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Exploring Place Identity and Local Heritage Commodification: A Comparative Study of Locally Born Residents and Internal Migrants

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Biographical notes:

Alin Croitoru, PhD, is a Romanian sociologist and Associate Professor at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. His research focuses on the dynamics of social change and social attitudes in post-socialist Romania, examining a diverse set of phenomena. He has made significant contributions to social sciences through numerous publications in high-impact peer-reviewed journals (e.g., *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *Cultural Trends*; *Memory Studies*; *Current Sociology*; *European Journal of Teacher Education*; *Population Space and Place*; *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*) and books or chapters in collective volumes published by international publishers. He has coordinated research teams and served as a researcher on various European projects (e.g., Horizon Europe, Horizon 2020).

Raluca Mureșan, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of Social Work, Journalism, Public Relations and Sociology, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. Her academic expertise focuses primarily on journalism and public relations ethics and law, while she also conducts lectures on Crisis Communication, Event Management, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Her research interests include traditional and new media ethics, communication law, online communication, and the ethics of social movements. She is the coordinator of the Communication and Public Relations bachelor's degree program.

Delia Stefanel, PhD, is in charge of coordinating the International Relations Office of "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, Romania. Currently, she provides lectures at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. In the past she was Guest Professor at The Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, The University of Applied Sciences Wurzburg-Schweinfurt, Germany and Społeczna Akademia Nauk, University of Social Sciences, Poland and lecturer at The Western Macedonia University and the Democritus University of Thrace. Among her main research interests there are: cultural heritage, international migration, positive youth development, cross-cultural communication, resilience.

Alain Chenevez is a sociologist, Associate Professor (HDR) at the University of Burgundy-Franche-Comté, and a researcher at LIR3S. A specialist in the sociology of culture and heritage, he develops the notion of the "argumentative making of heritage," which weaves together pragmatic sociology, Critical Heritage Studies, an ecology of attachments, and cultural rights. His fieldwork spans diverse urban sites to examine how cities negotiate their inheritances among institutions, urban commons, and controversies.

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He co-leads the Graduate Programme “Patrimoines” and the Master’s in Cultural Institutions and Project Management, supporting public bodies, civil-society practitioners, and residents in co-construction processes. He publishes and speaks regularly to make research useful and shareable, with sustained attention to caring for attachments, cultural justice, and the sustainability of public policies. Based between Dijon and Lyon, he works close to situations on the ground, favoring inquiry, accessible writing, and well-informed debate.

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Exploring Place Identity and Local Heritage Commodification:

A Comparative Study of Locally Born Residents and Internal Migrants

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Abstract

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In a global context where internal population mobility is becoming increasingly significant, the relationship between place identity, cultural heritage, and internal migration is inadequately documented, and the research on it remains limited. This study developed a framework to explore how individuals' status as internal migrants is related to their perceptions of place identity and their attitudes toward the commodification of local cultural heritage. This interplay was examined in Sibiu, a Romanian city where cultural dynamism and the attraction of new internal migrants were stimulated by its designation as a European Capital of Culture in 2007. Using survey data collected from over 900 residents of Sibiu and employing inferential statistical modeling, the differences in terms of place identity and local heritage commodification between locally born residents and internal migrants were examined after controlling for various socioeconomic variables. The results revealed meaningful differences: natives highly value iconic buildings, architecture, and traditions and are more concerned about heritage damage from commodification. Conversely, newcomers relate to place identity and cultural heritage differently, linking their appreciation of local culture to the processes of integration and the economic opportunities triggered by commodification. This study contributes to the scholarship focused on understanding social representations of cultural heritage in a local context.

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Keywords: Place identity; cultural heritage; commodification of cultural heritage; internal migration; Romania

Introduction

Today's world is characterized by, among others, large-scale and widespread population mobility. Consequently, new residents settle in places with a particular cultural heritage and interact with it in varied ways. Such interactions have not been sufficiently studied in association with place identity (King 2025). The concept of place identity describes how a population relates to the various components of (in)tangible cultural heritage (Lenzerini 2011; Proshansky et al. 2014; Strandberg and Ek Styvén 2024) and the processes of commodification that take place in connection with it nowadays. Place identity appears to be enduring and stable at first, but it is, in fact, interpreted differently by various categories of the local population depending on particular characteristics including demographics, socioeconomics and migratory background. This study approaches place identity not as a fixed cognitive or symbolic category but as a construction shaped by residents' assessments, attitudes and arguments. While heritage is neither passively inherited nor neutrally preserved, locally born residents and newcomers mobilize different regimes of justification, cultivate affective attachments, and report distinct models in relation to what heritage means and how it should be valued.

