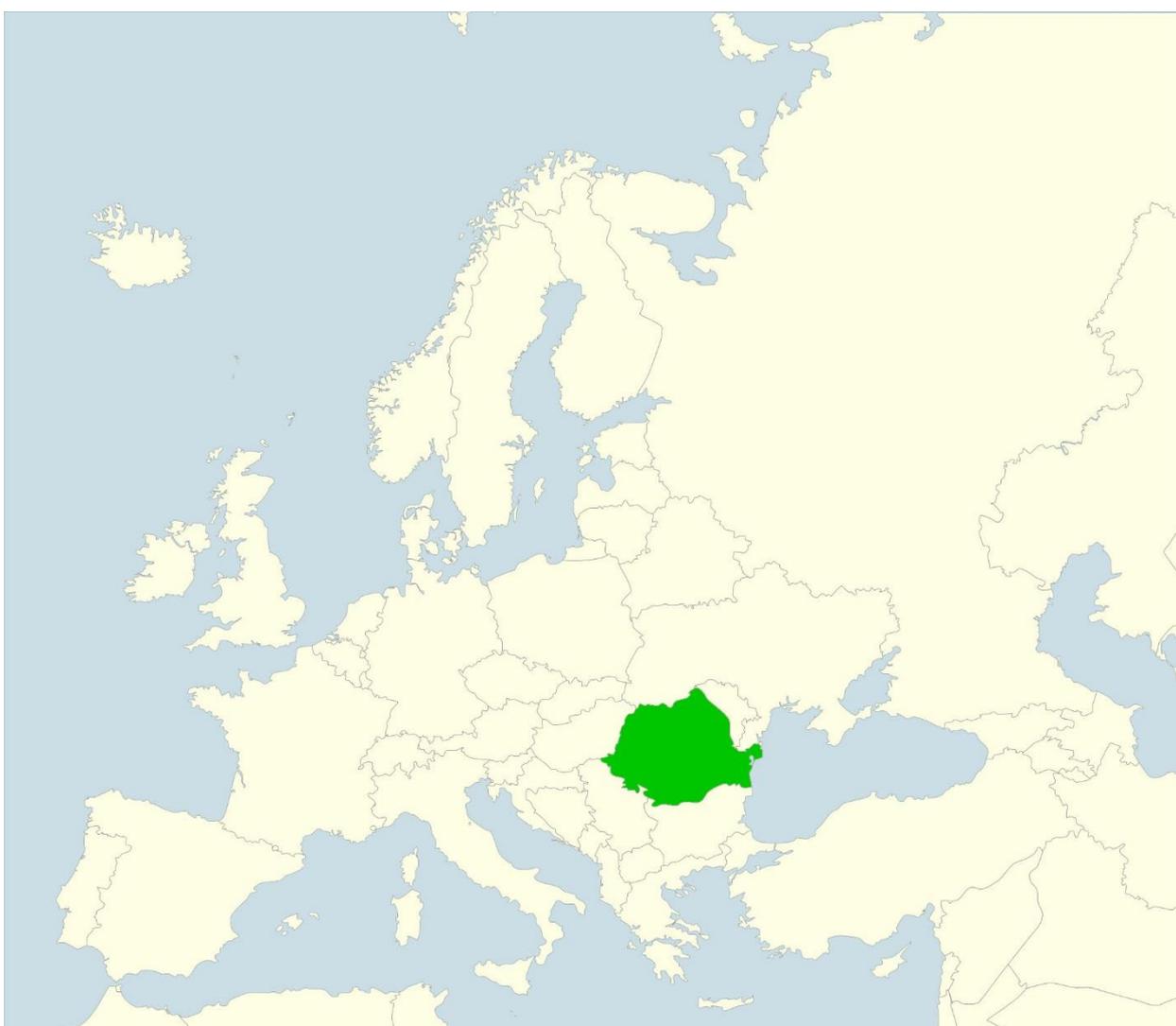


# STATUS QUO AND POTENTIAL OF REMIGRATION AMONG TRANSYLVANIAN SAXONS TO RURAL ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** Return migration recently became of scientific interest on an intra-European scale. As remigrants bring along various forms of capital, this form of migration is frequently considered as an opportunity to revitalize rural communities. Since Romania entered the EU in 2007, a certain number of Transylvanian Saxons, i.e., ethnic Germans, who emigrated to Germany in the 1980s and 1990s, temporarily or permanently returned to rural Romania. By means of qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey among returnees and potential re-emigrants, this study provides empirical insights to the status quo and the potential of this phenomenon. A particular emphasis is given to their everyday practices and implications on the Transylvanian community, mostly aiming at preservation of the cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** return migration, lifestyle migration, rural areas, regional development, Romania

## 1. Introduction: rural return migration

Currently, many European rural areas that were previously characterised by homogenous ageing populations and outmigration face selective in-migration, resulting in population change and manifold transformations of rural places. Accordingly, rural and peripheral areas are addressed as dynamic rather than static places. In recent years, an international dimension of changing rural populations came to the fore (Milbourne, 2007; Smith, 2007; Hugo and Morén-Alegret, 2008; Bell and Osti, 2010). Complex migrant trajectories over the life course, diverse drivers of migration, related to necessity and choice, and more heterogeneous socio-demographic and socio-economic backgrounds of migrants result in a “diversity of rural mobilities” (Woods, 2007, p. 29). Its protagonists move into, out of or through rural places or even stay there (Milbourne, 2007). With respect to in-migration to European rural areas, Kordel (2017) identified four prevailing processes: amenity/lifestyle migration, return migration, working migration and refugee migration. While the latter is mostly directed by specific dispersal policies of some European countries, working migration is mostly motivated by economic considerations and specific structural peculiarities of rural areas, e.g., a strong agricultural or tourism sector. Similarly, studies on return migration mostly focus on people, who originally emigrated from Eastern to Western Europe mostly in search for better employment opportunities (Nadler et al., 2017). However, return migration can also be explained by biographic events, such as the parent’s need for care or entering retirement (Ni Laoire and Stockdale, 2016). An emotional narrative of nostalgic representations of the place of childhood may also play a role, while returnees often associate a better life to the former place of living (Kılınc and King, 2017). Like return migration, lifestyle migration is addressed as a form of voluntary migration. Personal self-fulfillment and the strife for a better life as well as various forms of attachments, often established by means of previous tourist experiences are commonly addressed as motivations of relatively affluent lifestyle migrants (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009).

