

THE ROLE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE RESTORATION IN BUILDING THE LOCAL TOURISM IMAGE: THE GUMELNIȚA ARCHAEO - PARK (DRĂGĂNEȘTI - OLT, ROMANIA)

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Abstract: The study is based on the current global trend of archaeo-landscape studies aimed at reconstructing some relevant sites through experimental archaeology and encouraging their use for scientific and tourist purposes. In the town of Drăgănești-Olt, due to the involvement of local authorities and the Boianu Plain Museum, a Gumelnița Culture tell site was reconstructed. The study aims to establish if this unique Romanian archaeo-park can build the cultural identity of the town, assuring the foundation for building a local tourism image. Methods used were based on field research and survey as a tool to analyse people's perception. The data was processed in QSR NVivo 10. The archaeo-park is currently unique in Romania and the several reconstructed pile dwellings depict the living conditions of the Neolithic era. Each detail is based on the rigorous archaeological research and discoveries in the nearby tell, also sharing common features and elements with similar settlements in Europe. The results of semi-structured interviews show that most of the respondents view the museum of Boianu Plain as the regional center of interest, a major element of the town tourism identity. Consequently, townspeople consider it useful for educational tourism or scientific interest, but it needs serious efforts to market it as a cultural image of the town along with Boianu Plain Museum.

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INTRODUCTION

Every place has a more or less important history. Bringing to the fore the most valuable past elements through conservation, reconstruction, and promotion helps the development of local destinations and the emergence of symbols that combined with others form the national heritage.

International tourism literature argues that history provides resources for cultural heritage tourism and serves as an exploitable resource base for wide range of high-order economic activities (Ashworth, 1994).

Cultural tourism based on marketing, exchange of knowledge, and introducing the heritage of a place to visitors becomes an activity that allows its economic valorization and also spreads local culture to other social and spatial levels.

In fact, Palmer (1999, p. 10) highlights that *“tourism’s use of identity goes far beyond the commercial; it goes to the heart of a people because it serves to define their cultural identity and to make this visible, both to themselves, and to ‘others’.* Furthermore, *cultural identity underpins national identity as it communicates the past and present traditions and mores of a people, thus enabling them to be identified as a distinctive group”.*

The current trend of archaeological landscape restoration illuminates a part of history and can help build the cultural heritage and identity of a place (Iorgulescu et al., 2010) and sometimes of a nation. The study of archaeological landscapes is focused on the history of landscapes, the policy of preserving archaeological sites and landscapes, the reconstruction of some of them through experimental archaeology, and their use, first for scientific and then for tourism purposes, which can revitalize certain areas by creating new jobs locally and regionally.

The definition of archaeo-landscapes as natural landscapes modeled and/or adapted to life needs by humans in the past was developed by experimental archaeology, simply defined as *“the response to objects, habits, and processes from the past”* (Mathieu, 2002, p. 1). This science has allowed Archaeologists and other specialists to reconstruct and test some of their ideas about the past. Starting from Darvill’s assumption that *“looking into our own past is like looking into the future of other societies”* (Darvill, 1996, p. 192), the scope of such experiments varies largely. Many experiments included the construction of houses of various types from different historical periods, including the reconstruction of Iron Age farms that were furnished with appropriate livestock, arable land, and all the necessary conditions to maintain an independent life (Palmer et al., 2009, p. 10).

One of the benefits of experimental archaeology is that it provides a means by which we can visualize the interpretation of what happened in the past (Palmer et al., 2009, p. 10). In Europe, 111 out of 937 archaeological sites around the Alps reveal almost intact wood structures in prehistoric pile-dwellings of outstanding value for humanity. They were therefore included on the UNESCO heritage sites list in 2011 (UNESCO, 2011)¹. A few of these sites were reconstructed and function as open air museums, for example, Wauwil near Luzern in Switzerland and Unteruhldingen near Lake Constance in Germany (Schöbel, 2010).