Against this context, this study examined how local-born residents and the internal migrants who moved in Sibiu reveal distinct argumentative repertoires (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991; Smith 2006; Tornatore 2009), affective ties (Laplantine 2005; Stengers 2009), and prefer distinct models to define and commodify cultural heritage (Barbe 2010; Bourdieu 1994; Veschambre 2008). In our study, the term 'internal migrants' refers to individuals who reside in Sibiu but were born elsewhere in Romania. Two questions guided this study: First, how do locally born residents and internal migrants mobilize different arguments and attachments when evaluating the core elements of Sibiu's place identity in relation to its architecture (Riza et al.

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2012), public spaces, monuments, and toponymy (Rose-Redwood et al. 2010; Rusu 2017)?
Second, to what extent do locals' views on heritage commodification reflect differences between locally-born residents and the internal migrants who moved in Sibiu?

While most of the studies on heritage and migration focused on international flows of people (Harrison 2013; Logan et al. 2016; Smith 2006), our study shows that internal mobility has structuring power as well and it can also produce patrimonial recompositions, and new attachment types in relation to local heritage and its commodification. We studied this reality in Sibiu, a top city in terms of vital cultural life among Romanian cities (Croitoru et al. 2021). Moreover, designated as the European Capital of Culture in 2007, Sibiu is one of the cities that successfully attracted new internal migrants as residents during the post-communist transition decades. This influx has prevented demographic decline in the region and has contributed to the city's economic, social, and cultural prosperity (Cristea et al. 2017; Sandu 2010). It constitutes a fertile ground for research focused on cultural heritage since the Saxon cultural heritage from the area makes it different from other Romanian regions and raises challenges of cultural integration for in-migrants.

To answer the research questions, survey data were collected in 2023 using the framework of the Horizon Europe research project "XXXX" (to be added after peer review). With 920 respondents, a robust inferential statistical model was constructed to examine the differences between locally and non-locally born residents regarding place identity local heritage and its commodification, while controlling for other important demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. The next section describes the literature review and introduces the key elements of the study directly related to the local context of Sibiu.

The following section introduces the main elements of the research methodology, followed by a

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8 section focused on statistical analyses and results. Finally, the results are discussed in relation to
9 the existing findings, and the main conclusions and limitations of the study are presented.

12 **Literature Review**

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14 The literature review, structured on the concepts of place identity and the commodification of the
15 cultural heritage, answers Behrenshausen's (2019) call to emphasize the research context in order
16 to understand the contemporary and conjunctural conditions of life and the "consequences for the
17 way social groups orient themselves – the way they align themselves around those perceived
18 ruptures or breaks or discontinuities" (Behrenshausen 2019, 72).
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24 Place identity is informed by multiple elements that evolved as a result of long-term
25 historical processes and overlapped cultural stratum. According to Proshansky et al. (2014, 77),
26 this complex concept has a cognitive nature and is a dynamic entity produced by the interactions
27 between values, beliefs, and meanings that moderate individuals' attitudes and behavioral
28 tendencies and patterns. Going beyond pragmatical economic and emotional attachment or
29 belonging to a place, place identity creates a space for different kinds of understanding and
30 experiences, which can be explained by employing a place's (in)tangible cultural heritage, as well
31 as the subjective collective or individual evaluations of it. Individuals relate differently to place
32 identity and incorporate some features of a place into their own identity (Proshansky 1978).
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34 However, it must be noted that the "meaning or value of the same place is labile – flexible in the
35 hands of different categories of people" (Gieryn 2000, 465). In general, every place has a relatively
36 enduring and imposing materiality in which its most iconic components are historical buildings
37 and architecture that frame the geography of social relationships and contribute to the development
38 of a place's local identity and residents' subjective wellbeing (Riza et al. 2012; Hawar 2023).
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40 Buildings form the material foundation of place identity by offering spatial continuity and tangible
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8 reference points that foster memory, emotional attachment, and feelings of belonging (Low, 1992).
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10 Historic architecture and urban forms contribute to perceptions of authenticity and distinctiveness
11 by embedding social meanings within the built environment (Relph, 1976). At the same time,
12 buildings are not inherently meaningful; their significance is socially produced and varies across
13 groups depending on demographic characteristics and socio-economic position (Graham et al.,
14 2000; Low, 1992).
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20 This is complemented by public monuments, mnemonic configurations, and toponymies,
21 which are effective means of appropriating a space (Rose-Redwood et al. 2010; Rusu 2017). These
22 components of the local heritage create a context in which residents have varied understanding of
23 the place identity and invest various material markers of a place with particular value in relation
24 to the place identity (e.g., historical buildings, public squares). Monuments function as symbolic
25 anchors of place identity by materializing particular interpretations of history within public space.
26 Public monuments and other mnemonic configurations of the public space legitimize certain
27 narratives of the past while rendering others less visible or absent (Nora, 1989; Young, 1993).
28 Although often intended to stabilize shared meanings and identities, monuments frequently
29 become focal points of dissonance, revealing divergent emotional attachments and competing
30 claims to belonging (Young, 1993).
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42 Following a similar logic of distinguishing between a place's materiality and its translation
43 into place identity, Paasi (2001) proposed an analytical model for considering the identity of a
44 specific territory and the identity of its inhabitants. Traditions represent the intangible and
45 performative dimension of place identity. Through recurring practices such as festivals, rituals,
46 and customary activities, communities actively reproduce shared meanings and enact their
47 attachment to place (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2014). Rather than being fixed cultural survivals,
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8 traditions are continuously adapted and selectively maintained in response to changing social,
9 political, and institutional contexts (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2014; Smith, 2006). Consequently,
10 traditions play a crucial role in defining inclusion and exclusion, shaping whose cultural practices
11 are recognized as representative of the place and whose are marginalized (Smith, 2006). The
12 former refers to the narratives, symbols, and practices associated with a particular place that
13 describe its nature, history, and population, as presented in media or schools, and they can be
14 considered the 'ideal' identity. One of the 'ideal' identity manifestations involves the traditions
15 and customs that characterize a community from a particular place as part of the place's intangible
16 cultural heritage (Lenzerini 2011). On the one hand, traditions and customs are institutionalized
17 practices that reinforce social relationships and shared understanding within a community; on the
18 other, these are mechanisms that make people socially distinctive from people from other places
19 (e.g., tourists, immigrants, and people from neighboring regions).
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32 Taken together, buildings, monuments, and traditions illustrate that place identity is not a
33 static or unified attribute but an ongoing, negotiated process emerging from the interaction of
34 material environments, cultural practices, and symbolic representations (Proshansky et al., 1983;
35 Smith, 2006). In addition, Strandberg and Ek Styvén (2024) present place identity as a
36 multidimensional concept that includes components with different features and a particular cultural
37 value for a place's residents. Moreover, Strandberg and Ek Styvén (2024) highlight that place
38 identification can stem from physical and social/cultural affiliations and can be referred to as
39 "place-related self-categorizations" and defined as a "place-related social identity" linked to a
40 place-related group, which is manifested in referring to a person as a New Yorker, a Milanese, and
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While places identities involve processes that combine local and wider relationships of various kinds, such as economic, cultural, social, informational, etc. (Urry 2004) – the commodification of cultural heritage has become one of the most prominent phenomena of the globalized world in which tourism has expanded greatly and shaped economic and social realities of places (Quinn 2006; Shaw and Williams 1994). Desired for its economic outcomes, cultural heritage commodification has both positive and negative consequences (Baillie et al. 2010). Regarding the local community, the negative consequences can be related to increased social inequalities (if not, the whole community benefits from heritage commodification), privatization of common values, and the disruption of local communities (Alonso González 2014). Non-sustainable commodification can deteriorate heritage and harm local communities. However, individuals can have different attitudes and opinions about how local heritage should be preserved and whether commodification endangers this important component of place identity (Pepe and Schmitz, 2023).