Especially since Romania entered the EU in 2007, which came along changing legislation for travel and settlement for EU citizens, a fair amount of Transylvanian Saxons with German ancestors, who emigrated to Germany in the 1990s, have decided to return to rural Romania. They can be considered re-migrants since they decided to leave Romania as a consequence of oppression measures during the dictatorial reign of Ceausescu (Ursprung, 2015) in the middle of the 20th century. Thus, in the 1990s, a considerable number emigrated to Germany, but also to Austria, Switzerland or even the United States (Verband der Siebenbuerger Sachsen in Deutschland e.V., 2008), resulting in a decrease of German speaking population in Transylvania from 8% in 1930 to 0.1% in 2011 according to the current census (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017). The return of Transylvanian Saxons recently has been institutionally framed by a contact point, which aims at supporting potential remigrants in their decision to come back. Acknowledging previous research on return migration and lifestyle migration, this article takes both conceptual frameworks as a starting point to analyse return migration of this specific group to rural Romania.

In the next section, the literature on lifestyle migration and return migration is discussed with a particular emphasis on implications for rural development. Subsequently, the historical and current dimensions of population change in Transylvania as well as the design of the study including methods are illustrated, while, afterwards, the results are presented according to the research questions. We conclude by summarizing the results and highlighting further needs of investigation.

## **2. Conceptual background**

### **2.1 Lifestyle Migration in Europe**

Specific legislations in the European Union, encompassing, for instance, freedom to travel, to settle and to work, encourage diverse migration processes within the EU (Kordel and Weidinger, 2018). Migration processes that tend to follow a hedonic imperative, i.e., a strife for satisfaction, amenities and nice surroundings (Polèse, 2009), recently have become of scientific interest, and are discussed either under the term amenity migration (Bartoš et al., 2009; Steinicke et al., 2012; Moss and Glorioso, 2014) or lifestyle migration in rural areas (e.g. Weidinger and Kordel, 2016 in Spain; Sardinha, 2015 for Portugal; Benson, 2011 for France; Nagy, 2006 for Romania). The latter concept put the individual strife for better lives at the core of analyses. Compared to the population at places where they migrate to, lifestyle migrants are addressed as relatively affluent individuals of all ages, who move permanently or just temporarily to a place, which, for them, enables the realization of better lives. Migrants usually perceive that such place-based assets at destination contrast with assets in their previous places of residence (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009).

The migration event, however, is not an ahistorical phenomenon, but is rather preceded by prior events, such as holiday experiences that may result in permanent migration later on (Hall and Williams, 2002; Kordel, 2015). Indicated by the notion of an 'ongoing quest' (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009, p. 3), lifestyle migration evolves as an extended project rather than a single act of migration. After initial relocation, migrants tend to evaluate whether their expectations and aspirations considering 'the good life' have proven to be realised or not and may adapt to new circumstances (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009). This may result in multi-local living, when seasonal or longer-term variations occur between residences in various geographical settings (McHugh et al., 1995). Their affluent status also makes them particularly mobile and independently acting individuals. As soon as personal or structural contexts change, they either consolidate their seasonal stays – entering retirement may prolong stays or even result in permanent relocation (Kordel, 2015) – or terminate their migration project, while some finally decide to move back (Eimermann, 2017).

Lifestyle migrants evoke manifold transformations at rural places. In terms of rural housing markets, for instance, a high demand for well-equipped properties in exposed location is observable. Lifestyle migrants either invest in the portfolio (Eimermann, 2015) or purchase properties in new housing areas. Rising real estate prices, however, may result in an exclusion of local population from the market (Phillips, 2005; Reichert-Schick, 2018). Benefits for local economies are most visible as lifestyle migrants' demand for daily consumption goods and craft services, as especially (pre)retirees mostly rely on high and continuous incomes, which are not exposed to economic developments. For Spain, Stone and Stubbs (2007) proofed an economic revitalisation of rural areas through *lifestyle entrepreneurs*. Particularly, those migrants characterized as 'rural idyll seekers' consider a close-knit community as a valuable part of the desired way of life and thus pursue practices that encourage social cohesion, e.g., volunteering (Haas, 2013) or assistance for neighbours in need (Weidinger and Kordel, 2016). They learn cultural codes and habitus to become part of the rural community (Sardinha, 2015, p. 44). In order to safeguard their desired and idyllic way of life, some lifestyle migrants become involved in local politics and try to assert specific interests (Janoschka and Durán, 2014).

### **2.2 Return Migration**

Return migration addresses people who move to a place, i.e., their or their parent's place of origin, where they previously established and continuously maintained various ties to after having spent a significant amount of time abroad or at another place for various reasons (Glorius, 2013; Cassarino, 2014; Nadler et al., 2017). Returning, however, is not necessarily considered as

a natural conclusion and end of one's migration biography, but rather seen as part of an ongoing trajectory. As emigrants frequently maintain manifold transnational social relations, they might benefit from residential opportunities, social networks and welfare entitlements from various countries and may practice circular movements between here and there (e.g., the case of return migration between Germany and Turkey, Ciobanu and Ramos, 2016). Accordingly, King and Christou (2011) argue for return mobilities in light of the changing nature of (home) places as well as desires and structural contexts of people involved.

How can return migration be explained? From a neoclassical point of view, structural changes in rural labour markets and resulting wage increases (e.g., remigration from the UK to Slovakia, Williams and Baláž, 2005) or comparative advantages in terms of consumption encourage people to return. The latter is especially the case when pensions earned in other European countries are spent in rural areas (Lang et al., 2017). From the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) point of view, where initial emigration is intended as a strategy to increase family income (Cassarino, 2004), remigration after a certain amount of time is addressed as a manifestation for having successfully realized the intentional aims (for the specific case of return migration to Albania, see Göler and Doka, 2014). According to the sociologist Cerase (1974), four different types of remigrants can be identified due to their motivations to return, notions of economic success and failure as well as the innovation potential. While Cerase explicitly focused on economic reasons, Ni Laoire and Stockdale (2016) argue for considering life-cycle and biographical events as a trigger for return migration. People, for instance, return to rural areas after having completed education for family founding purposes or when they enter retirement. Especially the latter was extensively discussed in literature (Lundholm, 2015; Ciobanu and Ramos, 2016; Kılınç and King, 2017), and many have a conscious plan to return when entering retirement. Predictors identified for returning in retirement age (young-old are more likely to return) are home-ownership and presence of family members (Ciobanu and Ramos, 2016). Regarding family interrelations, remigration processes are often associated to family needs, such as need for care of a family member or the return of a single family member affects the whole family and thus can be addressed as a family project. Family can be addressed as both constraints and enablers of the return project (Konzett-Smoliner, 2016).

