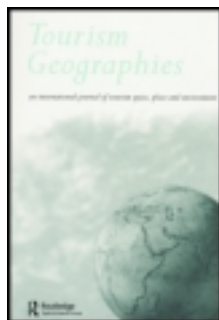


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Diaspora and Tourism: Transylvanian Saxons Visiting the Homeland

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ABSTRACT *This paper discusses visits to the homeland made by Transylvanian Saxons and their descendants, now mainly living in Germany, after their emigration from the former Saxon areas of Transylvania (Romania). The aim is to understand what compels those people to temporarily return to Transylvania, how the perception of the re-discovered places influences the sense of belonging, or not belonging, to the homeland, and the forms of connection that are re-established. Furthermore, the study aims at analysing the potential of diasporic-roots tourism for heritage protection and local development in this part of Romania. Study results revealed that the landscape re-visited over the journeys played an ambivalent role in the (re)definition of the meanings of home and homeland, reaffirming the sense of belonging to Transylvania and to Germany at the same time. Transylvanian Saxons pragmatically kept connections with the homeland both in Romania (visits, house properties, etc.) and away (associations, newspapers, social networks, etc.), without renouncing the new life found in Germany. Keeping house properties in the homeland was revealed to be a key feature for Saxons' heritage protection and local development, especially when properties were turned into guesthouses for tourists.*

KEY WORDS: Diaspora, roots tourism, Transylvanian Saxons, Romania, identity, heritage, local development

Introduction

*I haven't been there for a long time
Where I left much when I had to go
Eventually I found ways back
To find a part of myself*
(from the song 'Vergessene Welt' by Bürger7).

Whether in search of better opportunities or due to forced displacements, groups of migrants have always dispersed throughout the world. Nowadays, in the era of

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globalization, the size and pace of human mobility is rapidly increasing and contributing to the creation of hybrid forms of cultural identities (King 2010). Many of these displaced communities are commonly called 'diasporas', although the term diaspora originally refers to the Jewish population who was exiled from Palestine and forced to settle outside their homeland. The contemporary use of this term tends to include many population movements, such as migrants, political refugees, foreign workers, overseas communities, ethnic and religious minorities (Shuval 2000), describing the situation of people living out of their original homelands (Mitchell 1997), or communities who define themselves through reference to a distant homeland from which they once originated (Barber 2001, cited in Coles & Timothy 2004: 1). These people usually maintain cultural and psychological attachments to their places of origin and these ties with the homelands, even after several generations, help them to cope with new lives, displacement or discrimination (Baldassar 2001; Stephenson 2002). One of the most common ways to keep bonds with the homeland is travelling with the aim of preserving or strengthening personal and emotional links and to re-discover the places. Indeed, connections to homelands are major motivators of tourism flows for migrants and their descendants who wish to re-find their roots, to re-experience the former homeland and thereby to re-locate their identity.

The English terms 'roots tourism' and 'diasporic tourism', generally used as synonyms, similar to the German words '*Heimattourismus*' [homeland tourism] and '*Heimwehtourismus*' [homesick tourism], embrace this form of travel and underline its two dimensions, i.e. roots and tourism. People are motivated to travel to places where they believe they have roots and from where their families are thought to have originated.

The quest for roots and the desire to return home have been extensively covered in autobiographical and fictional writing (White 1995). In the United States, the longing for connections with homelands or ancestral lands has gained considerable visibility, particularly since the media coverage of *Roots*. Alex Haley (1976), of Afro-American ancestry, wrote this saga and became a model for thousands of Americans after he traced his family background starting from oral accounts collected for almost twelve years in the United States and Gambia. The recent success of Jonathan Safran Foer's (2002) novel *Everything is Illuminated* shows the persistent popularity of the theme of roots research and tourism.

From an academic point of view, research on diasporic and roots tourism is relatively recent. Earlier approaches, particularly from tourism studies, typically involved macro-level statistical analyses of tourism flows to identify the economic importance of homelands as travel destinations (Thanopoulos & Walle 1988; King & Gamage 1994; Asiedu 2005) and the prevalence of this kind of travel for specific migrant groups (Ostrowski 1991; Hall & Duval 2004). Concepts related to diasporic-roots tourism have been extensively covered by Timothy (1997), McCain and Ray (2003), Basu (2001; 2004a; 2004b; 2005; 2007) and Coles and Timothy (2004). According to

Timothy (1997), diasporic-roots tourism is a form of personal heritage tourism which involves people who possess emotional connections to the land of their ancestors. Similarly, McCain and Ray (2003: 713) defined roots tourists as 'individuals who travel to engage in genealogical endeavours, to search for information or to simply feel connected to ancestors and ancestral roots'. According to Basu (2004a; 2005), who did extensive field research in the Scottish Highlands, the 'return to the roots' is a real physical movement, as well as a performative act of belonging expressed through visits to ancestral heritage locations, and a more generalized collective project of connection to the homeland.

Coles and Timothy (2004) identified several ways in which diasporas and tourism intersect, e.g. travelling to homelands or diasporic and ethnic enclaves, genealogical research, homeland populations visiting the diaspora communities and tourism to spaces of transit. Baldassar (2001) conceptualized return visits to the homeland as part of the migratory process itself, as they influence the settlement in a new country, maintain connections with distant relatives, feed nostalgia for past times and places and create fluid, transnational identities, even possibly leading to relocation in the place of origin.

The importance of kinship obligations and cultural values has also been highlighted (Baldassar 2001; Nguyen & King 2002; Stephenson 2002; Oxfeld 2004), albeit usually in culturally specific contexts, as in the cases of Vietnamese (Nguyen & King 2002) and Caribbean (Stephenson 2002) diasporas. Demonstrating connections to the homeland and recounting visiting experiences can also become ways of enhancing self-esteem, social prestige and cultural capital within the diaspora (Stephenson 2002; Oxfeld 2004).

This study contributes to the literature on diasporic-roots tourism by exploring and discussing visits to the homeland made by Transylvanian Saxons and their descendants, now mainly living in Germany, after their emigration from the former Saxon areas of Transylvania (Romania). Specifically, this study analyses what compels those people to temporarily return to Transylvania, how the perception of the re-discovered places and landscapes influences the sense of belonging, or not belonging, to the homeland, and the forms of connection that are re-established.

A further aim is to understand the potential of diasporic-roots tourism for heritage protection and local development in this part of Romania, which is characterized by socio-economic weakness and intense emigration.

The main originality of the study lies in the investigation on diasporic heritage tourism in a relatively under-explored geographical/ethnic context. The Transylvanian Saxon diaspora embodies multiple stories and typologies of dispersal, being a 'double diaspora', away from Germany in earlier times and away from Transylvania nowadays, and needs complex and well-grounded economic and cultural policies in order to maintain significant relations between the diaspora and the region of origin over the longer term.

Diasporas and Roots Tourism: An Overview

According to Helmreich (cited in Coles & Timothy 2004: 1), the etymology of the word 'diaspora' may be traced back to the Greek word for 'dispersion', from the word 'through' and 'sow or scatter', and originates in the Greek translation of the Book of Deuteronomy in the Bible. Braziel and Mannur (cited in Coles & Timothy 2004: 1) noted that, through its religious significance, the term was used in medieval rabbinical writings about the Jewish diaspora and the predicament of Jews living outside Palestine. Indeed, the meaning of diaspora connotes forced displacements caused by traumatic historical events and has an ideal type in the Jews' exile from their original land (Safran 1991).

Within the academic discourse, there is an ongoing debate regarding the appropriate use of the term (Basu 2005). Some believe that it ought to be limited to describing the dispersion and exile of Jews from their historical homeland, while its use in other contexts should remain at a metaphorical level. Others still believe it is necessary to transcend the Jewish tradition and return to the etymological use of the word and its early usage in human dispersion studies. For instance, Cohen (1997) widens the definition of diasporas to include multiple causes of population dispersal and assembles a new ideal typology of diaspora which contains not only victim diasporas, but also trade diasporas, imperial diasporas, labour diasporas, and so on.

Important features of diasporic peoples are the desire to return to the homeland and the need to keep bonds with it, although, for many diasporic populations, the return is more a myth than a real aim or a possible achievable goal (King & Christou 2008). Indeed, the relations among diasporic peoples and their original homelands vary across time and space, with each case being different from the others. These identities generally tend to weaken with time due to assimilation into new living places and mixing of ancestries among subsequent generations. There are 'bound' and 'unbound' diasporas (Mavroudi 2007), with the former being more 'homeland-orientated' ethnic groups and identities and the latter more fluid, nomadic identities, with multiple allegiances and belongings (Ní Laoire 2003).

