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### DIVERSIFICATION OF NON-AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN SIMIAN COMMUNE, MEHEDINTI COUNTY

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**Abstract:** This paper addresses the issue of diversifying non-agricultural activities in rural areas, by capitalizing on local heritage, using the Șimian commune, Mehedinți county as a case study. In the context of current socio-economic transformations and the limitations of the traditional agricultural model, economic diversification becomes a strategic direction for ensuring the sustainable development of rural communities. The research methodology combines the theoretical analysis of the specialized literature with an applied component. In this framework, a project for the restoration and tourism capitalization of a traditional household in the village of Cerneți is analyzed. The results highlight the existence of a significant development potential in the Șimian commune, determined by the natural resources (Danube River), the cultural-historical heritage and the specific vernacular architecture. The proposed project demonstrates the economic viability of transforming traditional households into rural tourism structures, generating multiplier effects at the local level, such as job creation, stimulating the local economy and preserving the heritage. In conclusion, capitalizing on rural heritage represents an effective solution for diversifying the rural economy and increasing the resilience of local communities in the face of contemporary challenges.

#### • Introduction

The Romanian countryside concentrates identity, tradition and cultural heritage, but faces economic, demographic and social pressures.

In Șimian commune, agriculture remains important, but this traditional model must be completed by developing the service sector, rural tourism and capitalizing on the local heritage.

Non-agricultural diversification becomes a strategic direction for sustainable development and reducing dependence on agricultural incomes.

#### • Material and method

The studies undertaken for this work consisted of theoretical work, through the analysis of the specialized literature, archives, local documents and institutional sources relevant to rural development. It also had an applicative component, based on a case study on a project proposal for the redevelopment of a traditional household.

Methods: quantitative and qualitative data processing, socio-economic analysis and estimation of return on investment.

#### • Results and discussions

##### ➤ Physical-geographical characteristics

The commune of Șimian is strategically positioned in the south-west of Romania, on the left bank of the Danube, in the vicinity of the municipality of Drobeta-Turnu Severin.

Natural resources: Danube meadow, fertile soils, moderate temperate-continental climate with sub-Mediterranean influences.

Local economy: agriculture, trade, transport and services in expansion; potential for rural, cultural and ecological tourism.

##### ➤ Demography

At the level of the commune, there is a positive demographic trend: from 8,244 inhabitants (1992) → to 10,892 inhabitants (2024).