Engaging with the local heritage and reflecting on place identity can serve as a significant indicator of social integration, belonging, and place attachment. Several studies have explored the cultural differences generated by international migrants, but it must be noted that internal migration also produces challenges of social integration and cultural accommodation (King and Skeldon 2010). Generally, internal migration is driven by economic disparities and employment opportunities, motives linked to education or family, and is sensitive to the distance between origin and destination (Lichner et al. 2024; Thomas 2019). The cultural distances between internal regions are considered less important in the existing scholarship since the national contexts create premises for cultural proximity, and there is a need to understand how internal migrants adjust to

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8 a new cultural realm and how they experience the cultural heritage and the commodification
9 developing in their new place of residence.

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12 In countries characterized by significant cultural diversity, one can expect in-migrants to
13 have significant cultural differences compared to their host community (Cleveland et al. 2009).
14 Moreover, there are several stereotypes associated with in-migrants (for the ones associated with
15 migration from Southern and Northern Italy and from Eastern and Western Germany, see Zehring
16 and Domahidi (2022), and for the ones associated with migration within Romania between Oltenia
17 and Banat, see O'Brien et al, (2023)). Stereotypes and cultural differences can give rise to
18 discrimination and social exclusion. O'Brien et al. (2023) emphasized that the stigmatization of
19 outsiders is not merely a manifestation of a sense of community and resistance to external
20 influences, but instead, it must also be put in a broader context that considers the legacy of previous
21 historical periods and political regimes. For instance, the communist regime in Romania imposed
22 strict restrictions on internal mobility and discouraged any uncontrolled in-migration, with the
23 labor force being instructed by the authorities to move only according to the needs of the national
24 economy and under strict eligibility conditions (Lazaroiu 1998). Incomers were thus perceived as
25 representatives of the state's interests, which made them even more undesirable and nurtured
26 stereotypical social representations (O'Brien et al. 2023). From this perspective, the notion of
27 heritage can be presented as an argumentative fabric (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991; Smith 2006)
28 and extant research highlighted affective and embodied attachments to local heritage (Laplantine
29 2005; Stengers 2009). Heritage thus appears as a dynamic field, structured by competing claims
30 and attitudes regarding preservation (Barbe 2010; Bourdieu 1994; Veschambre 2008).
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Overview of the Local Context of Research