¹ Details on URL: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1363/>

Among other valuable long-term experiments, those conducted at Lejre near Roskilde² in Denmark and at Butser near Petersfield in England can be cited.

At Lejre, an experimental archaeology center was established in 1964 on an area of 43 hectares that recreates an Iron Age village with houses, household annexes, and workshops, a Stone Age settlement, a Viking market, and a 19th-century farm surrounded by pastures with grazing herds of animals, gardens, ponds, and woods. The Center for Historical and archaeological Research and Communication or “*Lejre, Land of Legends*”³ is visited annually by tens of thousands of tourists and archaeologists, ethnologists, anthropologists, and students (Palmer et al., 2009, p. 10).

The Butser Ancient Farm (Palmer et al., 2009, p. 10) is located near Petersfield in Hampshire, southern England (Reynolds, 1979; Fowler, 1983). It has a number of buildings that recreate the prehistoric Iron Age⁴, and the site is used both for tourism and activities by experimental archaeology specialists. The farm is open to the public and special events take place here throughout the year (Reynolds, 1999).

In Romania, experimental archaeology is still in its infancy, but there have been attempts in this regard such as the Vădastra experiment in the village of the same name in Olt County (Gheorghiu, 2008). In this village, several Neolithic houses were built from wood and clay as well as some pottery kilns for experiments in modeling, decorating, and firing ceramic vessels. Activities in the field of experimental archaeology were also conducted by the Alexander Ioan Cuza University from Iași, in Cucuteni, specifically the reconstruction of Neolithic houses and ceramics (Cotiugă & Cotoi, 2004; László & Cotiugă, 2005).

Another project was located in the town of Drăgănești-Olt where an archaeological park has recreated the Gumelnița culture of the area. The main purpose of the reconstruction undertaken by the Boian Plain Museum was a scientific experiment, but the possibility of exploiting the site for tourism use arose since the site was maintained.

In Romania, the range of the Gumelnița culture generally corresponds with the Boianu culture in Wallachia but extended into Dobrogea on the territory previously occupied by the Hamangia culture and into the southern Republic of Moldova. In Bulgaria it occupies the eastern half of the territory both north and south of the Balkan Mountains (Comșa, 1987).

The specific elements of this culture include a multitude of tell settlements located on islands reinforced or not with defense systems and invariably built around artificial and natural water sources and easily exploitable natural resources: water, land suitable for agriculture and livestock, and hunting, all combined to comprise a class of human relationships with the environment (Comșa, 1987). A tell is a specific type of Neolithic settlement and, to a lesser extent, of the Bronze Age, that has the appearance of a mound artificially formed by successive deposits of anthropogenic debris.

Such sites are registered among museums whose role is to research and conserve but also to encourage educational and cultural tourism.

STUDY AREA

Drăgănești-Olt is a small town on the western Boianu Plain, a subunit of the Wallachian Plain, located at the base of its rim on the Olt River flood plain (Figure 1).

The original Neolithic tell in Drăgănești-Olt is located in the peripheral area of the Băzărani neighborhood on the right bank of the Sâiu stream on the Olt River flood plain (Butoi & Zorzoliu, 1992, p. 73) (Figure 2). The settlement overlaid a mound built of

² For further information see: URL: <http://www.roskilde.com/cmarter.asp?doc=2978>