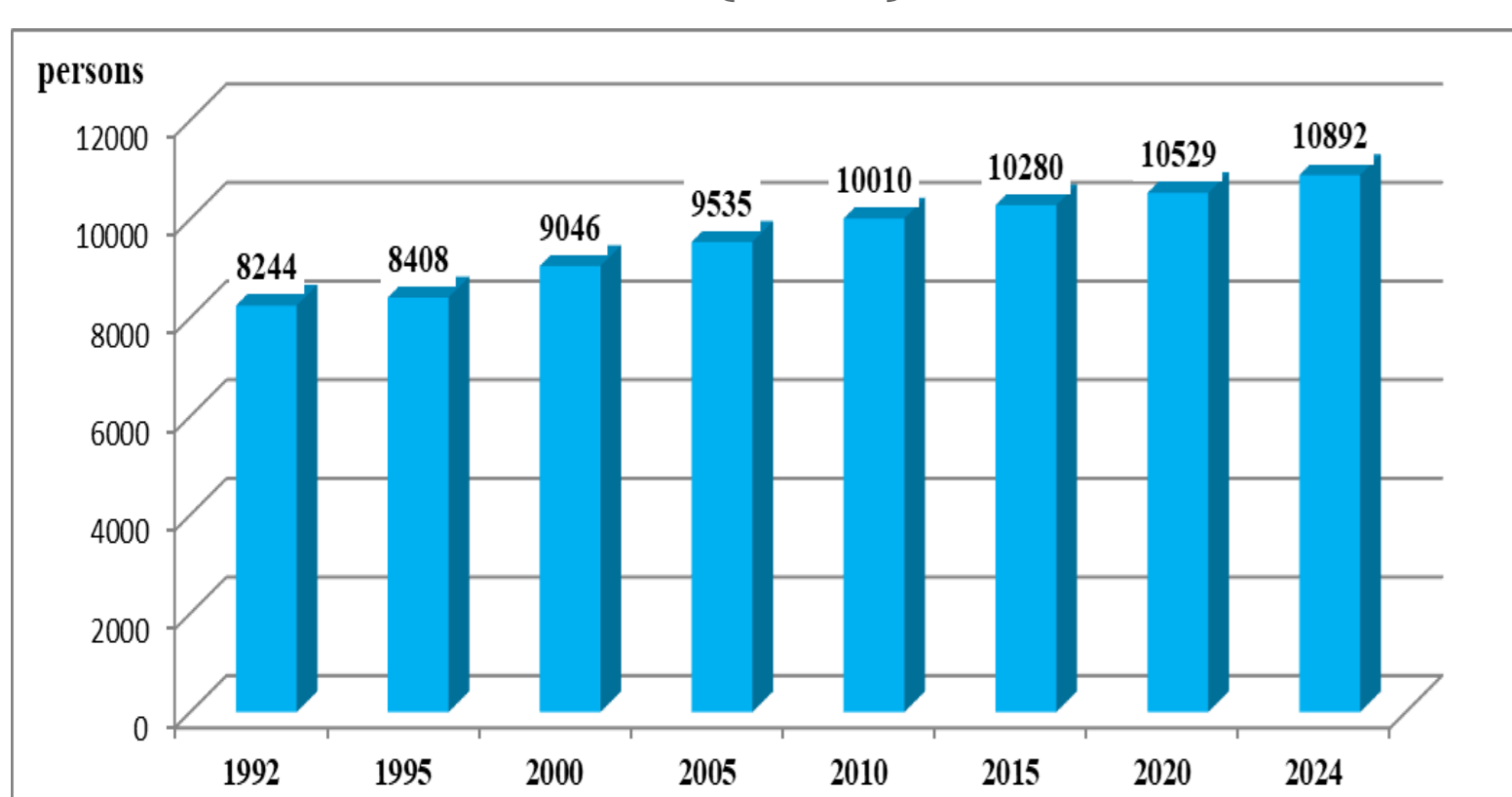


Figure 1 Evolution of the population of Simian commune

The commune combines natural resources, historical objectives and vernacular architecture, which supports the development of authentic tourist products. Thus, it can function as a connecting space between the rural economy, Danube tourism and the cultural offer of the Mehedinți area.

