV farmland landscapes and their associated farming systems. Without small scale farmers, these landscapes would not only lose their mosaic, fragmented aspect so important for species diversity, but also their cultural value. Within a broader socio-economic context, the clash in discourse on small scale farmers between the EU and the national government in Romania is at the moment one of the main factors that contribute to the decline in the number of small scale farmers in both Bran and Bunesti. One reason is because measures directed towards making small scale farmers competitive on the national and EU market are impractical and their eligibility criteria leave most of the small scale farmers outside the schemes. This was highlighted in the CAP Pillar 2 statistics for Romania and in previous chapters using the example of selective tourism and the bread baking business.

Another reason is the identity issue debated at length in section 4.2. Here, the rift between “Europeans” and small scale Romanian farmers deepens the clash in discourse on the role of the latter. There are, however, substantial differences between the two study locations. In Bran small scale farmers semi-unconsciously continue their role as stewards of the environment, while assuming the role of quality warrantors for traditional food products. In Bunesti, small scale farmers do not assume any of Bran farmers’ roles but at the same time do not tap into their market potential as cultural ambassadors in a European context. At the same time, local

and regional authorities fail to recognize any role to small scale farmers apart from production and stress that in the future their role will be to grow and consolidate their land.

The future role of small scale farmers is therefore uncertain but not deprived of hope. Despite being dominated by ageing middle class or senior farmers, small scale farming has attractive market potentials, but taking advantage of those will require a better identification with Europe and embracing innovation. In doing so, small scale farmers have the chance to internalize the benefits of HNV farming systems and make them sustainable. Farmers in Bran are such an example. Although still reticent about the EU and Europeans in general, they adopted the concept of multifunctionality and diversified their income, keeping the stability of their families, the community and the surrounding environment. Moreover, they seem to generally be aware of the benefits of HNV farming systems and therefore more conservative in changing their traditional farming techniques. In doing so, they fit into EU's concept of family farm as source of continuity, commitment and solidarity. On the other hand, there is the risk of HNV farmland landscapes to be managed by an emerging class of medium to large land tenants with no perspectives other than taking advantage of the EU subsidies.

## 5. Conclusion

HNV farmland landscapes are places of rich European biodiversity and constitute a core habitat for many plant and animal species of Community importance. Their preservation is of great importance to the achievement of EU's 2020 Biodiversity Strategy and implicitly to halting biodiversity loss in Europe. At the same time, however, HNV farmland landscapes are places of unique cultural value, which define and represent a significant part of the European identity. These places have been shaped across centuries by many generations, according to a complex set of local traditions and farming practices transmitted to date. However, at the moment, the farming systems that support HNV landscapes are at threat. On one hand, the high costs of production inputs for small scale farmers combined with natural constraints and little value for products is an incentive for intensification of production. On the other hand, agricultural abandonment common in the new post-socialist Member States also impact negatively on HNV landscapes, by decreasing its species diversity. Findings from existing literature acknowledge that HNV farming systems are providing valuable ecosystem services, but because those are not recognized on the market it is very difficult to financially support them and provide a common understanding of their benefits.

Romania is a country with at least a third of its agricultural land classified as having HNV. Transylvania in particular is a region where HNV farmland landscapes are associated with an extremely rich and diverse culture and in recent years this image was promoted in Western European media and recognized at the EU level. Throughout the region, HNV landscapes are enhanced by an interconnected network of small parcels that create a biodiversity rich mosaic habitat. Quintessential to HNV farmland landscape are small scale farmers, who constitute the bulk of Romania's and Europe's farmer community: the new Member State has almost 4