³ More details on URL: <http://www.sagnlandet.dk>

⁴ For more see: URL: <http://www.butser.org.uk>

point bar deposits, but had no defensive mud wall, normally a feature of the Gumelnița Culture – Neolithic sites (Figure 3). The profile in Figure 4 indicates the detailed geomorphic features of the area where the islet was surrounded by a marsh (Corboaica Marsh) that existed here until 1950 when land reclamation work and the cultivation of rice began (Nica et al., 1995, p. 15). This explains the absence of moats at this tell, which was protected for millennia by the marshes of the Sâiu stream (Nica et al., 1995). The layer thickness exceeds three meters. Between 1982 and 2005, seven archaeological campaigns were conducted, and the excavations revealed that this tell settlement contains archaeological material belonging to both Gumelnița-Sălcuța and Glina cultures since it falls between them. Measurements of the surface indicated that the settlement had an ellipsoidal shape with a maximum 120-meter diameter (Butoi & Zorzoliu, 1992). The tell comprises three major periods of occupation, and the archaeological material reflects the lifestyle of these communities in 5,000 to 4,000 BC. The Drăgănești-Olt restoration is not achieved *in situ* but inside The Boianu Plain Museum (Figure 2).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The proposed targets were based on research of the literature, direct field observations, and socio-statistical techniques including semi-structured interviews using coding data by QSR.NVivo 10 software (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Several visits were made to the area between 2010 and 2012 for direct observations, taking photographs, and conducting interviews with local authorities, the managerial team of the Boianu Plain Museum, local people, and tourists. Inline with the deontology of interview applying we obtained the approval of using the demographic data of each respondent and consequently we code them. QSR.NVivo 10 software allowed us to make nodes for each respondent's opinion regarding the 10 addressed questions and analyze the relationships between the demographic characteristics of the interviewed sample, draw the word query which gave us the frequency of words and group all of them by words similarities.

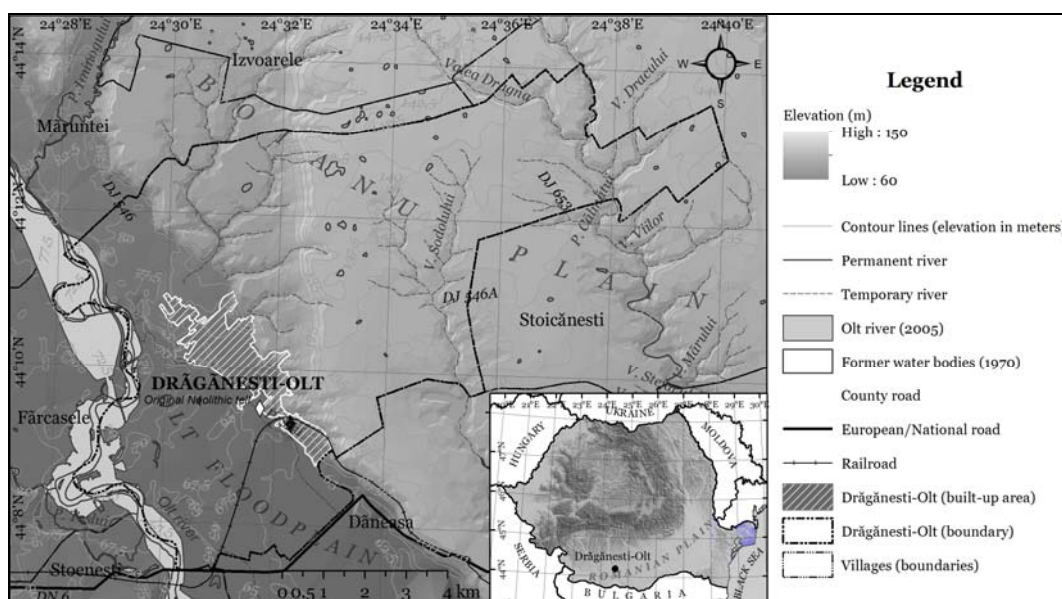


Figure 1. Geographic setting of Drăgănești-Olt town
(SRTM data for the map in the vignette, DEMs by authors)