Sibiu has a consolidated place identity that combines an excellently conserved Saxon cultural heritage with a dynamic Romanian cultural heritage. The Saxons had a long tradition as a closed and conservatory community that preserved their distinct ethnic and cultural–religious identity, which enabled them to self-isolate from other ethnic communities in Transylvania, particularly the Hungarians and Romanians (Voinea 2023). The Saxons ruled the region for several centuries until the beginning of the 20th century, when Transylvania united with other Romanian regions and became a single state in 1918. The long period of Saxon domination was extremely prolific in terms of the emergence of iconic buildings, architecture, public places, and public monuments (Pop 2021). Moreover, Sibiu’s main promenade pathways were developed by its Saxon community and are still part of the tangible heritage of the city (Stanciu 2019).

After the Saxon era, Romanian culture expanded into the area of Sibiu from the culture of the ordinary people to political power positions in the interwar period and even strongly under the communist period (1947–1989), when most of the Saxons from the area emigrated to Germany under special conditions negotiated by the two states (Romania and Germany). During this period of Romanian domination, other patrimonial items were developed in the region (for instance, the Astra National Museum was officially opened to the public in 1967; it is one of the largest open-air museums in Europe and one of the most important ethnographic museums in Romania).

The post-communist era started with a decade of economic recession in Sibiu (and in Romania). Saxon emigration to Germany continued, leaving only a few Saxons in the region—the most recent national census estimates their population share to be around 1% (NIS 2021). In the 2000s, through a series of restorations of the historic buildings and private foreign economic investments in industry and public investments in hospitality and tourism infrastructure, Sibiu

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gradually became one of the most appealing cities in the country, attracting tourists and in-migrants from other regions of the country. In 2007, it was designated the European Capital of Culture. During this period, the city's Saxon heritage was 'rediscovered' and reinforced by the municipality and other stakeholders and became the main highlight of the city, even though the number of Saxons residing there was negligible (Oltean et al. 2017). As Rusu (2022, 91) notes, "the city's [Sibiu's] identity is defined by the material heritage and cultural legacy of the Saxons, even though they no longer reside in Sibiu."

In a country characterized by high emigration rates and a severe decrease in population, Sibiu has been attracting internal migrants and succeeding in maintaining its total number of residents as relatively constant despite emigrations (NIS 2025; Sandu 2010). In fact, in the last two decades in Sibiu, more than in other regions of the country, there has been a phenomenon of population renewal through the in-migration of those born in other regions of the country. Last but not least, the phenomenon is framed by a national context characterized by strong regional identities (O'Brien et al. 2023; Rusu and Croitoru 2022).

Methods and Data

In 2023, using the framework of the Horizon Europe project "XXXX" (to be added after peer review), survey data from the general population of Sibiu were collected. The study aimed to arrive at a comprehensive image of the cultural consumption behaviors in the area and individuals' opinions about its cultural sector, as well as their attitudes toward the various components of the local identity and cultural heritage, the commodification of local heritage, and the organization of public events and festivals. In this study, we piloted an operationalization of place identity and the commodification of heritage. First, place identity was measured using individuals' assessments of the importance of three distinct components: historical buildings and architecture, public

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8 monuments, and traditions and customs. Second, commodification of cultural heritage was
9 measured by individuals' evaluations on three dimensions: whether commodification is a good
10 thing for the community, whether it benefits all inhabitants, and whether it does not lead to heritage
11 damage.
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17 In the survey we used a self-administered questionnaire, hosted on the QuestionPro
18 platform, and it was disseminated using multiple channels, including public calls for respondents
19 posted on local websites, social media platforms, local media, and the snowballing technique.
20 During data collection, attention was paid to ensure that the sample was diverse in terms of age,
21 gender, and education level. The total sample included over 900 Sibiu residents and was
22 heterogeneous, which allowed for the testing of various statistical relationships between variables
23 without generalizing the results to the entire population. Alongside the major advantages offered
24 by this sample, there are also some limitations to this research strategy. Online respondent calls
25 and snowball sampling might introduce self-selection bias and facilitate the presence of people
26 from the online venues where the call circulated and those interested in cultural topics, leaving
27 some social groups underrepresented. While this sampling strategy does not permit generalization
28 of the results to the entire population, it is appropriate for testing statistical relationships between
29 variables and for making comparisons across categories of participants. The participants' consent
30 was obtained using a dedicated opening question that provided general information about the study
31 and the opportunity to open and complete the questionnaire anonymously. The eligibility criteria
32 for participation were linked exclusively to the individuals' current residence at the moment of the
33 survey, regardless of the place where they were born. The study was ethically approved by the
34 XXXX (the name of the institution will be added after peer review).
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Using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, comparisons were made between locally born Sibians and non-locally born Sibians in terms of their assessments of the various components of local identity and their attitudes toward cultural heritage commodification. This dichotomization of the categories was employed based on the research questions assumed by this study. While the sample size ($N > 900$) ensures sufficient variability for robust inferential models, the aforementioned limitations should be considered when interpreting the results, which reflect the patterns within the surveyed population and not Sibiu's entire resident population. Logistic regression modeling was preferred over other potential statistical comparisons between locally born people and internal migrants, as it is a highly effective method for estimating the probability of a result coded as a binary variable (dependent variable) using a set of independent variables, which can include a variable dedicated to an individual's birth place and other potential controlling variables such as age, gender, education, and economic status (Seawright 2016; Sweet and Grace-Martin 1999). However, the cross-sectional design of the models does not support causal interpretations. The statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 23.