Various scholars (Safran 1991; Clifford 1994; Brah 1996; Cohen 1997; Shuval 2000) remark that diasporic peoples and their descendants generally maintain multiple connections with the homeland, preserve cultural memories and feel some degree of alienation from their current place and society of residence. Thus, diasporic groups living in a host country may have feelings of unease, ambiguity and restlessness (Coles & Timothy 2004; Richards 2005). The term 'in-betweenness' describes a diasporic identity and the connections among people and the spaces of their past and present, which may produce an identity crisis, causing some people to wonder who they are and where they come from (Basu 2001; 2007; Timothy & Guelke 2008). Alternatively, individuals may embrace transnationalism and may feel comfortable, even at home, in more than one place. Some scholars (Rapport & Dawson 1998) have even argued that, nowadays, individuals may feel at home in movement, while home,

rather than being based on territorial attachment, comes to be found in behavioural routines and techniques, in styles of dress and address, in memories, myths and stories, in jokes and opinions.

Although humankind is now facing a situation where one's own life is no longer tied to a particular place (Beck 2000), and the current forms of globalized mobility appear to challenge the traditional notion of home, identity and citizenship linked to defined territories (Cohen 1997), today's world is not placeless. Instead, places, either real or imaginary, continue to have crucial importance in everybody's life (Archibald 2002) and the idea of home is still an essential element for individual and group identity. Those who are uprooted, willing or unwilling migrants and refugees, may continue to keep the idea of reconnecting to their point of origin, the homeland, after their displacement or even after their death.

In spite of the positive sides of living and integrating in a new place of residence, the feeling of nostalgia for homeland, people and places and the desire to seek or strengthen cultural and social identities are strong factors compelling trips back home (Baldassar 2001; Hirsch & Spitzer 2002), even for those whose ancestors migrated several generations earlier (Akhtar 1999; Nguyen & King 2004). Various terms have been adopted to refer to this kind of travel: 'personal heritage tourism' (Timothy 1997), 'ethnic tourism' (King 1994), 'ethnic reunion' (Stephenson 2002), 'ethnic pilgrimages' (Kelly 2000), 'visiting friends and relatives' (Jackson 1990; Seaton 1997; Moscardo *et al.* 2000; Duval 2003; Backer 2011), 'roots tourism' (Bruner 1996; Basu 2007) and 'visits home' (Baldassar 2001). According to Basu (2001), homeland visits display a popular reassertion of a territorial basis of identity, since the past may be objectified or externalized in the landscape, which, as 'site of memory', in turn, provides sources of identity for roots tourists.

Motivations for diasporic travel (and, specifically, to visit a homeland) are varied and complex, ranging from visiting relatives and friends, searching for roots, experiencing the land of the ancestors, maintaining cultural identities, attending festivals or celebrations and engaging in different forms of tourism. Usually, travel meaning varies according to the generation. For many first-generation migrants, travelling to the homeland is a way to address a sense of nostalgia (Baldassar 2001) and to seek comfort in an environment in which they left a part of themselves (Lowenthal 1985; Pickering & Keightley 2006). However, their experiences may be varied and prior expectations are not always met. Standards of living, social norms and political structures of the homeland, as well as the physical appearance of the places, may have changed since migrants left, and living conditions in the receiving society may be vastly different from those in the homeland. Thus, a true homecoming may not be possible and the idealized picture of the homeland often collides with the reality of a place that has changed in the meantime (Brah 1996; Read 1996; Levy 2004; Markowitz 2004). The fear of facing these changes and the difficulty of accepting them are reasons why many former migrants decide not to travel back to their homelands (Smith & Jackson 1999; Baldassar 2001). Disjunctive experiences

in the homeland may also cause home to be detached from homeland, with a sense of belonging re-routed to the receiving society, or even up-rooted completely, producing a feeling of 'homelessness'. The homeland may remain a mere cultural and spiritual entity, a land of descent and identification, yet not a place of everyday belonging and social participation (Kelly 2000; Voigt-Graf 2008).

For migrants' children and subsequent generations, the experience may be rather different. They do not have their own individual memories about the homeland in past times. They may know family stories or cultural traditions related to the homeland, but they generally have weaker links with specific local places. However, many roots tourists seem to achieve the sense of identity affirmation and belonging that they initially desired (Bruner 1996; Basu 2007). Travelling to the ancestral homeland, in these cases, is motivated by a desire to seek or revive personal and family roots by researching genealogies, family histories and significant historical events. Even when little is known about individual ancestors or the exact places or houses where they lived, there can still be a strong desire to experience and spiritually reconnect with these landscapes of personal heritage (Bruner 1996; Basu 2004b; 2007; Schramm 2004).

Emphasis has been put on the importance of the ancestral space for roots tourists, which is consumed either symbolically (e.g. sightseeing, photographing, gazing) or materially (e.g. consuming local food, buying local products) (Coles & Timothy 2004). The activities undertaken during the journey are usually orientated towards the experience of an emotional landscape which is reconstructed by visiting worship places and cemeteries, looking for houses where ancestors lived and places where they used to work and talking to local people with the hope of collecting information about ancestors (Nash 2002; Basu 2007; Timothy & Guelke 2008). The renewed presence in the place of origin can give substance and concreteness to emotions and narratives from the past (Peleikis 2007; Hirsch & Spitzer 2002). The landscape helps re-constructing not only personal family stories, but also broader community stories, either real or imagined, from where roots tourists believe themselves to originate.

Over the past decades, roots tourism has become increasingly popular, particularly amongst people of Irish, Scottish, Jewish and African-American descent living in North America and Australia (Coles & Timothy 2004). Studying roots tourism in the Scottish Highlands, Basu (2004a; 2005) pointed out that the Highland landscape makes them able to finally re-construct the traumatic events and the perceived historical injustices (the Clearances) that caused the dispersal of their ancestors and original communities, even if those events were not necessarily the main cause for their own ancestors' dispersal. It is the strength of the Highland Clearances narrative – represented as an unfair exile – that binds the group together as a diaspora and re-affirms a social identity.

The implications of diasporic-roots travel for tourism industry have been acknowledged. Coles and Timothy (2004) and Timothy and Guelke (2008) pointed out that

journeys undertaken by those who want to visit their homeland, either as diasporic, roots or genealogical tourists, are an important segment of the tourism market, although difficult to evaluate. Among the few studies that tried to calculate the magnitude of this sector, O'Flaherty *et al.* (2007) reported that an estimated 11 percent of first-generation migrants to Australia visit their homelands regularly, and Feng and Page (2000) asserted that a majority of Chinese immigrants to New Zealand make regular trips to China. German 'heimat' tourism is also quickly developing in the area of Kaliningrad [Ger. Königsberg], Russia, where about half of the 40,000 foreign tourists recorded in 2001 was formed by Germans personally or culturally attracted by the German heritage of East Prussia (Kropinova 2006).

This kind of travel is likely to involve relatively long stays and is often associated with other forms of tourism (cultural, natural, rural, mountain, seaside, etc.) in various places within the same country or region, helping to spread the benefits of tourism spending (King & Gamage 1994; Duval 2003; Asiedu 2005; Scheyvens 2007). In some respects, it is thus closer to domestic rather than mainstream international tourism (Scheyvens 2007) and tends to have smaller fluctuations over time as there is a typically stronger personal interest in the destination. Other benefits may also accrue, such as business and property investment or remittances (Lew & Wong 2002; 2004; Oxfeld 2004). However, benefits may be unevenly distributed and disputes may arise as visitors attempt to reclaim former properties, or as diaspora populations become involved in domestic politics, as happened, for example, in Croatia (Skrbiš 1999; Carter 2004).

In some cases, diaspora members, expatriates and other potential travellers with recognizable genealogical backgrounds have been targeted by tourism development agencies, leading to the production of institutionalized and commercialized diasporic travel services. According to Peleikis (2007), travellers in search of some kind of roots, at the same time, are also conventional tourists and engage in social practices described as tourism, such as gazing at landscape, taking photographs and videos, purchasing souvenirs and so on. Tourist managers and travel agencies acknowledge this tourist interest in the past and invent and promote specific tourist events and excursions to meet roots tourists' interests. The Scottish and Irish national tourism bureaux realized that roots tourism could be lucrative for host communities and actively promoted it through websites and specific packages and campaigns, including large-scale events called 'Homecoming Scotland', the first one in 2009 and the next one in 2014 (Ancestral Scotland 2011; Homecoming Scotland 2011; Irish Ancestral Holidays 2011) (Legrand 2002; Morgan *et al.* 2002; Nash 2002; Schramm 2004; Basu 2007; Timothy & Guelke 2008).

Some governments have also capitalized on roots tourism in order to gain political support and sympathy for political issues and to build a sense of nationalism and pride not only among the residents of the country but also among members of their diasporas (Timothy & Guelke 2008). The Israeli government, together with organizations such as *Taglit-Birthright Israel*, provides free trips to Israel for Jewish young adults as a

way to reinforce the connection between Israel and Jewish communities around the world (Di Giovine 2009).