Besides, returning to rural places of origin is associated to individual desires, such as an emotionally motivated strife for nostalgia and the past (Datta, 2013) as well as the representation of an overseeable space of home (cf. remigration of late repatriates to Russia, Schönhuth, 2008). Whilst such representations often refer to situations in the past, e.g., the childhood, Vathi (2017) indicated that changing socio-economic contexts, cultural discontinuities and political and personal ruptures can disillusion people, finding themselves and their homeplace transformed.

Bock et al. (2016) claimed to address migrants as actors of rural development, bringing along human capital. However, Woods and McDonagh (2011) consider their potential to contribute to rural development as under-utilised. With regard to return migrants, King (2015) stresses their role as both investors and innovators. Investments in existing properties or developing new real estate are widely reported, while price increases occasionally come along (Reichert et al., 2014). With regard to rural employment markets, re-migrants are also addressed as valuable workforce being well educated and having made experiences in transnational enterprises prior to their return. However, as Nadler and Matuschewski (2013) point out, their human capital often does not meet the need of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in rural areas. Similar to lifestyle migrants who start to become self-employed, remigrants who establish their own business consider rural places of origin as space for opportunities and to reactivate former social links. Pivotal to the success of innovation in rural areas is the support by and especially the ability of local institutions to absorb external knowledge (Klein-Hitpaß, 2016). Especially during the reintegration process, returnees become involved in local social life and civic engagement, which has a positive influence on social cohesion. Compared to other migrant groups, remigrants are tendentially more accepted by the local population (Reichert et al., 2014). Cassarino (2004) states that the longer people are absent from their place of origin, the more difficult is remigration and reintegration in particular.

### 3. Site of the study and methods

#### 3.1 Transylvania as a region of constant population change

From a historical perspective, the studied region, commonly addressed as Transylvania, has undergone an eventful history (Gräf and Grigoraş, 2003, p. 55). At present, it is composed of the following nine districts: Alba Iulia, Braşov, Bistriţa-Năsăud, Cluj, Covasna, Harghita, Hunedoara, Mureş and Sibiu, thereof eight districts belong to the macroregion of the northwestern and central part of Romania, while the district Hunedoara is located in the macroregion of the western and southwestern part (Institutul Naţional de Statistică, 2017). Currently, 3.7 million persons live in the nine districts of Transylvania, which is 19% of the country's total population (Eurostat, 2017).

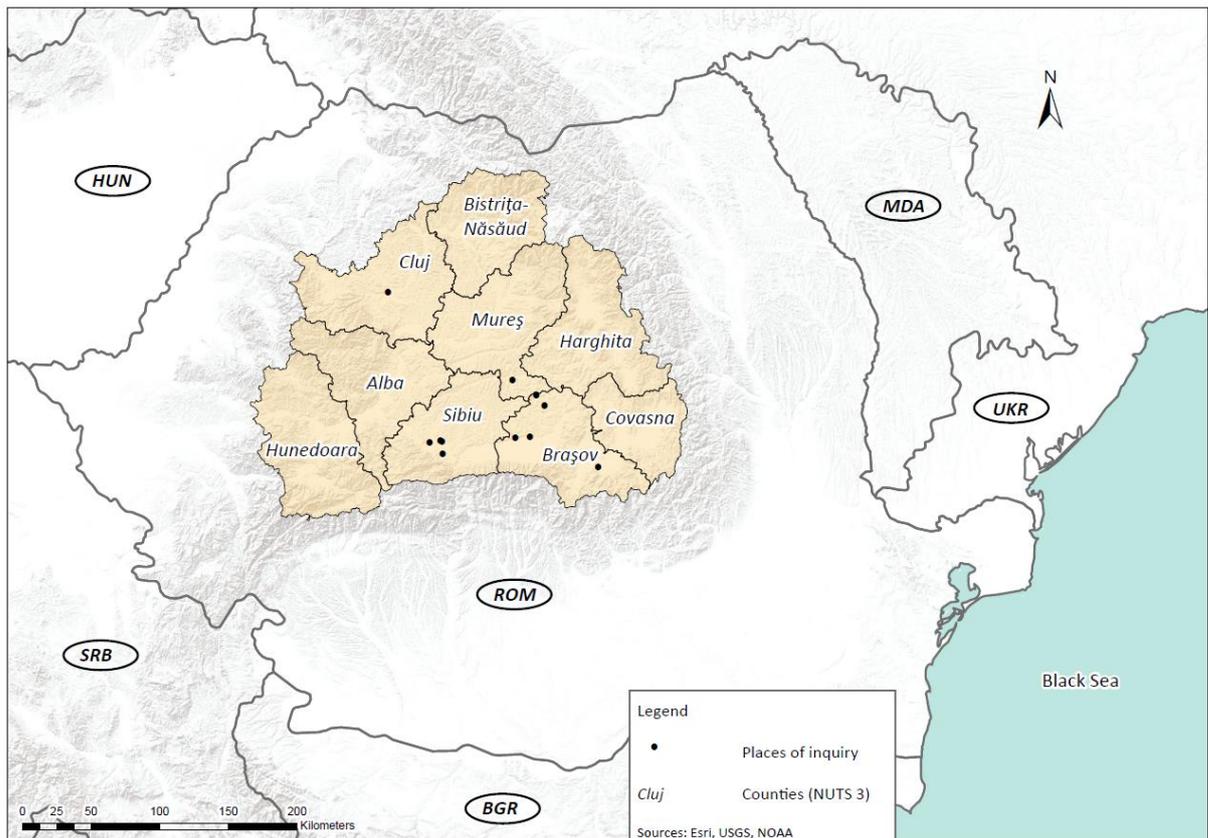


Fig 1. Site of the study: Transylvania. Cartography: Florian Dworzak

Various territorial conflicts in former times brought together populations of different ethnic origins resulting in communities with heterogeneous religious and social backgrounds (Ursprung, 2015), encompassing orthodox Romanians, Roman-Catholic Magyars like Hungarians, Csangos and Szekelys, Jews, Roma, Armenians and Greeks, as well as German communities like the Transylvanian Saxons. The settlement of the latter, dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, when the Hungarian king Géza II. requested settlers from the German Rhineland and Moselle areas as well as Luxemburg, Flanders and Alsace to cultivate the unoccupied and fertile region in the middle of the country, which was later called Transylvania (Schenk, 1992; Scharr and Gräf, 2008). Transylvanian Saxons nowadays represent the oldest German community in southeastern Europe (Armour, 2013, p. 18).