Results

Given the local context, it must be noted that the locally and non-locally born residents who were compared in this study were all born in Romania. The country has extremely low levels of immigration, with immigrants mainly concentrated in the capital city and its surroundings (Voicu and Croitoru 2023). Consequently, 99% of the participants were born in Romania, and 12 individuals who declared that they were born in other countries were excluded from further analyses because their share (around 1%) was too low to conduct relevant statistical analyses and their profiles could be extremely different compared to internal migrants. This study thus reflects the differences between those who share a similar national background but differ in terms of their

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8 regional birth places. Of the total 920 participants, 56.3% were born in Sibiu, while 43.7% were
9 born in other counties and later relocated to Sibiu County. Among the non-locally born residents,
10 the largest category was those born in Oltenia (around 170 people), a neighboring but culturally
11 different region, while the other participants were born in regions spread all over the country,
12 including Transylvania, Muntenia, and Moldova. The number of years lived in Sibiu varied within
13 the category of non-locally born residents, with the mean value being 13 years and the median
14 value being 6 years.
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21 ***Components of the Local Identity and Place of Birth***

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24 Local identity is the result of a long process of socialization and appropriation of tangible and
25 intangible cultural heritage (Lenzerini 2011; Paasi 2001). There can thus be differences in how
26 locally born and non-locally born residents assess the importance of certain cultural aspects of a
27 place's local identity. In our study, these differences were analyzed using a three-dimensional
28 model (Figure 1). The participants attributed the highest importance to the historical buildings and
29 architecture or the local identity of Sibiu (92.8%). This was followed by traditions and customs
30 (88.9%). The third dimension registered a significantly lower importance compared to the other
31 two components, but public monuments were also found to be important for Sibiu's local identity
32 (78.6%).
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42 **[Figure 1 inserted here]**

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45 To test the differences in evaluating the three components of the place identity between
46 locally and non-locally born respondents, a logistic regression model was designed. The dependent
47 variable was the assessment of each of the three components presented above as important for
48 Sibiu's local identity. The main socio-economic and demographic variables were controlled to
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better isolate the effects of the birthplace as an independent variable (Table 1). Moreover, using the logistic regression modelling (Table 1), this study uncovered a statistically significant difference between locally and non-locally born residents in assessing two out of three dimensions as being important for local identity. First, after controlling for age, gender, education, and household income, historical buildings and architecture were found to be considered more important by locally born respondents. The odds ratio of considering this component of tangible culture important for local identity was 70% higher for locally born residents ($p < 0.05$). At the same time, traditions and customs were also found to be statistically significant and more important for locally born residents (the odds ratio was 66% higher; $p < 0.05$). However, after controlling for all the other variables in the model, no significant differences were found between the locally and non-locally born residents in assessing the importance of public monuments for Sibiu's local identity.

[Table 1 inserted here]

Commodification of Local Heritage and Place of Birth

The process of cultural heritage commodification is visible in the region, mainly since Sibiu was bestowed the title of European Capital of Culture in 2007. In the last two decades, its cultural infrastructure has been renovated and extended, and presently a significant part of its local budget is derived from the economic activities linked to the commodification of its cultural heritage. Three survey questions were formulated to assess how residents position themselves in relation to the commodification process. Figure 2 shows the percentage of individuals who agreed with several statements about commodification. Commodification was largely seen as a good thing for the community (88.6%), and most of the participants (82.3%) agreed that it benefits all residents.

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8 Moreover, according to a lower share of participants, commodification does not lead to heritage
9 damage (79.2%).
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13 **[Figure 2 inserted here]**
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16 A similar approach was used to test differences regarding the commodification of the local
17 cultural heritage. We analyzed whether and how an individual's birthplace influences their opinion
18 about commodification and this was examined using an analytical model that allowed controlling
19 for other demographic and socio-economic characteristics. Table 2 presents the results of the
20 logistic regression models and indicates a statistically significant difference between the locally
21 and non-locally born residents of Sibiu in terms of their concern that commodification leads to
22 heritage damage. The odds ratio of agreeing with this statement was found to be 58% higher for
23 locally born residents ($p < 0.01$), even when all the other factors included in the model were
24 maintained equal. However, no statistically significant differences were found between the locally
25 and non-locally born respondents in terms of their evaluation of commodification being good for
26 the community and beneficial for all residents.
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37 For the robustness check, we introduced two additional variables into the described logistic
38 regression models: one measuring individuals' interest in the cultural activities taking place within
39 the local community, and the other assessing whether festivals held in Sibiu are perceived as
40 defining features of local identity. All differences identified between locally born residents and
41 internal migrants living in Sibiu remain stable both in the direction (positive/negative) of the
42 relationships and regarding the statistical significance of the relationship between variables. Since
43 these new variables are not the focus of the main analysis, the results are presented in a table in
44 Appendix 1.
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11 Discussion and Conclusions