##### ➤ Valuable tourism resources

##### Historical and cultural heritage:

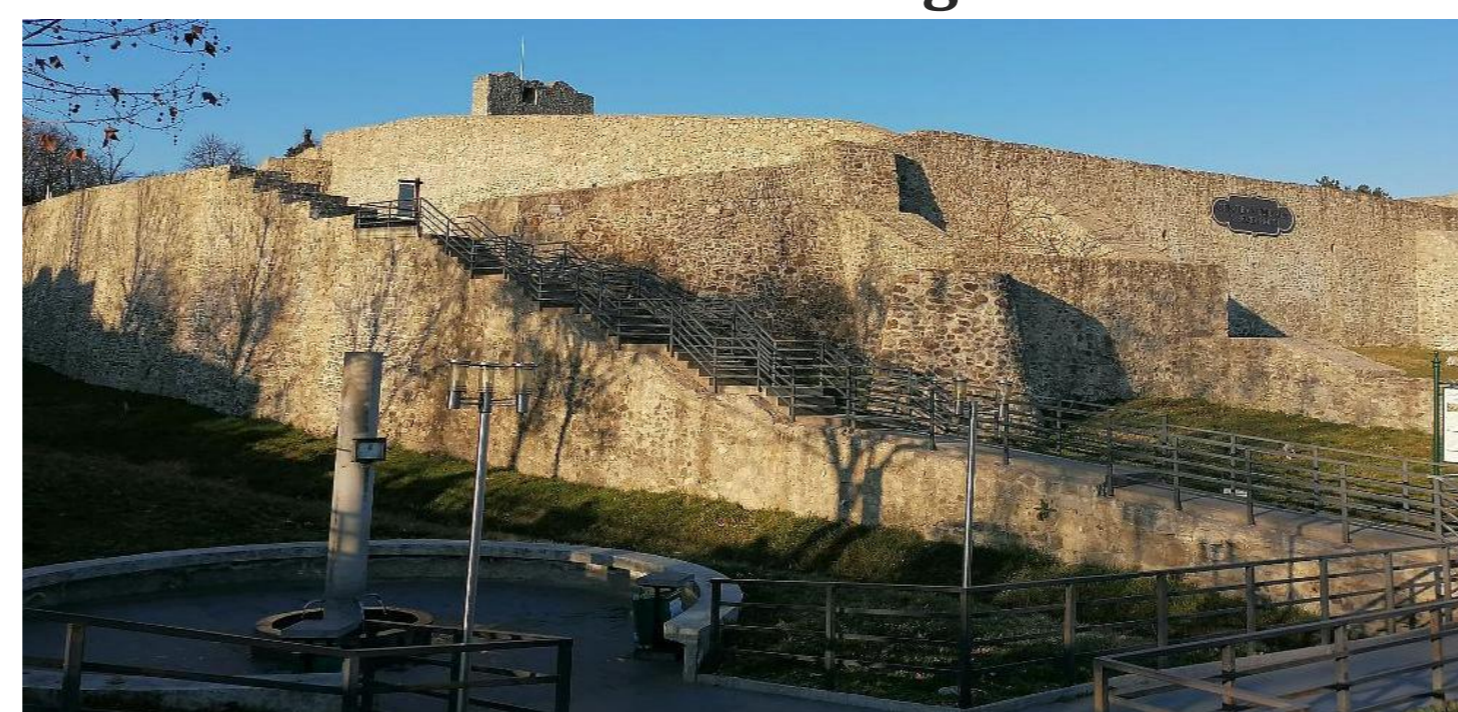


Figure 2 The Medieval Fortress of Severinului

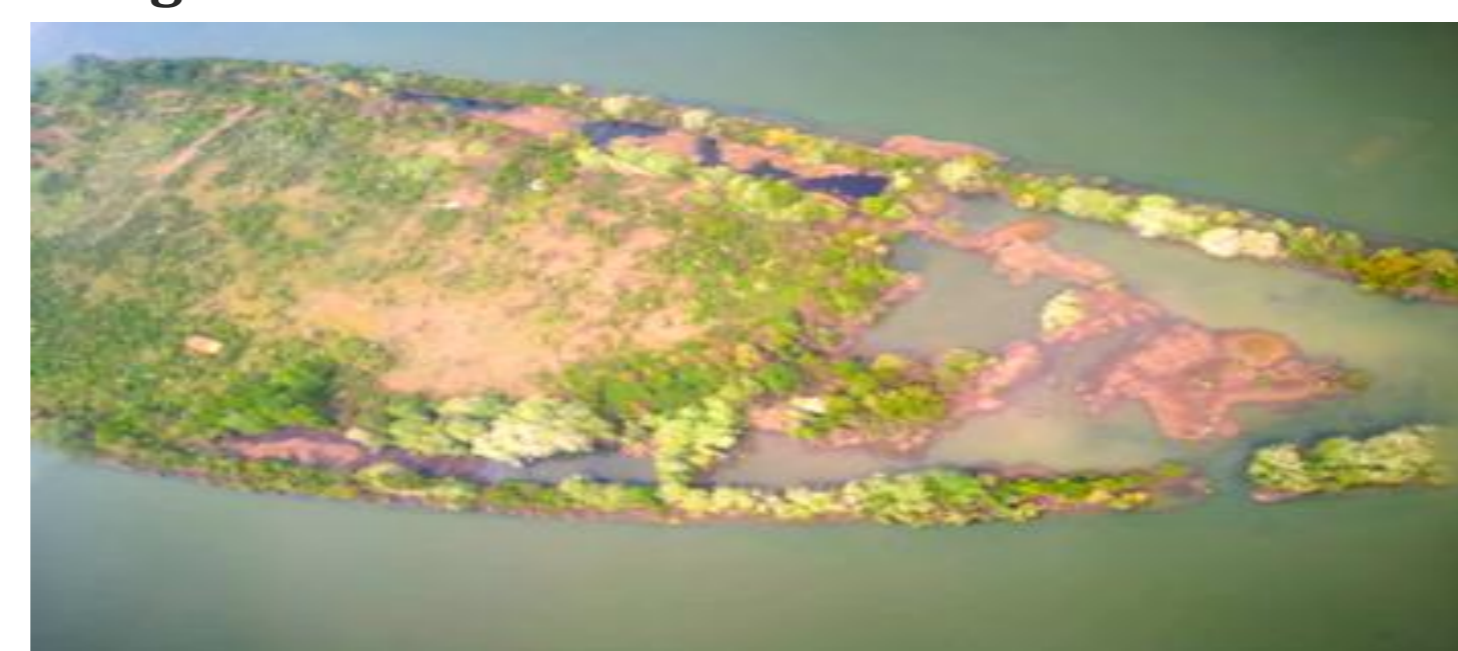


Figure 3 Simian Island/Ada Kaleh



Figure 4 Cerneti Monastery

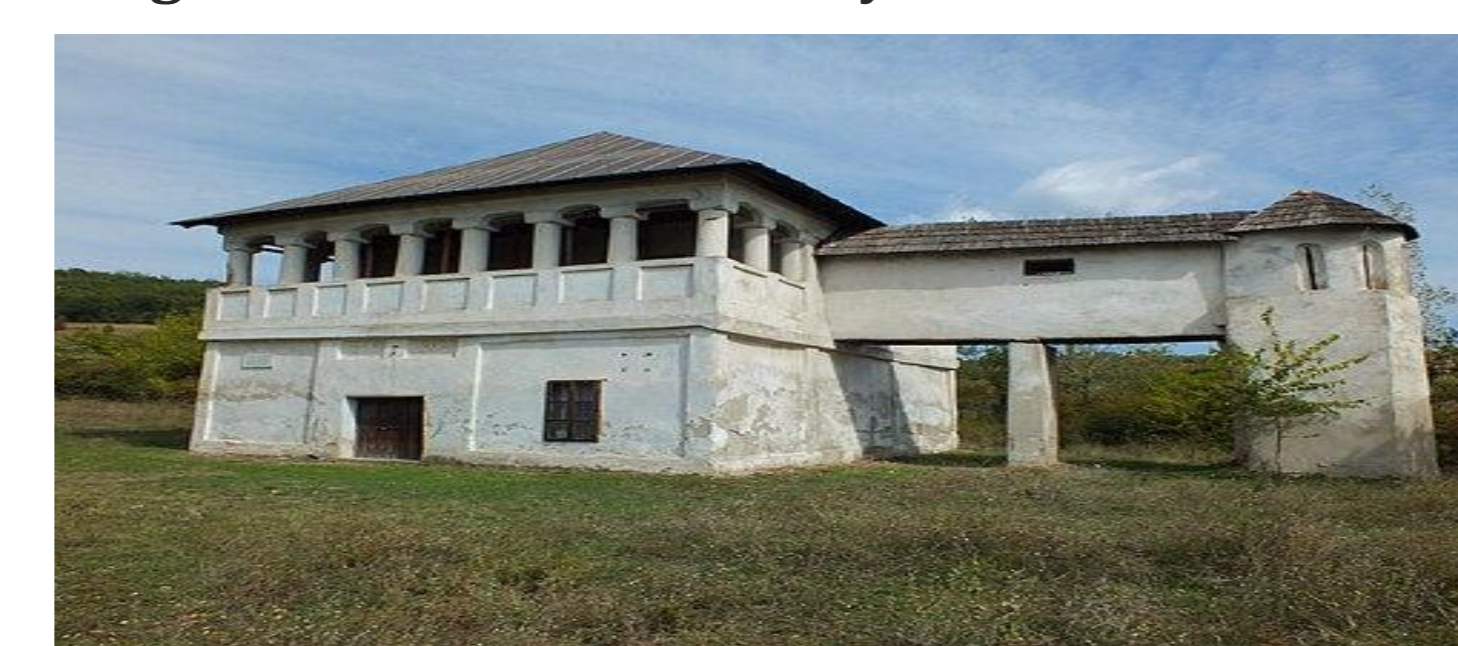


Figure 5 Cula Tudor Vladimirescu.

Natural heritage: The Danube, the meadow, the agricultural landscapes and the Opanesti site, with potential for leisure, fishing, ecotourism and birdwatching.

Intangible heritage: local gastronomy, crafts, Mehedinți traditions and farm stay experiences.

##### ➤ Case study: traditional household

Location: Cerneti village, Simian commune; family property with local architectural and cultural specificity.

Objective: restoration, redevelopment and transformation into a rural tourism structure with 9 rooms and about 20 accommodation places.

Interventions: restoration of the foundation, roof, installations, façade, floors, endowment of rooms, bathrooms and kitchen.

Total budget: 28,815 EUR.

##### ➤ Proposed activities

Accommodation in a traditional household and meal services with local products.