A certain proportion of the Transylvanian Saxons decided to emigrate especially to Germany after World War II, mainly because they and their institutions suffered subordination due to their ethnic origin during the communist regime or even were deported to the former Soviet Union for forced labour because of their potential collaboration with Nazi regime (Baier, 2015). In 1967, the Federal Republic of Germany and Romania arranged an opportunity for family reunification for payments that were frequently addressed as random (Rock and Wolff, 2002). Besides the steady increase

of the emigration movement, the Transylvanian Saxon community was under a great deal of stress and danger due to a homogenising policy of the dictator Ceaușescu which was characterised by steered settlement of Romanians in areas with high share of minorities. Since the end of Romanian communism in 1989, the migratory outflow developed to a mass exodus, mostly because of differences in prosperity between Romania and Western Europe. In Romania, corruption and a lack of political and personal liberty deteriorated future perspectives (Wolff and Cordell, 2003, p. 110). Many people made use of the opportunity of open borders and settled mainly in Germany (Tab. 1) but also in Austria, in Switzerland, in the United States or Canada (Verband der Siebenbuerger Sachsen in Deutschland e.V., 2008, p. 5). Data on emigration do not provide a reliable basis on how many Transylvanian Saxons currently live in Germany, mostly as a consequence of natural population development, i.e., death and moving on to other countries. However, the micro census 2011 reports 213,000 (late) repatriates from Romania (Worbs et al., 2013), covering people that were born in Romania.

Tab 1. Emigration of ethnic Germans from Romania to Germany. Source: Bundesverwaltungsamt 2018

Period of time	Number of emigrants
1950–1959	3,454
1960–1969	16,294
1970–1979	71,417
1980–1989	151,161
1990–1999	186,354
2000–2009	1,535
2010–2016	115

Around 100,000 Transylvanian Saxons stayed in their homeland, i.e., mainly the older generation and people being married to a Romanian or Hungarian citizen. Since then, the fear of loss of their identity was a widespread sentiment in Transylvanian Saxon communities, mostly because the usage of the German language and relationships to their community members became more difficult over time (Ursprung, 2015). As a consequence of emigration, the share of ethnic Germans in Transylvania continuously decreased from 8% of the total population in Transylvania in 1930 to 1% in 1992 and 0.1% in 2011 (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017). The districts Sibiu, Brașov and Mureș with its partially same-named counties Sibiu, Brașov and Sighișoara were and are to date the Transylvanian districts with the highest proportion of ethnic Germans<sup>3</sup> in the country (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017).

In the last decade, Romania's as well as Transylvania's population decreased because of intra-European out-migration after the accession to the European Union in 2007 (Anghel et al., 2016). Romanian citizens increasingly migrated to Western European countries, like Italy, Spain or Germany for seasonal work and provided remittances to their families back home. As those emigrants are mostly young and well educated, these outmigration processes often result in a decline of birth rate and a lack of skilled workforce, especially in rural areas (Anghel et al., 2016).

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<sup>3</sup> It needs to be emphasized that the data provided by the national census does not capture historical regions, like Transylvania. Therefore it is difficult to quantify ethnic Germans in Transylvania. Moreover, the equation of ethnic Germans with Transylvanian Saxons is an approximation, but carry inaccuracies as more ethnic Germans from Germany, Austria or Switzerland choose Transylvania as their place of residence and will not be separated from the Transylvanian Saxons in the census.



Fig 2. Village of Criț/County Brașov. Photo: Stefanie Lutsch

### 3.2 Research questions and methods

#### ***Research questions***

In order to get a better understanding of the processes, the implications and the potential of this re-migration phenomenon, research questions in this article are as follows: (1) what patterns of and motivations for remigration of German speaking people to rural Romania can be identified; (2) how do they perceive their role in rural development; (3) what quantitative and qualitative potential does future remigration have? In order to provide empirical evidence for status quo and the potential of remigration of Transylvanian Saxons to rural Romania, data were collected in 2016/2017 by a mixed methods approach, consisting of 27 qualitative interviews with Transylvanian Saxons (re-migrants and contact persons for potential re-migrants, conducted in four counties in rural Romania, and a quantitative online-survey among 391 people of the Transylvanian Saxon community in Germany.

#### ***Expert interviews***

Semi-structured interviews with experts of political, religious and civil-society institutions, among them were both stayers and re-migrants, were conducted to investigate current remigration movements as well as resulting implications on economic activities, social cohesion and cultural cohabitation (cf. interviews with elites in Kvale, 2007). Thus, experts had a double role, both as they were equipped with specific knowledge on the phenomenon of remigration in the region ("contextual knowledge", Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr, 2010), but also had experiences from their own migration process. Using expert interviews in an exploring and systematizing way (Bogner and Menz, 2009), this qualitative approach allowed us to explore both the social and institutional relevance of remigration and shape the subsequent quantitative questionnaire.

The questionnaire served as an orientation for the interlocutors and related to relevant main topics. At first, the interviewee was asked to introduce himself or herself and his or her activities

in the Transylvanian Saxon community. Afterwards, key questions followed to capture personal assessments and experiences with regard to the individual and family migration history (emigration from Romania, permanent or temporary remigration to Romania). Subsequently, the focus was on current and future positive or negative implications on regional development in the realms of local economy, housing and social lives, as a result of remigration movements to Transylvania. Further questions concerned living circumstances in post-migration lives, locals' reactions towards re-migrants, social networks between them or the assessment of future development potential of the region in five years.

The interviews were conducted in German language and lasted between 20 and 60 minutes. For analysis, all interviews were transcribed verbatim. In order to safeguard anonymity, all names of interviewed persons are pseudonyms. For data processing, qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2001) was applied. After sequencing data, texts were organized according to the research questions, i.e., processes, perceived implications and the potential of re-migration to rural Romania. Finally, outputs and quotes were translated from German to English.

### ***Standardised online questionnaire***

The quantitative online-survey aimed at unravelling current and future remigration movements of persons with genealogic conjunction to Transylvania. Particularly for the context of anticipated multiple dwellings of respondents and the spatial dispersal of respondents, an online approach was chosen. General limitations and challenges, such as lacking traceability of who filled the questionnaire (Mattissek, Pfaffenbach and Reuber, 2013) did not outweigh the positive aspects of the method chosen.