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14 The statistical analyses revealed differences between locally born residents and non-locally born
15 residents in terms of how they value Sibiu's heritage and place identity. These results can be
16 interpreted using two complementary perspectives that explain both the complexity of local
17 attachments and the contested nature of patrimonialization.
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22 According to our results, heritage can be discussed as an *argumentative fabric*, a space
23 where groups construct, evaluate, and rank the justifications they use to legitimate their
24 relationship to heritage. This approach, drawing on pragmatic sociology (Boltanski and Thévenot
25 1991) and extended by critical heritage studies (Davallon 2006; Rautenberg 2003; Smith 2006),
26 views heritage not as a fixed resource but as a product of the situated regimes of justification (Pepe
27 and Schmitz, 2023). In Sibiu, the observed differences are less a matter of individual taste than
28 structured argumentative positions shaped by collective histories, cultural repertoires, and
29 positioning.
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38 The second perspective might indicate *sensitive and affective attachments*. Beyond
39 cognitive evaluations of monuments or traditions, heritage lives through emotions, embodied
40 memories, and everyday practices. Heritage can evoke pride, nostalgia, vulnerability, or anxiety
41 (Illouz 2025; Laplantine 2005; Stengers 2009). In Sibiu, historical buildings and practices are
42 recognized as cultural assets and are felt and inhabited differently depending on its residents'
43 mobility trajectories. Locally born residents, shaped by long-term immersion, tend to emphasize
44 their importance for the place identity, while newcomers articulate their attachments more
45 pragmatically, linking their appreciation of local culture with its commodification. At the same
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time, our results indicate that heritage is not only about preservation or commodification but also raise questions about potential struggles for meaning and recognition in which justifications and emotions can be intersected.

Beyond Sibiu, these findings matter for other contexts related to internal mobility. They resonate in many societies where domestic migration reshapes communities. Sibiu can thus be considered a laboratory to study social representations of cultural heritage, demonstrating how internal mobility, often overshadowed by international migration (Harrison 2013; Logan et al. 2016; Smith 2006), is a driver of patrimonial assessments and raises universal questions regarding evaluations of place identity and its commodification. While locally born residents are concerned about the potential damage of the cultural heritage through its commodification, internal migrants might evaluate heritage a resource for tourism, growth, and openness. These contrasting repertoires confirm that heritage is not a neutral cultural reservoir but a field in which groups have different views regarding the place identity and its commodification. The observed statistical differences thus indicated the need to further explorations of factors shaping individuals' representations of the local cultural landscape.

Taken together, these two perspectives demonstrate that Sibiu's place identity is shaped by argumentative regimes as well as affective attachments. These differences can be viewed within the broader framework of the sociology of patrimonialization that is attentive to conflicts, emotions, and claims to recognition. Following Bourdieu (1994), Barbe (2010), and Veschambre (2008), heritage does not appear to be neutral - instead, it is a political field structured by a series of socioeconomic factors embedding struggles over legitimacy, authority, and memory. By focusing on Sibiu, this study underlines the role of internal mobility, which is often neglected, in reshaping its place identity and cultural legitimacy. The Romanian case contributes to a broader

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8 international agenda: understanding how heritage is evaluated and transformed in societies facing
9 demographic changes. Since 2007, the Sibiu municipality's touristification strategy has
10 increasingly relied on heritage commodification to drive economic prosperity and has created a
11 political arena in which local voices, historical communities, and newcomers do not always share
12 the same priorities. The absence of the Saxon community, which has historically played a central
13 role in shaping Sibiu's cultural landscape, further complicates these debates on the
14 commodification of cultural heritage, as their legacy is appropriated and reinterpreted in their
15 absence. Far from isolated, Sibiu exemplifies a general dynamic in which heritage is differently
16 experienced and inspire distinct concerns. Heritage thus functions as a political field in which
17 economic interests, collective memories, and forms of belonging intersect, sometimes reinforcing
18 and sometimes undermining each other.
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30 Our results indicated that cultural policies must protect the emblematic elements of local
31 identity - buildings, traditions, customs - while creating inclusive frameworks that allow
32 newcomers to develop their own attachments with a place. This can be also linked to extant
33 research which pointed out that built heritage can have important implications for individuals'
34 subjective wellbeing (Hawar et al. 20223). Moreover, it was found that commodification is
35 considered ambivalently: its economic benefits are recognized, but fears of damage and loss are
36 stronger among locally born residents, reflecting their deeper emotional investment in the place.
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44 This study has limitations. Survey data, by design, rely on a restricted set of indicators.
45 Such data offer a broad overview but cannot capture the full depth of lived experiences and
46 motivations. Moreover, while Sibiu is a fertile ground for cultural research, especially due to its
47 Saxon legacy, its specificity limits the generalization of the results, which should be read less as
48 final conclusions than as an invitation for comparative and qualitative research.
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Table 1. Results of the logistic regression models – Assessments of the three components important for Sibiu’s local identity