Most roots tourists travel independently in order to keep the necessary flexibility to visit their own places of interest. They are often aided by information found on the Internet and they usually stay, for at least part of their trip, with friends and relatives (Butler *et al.* 2002; Klemm 2002). At the same time, the remarkable business potential related to this phenomenon has led to the appearance of specialized travel agents and tour operators who offer dedicated products to diaspora tourists of various backgrounds. Professional family historians, accommodation and food service suppliers, and transportation providers linked with these forms of tourism are also growing in number (Timothy & Guelke 2008).

Researching Transylvanian Saxons Diaspora

The ethnic German population traditionally known as Transylvanian Saxons settled in several parts of Transylvania, in present-day Romania, mainly between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This migration was part of a wider German eastward demographic expansion (*Ostsiedlung*) which lasted for several centuries and created a scattered 'colonization diaspora' stretching from the Balkans to the Baltic Sea and into Russia.

The colonization of Transylvania by Germans was started and promoted by the Hungarian King Géza II (1141–62), who encouraged the settlers to defend the south-eastern borders of the Kingdom of Hungary, sparsely inhabited at the time by Hungarian, Romanian and Szekler populations (with Szeklers being a subgroup of the Hungarian people). Besides military purposes, these German settlers were also invited to move to the area thanks to their renowned expertise in mining and other economic activities. The colonists mostly came from the Western regions of the Holy Roman Empire, while the collective term 'Saxons' probably derived from the privileged status held by Saxon assistants working for the Hungarian chancellery (Wagner *et al.* 1982; Gündisch 1998).

The first waves of settlers travelled to what would become the Altland area, centred on the fortified city of Hermannstadt (Romanian: Sibiu; Hungarian: Nagyszeben), Nösnerland, centred on Bistritz (Bistrița; Beszterce) and Burzenland, centred on Kronstadt (Brașov; Brassó). Further waves of settlers founded a number of villages, towns and cities and were temporarily joined by Teutonic Knights who built a series of castles and fortresses to further strengthen the border. King Andrew II (1177–1235) allowed the colonists a series of privileges, rights and obligations through the *Diploma Andreanum* of 1224. This document substantially conferred upon the German population living in the region both administrative and religious autonomy, and obligations towards the kings of Hungary. The core of the territory which was colonized by Germans covered an area of about 30,000 km². Within each village, social interaction was strictly regulated through neighbourhood associations, while guilds dominated

urban life (Rouček 1971; Wagner *et al.* 1982; Gündisch 1998; Tiplic 2006; Riley & Dinescu 2007).

After the devastating Mongol invasion of 1241–42, about 300 villages were defended by *Kirchenburgen*, or fortified churches with massive walls, mainly built in Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance styles. About 150 of these structures still exist and define the landscape in many parts of central, southern and south-eastern Transylvania. Seven of these fortified churches, together with their surrounding villages – BIRTHÄLM (Rom. Biertan; Hung. Berethalom), Kelling (Câlnic; Kálnok), Ders (Dârjiu; Derzs), Tartlau (Prejmer; Prázsmár), Keisd (Saschiz; Szászskézd), Wurmloch (Valea Viilor; Nagybaromlak) and Deutschweisskirch (Viscri; Szászfehéregyháza) – all of them of Saxon or Szekler-Hungarian foundation, were included in the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1993 under the name of ‘Villages with Fortified Churches in Transylvania’ (Fabini 2007; Nypan 2006; Tiplic 2006). During the Middle Ages, the rapid development of the Saxon urban centres, led by flourishing crafting and trading activities, generated the German name of *Siebenbürgen* for Transylvania, referring to seven fortified towns generally identified with Bistritz (Rom. Bistrița; Hung. Beszterce), Hermannstadt (Sibiu; Nagyszeben), Klausenburg (Cluj-Napoca; Kolozsvár), Kronstadt (Braşov; Brassó), Mediasch (Mediaş; Medgyes), Mühlbach (Sebeş; Szászsebes) and Schässburg (Sighișoara; Segesvár) (Figure 1).

The privileged status of the Saxon population was confirmed in 1438 by the *Unio Trium Nationum* pact, which divided political and social power among Hungarians, Saxons and Szeklers, thus excluding the Romanian population. The relations among Saxons and Hungarians deteriorated during the nineteenth century, though, because of increasingly heavy Magyarization policies and progressive erosion of the old privileges, and led Saxons to side with Romania after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In 1918 Transylvania was annexed by Romania according to the Treaty of Trianon and Transylvanian Saxons, together with other ethnic German populations living in other regions of Greater Romania (Banat, Bessarabia, Bukovina, Crişana, Dobruđja and Maramureş), became part of a stronger but more heterogeneous German minority in Romania. The Swabian community in Timiş (Ger. Temesch; Hung. Temes), Arad (Arad; Arad), Caraş-Severin (Karasch-Severin; Krassó-Szörény) and Satu Mare (Sathmar; Sathmárnémeti) counties was particularly strong. The relations among these distinct ethnic German groups were weak, due to their separate geographical distributions, their different histories and traditions, and their religious affiliations, Saxons being predominantly Lutheran and Swabians predominantly Catholic. Growing conflicting relations between the German minority and the increasingly nationalist Romanian government in the interwar period, caused by assimilation policies and land reforms, led Transylvanian Saxons to become more and more attracted by National Socialism (Paikert 1967). When Romania signed a peace treaty with the Soviet Union in 1944, the German army began evacuating the Saxons from Transylvania, as happened in other German-speaking areas of Central and Eastern Europe in the same

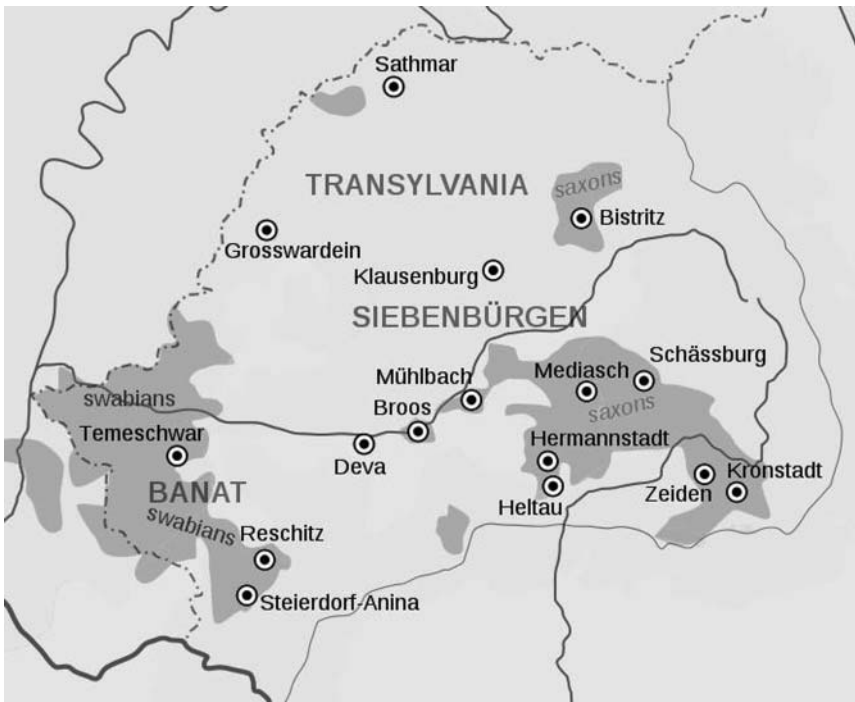


Figure 1. Distribution of traditional German settlements in Transylvania. *Source:* Andrei Nacu 2007, modified by the authors.

years. This operation involved, in particular, the Saxons living in the Bistrița region, an area previously re-annexed by Hungary following the Vienna Award of 1940.

Although Romania decided not to expel Germans, as did neighbouring countries at the end of the war, around 100,000 Germans fled the country before the arrival of the Soviet Red Army, creating a Transylvanian Saxon diaspora mainly located in Germany. More than 70,000 Saxons were arrested by Soviet and Romanian communist authorities and deported to labour camps in Dobrudja and Ukraine for alleged co-operation with Nazi Germany; many of them never returned. After the early post-war turmoil, the German minority in Romania lived through calmer times, but its politically conservative and free-market-orientated élite was largely marginalized by the communist government (Rouček 1971; Wagner *et al.* 1982; Steigerwald 1985; Müller 2009).

The size of the Transylvanian Saxon population significantly decreased during the twentieth century, with the last emigration wave occurring in the last two decades of the century, before and after the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, mainly relocating to the Federal Republic of Germany and, secondly, to Austria, the United States,

Canada and other countries (Illyés 1982; Cadzow *et al.* 1983; Verdery 1983; 1985). This mass exodus was caused by the constant degradation of Saxons' and Swabians' economic and social status after World War II and by the danger of losing their well-preserved identity. West Germany was the favourite emigration target, as it presented welcoming policies, high standards of living, political freedom and high probability of integration (Gräf & Grigoraş 2003). The ancient diaspora of German colonists in Eastern Europe (*Ostsiedlung*) produced a new diaspora of Eastern European Germans emigrated in Germany, and Transylvanian Saxons were and are part of this double migration, which occurred over the past eight centuries (Süssner 2003; Koranyi & Wittlinger 2011).