Thematic programs: cart rides, tastings, agricultural activities, cultural and ecotourism trails.

Online promotion and integration into local tourist circuits, in partnership with the Ada Kaleh community and LAG.

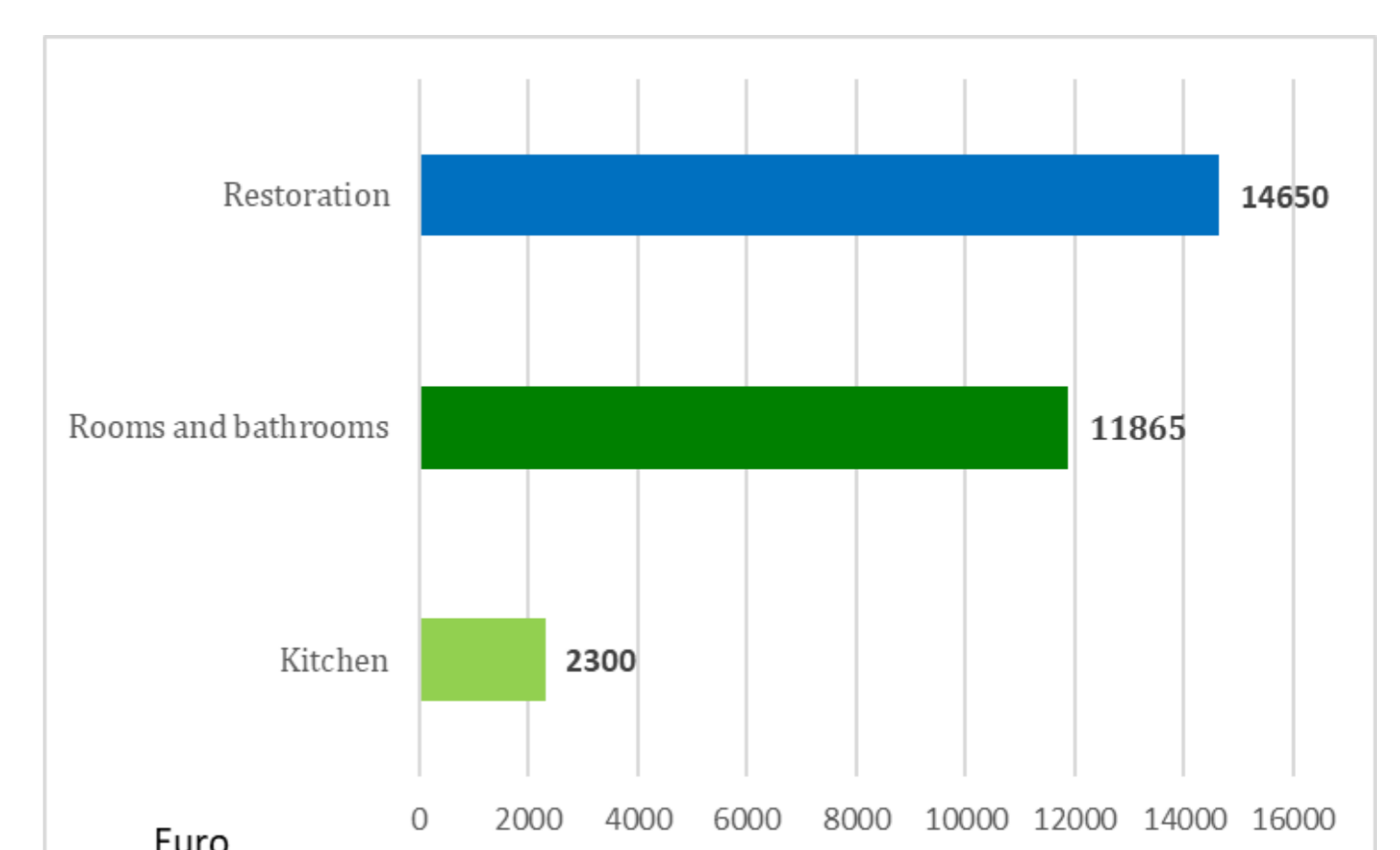


Figure 5 Structure of the proposed investment (28.815 Euro)

The total proposed investment is included in the DR-36 LEADER non-reimbursable support for non-agricultural activities.