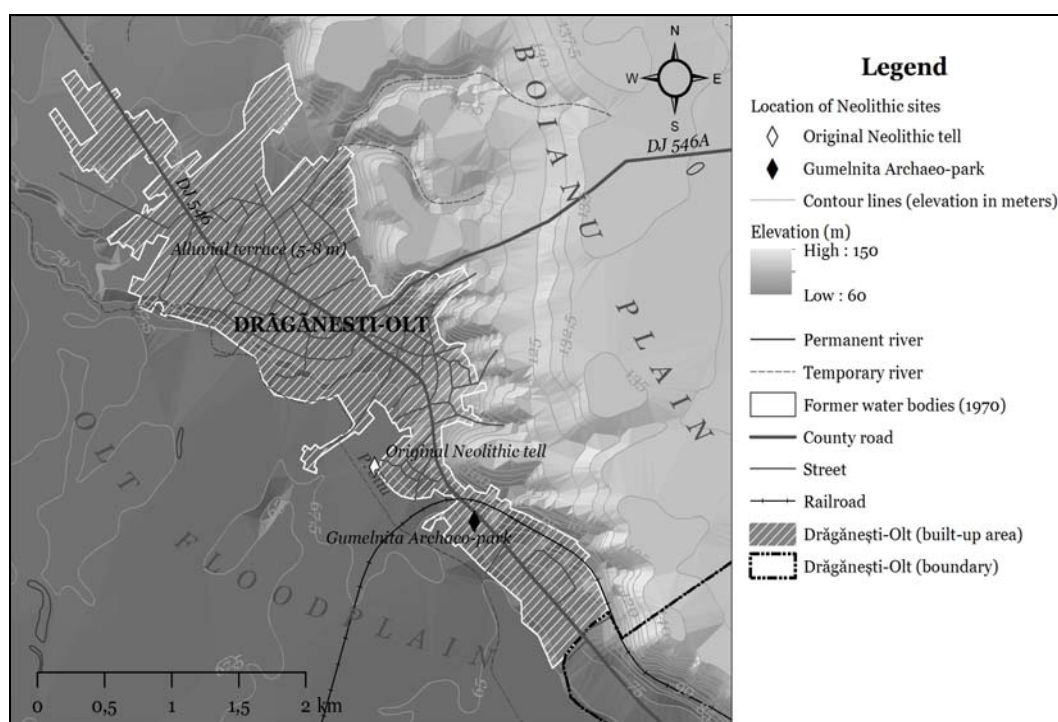


Figure 2. Location of the Neolithic tell and Archaeo-park in Drăgănești-Olt

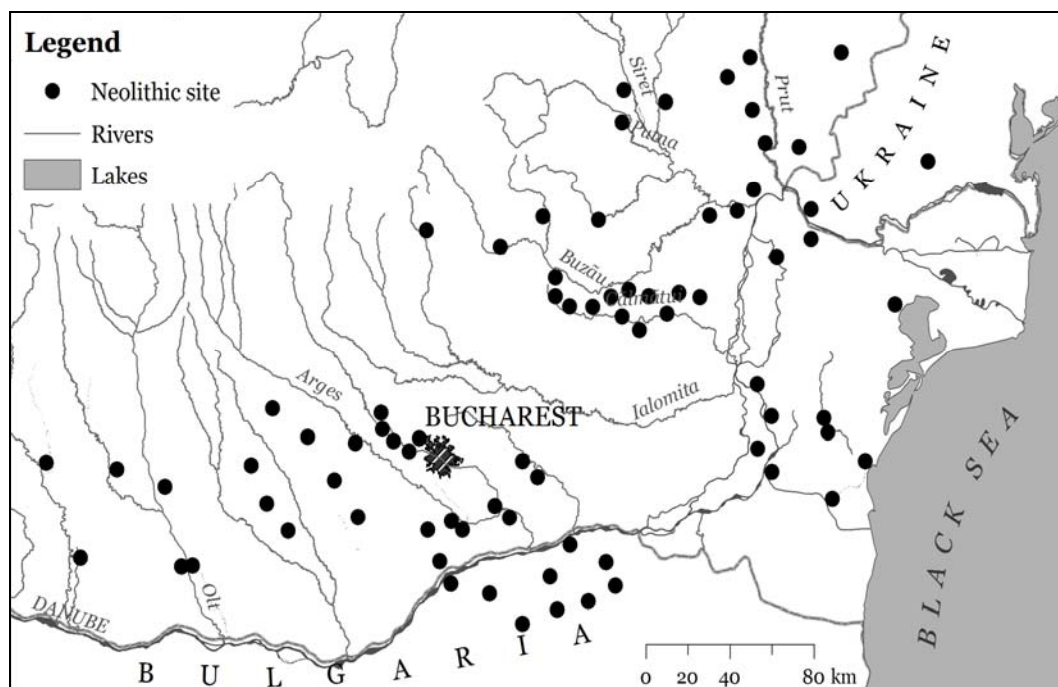


Figure 3. Gumelnita Culture Archaeological sites

(Source: CIMEC map, processed after: <http://www.cimec.ro/Arheologie/gumelnita/3arii/main.htm>)

The Pearson's correlation analysis was used to illustrate the respondents' profiles. Respondents' age and occupation were the two input variables. Generally, the index value -1 shows no correlation and value of 1, a strong correlation. The results are referred to as nodes and output on a 3D graph as columns.

The maps and geomorphic profile in Figures 2, 3, and 4 were created using GIS techniques (in Global Mapper *v.9.x* and ArcGIS *v.10.x* applications) in order to precisely locate the *in situ* Neolithic settlement and its accurate reconstruction inside the Boianu Plain Museum. To obtain the different layers, we used topographic map 1:25,000 (1970), orthophotographs with resolution of 0.5 m (2005), and SRTM data (source: USGS, University of Maryland). The reference system used is UTM/WGS84. The Gumelnița site data was collected from www.cimec.ro.

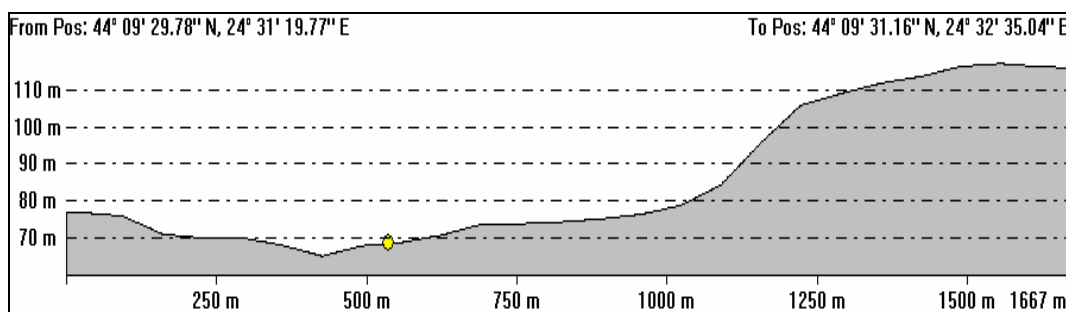


Figure 4. Cross-section of Olt flood plain and rim of Boianu Plain showing location of the original Neolithic tell (geomorphic profile created with Global Mapper)

Research hypothesis: the Drăgănești - Olt Archaeological Park presents a piece of Romania's heritage and is an attraction of cultural value that could represent the town's tourist identity and make it more visible in the tourism offer.

In order to test the hypothesis, the study was structured in four parts corresponding to the following objectives: presentation of a recovery model through experimental archaeology on a tell settlement in Drăgănești-Olt, Olt County; identifying the main forms of tourism and relevant target groups; exploring methods of promoting this cultural and historical site; analyzing the community perception about the Gumelnița Archaeo-park as a part of Boianu Plain Museum as a symbol of the town's tourism identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Presentation of a recovery model through experimental Archaeology on a tell settlement in Drăgănești-Olt, Olt County

This archaeo-park is currently unique in Romania and is among the few reconstructions of this type in Europe. It presents the typology of housing, the layout of houses, household inventory, and tools used for pottery, fishing, hunting, and agriculture.