In 1978 the German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt signed an agreement with Nicolae Ceauşescu establishing an emigration system where about 10,000–12,000 ethnic Germans were allowed to emigrate from Romania every year, against a payment of approximately 5,000 German Marks per person by the FRG. Both sides agreed on keeping that additional provision secret, but it was well known to the people involved. Many Transylvanian Saxons saw it as evidence that their homeland, Romania, was trying to get rid of its German population (Gräf & Grigoraş 2003; Koranyi & Wittlinger 2011).

Poverty, human rights' violations and rampant nationalism undermined the once ethnically diverse Transylvanian society, and the effects of those dynamics, even after the reintroduction of democracy and the free market economy in the early 1990s, further weakened the historical ethnic minorities of the region, including the Saxon community. According to the population censuses, the size of the German minority in Romania, including Banat Swabians and smaller communities left in the counties of Satu Mare, Maramureş, Suceava and Bihor, and in the capital city Bucharest, decreased from 745,421 (1930) to 384,708 (1956), 359,109 (1977), 119,462 (1992) and 59,764 people in 2002. Within this broader community, the Transylvanian Saxon population decreased from 237,416 people in 1930 to 18,208 in 2002, reflecting the magnitude of emigration and the extent of assimilation. As many of them are now elderly people, the next census, due for 2011, is expected to record significantly smaller numbers. The size of the Transylvanian Saxon diaspora is difficult to estimate, due to mixed marriages and dwindling association membership. Based on demographic calculations, it is about 400,000 people, mostly concentrated in Germany, particularly in the *Länder* of Bavaria (Bayern), Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate (Rheinland-Pfalz) and Hesse (Hessen) (Michalon 2003). The Transylvanian Saxon language, which belongs to the West-Central German group of High German dialects, is currently still spoken by about 200,000 people around the world, with only 15,000 of them living in Transylvania (Gündisch 1998; Schuller 1999; European Commission Languages 2011). Yet, in spite of these negative indicators, the re-establishment of a German political party (*Demokratisches Forum der Deutschen in Rumänien*, or Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania 2011) in 1989 has been followed by a series of surprising electoral successes in towns, such as Sibiu, with Mayor Klaus

Johannis becoming one of the most popular politicians in the whole country, but also Mediaş and Cislădie (Ger. Heltau; Hung. Nagydisznód), showing that, in spite of its reduced size, the Transylvanian Saxon community in Romania still holds a visible cultural, economic and political role in the country (Cordell & Wolff 2003).

The complex history of the flight, expulsion and emigration of ethnic Germans from central and eastern Europe during the twentieth century, estimated at 12–14 million people for the post-war period alone, possibly forming the largest population movement ever recorded in modern human history, is still linked with painful memories of slaughter, violence and revenge, intermingled with collective blame caused by the support of many of those communities for the Nazi regime before and after World War II (Schechtmann 1946; Paikert 1967; De Zayas 1994; Knopp 2001; Steigerwald 2009). This issue seems to have found an acceptable key through the debates which accompanied the highly popular ‘Heimat’ film trilogy by E. Reitz (1984; 1992; 2004), with a growing tendency to speak of ‘heimat’ in more intimate ways, without necessarily implying Nazi or nationalistic connotations (Palfreyman 2000), thus possibly giving way to more serene relationships with the former German-speaking areas of central and eastern Europe, also in the field of tourism. These people, and their descendants, are increasingly often seen by local communities as an important resource for tourism development in many regions. For example, doing research on German roots tourism in Lithuania, Peleikis (2007) observed that regular folklore evenings were performed in hotels and restaurants, especially German ‘heimat’ (home) songs, in order to fill the sense of nostalgia of German roots tourists in Nida (Ger. Nidden).

Methodology

In order to investigate diasporic tourism related to Transylvanian Saxons, a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods was adopted. Concerning the qualitative part, data collection incorporated the three main sources of information recognized in qualitative research: consultation of secondary sources, observations and interviews (Merriam 2002; Patton 2002). Prior to entering the field, a range of secondary sources was consulted. A review of literature on diasporic-roots tourism, part of which has been presented above, was undertaken to provide a broad academic context for the research. Also, materials that directly or indirectly dealt with the Saxon-Transylvanian community (including novels and documentaries, such as *Everything I possess I carry with me*, by Literature Nobel Laureate H. Müller, 2009, *Zweieinhalb Störche*, by C. M. Florian, 2008, and the documentary *Leaving Transylvania*, by D. Auner, 2006) and virtual communities (such as Siebenbürgen 2011 and SibiWeb 2011) were consulted in order to better place the study in its geographical setting.

Two sources of information were primarily used: in-depth interviews in Transylvania and questionnaires within the diaspora. On-site observations were carried out in the villages of Biertan, Mureş county, and Viscri, Braşov county, during the

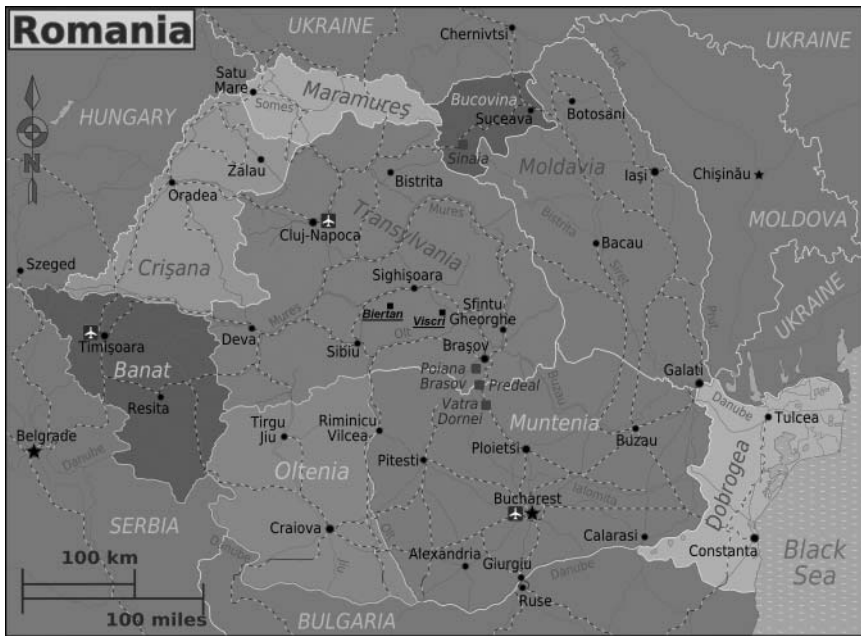


Figure 2. Location of the case studies. *Source:* http://wikitravel.org/en/Image:Romania_Regions_map.png/, modified by the authors.

summer of 2010 (Figure 2). The investigation included semi-structured and unstructured interviews with emigrated Saxons or Saxons' descendants living in Germany and travelling to Transylvania. They were approached at the entrances of the Saxon fortified churches, as these are the most important tourist attractions and identity landmarks in each village. The project was briefly explained and they were invited to be interviewed. Interviews were taped (after receiving permission from respondents) and subsequently transcribed. Interviewees were asked to talk about their migration histories, their bonds to Transylvania and Romania, their motivations for and experiences of travelling to this land, their feelings about which places they consider to be home, the will and ways to keep links with Transylvania, and their opinions about the development of roots tourism in this region.

Ten in-depth interviews in total were collected in the two villages. The results obtained from this small sample were integrated with a questionnaire survey. The questionnaires were distributed via the Association of Transylvanian Saxons website (*Verband der Siebenbürger Sachsen – Siebenbürgen* 2011). Members of this virtual community are persons born in Saxon Transylvania, or of Transylvanian Saxon ancestry, currently mainly living in Germany. The survey was, at the same time, advertised in the *Siebenbürgische Zeitung* newspaper and its website. The completed

questionnaires were received directly by the authors by e-mail. A total of 103 completed questionnaires was collected between May and September 2010.

The survey consisted mostly of open-ended questions regarding demographic information, family migration histories, childhood experiences, participation in Saxon activities in the present country of residence. For those who had visited Transylvania, details regarding those trips were sought, while, for those who had not, reasons for not visiting and their possible interest in visiting in the future were solicited. Opinions about the future development of roots tourism in Transylvania were also requested.

The survey and the interview samples were subject to biases arising from the way participants were selected. Respondents who were attached more strongly to Transylvania were more likely to have known about the survey. Older and retired people were also more likely to have filled out the survey, having direct personal memories with the places, more time available and stronger involvement in traditional cultural activities. Furthermore, even though the survey was also explicitly targeted at individuals who had never visited Transylvania, there may have been some bias favouring individuals who had already visited or lived in the region. Due to the above factors, qualitative analysis was used together with quantitative and statistical evaluation, and the results presented and discussed as a whole, rather than separately. To give further insights, the most significant assertions made by those interviewed are reported as quotations.