Triggered by the slogan "*Desire for the sweet homeland*" (in German: *Sehnsucht nach der süßen Heimat*), which refers to the anthem of the Transylvanian Saxons, the questionnaire was advertised among their community by means of respective offline and online media, e.g., a Transylvanian Saxon newspaper (*Siebenbürgische Zeitung*, with a circulation of 23,250 people) and a group of this community in a social network. A genealogic conjunction with Transylvania was the criteria for participating in the survey. Finally, 391 persons responded to all mandatory questions. While socio-statistical data of respondents as well as motivations for prior emigration from Romania were captured, the potential for remigration to Transylvania was at the core. The questionnaire recorded respondents' interest for and commitment to the Transylvanian Saxon community as well as their connection to the territory through relatives, property or patterns of (tourist) stays in the region.

For processing quantitative data, descriptive analyses was undertaken by means of SPSS statistics in order to present socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the sample. Moreover, bivariate analyses were processed in terms of potential returnees.

## **4. Results**

### ***Status quo of the remigration movement: patterns and reasons***

According to the first research question, patterns and reasons of current remigration movements of emigrated Transylvanian Saxons from Germany to rural Romania are discussed in this part, whilst a particular emphasis is given to the question whether these movements can be conceptually framed as lifestyle migration. Drawing on results from expert interviews, remigration movements of Transylvanian Saxons to rural Romania are firstly interlinked to prior emigration to Germany. The majority of the interviewees emigrated as adolescents with their parents mostly to Germany before 1990 when the communist regime was overthrown. Half of them returned in the age group of 30 and 49 years old. Thus, the interviewed Transylvanian Saxons returned 15 years after their emigration on average, either as permanent or temporary re-emigrants. Secondly, return migration can be characterized as male-dominated. This result is in accordance with Hientz (2015), who recognized this unbalanced gender relation during a research on transnational networks in the course of remigration of Transylvanian Saxons to Romania and reports of local newspapers like *Siebenbürgische Zeitung* or *Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung*, which point out more about single men returning to rural Romania than women with children.

Regarding patterns of remigration, results show that the return is frequently not considered as a single act, but as an ongoing process. People have intensive thoughts about possible return, while a coexistence of both permanent and temporary remigration, i.e., a multi-local living arrangement (McHugh, 1995; Benson and O'Reilly, 2009), represents an impressive manifestation of this negotiation process. Frequently, a stay that initially was considered as a temporary one becomes permanent, as the following quote illustrates.

“At the beginning, I ran the company from Germany. At first [I stayed] one week per month, then two, then three, then four in Romania. Finally, I only stay four to five weeks per year in Germany until I decided to return completely.” (Martin, 49, self-employed, remigrant)

Most of the re-emigrants prefer cities with various German-speaking institutions, such as kindergarten and schools or the infrastructure for enterprises, over rural areas. Due to the fact that the majority abandoned their parental home in rural Romania – the new inhabitants of their houses are often Romanians or Romas – they are relatively free to choose place of residence and do not feel bound to a particular place. For other temporary remigrants, however, family obligations or health conditions were addressed as obstacles for permanent remigration.

“It is difficult to harmonize both [family and profession]. Of course, you can return easier, when you are single or footloose and fancy-free from family and children.” (Holger, 46, self-employed, temporary remigrant)

By asking for the decisive reasons for returning, the majority of them agreed that homesickness was their main motivation. They felt uprooted and like strangers at their new site of living after their emigration to Germany, as illustrated in the following quote.

“The reason why I returned? Despite I never wanted to return, I recognize – after a certain time of absence – that my heart belongs to here.” (Markus, 49, self-employed, temporary remigrant)

Nostalgic feelings often resulted in regular stays for holidays in Transylvania during the summer months. Even during those stays, remigrants got involved in voluntary activities in religious, political or cultural institutions as they pursued a preservation of the German community with its tradition and culture. These tourist stays provide the basis for future relocation, possibly in retirement age (Kordel, 2016).

Besides lifestyle-related reasons, respondents also see a chance to be fulfilled themselves in small- or medium-sized enterprises in the automotive, energy or technology sector respectively, to have their own tourism or cultural business. They gathered the necessary financial resources and knowledge for becoming self-employed, e.g., holding a university degree or having transnational ties. Moreover, Transylvania is considered as an attractive location for enterprises of German-speaking countries. For entering the local and regional labour market, however, especially young remigrants who did not grow up in Romania and did not learn Romanian have to struggle with language barriers for professional purposes. Simultaneously, there are some German communication media like newspapers or TV shows that have continued to exist.

There are two main institutions considered as facilitators for both relocation and first orientation at the new location for Germans in Transylvania: the Evangelical Church of Augustan Confession in Romania and the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania as a political association. Central stakeholders are remaining members of the Transylvanian Saxon community and can be considered as multipliers and mediators as they know the conditions before, during and after the exodus of their ethnic group and especially today's structural peculiarities of the country and the specific region. Thus, the interviewed pastors and mayors, for instance, serve as a point of contact for potential re-migrants and persons already returned to their homeland but also for new residents of the German-speaking countries. Since August 2017 the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania arranged a central contact point, where a Transylvanian Saxon who returned more than ten years ago, being self-employed in the catering sector, is acting as a contact person providing assistance (see flyer Fig. 3). He explicitly gives information about housing and working opportunities, legal framework, the school system and visits to the authorities regarding the remigration process.

### **A future in Transylvania**

You may ask yourself, what chances **Transylvania** and **Romania** offer nowadays?

Various career options exist, also the step to self-employment.

The *Siebenbuergenforum* helps you to getting started and established a contact point.

### **Take control of your own future!**

Approach our experienced counterpart, who once emigrated and lives in Romania again since 2005.

Fig 3. Excerpt of a flyer of the contact point for (potential) returnees. *Siebenbuergenforum*, translated by the authors

### **Self-reported implications**

With regard to the second research question, how do remigrants perceive their role in rural development, we identified ambivalent evaluations among interviewees, addressing the economic situation, issues of social cohesion and cultural life. Purchasing real estate and subsequent refurbishment of houses is widely reported and has an implication on local economies insofar that there is a demand for workforce in crafts (cf. Kordel and Weidinger, 2018). These implications, however, are quite limited as family members often provide this kind of assistance. Especially, remigrants being self-employed evaluate their existence positively with regard to economic development in the region as they argue to create jobs for all citizens. They contend that middle class develops and the local population benefit from intercultural experiences in small- and medium-sized enterprises.