	Historical buildings and architecture Exp(B)	Traditions and customs Exp(B)	Public monuments (statues, busts, and names of places) Exp(B)
Locally born Sibians (Yes = 1)	1.7*	1.66*	0.96
Age (No. of years)	1.02	1.02*	1.02**
Gender (Male = 1)	0.71	0.62*	0.82
Tertiary education completed (Yes = 1)	2.2*	1.64*	1.4
Self-assessed household income (scale 1 to 5)	0.94	0.94	0.97
Constant	6.06**	4.2**	1.99

Source: XXXX survey (authors’ elaboration) – to be added after peer review;

Note: *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001

Table 2. Results of the logistic regression models – Assessments of the three statements about the commodification of Sibiu’s cultural heritage

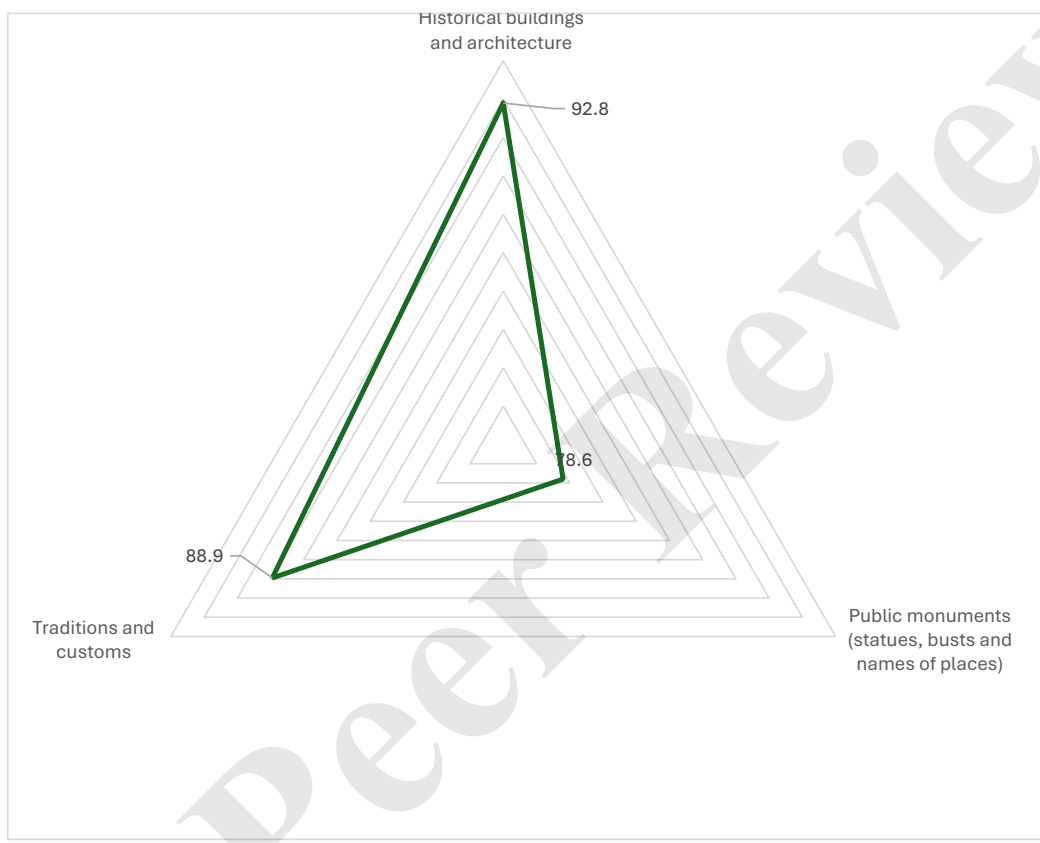
	... leads to heritage damage Exp(B)	... is a good thing for the community Exp(B)	... benefits all its citizens/inhabitants Exp(B)
Locally born Sibians (Yes = 1)	1.580**	1.170	1.012
Age (No. of years)	1.005	1.012	1.008
Gender (Male = 1)	0.793	0.902	0.880
Tertiary education completed (Yes = 1)	1.112	1.591*	1.382
Household income (ascendent scale 1 to 5)	0.888	1.123	1.044
Constant	0.263**	2.660	2.733*

Source: XXXX survey (authors’ elaboration) – to be added after peer review;