Overview on Visits to Transylvania

Composition of the Sample

As mentioned, 103 valid questionnaires were collected. Males represented 62 percent of the total and females the remaining 38 percent. Most of them (73%) were born in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The generational composition revealed that 86 percent of respondents belonged to the first generation of migrants, while 10 percent belonged to the second generation and 4 percent to subsequent generations. The small number of second- and subsequent-generation respondents partly reflects their typically weaker involvement in ethnic community activities or related social networks and indicates fading cultural identities. This echoes other researchers' difficulties in reaching those individuals (Drozdzewski 2007).

More than half of the respondents (52%) left Romania after 1988, with a peak in the years 1989–90, which corresponds to the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship. According to the respondents, the main reasons for leaving Transylvania were the search for political and economic freedom, the desire to escape poverty and the longing for family reunification with already-emigrated relatives. Mass emigration of Transylvanian Saxons was supported directly by the German government who considered the Saxons as *Auslandsdeutsche* (Germans abroad), thus having the right to apply for German citizenship, and their relocation in Germany was facilitated by

financial assistance. The Federal Republic of Germany represented both the 'free and rich' West (opposite to the difficult living conditions in communist and post-communist Romania) and an idealized cradle of art and culture, or *Kulturation* (Koranyi & Wittlinger 2011). Therefore, the German policy towards the *Auslandsdeutsche*, and the desire to find freedom and escape from the adverse economic and political situation of Romania, produced the mass migration of Saxons between the 1980s and 1990s.

Visits to Transylvania were highly popular with the survey respondents, 86.4 percent of them having visited multiple times. First-generation respondents were likely to have visited Transylvania (once 7.9% or more than once 92.1%), whereas second and subsequent generations had significantly fewer travel experiences (21.4% had visited once, 50.0% more than once and 28.6% of them had never visited the region) (Table 1). A high percentage of respondents (86.4%) declared themselves to be willing to visit Transylvania again (Table 1), which shows that the will to maintain strong ties between the diaspora and the homeland is still very strong. The average age at first visit was 49 years; the first visit occurred, on average, around 8–9 years after the migration to Germany. Most respondents travelled with spouses, children, parents or friends. A majority (40.8%) was hosted by relatives or stayed in apartments (rented or owned), although some (33.0%), particularly those making shorter visits, stayed in hotels or pensions (Table 1). The average length of stay was about 10 days.

Motivations for Visiting

Visiting relatives and friends was the main reason for travelling to Transylvania, which demonstrates the importance of the human aspects in this type of tourism and the reinforcement of the attachment to the ancestral homeland that it may provide (Seaton 1997; Duval 2003; Backer 2011). The desire to learn more about family history was also an important reason for travelling to Transylvania (Table 2). This was also confirmed by the fact that most respondents (79.6%) indicated they were interested in genealogy and had done (53.4%), or had intended to do (58.3%), some form of genealogical research (Table 2). A feeling of nostalgia and longing for the homeland accompanied the desire to re-establish family relations. The relatively widespread disillusionment and disappointment related to the partially failed integration of Transylvanian Saxons and other groups of ethnic Germans from eastern Europe in Germany, with local Germans often seeing them as 'foreigners' (White 2002; Süßner 2003; Koranyi & Wittlinger 2011), also led to a re-appreciation of their original roots.

For the respondents who were not born in Transylvania, thus belonging to second or subsequent generations, attempting to locate the land of their ancestors was an important way of engaging with their personal heritage, family past and cultural identity. Along with the desire to learn more about their homeland and to visit relatives and friends, the respondents showed a desire to relax and to discover the

Table 1. Overview of the visits

	First generation		Second generation and subsequent			
	No. of resp.	%	No. of resp.	%		
Have you ever visited Saxon Transylvania?	Yes, once	7	3	21.4	10	9.7
	Yes, more than once	82	7	50.0	89	86.4
	No	0	4	28.6	4	3.9
	<i>Total</i>	89	14	100	103	100
Will you visit Saxon Transylvania again?	Yes	89		86.4		
	No	3		2.9		
	Don't know	11		10.7		
	<i>Total</i>	103		100		
Who did you travel with?	With my family	77		74.8		
	With my family and friends	5		4.9		
	With friends	9		8.7		
	By myself	10		9.7		
	Other	2		1.9		
		<i>Total</i>	103		100	
Where did you stay?	Own home	19		18.4		
	Hosted by friends/relatives	42		40.8		
	Hotel, pension	34		33.0		
	Other	3		2.9		
	N.d.	5		4.9		
		<i>Total</i>	103		100	

Table 2. Motivation for visiting and interest in genealogy

		No. of resp.	%
What were your reasons for visiting?	Visiting relatives and friends	51	35.4
	Family history	39	27.1
	Discovering cultural and natural heritage	29	20.1
	Relaxation	25	17.4
	<i>Total^a</i>	<i>144</i>	<i>100</i>
Are you interested in genealogy?	Yes	82	79.6
	No	21	20.4
	<i>Total</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>100</i>
Have you ever researched your family history?	Yes	55	53.4
	No	48	46.6
	<i>Total</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>100</i>
Do you think you may research it in the future?	Yes	28	58.3
	No	8	16.7
	Don't know	12	25.0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>100</i>

^aMultiple choices allowed.

cultural and natural heritage of Transylvania and the rest of Romania (Table 2). Thus, these visitors were not only roots tourists, but also conventional tourists.

Those Not Visiting

Although most respondents had already travelled to Transylvania, often more than once, four interviewees had not visited the region. Two of these individuals had a strong desire to visit yet had been unable to do so, impeded by financial constraints, insufficient time and/or work or family commitments. Two respondents decided not to visit their homeland even if they were healthy and could afford to travel. Uwe feared that visiting would bring up painful and traumatic memories that he wanted to forget: 'Particularly in the last years before leaving, I lived through very negative times that I do not necessary want to remember returning to the places that I once wanted to quit so much'.

The desire, or at the least the attempt, to forget the past, also emerged in Klaus's interview:

My grandfather, who was born in Siebenbürgen and left after WWI, burned a lot of things that reminded him of his homeland – pictures, papers, etc. He rarely talked to us about his native land and, when he did so, it was to criticize the way he had been treated; thus I grew up with the impression that Siebenbürgen does not deserve my visit. I have little to share with that land.

These experiences show that painful personal or family stories might have affected the desire to return to or visit Romania for the first time. For Astrid, the main reason for not visiting the region was linked to the fear of feeling a sense of ‘inbetweenness’ and alienation in the new country (Germany), thus preferring to forget the past: ‘I believe that one will find a new home only if he forgets the old one’.

In other cases, particularly for subsequent generations, the link with the distant homeland seems to have become very weak, although some curiosity remains, as Patricia reported:

It was behind the Iron Curtain for a long time. Then my grandparents went back to visit right after it was possible and it just seemed as if they were disappointed. It never occurred to me to go there. Can you even do that? Is it dangerous?

Experiences of Visiting

(Re)connecting with Places and Landscapes: The Landscape of Roots

As Cohen pointed out (1997: 177–8), there is a strong agricultural or gardening trope in accounts and framings of diaspora, which so often speaks of native soil, roots and family trees. The roots metaphor has powerful resonance in ancestral tourism. Indeed, visitors seek to re-discover the signs of their ancestors’ lives in the landscape. Journeys are made in order to articulate a sense of belonging to the ancestral community and to reaffirm or re-find a true identity (King & Christou 2008). Visiting Transylvania was addressed at reviving those roots for many respondents. Most (70.9%) did not consider themselves to be mere tourists, even during their first visit (Table 3). Almost all respondents engaged in a variety of commemorative activities during their travelling, in order to re-discover the landscape of their roots. They visited houses, schools, workplaces or graves related to their families, usually during their first or second journey to Transylvania (Table 3), although many of those places are now abandoned or in bad condition after decades of neglect. For a minority of respondents, houses and farms were still owned and, in some cases, inhabited by living relatives or friends. For others, the locations of former houses, or even ancestors’ villages, were not always known. As normally happens in this type of tourism, also according to the literature (Hirsch & Spitzer 2002; Coles & Timothy 2004), houses were visited in order to see, smell and touch the places where they, or their parents or grandparents, were born or grew up, together with other places linked with family identities. Such sensory engagement allowed visitors to re-experience the past through the materiality of being in places where their forebears are known to have been. Ilona’s words are quite meaningful:

It is a very moving experience to be in the house where generations of your family were born. I went to the cemetery and saw all these people, my relatives and ancestors. It was like meeting them and talking to them.