The park is a reconstruction of a Neolithic village street that shows the manner of development specific for Neolithic settlements, starting with a small group of dwellings and gradually adding others as the population grew. The reconstituted village consists of life-size huts in a natural setting on land surrounded by a moat and a wattle fence and seeks to replicate the historic landscape as closely as possible (Figure 5).

Entry to the village is across a wooden bridge constructed over a stream. One of the huts is a fisherman's house where several fish are hung to dry beside the door along with a fishing net and fish scales lie scattered in front of the house.

A farmer's house is surrounded by tools used in the fields and exposed to the elements, including hoes and scoops made of antler. There is also a potter's house and a grave specific to this culture, an oval hole containing a skeleton with its legs and arms folded against the chest.

The village has a pile building with wooden shelves used for storing supplies, necessary because these ancient settlements were built in frequently flooded valleys.



Figure 5. The entrance to the Gumelnița Archaeo-park, Drăgănești-Olt
(Source: Iuliana Vijulie)



Figure 6. A pile dwelling
(Source: Iuliana Vijulie)



Figure 7. Entrance porch
(Source: Iuliana Vijulie)

A stilt house or pile dwelling made of wattle was reconstructed in the village (Figure 6) and a corral where people kept their animals. According to studies on the Gumelnița Culture in the study area (Nica et al., 1995) and the reconstruction of the Gumelnița Archaeo-park in Drăgănești-Olt, Neolithic dwellings were rectangular, often consisting of one or two rooms. Some houses were also provided with an entrance porch (Figure 7).



Figure 8. The inner design of a hut: a. room; b. loom; c. pottery on rudimentary shelves; d. clay bed covered with a mat or woolen woven blanket (Source: Iuliana Vijulie)

The roofs were made of straw or reed with two or four sides. The buildings were low because the people did not exceed 1.50 to 1.60 meters in height and had round or oval windows that probably were covered with wattle gratings. The walls were made of poles tied with cane and covered with clay mixed with chaff. Each hut was fitted inside with a fireplace for food preparation, an oven, a loom, and rudimentary furniture (shelves, tables). The bed was built from clay and covered by mats made from lake plants (Nica et al., 1995) or simply animal skins (Figure 8).

The floors were made of clay or beaten soil. The walls of the houses were mostly painted using natural pigments from the Gumelnița area (Figure 9).

The reconstruction of the tell offers an understanding of how the life of the past populations was organized, the housing typology, the arrangement of houses, household inventory, and the tools used for pottery, agriculture, fishing, and hunting.



Figure 9. Hut walls painted in natural pigments (Source:Iuliana Vijulie)

The Gumelnița archaeo-park and the tourist market

Beyond its strictly scientific achievements, the park is a local and even national sightseeing destination. Although the town is on the Bucharest-Timișoara railway line, its location five kilometers north of the E70 highway means access by road is somewhat

inconvenient. Given the two and a half hours needed to drive from Bucharest and the forty-minute drive from Slatina on the E65 highway, the flow of tourists is small. Furthermore, the town has no accommodation facilities.

According to the Boianu Plain's authorities, despite the park's recent establishment, the volume of visitors is around 5,000 yearly with two peaks in September and April due to school visits. The guests have included Romanian visitors (students, archaeologists, ethnologists, anthropologists, geologists, geographers, etc.), transit tourists, and tourists from the United Kingdom, Germany, the Republic of South Africa, and Moldova.

The informative content of the Gumelnița Archaeo-park is suitable for several forms of tourism: educational, scientific, cultural, and event tourism as well as transit tourism. Students, who comprise the largest category of visitors, come primarily from local schools in Olt County or neighboring counties. The first "*scientific*" tourist event occurred in September, 2010, was part of a trip for participants of the International Aerial Archaeology Conference organized by the international Aerial Archaeology Research Group (AARG) and the Institute for Cultural Memory (CIMEC). Tourist events can be held in the context of Gumelnița Day and include book launches and cultural activities of various NGO's.