Note: *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001

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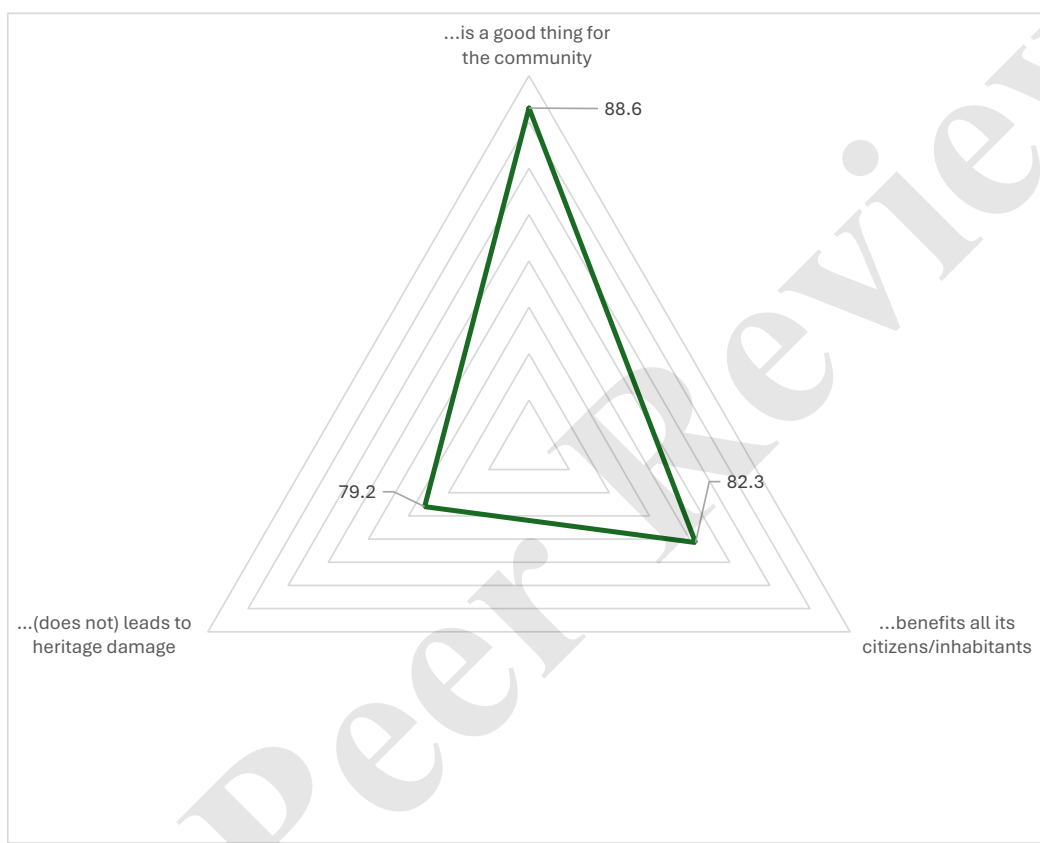
Figure 1. Assessments of the three components considered important for Sibiu's local identity (percentage of respondents who agree with the three statements)



Source: XXXX survey (authors' elaboration) – to be added after peer review

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Figure 2. Opinions about the commodification of cultural heritage in Sibiu (percentage of respondents who agree with the three statements)



Source: XXXX survey (authors elaboration) – to be added after peer review

Appendix 1. Results of the logistic regression models with additional variables (V1 and V2) included for robustness checks.

	Historical buildings and architecture are important for Sibiu's local identity Exp(B)	Traditions and customs are important for Sibiu's local identity Exp(B)	Public monuments (statues, busts, and names of places) are important for Sibiu's local identity Exp(B)	The commodification of Sibiu's cultural heritage leads to heritage damage Exp(B)	The commodification of Sibiu's cultural heritage is a good thing for the community Exp(B)	The commodification of Sibiu's cultural heritage benefits all its citizens/inhabitants Exp(B)
Locally born Sibians (Yes = 1)	1.75*	1.63*	0.94	1.56*	1.21	1.03
Age (No. of years)	1.02*	1.02*	1.02***	1.00	1.02*	1.01
Gender (Male = 1)	0.88	0.70	0.98	0.82	1.08	1.00
Tertiary education completed (Yes = 1)	1.71	1.45	1.17	1.12	1.28	1.21
Household income (ascendent scale 1 to 5)	0.83	0.91	0.92	0.89	1.04	0.99
V1. Individuals' interest in the cultural activities taking place within the local community (ascendent scale 1 to 5)	2.08***	1.37**	1.61***	1.05	1.72***	1.38**
V2. Individuals' assessment regarding festivals held in Sibiu as defining features of local identity (ascendent scale 1 to 5)	1.57**	1.35*	1.28*	1.03	1.70***	1.74***
Constant	0.11*	0.42	0.14**	0.19**	0.52***	0.09***

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

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For Peer Review