Table 3. Experience of visiting and social-economic connections

		No. of resp.	%
Did you feel like a tourist during your visit?	Yes	73	70.9
	No	30	29.1
	<i>Total</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>100</i>
Did you visit the places where you/your family/ancestors lived?	Yes	102	99.0
	No	1	1.0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>100</i>
Have you ever thought of moving back (e.g. after retirement)?	Yes	24	23.3
	No	62	60.2
	Don't know	17	16.5
	<i>Total</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>100</i>
Are you a member of a Saxon association?	Yes	67	65.0
	No	36	35.0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>100</i>
Do you read Saxon journals?	Yes	73	70.9
	No	30	29.1
	<i>Total</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>100</i>
Have you ever participated in Saxon cultural events?	Yes	67	64.4
	No	36	35.6
	<i>Total</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>100</i>
Have you ever thought of buying a house in Transylvania?	Yes	38	36.9
	I already have one	11	10.7
	No	50	48.5
	Don't know	4	3.9
	<i>Total</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>100</i>

Travel routes through Transylvania were also based on seeing landscapes that parents or grandparents had talked about and meeting relatives, neighbours and friends. Ancestors' graves and houses, or their remnants, became powerful material objects that elicited deep feelings of historicity and identity. They were personal 'sites of memory' (Nora 1989), symbolic monuments embedding historical narratives into the landscape, in which collective and familial beliefs about history and ancestry could be tangibly engaged with through sensory experiences. This desire to trace the physical remnants of family pasts constituted, as Basu (2007) observed, a 'spatialization of memory', where such sites function as 'sources of identity and places from which the identity of the self is perceived to derive'. Indeed, for roots tourists, walking through sites of family history and elaborately imagining ancestors' lives can generally establish a deep sense of ontological security and historical rootedness (Schramm 2004; Basu 2007). However, the experience of the homeland landscape may also produce feelings of disillusionment or disappointment, especially when this landscape is perceived as different from the one remembered or imagined through family narratives. Study results show that Saxons visiting the homeland often experienced this sort of feeling.

Disconnecting with Places and Landscapes: The Landscape of Rupture

The typical traditional rural landscape of Saxon Transylvania was characterized by linear villages of colourful houses and farms dominated by gothic fortified churches and surrounded by agricultural lands and forests. Urban settlements often kept their gothic, renaissance and baroque architecture and medieval fortifications well into the twentieth century (Akeroyd 2006).

At the end of the twentieth century, particularly after the last big waves of Saxon emigration from Transylvania, this typical rural and urban landscape profoundly changed. The urban landscape, in particular, was deeply modified during the 1980s by the construction of big standardized blocks of flats of poor quality, often after the demolition of historical districts and buildings. The population of the former Saxon villages and towns has almost entirely been replaced by incoming groups of different ethnicity, religion, language and identity, principally Romanians and Roma. As observed by the authors, the new inhabitants have understandably started to mark their identity, values and ways of living through changes to their homesteads, including alterations to Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque house façades. At the same time, the Lutheran fortified churches and their annexed cemeteries are neglected and the construction of Greek-Orthodox churches, often built in neo-Byzantine style, has modified the traditional architecture. Dialects, legends, customs, songs, dances, recipes, dresses, skills and crafts have largely been replaced by different ones. The old traditions basically survive only within the diaspora. Several villages have largely been abandoned and are falling into ruin – e.g. Agârbiciu (Ger. Arbegen; Hung. Szászegerbegy), Gherdeal (Gürteln; Gerdály), Mighindoala (Engenthal; Ingodály), Sapartoc (Schorpendref; Sarpatak), etc.

Thus, the landscape remembered by the Saxons of the diaspora, or narrated by their parents or older ancestors, does not correspond to its current actual state. Most respondents felt disappointed seeing such a deeply changed landscape, as expressed well by Gerda, Heidi and Katherine: ‘I was disappointed. The houses of the people I knew and who had emigrated all looked very different. It was loud, dusty and chaotic. It was not a good feeling. I almost cried’ (Gerda); ‘Many things have changed and look much worse in the village of Petiș and in the surroundings where I went to school and I grew up. I did not expect it to be that run down’ (Heidi); ‘The economy is so poor, valuable arable land is abandoned, many houses have collapsed, cultural life has declined a lot’ (Katharine).

At the same time, the perception of cultural and architectural rupture was an occasion for some respondents to wonder who was to blame, eventually accusing Saxons themselves. Dirk reported:

Look at the conditions of the Saxon villages: they are ruined, collapsed, abandoned... but it is our fault, we left. We should do something to save our homeland, but up to now I cannot see any signs of shared action

Other respondents perceived negative changes occurring in Transylvania mostly related to 'westernisation' of the country, especially in urban areas, as in the cases of Herbert and Hans:

Every year, things change and look more and more westernised. On the other hand, poverty is high and the disparities in living standards of the population have increased (Herbert).

After communism ended, everything changed. Even people have changed. Previously, there was more 'togetherness' than today. Capitalism has made men more selfish. I do not want to give the wrong impression: I am glad that communism has had its day, but people have developed to their detriment. This is my personal opinion (Hans).

These visiting respondents reacted to the changing landscape developing a sense of nostalgia for the old good days, when life in Saxon Transylvania was simple, close to nature and surrounded by solidarity.

Homeland, Home and Belonging

Although many respondents felt a strong sense of connection to the places during their visit, the peculiar combination of familiar and unfamiliar elements in the ancestral landscape that they were visiting collided with the remembered, imagined or idealized one. The comparison with the positive sides of living in Germany ended up producing, in some cases, a sort of detachment and separation between homeland and home, as observed by White (2002). For most of those who were born there, *Siebenbürgen* is the 'heimat' ('homeland'), the place where they spent their childhood and a place connected with happy memories. This is expressed well by Sonya: 'Siebenbürgen is my heimat. It will always remain my land, because I spent my childhood and youth there'. However, 'home' is in Germany, the place where they live at present, where they have most of their relatives and friends, as reported by Erika: 'My home is my present place of residence: Germany'.

Consequently, a difference arose between *homeland* and *home*, where homeland is mostly immaterial and made up of emotional attachment, memories, identification, culture and spirit, while home is materiality and real life experience. Thus, *Siebenbürgen* was discursively constructed by respondents in ways that made it familiar and special to them, a cultural homeland rather than a real home or place of residence. The latter was generally identified with the place of present life and work, of everyday belonging and social participation. The 'double diaspora' of the Transylvanian Saxons, currently living in Germany, produced a complex and multifaceted status in which homeland and home are not antithetical, as stated by Jürgen and Rainer: 'I feel at home in Germany, I work and live there, but I feel my homeland

is Siebenbürgen. They do not exclude each other' (Jürgen). Even for second generations, Transylvania is still a 'homeland': 'I suppose my home is in Germany where my living relatives are, but Siebenbürgen has always had a strong pull on my heart, it is my ultimate homeland' (Rainer).

Feelings of 'home' and 'homeland' are not mutually exclusive and are anchored to fixed, physical territories even though they are expressed in dynamic, multiple and flexible ways, being adapted to different life circumstances and migration contexts.

Maintaining Connections with Transylvania

For the members of a diaspora, lived experiences and multiple visions and perceptions of home, homeland and belonging may evolve into a continuous pattern of transnational living between homeland and home, made up of communications – letters, emails, instant chat in social networks, visits, remittances, properties etc. – as well as participation in a more generalized transnational social space created and articulated by parents' lives, friends with the same ancestry and associations. Excluding the assimilated fringes, this kind of connection is a way to engage with the homeland until the moment of an ultimate return or it may go on forever, in case this return is not desired or not possible. The Transylvanian Saxons interviewed in the present study seemed to have predominantly embraced pragmatic links between Romania and Germany, which allow them to keep emotional links with their native or ancestors' land without leaving their (new) home. These connections are also clearly perceived as ways to keep heritage alive, as Sigrun reported: 'If there are more people with German roots travelling back to these places, then there could possibly be more preservation of cultural treasures. Hopefully, it would also feed the motivations of the remaining German population there'.

Repeated Visits

The repeated visits to Transylvania, which emerged through the survey (Table 1), were the most important evidence of the connections maintained by the Saxon diasporic people and their descendants. Indeed, as mentioned above, many respondents who visited Transylvania did so multiple times. Some visited once or twice, whilst others went back every one or two years. These repeated visits strengthened existing transnational linkages and forged new ones. Regular trips allowed individuals to maintain and expand their connections with Transylvania without having to give up the comforts of living in Germany.

Repeated trips also provided snapshots of the homeland, allowing individuals to immerse themselves in what remained of the old Transylvanian society whilst witnessing and experiencing the social, economic and physical changes of Romania as it develops from a centrally planned economy to a capitalist democracy. However, this also raised the spectre of the possible final disappearance of Saxon heritage in

Transylvania. Thus, frequent visits to the region were ways to reconnect with places from where respondents and their families grew up, and to reinforce the Saxon ethnic and cultural identity.