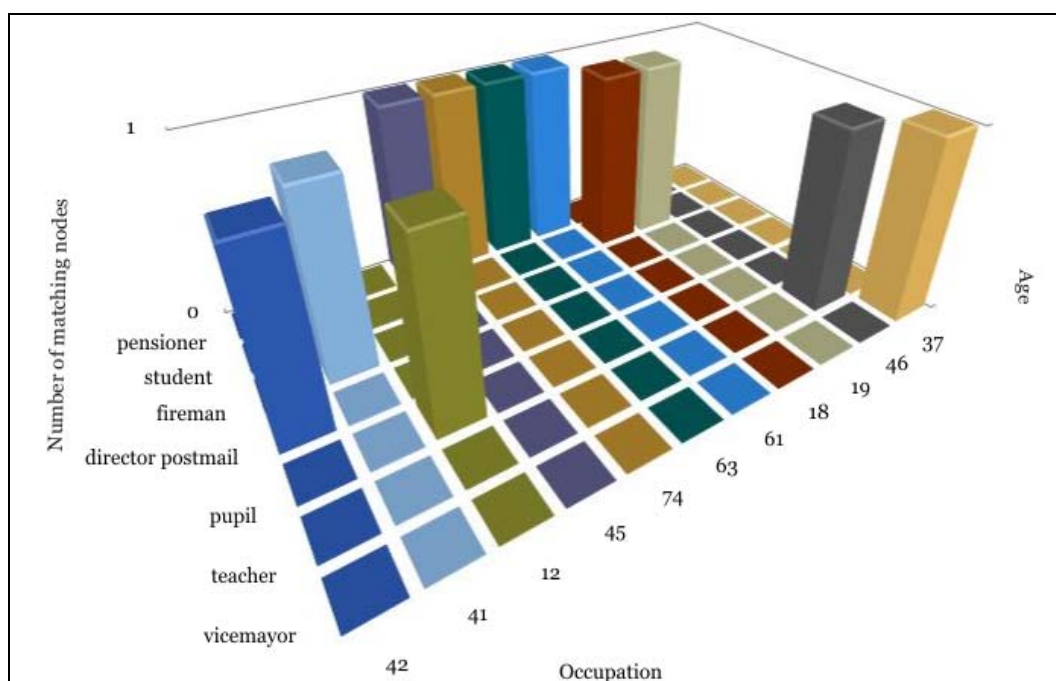


Figure 10. The respondents' profiles: Pearson's correlation between age groups and occupations
(Source: QSR NVivo.10 output)

The administration of the Boianu Plain Museum also proposes using its Neolithic settlement as the starting point of a package tour to Archaeological and historic sites in Olt County, a plan that is quite feasible at this stage. The circuit will run about eighty kilometers and include other area attractions such as the Titulescu Complex Museum, the Museum of Post Chaise in Șerbănești, the Museum of Military Priests in Radomirești, the Firefighters Museum in Drăgănești-Olt, and the Dacian artifacts in the Sprâncenata

To highlight the result of the word frequency query we asked the software to cluster the interviewed persons and obtained two large clusters, one very developed that includes many subgroups (pupils and teacher, the vice-mayor and a pensioner, both women, etc.) and one made up of pensioners (Figure 12).

In order to continue our research and test how strong this image could be for the town, we collected answers about its importance in topical conversations among respondents within friends and families, which showed that while the museum is not generally a subject of conversation within families, it is often discussed outside the home (63%). Furthermore, all of them had visited the museum between one and ten times, while two revealed a genuine community spirit by being involved as volunteers in the museum's endowment activities by collecting donations and donating artifacts.