“Currently, there is an economic growth of five per cent nationwide which arranges an increase of wages in the future. Thus, the local population will earn more and wages could rise by 20%. The regular guy on Main Street from middle class, destroyed by the communist regime, will benefit from this development” (Michael, 76, representative of the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania, stayer).

In terms of social life and community, respondents ascribe positive implications to their existence mostly in terms of the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Transylvanian Saxon community in the villages if a remigrant settles and takes responsibility for his/her village. The vast majority who returned to Transylvania became politically active and participate in social and cultural activities in their local community. They engage in cultural activities like the preservation of the local fortified church by offering guided tours for tourists or by showing the local community how to renovate the old Saxon houses (Fig. 4). Further, they teach locals to prepare traditional meals or handcraft of the Transylvanian Saxon community for tourists. In terms of cultural heritage, remigrants from Germany express a kind of superiority concerning the interpretation of what is authentic and thus have a powerful say in what constitutes the Transylvanian Saxon community.

Finally, respondents address re-emigrants as a positive example and multipliers of the European idea. In doing so, they reflect on everyday experiences of being a European citizen that go beyond the right to move and settle in another EU country, but also encompass intercultural exchange encouraged by circulation and experiences in both countries.

“Due to their established transnational links between Romania and Germany, remigrants contribute to the reinforcement of a peaceful coexistence in Europe, which is of great importance nowadays” (Gustav, 72, retiree, temporary re-emigrant).



Fig 4. Traditional Transylvanian-Saxon house in Criș/County Brașov. Photo: Stefanie Lutsch

In summary, all interviewees reported that the remigration process of Transylvanian Saxons is a niche movement at the moment and will be like that in future. However, the majority of the interviewed experts desired that more compatriots return to Transylvania to strengthen the community and preserve a specific social and cultural structure. With regard to further remigration, interviewed experts, however, also reported concerns and fears and thus consider the existence of German citizens critically. They expect, for instance, that the regional and local housing market will be under great stress if re-emigrants in a large number would settle. Property prices could rise according to the increasing demand for living space both in the cities and the villages. Especially the temporary re-emigrants – so called “Sommersachsen” (i.e., Transylvanian Saxons who regularly return to rural Romania during the summer months) – guided by emotional and nostalgic expectations take an important role in influencing potential remigrants to move to rural Romania (see quotation below). Moreover, they are considered as problematic, because their houses and apartments are vacant most of the time, while locals simultaneously suffer from the lack of (affordable) housing. During their stay, they behave superior towards permanent remigrants and try to have an influence on how things are going while they are absent, as the second quote below illustrates.

“There is the phenomenon of the “Sommersachsen”, who come for two or three months. They are mostly (pre)retirees, who own houses and make other people curious to imagine a life here” (Oskar, 47, pastor, stayer).

“Sometimes the communication with the remigrants, especially the temporary ones, is difficult because when they come back for a short while, they would like to lead the direction how the remaining members of the Transylvanian Saxon community have to manage their responsibilities. But time and conditions changed compared to the date before the mass-exodus” (Wilhelm, 36, pastor, stayer).

### **Potential of remigrants**

In light of processes and perceived implications, the third research question addresses the quantitative and qualitative potential of future remigration, i.e., the scope and structure of

possible re-emigrants. At first, however, the sample is characterized in terms of socio-statistical data. Among the 391 respondents, the gender relation was balanced, the mean age of the participants was 45 years, while the majority of the respondents were at working age, i.e., between 35 and 49 years old (38.9%), followed by the cohort of 50 to 64 year old people (30.4%). 70% of the respondents were married or living with a partner, 23% was single. More than a half had abitur (A levels) or a higher education degree. Two-thirds of the respondents were employed, nearly 11% self-employed and 7% retired.

With regard to the available net household income, almost 40% reported between 1,500 and 3,000 Euro to spend, while for 28% the wage level was between 3,000 until 4,500 Euro as the following table shows. 84% of all respondents (n=327) were born in Transylvania and mostly originate from rural areas. Considering their emigration to Germany, data show that most of them emigrated in the 1990s after the fall of the communist regime in Romania.

Tab 2. Sociodemographic data of the survey (n=391). Source: own survey

<b>Sociodemographic data of the survey (n=391)</b>			
<b>Age groups</b>		<b>Share (in %)</b>	
< 21 years		4.6	
21 – 34 years		21.0	
35 – 49 years		38.9%	
50 – 64 years		30.4	
< 65 years		5.1	
<b>Total</b>		<b>100.0</b>	
<b>Marital status</b>		<b>Share (in %)</b>	
Single		23.3	
Living with a partner		13.3	
Married		56.8	
Divorced/separated		5.1	
Widowed		1.5	
<b>Total</b>		<b>100.0</b>	
<b>Education level</b>		<b>Share (in %)</b>	
Elementary school		0.8	
Secondary school		7.4	
Intermediate school		32.7	
Higher education		34.0	
Academic degree		25.0	
<b>Total</b>		<b>100.0</b>	
<b>Employment</b>		<b>Share (in %)</b>	
Unemployed		2.8	
Pupil/Student/Trainee		9.5	
Self-employed		10.5	
Employed		66.0	
Director/Official		4.3	
Retiree		6.9	
<b>Total</b>		<b>100.0</b>	