million farmers. The study locations for this research were Bunesti and Bran parishes from South-East and South of Transylvania, respectively. The two locations are internationally recognized as places where pristine medieval Europe still exists and centuries old traditions still kept. The research was based on the theory that cultural landscapes can be framed objectively by outsiders – policy makers, biodiversity experts, implementing bodies – and subjectively by insiders, in this case small scale farmer communities or local NGOs. The first chapter of the analysis was centered around landscape perception and how the way in which communities organize themselves reflects their relation to the surrounding landscapes. From the very beginning, there were evident differences between the two locations and those were not only linked to topographic characteristics and farm structure but also to social and economic aspects. The way in which farmers organized their premises reflected a different approach to farming. In Bran, farmers were more oriented towards the future and they managed to adapt well after communism, embracing income diversification in the form of agro-tourism. In Bunesti, farmers had fewer opportunities and were looking back to the past where, in their opinion, living standards were higher. For farmers in Bunesti, the viability and normality of HNV farming systems was disrupted by collectivization during communism and at present, the communities here were finding it very hard to adapt to open markets and capitalist conditions. Conversely, in Bran collectivization never took place and therefore HNV farming continued throughout socialism, transition and EU integration without significant changes.

The second chapter of the analysis discussed at length the identity of small scale farmers in the two communities. The rift between the two communities was evident here too, manifested through an acute communist nostalgia in Bunesti and a more optimist approach in Bran. For farmers in Bunesti, the clash in discourse of small scale farmers between a government favoring large-farms and a small scale farmer friendly EU had negative impacts. Here, farmers identified themselves with a productivist, ‘glorious’ past of the ‘golden age’ of communism, as this is

sometimes ironically referred to. With no skills left after decollectivization and with increasing input prices for agricultural production, farmers in Bunesti saw themselves as victims of the transition and, once Romania joined the EU, of other richer farmers from Western Europe who could easily outbid them on the market. The initiative of EU decision makers to subsidies lack of production and encourage the preservation of HNV farmland landscapes was not seen in a good light by neither small scale farmers nor local and regional authorities. In opposition, Bran farmers did not identify themselves with production but rather adopted a more dynamic identity, continuing the stability of their communities and bringing less critiques to the EU. They also identified themselves better with what tourists were looking for in the area, unlike farmers from Bunesti, where the picturesque images from media were in sharp contrast to the poor infrastructure and sad faces of the villagers.

The third and last chapter looked at the changing role of small scale farmers and future perspectives for the HNV landscapes. While it would be theoretically possible to preserve these landscapes without their supporting labor intensive farming systems powered by small scale farmers, the cultural aspect would have a lot to suffer. The solution for a viable conservation of these systems is economic sustainability and innovative market mechanisms, however, at least in Bunesti this does not seem very probable in the near future. Here, more than in Bran, small scale farmers have little means, they grow even older and the youth depopulation becomes more acute as lack of employment opportunities drives them out of the villages and into cities or abroad. Not only that the number of small scale farmers is expected to decrease but their parcel size should also increase significantly if they are to survive. Also, from custodians of the landscape and rightful owners of the land they recovered during decollectivization, small scale farmers have become a subsidy dependent segment of the rural population and barriers to agricultural production in the eyes of regional and national authorities. Tourism appeared to be the only other source of income on the large scale but as it

turned out in Bunesti, if this is not regionally widespread – like in Bran – only few people with means will benefit from this sector.

As such, HNV landscape preservation is being re-branded as a business for larger land tenants or ‘social aid’ for small scale farmers in places like Bunesti, rather than a tool to preserve the rich culture and diversity of HNV farming systems. This widens the gap between the intentions of EU policy and what small scale farmers and the wider rural communities understand by Europe. Moreover, in this way the cultural aspect of HNV farmland landscape is diminished or lost, posing a threat to Romania’s cultural heritage and implicitly to its promising revenues from tourism. Besides, the rich culture embedded in these landscapes are one of the few assets through which the country can recover from its current image deficit in the EU. A closer connection between small scale farmers and the EU is clearly needed and access to unbiased information invaluable. Instead of perceiving EU and other European farmers are working against their interest, small scale farmers need to be made aware of the opportunities available under policies such as CAP. However, access to information alone cannot suffice the viability of ageing small scale farmers. Instead, policies targeting conservation of HNV farmland landscapes should take advantage of the vast migration of youth abroad and reverse this trend by bridging those two generations through better tailored schemes – for instance, providing wider access to CAP measures such as modernization of farm holdings or setting up of young farmers. This could also soften senior small scale farmers on the EU issue as the European youth would provide a better light on what the Community can offer.

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