To build an identity image of the town for use in tourism, our field observations indicated the vital importance of signing and promotion. While obviously the town is small in terms of area, population, and economic output, the museum does not benefit enough from a good strategy of promotion and signing. Thus, the respondents' opinions on organizing at the territorial level, which includes visible means of providing information, are divided: some believe there are enough signs near the museum or on the E70 highway, others suggest augmenting local bus routes and bus stops to provide easier access the tourist landmark, and all of them recognized the lack of promotion through any of the available marketing channels. As the respondents' recommendations indicated, the necessary next steps in building an identity image of the town based on the museum include increasing the flow of tourists, who are generally perceived as being favorably impressed with the contents of the museum and especially by the Gumelnița site; improving the promotion of the museum, and integrating the spatial planning for the museum and the town with the deep involvement of the mayor in the process.

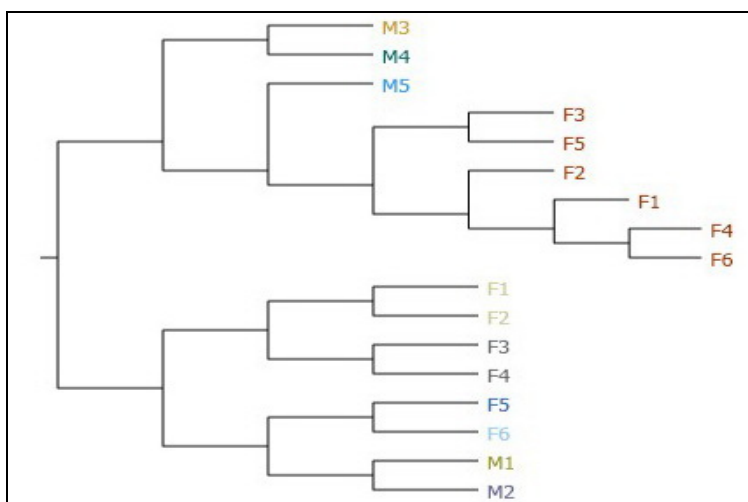


Figure 12. Nodes clustered by word similarity among male and female respondents
(Source: QSR NVivo.10 output)

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the research activities, it can be said that even though the Gumelnița site is unique in the country, the townspeople did not consider it a tourist attraction other than for educational tourism or scientific interest.

Its position, somewhat distant from popular tourist destinations, and its small effect size compared to an amusement park like Disney Land make it unknown on the tourist market. In its current state and form as part of the Boianu Plain Museum, it can contribute together with the entire museum to establishing the town's tourist identity image, but as most residents largely recognize, it needs a serious marketing effort and smart promotion.

In an era in which information spreads so quickly and can be easily accessed with a computer, museums are finding it increasingly more difficult to attract visitors and are therefore obliged to offer more than just a few exhibits in a window. Under these circumstances, the impact produced among potential tourists who are interested in the visual (aesthetic) aspects of reconstructing the past and see a restored Archaeological landscape could help, but the museum needs more than a website, including the possible establishment of a Gumelnița tell network.

Capitalizing on a country's or region's Archaeological heritage is a difficult task. However, despite the time and financial commitment necessary, reconstructions of historic landscapes such as the Drăgănești-Olt tell will be the future method for museums to present the past.

Until now, this Neolithic settlement has been appreciated and promoted individually on a small scale but could easily be included in a medium-scale museum circuit. The proposed objective of the Boianu Plain Museum is to use its Neolithic settlement as the starting point of a package tour to Archaeological sites and historic sites in Olt County, which is a feasible plan at this stage. The proposed circuit will run about eighty kilometers and include other area attractions such as the Titulescu Complex Museum, the Museum of Post Chaise in Șerbănești, the Museum of Military Priests in Radomirești, the Firefighters Museum in Drăgănești-Olt, and the Dacian artifacts in the Sprâncenata museum. The future inclusion of the Romanian "Călușului" Museum and the Ethno-folk revival complex in Stoicănești that the local authorities propose, plus accommodation facilities development will further support the increase of tourist interest in this area.

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