Temporary visits are symbolic ways of engaging with the myth of return, getting back home without the reduction in living standards or employment opportunities that a permanent move back to the homeland would entail (Nguyen & King 2004). Indeed, despite the popularity of frequent visits to Transylvania, respondents were ambivalent about whether they would ever move back, either for an extended period of time or permanently: just 23.2 percent reported that they were willing to move back to Transylvania even after their retirement (Table 3), for Germany has become their home, as previously mentioned, where they have family, friends, properties and work. As a result, moving back is not always feasible or desirable. Furthermore, for those who found Transylvania different than they remembered or expected, yet still maintain kinship and emotional connections to it, the myth of return does not compel (eventual) permanent relocation, because the original and remembered homeland is a past version that no longer exists and, thus, cannot be returned to. Rather, repeated visits are the only returns that can ever be achieved.

Engaging in Social Connections

As observed through the survey, a very important form of social connection with the homeland occurs through membership (65% of cases) in the 'Association of Transylvanian Saxons' (*Verband der Siebenbürger Sachsen*) (Table 3). This association dates back to the 1950s and is part of a wider Federation of Transylvanian Saxons which has branches in Germany, Austria, the USA and Canada. It aims to represent the diaspora and to keep the Saxon community and its heritage alive. It also offers social assistance and is in direct contact with several Transylvanian-based associations and organizations, such as the German Democratic Forum. Respondents asserted that their visits to the homeland reinforced this membership or stimulated their involvement. Thus, in this way, travelling to the homeland strengthened a sense of belonging to the Saxon culture.

Respondents (70.9%) also reported that they regularly read the newspaper *Siebenbürgen Zeitung*, which publishes news and information concerning the Saxon community. This newspaper has about 30,000 annual subscriptions and more than 4,000 hits per day on its website (Koranyi & Wittlinger 2011).

Many respondents (64.4%) (Table 3) reported frequently attending events related to Saxon culture, such as folk dancing performances and the 'Heimattag' meetings, a kind of 'homeland celebration day', the most important of which has been held annually since 1951, over Pentecost, in the town of Dinkelsbühl, Bavaria. Heimattag is an important meeting for Transylvania Saxons, with art and book exhibitions, seminars, fairs, social events and dancing. Approximately 20,000 people, mainly from

Germany, Austria, Romania and North America, attend it every year (Siebenbürgen 2011). A similar annual event is held in Transylvania, usually in the village of Biertan.

Some of the interviewees were deeply involved in projects and actions for the preservation of Saxon heritage. One of them founded a music group (*Bürger7*) that sings mainly in the Saxon dialect in both Germany and Romania. Another interviewee founded a radio station (*RTI – Radio Transylvania International*) which broadcasts on the Internet, for the most part in the Saxon dialect. A respondent presents a weekly programme for this radio channel and takes videos of Saxon festivals and events performed in Germany, which are subsequently uploaded on to YouTube. Another one founded a virtual community (SibiWeb 2011) which manages a forum and delivers information to Saxon members. Through these kinds of social initiatives, the Saxon diasporic consciousness is being reproduced and sustained on multiple scales and various places leading to new forms of community connection.

The emergence of prominent Romanian-German figures, such as Herta Müller and Klaus Johannis, has reinforced this social closeness to the former homeland, as did the successful choice of Sibiu as European Capital of Culture in 2007.

Retaining House Properties

A house property proved to be a very important form of connection, since it creates and maintains strong material and symbolic belonging to the homeland and, at same time, allows Saxons to keep playing an active economic and social role in Transylvania, which also has important implications for heritage protection, as will be discussed later.

It is important to note that, according to the law that existed in Romania until 1989 (Decree 223/1974), properties of those Saxons who emigrated before 1989 were automatically confiscated by the state, which meant that emigrants could not retain any properties in Romania. After 1989, this law was cancelled and Saxons had the opportunity to keep their properties when emigrating. At the beginning of the big wave of departures (1990–1), most migrants used to sell their houses and properties at very low prices, which can be interpreted as a desire to cut any relations with Transylvania, illustrated admirably in the documentary *Leaving Transylvania* by D. Auner (2006). At a later stage (from 1992), many started to keep the houses and let them, or entrust them to relatives, friends or neighbours of various ethnicities (Michalon 2003), thus maintaining material and social connections with their former villages and towns. Some of the emigrants and their descendants have started to buy houses and lands again in recent years, and there is a growing tendency to reclaim the properties confiscated by the communist authorities before 1989, also with the support of a specific Romanian-German organization, called *Restitution Rumänien e.V. (ResRo)*, established in 2007 with the aim of supporting these claims. The results of the present study confirm the emergence of this form of (re)connection.

Among the interviewees, around 10 percent kept their house, inherited it or reclaimed it after communist nationalization. Approximately 36.9 percent of respondents reported that they would be willing to buy a house in Transylvania (Table 3).

Two interviewees in Viscri had come back from Germany to spend summer holidays in their own house which, for the rest of the year, is kept by a Saxon neighbour who organizes accommodation for tourists. This arrangement ensures that the house is maintained and the owners can go to it whenever they choose. This system, which appears to be widespread in Viscri and many other Saxon villages and towns (Michalon 2003) is a distinctive form of connection and, at the same time, a way to keep Saxon heritage alive, as well as being a source of livelihood for local residents. Another interviewee returned to live in Biertan, having spent about ten years in Germany. This woman bought a villa, restored it and organized a guesthouse for tourists. Thus, property is a very important way, probably the most important one, to maintain ties with places of origin, to reaffirm social belonging to the Saxon community and to keep playing a role in local life, while living in Germany for most of the year. Furthermore, as mentioned, it helps to protect the Saxon built heritage, since the entrusted persons are asked to take good care of the house. Indeed, as observed by the authors, the houses that best maintain Saxon architecture are those which have been turned into guest houses for tourists by local Saxons, or have been entrusted to Romanian local people but still host the Saxon owners during their holidays.

Implications for Tourism in Transylvania

The repeated visits made by most respondents suggest that the Saxon diaspora might be a significant tourism market. As shown by the reviewed literature, roots tourism typically has smaller annual variations than the overall tourism market for particular destinations (King 1994; Feng & Page 2000), as the homeland is usually visited for reasons that are different from mere recreation or exotic encounters (Cohen 1974; Urry 2002). Although diasporic travellers may stay with relatives or friends, or even in their own residences, hence reducing accommodation spending, they are more likely to stay for longer time periods than conventional tourists and, thus, may have higher non-accommodation expenditures.

The majority of conventional tourists visiting Transylvania tend to cluster in the main art towns (Braşov, Sibiu, Sighişoara) in the mountain resorts of the south-eastern Carpathians (Bran, Moeciu, Poiana Braşov, Predeal), in the scattered spa areas (Borsec, Covasna, Sovata, Tuşnad) or in the heritage region of Maramureş, while most of Transylvania receives few visitors (Iorio & Corsale 2010). Since many Saxon travellers have relatives or friends living in these areas, or may be visiting former family farms, graveyards or ancestral sites in less touristic rural areas, diasporic travel provides an important opportunity to balance and spread the benefits of tourism spending. Indeed, as the survey revealed, many respondents also visit other places in

Table 4. Tourism perspectives

		No. of respondents	%
Did you visit other parts of Romania during the trip?	Yes	61	59.2
	No	42	40.8
	<i>Total</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>100</i>
How did you organize the trip?	By myself	94	91.3
	Through a travel agency	9	9.7
	<i>Total</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>100</i>
Do you think it could be useful to have travel agencies/tour operators specialized in Saxon roots tourism?	Yes	57	55.3
	No	21	20.4
	Don't know	25	24.3
	<i>Total</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>100</i>

different parts of Romania (59.2%) (Table 4). Bucharest, the painted monasteries of Bukovina and the Black Sea coast are the most popular complementary destinations.

Almost all of the interviewees (91.3%) organized the trips themselves (Table 4), although the creation of service providers (specialized tour operators, transportation agencies, genealogical research professionals, etc.) could be an opportunity for further development of roots tourism in Transylvania. When asked if they thought it would be useful to have travel agencies or tour operators specializing in roots tourism in Transylvania, 55.3 percent of respondents answered positively, showing that even many individual travellers would appreciate this kind of service (Table 4), as Walter reported: 'It would be easier for my children to visit if there were Saxon specific tours we could use'.

A thorough examination of online information revealed that in 2010 there were only two small tour operators that offered personalized package tours for people who wanted to look for their roots in Transylvania. The Romanian national tourist board explicitly mentioned the importance of German heritage tourism in Transylvania, the Banat and other regions of the country, showing growing attention to this tourist market, but this has not yet been followed by specific marketing initiatives.

As observed, the mass exodus of Saxons from Transylvania critically endangered the survival of Saxon tangible and intangible heritage. A partial yet important step to revert this tendency was the inclusion of seven villages (six Saxon and one Szekler-founded settlements) in the UNESCO World Heritage List due to their being 'characterized by a specific land-use system, settlement pattern and organization of the family farmstead that have been preserved since the late Middle Ages' (UNESCO 1999). Accommodation in former Saxon houses and farms, restored and furnished according to Saxon traditions, is emerging as an important source of livelihood for local families of different ethnicity. At the same time, the coexistence of overlapping, distant or conflicting identities in the region is not easy to manage, as each group

formerly or currently living in the villages and towns feels the right to primarily protect or develop its own heritage, and the perspective of turning the traditional settlements into mere past-orientated open-air ethnic reserves should be avoided.