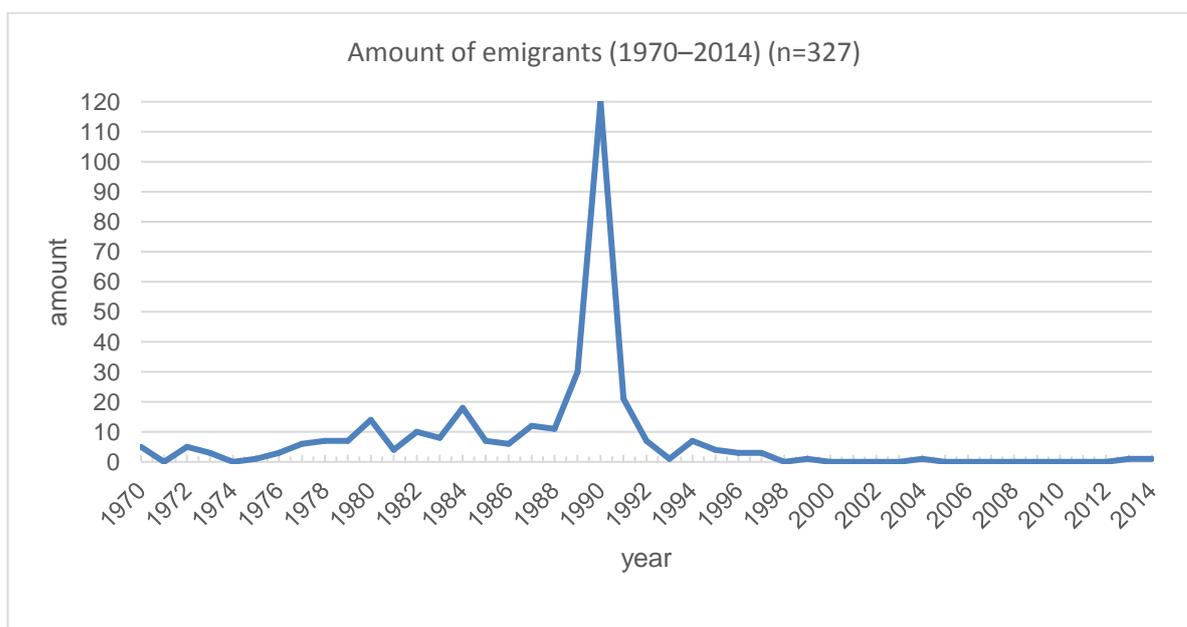


Fig 5. Amount of emigrants to Germany (1970–2014) (n=327). Source: own survey

Most of the interviewed people (57%) expressed their interest for the Transylvanian Saxon community especially by reading the newspaper (Siebenbuergische Zeitung) or by participating in the annual festival of the Transylvanian Saxons on Pentecost in Germany (55%). More than a third dedicate themselves to the community in form of an association membership, a financial support for the cultural heritage like fortified churches and as a board member in a so-called “Heimatortsgemeinschaft” (an association which advocates the preservation of the Transylvanian community). Half of the participants are still connected to Transylvania through relatives or friends living there with whom most of them stay in contact less than once a month per telephone or social media. With regard to property, only 20% of the interviewed Transylvanian Saxons still own their parental home and use it during regular stays in Romania. Tourist stays are quite common among emigrated Transylvanian Saxons. 40% of the respondents stayed at least once in Transylvania in the last year. During regular stays, ranging from one week (27%) to two weeks (40%), respondents mostly travel with family members (81%), one quarter also with friends. Most of the time is spent at relatives’ homes or in their own houses. Two-thirds of the Transylvanian Saxons indicated holidays as their reason for travel, while visits of family were mentioned by one quarter. Besides regular stays, involvement in transnational business companies can be considered as one structural frame for further remigration.

Tab 3. Community interest, involvement and temporary stays in Transylvania. Source: own survey

<b>Community interest, involvement and temporary stays in Transylvania (n=391) (*multiple answers possible)</b>			
<b>Interest in the community*</b>	<b>Share (in %)</b>	<b>Involvement in the community*</b>	<b>Share (in %)</b>
Reading the Transylvanian Saxon newspaper	56.8	Financial support for the cultural preservation (e.g., the fortified churches)	34.9
Participate in the annual festival on Pentecost in Germany	55.2	Member of an association	34.9
Reading books about the culture	41.4	Board member of a “Heimatortsgemeinschaft”	31.1
Participate in dancing events	36.3	Active member of a dancing group	27.7
Participate in events focussing on the history of Transylvania (e.g., seminars, Kronenfest)	21.2	On-site assistance in case of maintenance or renovation (e.g. cemetery)	16.7
<b>Occasion for stays in Transylvania*</b>	<b>Share (in %)</b>	<b>Duration of the stays</b>	<b>Share (in %)</b>
Holiday	67.5	Two weeks	39.6
Family visit	27.8	One week	26.6
Events like weddings, school reunions, funerals	20.5	Three weeks	12.3
Meetings of the “Heimatortsgemeinschaft” or associations	10.5	Less than one week	12.3
Business or research activity	7.9	More than one month	3.6
Renovation activity of homes	7.1	One month	3.1
		No stay	2.5

The core question of the survey, however, focused on the imagination of a potential remigration to Transylvania. 27% of the respondents could imagine returning permanently under specific preconditions like the availability of a job (35%), a property (27%) and the improvement of legal

security in Romania (27%). With respect to gender aspects of potential returnees, two-third of the male respondents could imagine returning to their homeland. Half of the target group is between 35 up to 49 years old and one quarter is 50 up to 64 years old, has abitur or a higher education degree and earns more than 3,000 Euro. Taking into account the year of emigration, almost 60% of all respondents, who are willing to remigrate, left Romania in the 1990s. They might feel more homesick because of their decision to emigrate on a voluntary basis.

Tab 4. Potential remigration.

<b>Potential remigration (n=391) (*multiple answers possible)</b>			
<b>Preconditions for remigration*</b>		<b>Share (in %)</b>	
No return at all imaginable		42.7	
Availability of a job		34.5	
Availability of a property		27.4	
Improvement of legal security in Romania		27.1	
Reaching retirement age		20.7	
Family decision		17.6	
Support by the community		9.2	
Preconditions like improvement of the health care system		6.9	
Support by the local authority		5.4	
<b>Education level</b>		<b>Share (in %)</b>	
Elementary school		0.0	
Secondary school		2.3	
Intermediate school		8.4	
Higher education		7.9	
Academic degree		8.7	
No intention to return		72.7	
<b>Gender of the potential returnees</b>		<b>Share (in %)</b>	
Male		17.6	
Female		9.7	
No potential returnees		72.7	
<b>Age groups of the potential returnees</b>		<b>Share (in %)</b>	
< 21 years		1.3	
21 – 34 years		5.4	
35 – 49 years		13.0	
50 – 64 years		6.9	
< 65 years		0.7	
No intention to return		72.7	
<b>Amount of net household income</b>		<b>Share (in %)</b>	
< 1,500 Euro		4.1	
1,500 – 3,000 Euro		9.7	
3,001 – 4,500 Euro		7.6	
> 4,500 Euro		5.9	
No intention to return		72.7	

Among the potential remigrants, the interest in affairs in the Transylvanian Saxon community is equally high as those who do not intend to return, whereas the engagement for the community is higher (33.3% among potential non-returnees to 46.1% among potential returnees). Moreover, they more likely have relatives in Romania and more frequently own their former dwelling (35.5%). Regular visits can also trigger remigration, as potential remigrants visited rural Romania more often than non-remigrants.