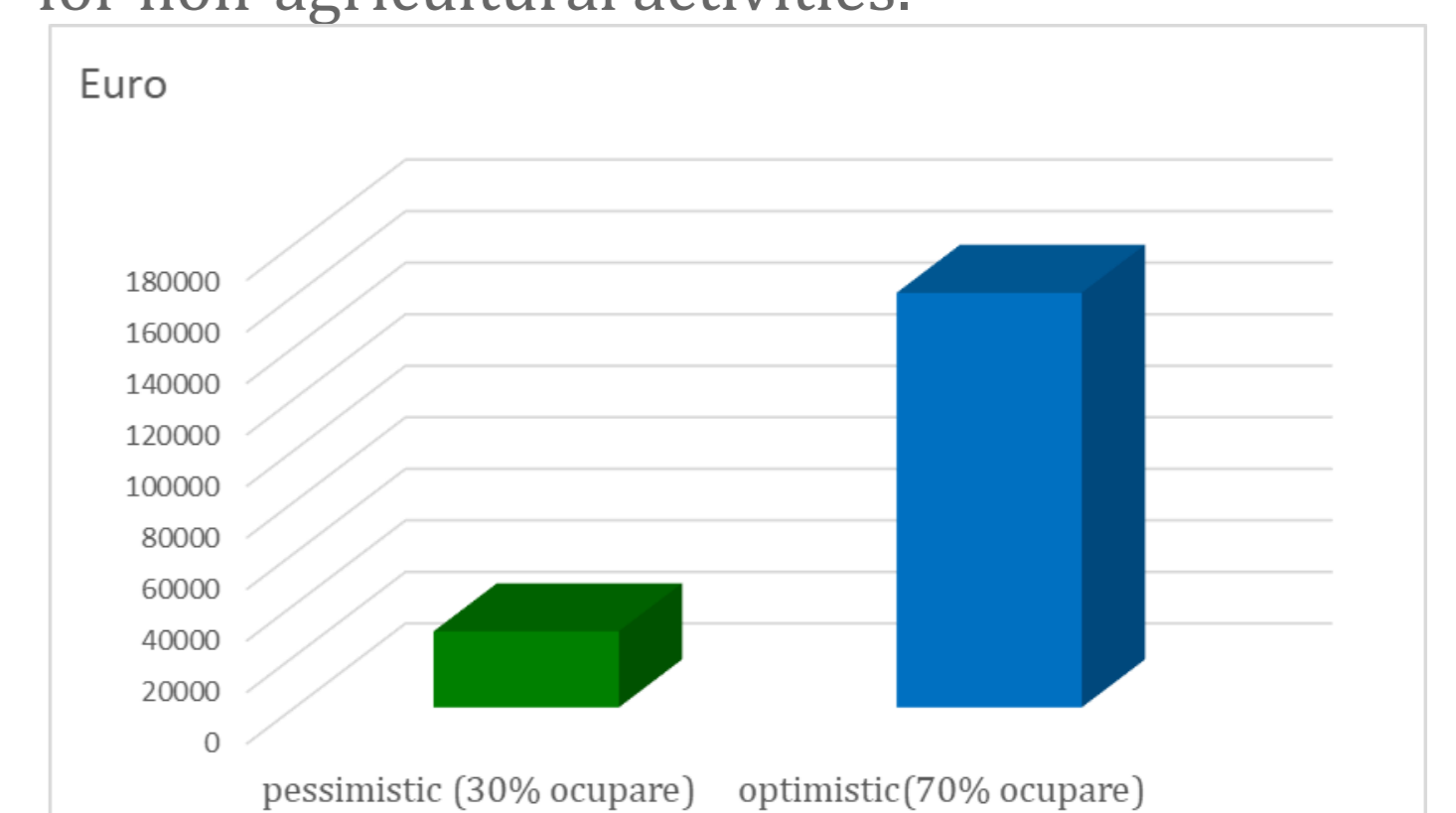


Figure 6 Estimated annual income from accommodation

Investment recovery period: 0.98 years (pessimistic) and 0.20 years (optimistic).

#### • Conclusions

The restoration of traditional households is a viable solution for preserving heritage and diversifying the rural economy.

The project can generate multiplier effects: at least 2 permanent jobs, 2 seasonal, demand for local products and related services.

The initiative contributes to reducing migration, revitalizing traditions, increasing tourist attractiveness and strengthening local identity.

The model can be replicated in other rural communities with similar built heritage and natural resources.