During fieldwork, as well as on previous occasions, the authors had the opportunity to observe interesting cases of bottom-up rural development related to rural tourism in several villages of Transylvania. The village of Viscri has often been indicated as an example of good practice, as families of Saxon, Romanian and Roma ethnicity started integrating tourism into their livelihoods as a complementary activity, contributing to economic diversification and forging positive linkages with agriculture. The still open challenge, in the case of Viscri, is the search for common identity bases taking into account Saxon, Romanian and Roma tangible and intangible heritage. Its inclusion into the UNESCO list provides high international visibility and specific tools and rules for the preservation of traditional architecture, while the vast majority of Transylvanian rural and urban settlements are facing serious socio-economic difficulties and urgently need ideas and solutions for their tourism development (Iorio & Corsale 2010).

Even for the respondents of the present survey, the development of roots tourism could be an effective economic opportunity for Transylvania and Romania, especially for the rural villages that, in many cases, are at risk of disappearance or have already been abandoned. Dirk reported that 'Many centuries of Saxon presence in Siebenbürgen have left traces that can be used for tourism purposes both for people with Saxon background and for the others. It may bring economic advantages for people living in Transylvania today'. Lena added that 'The representation of the past of our ancestors could stimulate the maintenance of our heritage and offer protection from decay and disappearance'.

These optimistic views basically stress the value of natural and cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, as key elements to protect and stimulate socio-economic development in the region. Lack of interest in Saxon heritage by Romanians and Roma is often criticized by the diaspora, but, nevertheless, there is widespread awareness that this heritage will remain in Transylvania and will eventually constitute a strong opportunity for tourism development benefiting the new inhabitants.

At the same time – though a minority opinion – some respondents showed scepticism, mainly based on the poor present conditions of tourism infrastructures, on the hopeless abandonment of many settlements and monuments and on the perception that younger generations, well integrated in Germany and holding fragile ties with the homeland, are not interested in this kind of travel and, thus, the demand will be weak, as Anite and Frank underlined:

The new generation, born in Germany, is no longer interested in their ancestral roots; they do not speak the Saxon language. They have no interests in visiting Siebenbürgen and Romania; at least, no more than any other tourism destination (Anite).

My niece is hardly interested in our ancestors in Siebenbürgen. She grew up in Germany and has no reference to Transylvania. So I am not sure this type of tourism has a future. Maybe in 40 years or so, when the younger generation will be old and will probably feel the need to go back to their roots (Frank).

Conclusions

Besides its own complex and fascinating history of multiple diasporas, the case of the Transylvanian Saxon community is important because it holds partial yet significant similarities with many other diaspora stories linking different parts of the world. As in many other diaspora groups, the emotional links with the homeland were strong among first-generation migrants, who mostly left Transylvania during the 1980s and 1990s. Transylvanian Saxons who left in earlier times, and their descendants, showed weaker ties with their places of origin, mainly due to assimilation in the current places of living. Study results still revealed a deep attachment to Transylvania, seen as the 'heimat' or homeland.

For the respondents the desire to rediscover their ancestral land, and to visit the places where they grew up and where their families and friends used to live, was a strong motivation that fed roots tourism, confirming the existing literature on this topic, part of which has been reported previously (Baldassar 2001; Hirsch & Spitzer 2002; Nguyen & King 2004). However, their travel experience back to the homeland often revealed a landscape that they did not recognize anymore ('landscape of rupture'), because the Saxon population has been replaced almost completely by Romanian and Roma inhabitants, and the villages and their society look very different now, which produces a sense of alienation or exclusion, rather than belonging. While part of the tangible elements of Saxon culture survives (fortified churches, castles, houses), the intangible one, linked with human presence, has nearly disappeared, challenging the role of this modified landscape in the (re)definition of the meanings of 'home' and 'homeland'. Although other research previously explored the function of places and landscape in shaping identities (particularly through Basu's works), this study widens the understanding of the influences produced by the landscape on the sense of belonging for diasporic people. Indeed, landscape seems to be a dynamic source for identity definition, more than a passive container of identification. On the one hand, the landscape re-found ('landscape of roots') confirmed the sense of belonging to the homeland; on the other hand, due to its considerable changes in comparison with the remembered or imagined one, it re-affirmed identification with the (new) home, Germany, producing unique hybrid identities.

The repeated visits found and analysed during the survey formed an alternative to relocation in Transylvania, (re)experiencing local life for a few days or weeks and moving back to Germany to cope with regular life (*Sommersachsen*). The fact that Transylvanian Saxons experienced a double diaspora, even though over a very long period of time, first away from Germany in the East and now away from Romania

in the West, produced complex ties with places and people. For centuries, within the Saxon community in Transylvania, the German lands had been perceived, at least in an imaginary way, as a sort of distant home, a *Kulturnation*, and a place of belonging. This, together with the welcoming policies promoted by the West German government over the 1980s, led Transylvanian Saxons to think that (re)assimilation in Germany would be an easy and inevitable achievement, although being a 'double diaspora' produced a much more complex status. This shows that different historical, social and personal events shape attachments to places, making diaspora members feel bound, or unbound, to the homeland. It also signifies that homecoming is not a static state of being but a fluid process of becoming, a journey into spaces of selfhood in which the self may be divided between the old and new home. The experience of Transylvanian Saxons showed that roots tourism is a chance to redefine the meaning of 'home', as a symbolic place of roots and past life, and, at the same time, as a material place of present life in the new country. Transylvanian Saxons seem to constitute a fluid diaspora which, having experienced multiple forms of diaspora, feel multifaceted bonds to more than one place. They pragmatically keep links with the homeland both at the local level (visits, house properties, etc.) and away (associations, newspapers, social networks, etc.). Keeping house properties and travelling to their places of origin, seeking contacts with significant elements of the landscape, such as cemeteries, schools and churches, still make Saxons an important part of local communities, stimulating new economic opportunities for the inhabitants of other ethnicities and contributing to the survival of Saxon tangible and intangible heritage.

Another aspect that the study findings suggest is that, when analysing recent population dispersal phenomena, where migration, integration and transnationalism are prevalent, the original Greek meaning of 'diaspora' should be considered, implying that an effective relocation to the place of origin is not inevitable, nor desirable nor possible. In fact, in the case of Saxons, the wide socio-economic gap between Germany and Romania makes the relocation of significant numbers of Saxon migrants back to Transylvania very unlikely, since economic reasons were predominant among the push-factors underpinning migration. The dramatic change in the ethnic composition of Transylvania that occurred during past decades is probably not going to revert. Although the development gap between the two countries is expected to reduce over the next decades, assimilation processes in Germany will tend to progressively weaken the links between the diaspora and the homeland and, since moving back implies a strong attachment to place, the number of people relocating to Transylvania is most probably going to remain small. At the same time, many Saxons are aware of their own responsibilities and fault in the loss of cultural heritage due to the mass migration of the past decades.

In line with the above-mentioned literature that shows the implication of diasporic-roots travels for the tourism industry (see, for example, Coles & Timothy 2004; Timothy & Guelke 2008), the study results also highlighted that Saxon roots tourists can

easily turn into more conventional tourists when visiting other regions of Romania, once again showing the economic potential of these relations.

The Romanian German diaspora currently exceeds one million people globally, and around 400,000 of them are Transylvanian Saxons. Comparing these numbers to the weak position of Romania in the European tourist market, with just 7.5 million arrivals in 2009, the importance of this tourism segment is evident. However, up to now, no specific policies have been adopted to promote this type of tourism. Marketing programmes and actions by the Romanian government and by county and municipal authorities could strengthen roots tourism. In particular, there is an opportunity to reach a broader audience of second and subsequent generations, and to encourage and aid reluctant first-generation emigrants to visit their homeland. The fading identities already recorded among second and subsequent generation diaspora members, however, prove that this kind of promotion ought to be adopted in the nearest future. Forms of partnership with Germany could strengthen marketing policies and the creation or opening of archives, registers and cadastral maps could provide further important tools.

Economic and cultural policies could be introduced in order to turn diasporas into resources for local development. However, for such policies to be well grounded, further investigation on residents' attitude towards hosting roots tourism would be very useful, as well as exploration on their willingness to preserve the heritage of diasporic groups, particularly in areas characterized by deep social, economic, political, cultural and demographic changes that occurred after migration. In the case of Transylvanian Saxon heritage, its total disappearance would undermine roots tourism and destroy one of the main chances for local development in many rural settlements.

Working for the preservation of local and dispersed tangible and intangible heritage, strengthening the inter- and intra-generational ties within specific cultural communities and elaborating development projects that may be able to translate these potentials into opportunities for effective sustainable development is an innovative, difficult, yet fascinating challenge.

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