During a continuous weighing up of pros and cons for remigration to Romania, respondents relationally compare their current place of residence with Transylvania and evaluate satisfaction at both locations. While they are, generally speaking, more satisfied with life in Germany and highlight better transport infrastructure and a higher income level, they ascribe a more beautiful landscape, a diminished stress feeling, a higher social cohabitation and cultural sense of community to Transylvania. Among those respondents who are willing to remigrate, 88% estimate

the landscape in Transylvania as more beautiful than in Germany, while 60% reported a better cultural sense of community and 70% a better social cohabitation.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Empirical evidence on patterns and motivations for remigration of German speaking people to rural Romania firstly coincide with existing conceptual frameworks on return migration only to a certain extent. Whilst neo-classical argumentations, e.g., changes in labour markets as a reason for returning (Williams and Baláž, 2005), and biographical events stemming from concepts on life-cycle (Ni Laoire and Stockdale, 2016) seem to be of less explanatory power in terms of this phenomenon, returning to rural places of origin is mostly associated to individual desires. Re-emigrants associate places in rural Romania to emotions of nostalgia and the past (Datta, 2003) and finally a static feeling of home. We contend that nostalgic feelings for the community of Transylvanian Saxons mainly result from previous forced emigration to Germany in the 1990s. This is especially the case for retired re-emigrants, whilst middle-aged people also consider opportunities of employment and highly appreciate the existence of German firms in order to make use of transnational experiences, e.g., language or professional experiences. Finding altered economic and political contexts (Vathi, 2017), return migrants consider transnational firms as an anchor of stability and simultaneously see themselves as pioneers that could stimulate further remigration. Empirical data on the processes of return also are in line with the concept of return mobilities (King and Christou, 2011) at first sight, since return migrants prepare future relocation by means of regular stays for holiday purposes and resulting circulation. These findings coincide with the tourism-migration nexus that has already been discussed in lifestyle migration research (Kordel, 2015). Whilst circular movements are characteristic during an initial phase of intensively practiced transnational life-worlds, re-emigrants relate representations of a better life to a strong commitment to the Saxon community, frequently resulting in a settlement that is less volatile and more permanent at a later stage. For German remigrants moving to Transylvania, a kind of commitment to revitalize the community and keep the cultural heritage alive represents a peculiarity. Several institutions serve as a kind of facilitator, not only by providing useful practical information for relocation, but providing the emotional basis by means of maintaining contact to the Transylvanian community in Germany.

While implications of remigration recently focused on regional and local economies (Lang, 2013), cultural issues and the realm of social lives were at the core of this study. We showed that a profound understanding of the structure, the representations, and the everyday practices of re-emigrants is an important precondition for discussing the potential implications from their specific angle. Return migrants illustrate their role in evoking implications on the economy, social cohesion and cultural heritage by referring to what they do in everyday life, i.e., practices in post-migration lives. As previously reported for lifestyle migration processes, its protagonists orientate those practices to what they expect from life back home (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009; Weidinger and Kordel, 2016). Similarly, re-emigrants in rural Romania therefore pursue practices that preserve their particular and often static understanding of community and the cultural heritage of the Transylvanian Saxon culture in particular. These practices, however, must not be interpreted ahistorically since they result from a subjectively felt minority status, having in mind how they or their ancestors have been treated at the time of emigration to Germany. We reason that previously established feelings of alienation from a home country and resulting notions of nostalgia becomes a driver of the desire for a better life. While, in lifestyle migration research, nostalgia was recently discussed as an abstract, but powerful figuration, e.g., the rural idyll (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009), our case study reveals a very concrete, territorially and culturally bounded notion of nostalgia. However, the case study provided insights on implications on immigration for rural development only from one selected group of the society, the Transylvanian Saxon community. From their perspective, local economies, parts of the society and especially heritage conservation benefit from remigration processes. Negative issues were hardly addressed, either for reasons of living in a relatively homogeneous and privileged community (cf. Fechter, 2007) or because remigrants tend to present themselves in a favourable light as do-gooders. Accordingly, future research must consider multiple perspectives and stakeholders being involved in that phenomenon in order to

identify winners and losers with regard to rural development. Of specific interest which parts of the society will benefit from remigration and who becomes excluded. Since we now know more about possible realms of implications, a more systematic analysis could be implemented. Questions that remain open are, for instance, to what extent do re-emigrants refurbish historical buildings according to their nostalgic representations or how and for whom, do they revitalize tourism in that particular area?

How can we finally evaluate the quantitative and qualitative potential of future remigration to rural Romania? Survey data firstly show a relatively strong interest in affairs of the Transylvanian Saxon community and respective practices, despite living dispersed all over Germany. This could be addressed as a prerequisite for community-led or nostalgia motivated remigration. Besides, regular, long-term tourist stays could be interpreted as an indicator for preparing remigration. However, the share of re-emigrants, who expressed their explicit willingness to relocate from Germany to rural Romania, is relatively low. Those one-third who consider returning, are higher educated, well-off and middle aged and could therefore be addressed as privileged in comparison to the Romanian population. However, whilst the study results emphasised the strong ties of re-emigrants to the German speaking community, it would be of particular interest if the knowledge of Romanian language was a predictor for potential remigration. Since the study revealed (1) preconditions for future remigration, (2) attitudes of current and possible returnees towards the community and (3) the procedure of remigration, actors involved in rural development could make use of these insights for fostering or limiting future remigration. With regard to the first issue, we know that job availability and purchase of property is of particular relevance for potential re-emigrants. Thus, measurements of place marketing (Niedomysl, 2004; Kordel and Weidinger, 2018), such as an online platform for vacant houses could match the interest of potential remigrants and simultaneously reduce vacancies. In light of a strong community spirit among the Transylvanian Saxon community and their particular interest in conservation of cultural heritage, regional development actors could make use of this, for instance, in terms of restoration of buildings, but should be aware of re-emigrants' economic power and tendencies of segregation. Finally, the identified procedure of remigration processes, starting with return mobilities and circulation movements that, in some cases, end with a permanent relocation, could be a stimulus for local economies. Despite "Sommersachsen" prefer dwellings of relatives or hotels operated by members of the Saxon community during their stay in Romania, special offers dedicated to that target group could be promoted by the regional tourism board, and thereby increase tourism or transportation sector. To sum up, re-emigrants hold a certain potential for rural development in Romania, provided that they themselves realize that they are part of but also are accepted as a part of Romanian society.

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