

## P PROMOTING BUCOVINA AS A RURAL DESTINATION VIA FACEBOOK. AN EMPIRICAL IDENTIFICATION OF SUPPORTING ONLINE MARKETING INITIATIVES

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### Abstract

*The villages of Bucovina possess a particular charm, mainly through the orthodox churches with heritage value, the deep spiritual character sent both to local communities and tourists, the architecture based on wood handicraft, the manner in which traditions, local customs and crafts are still preserved, the multicultural character, and, not least, the outstanding hospitality of the hosts.*

*Continuous improvement of performance in rural tourism refers to an integrated approach of specific elements in the destination Bucovina, online marketing becoming more present in everyday practice of small entrepreneurs in local tourism. From an empirical point of view, promotion of rural tourism via Facebook and YouTube represents an easy initiative accessible to the general public, which has the ability to create the foundation of a competitive tourism.*

**Key words:** Rural tourism, destination Bucovina, Social media, Facebook, Promotion of Tourism Services.

**JEL Classification:** P25, Z32, L83.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism and agritourism phenomenon is not of recent date: the need to discharge of daily needs and the desire for leisure and vacations in the “countryside” were old concerns, especially for the lovers of the nature. The novelty relies in how they developed this form of tourism, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in recent decades, and in the fact that it tends to become a mass phenomenon. According to Fernard Boden (2009), “in the next 20 years, tourism will be a key component of national economies, tourism and rural tourism becoming the future”.

The fundamental principle of rural tourism is that specific activities must be developed by people from the “countryside”, whether farmers or not. This fact is obvious since the socio-economic benefits of rural tourism, that implies sustainable goods, mainly refer to the local community.

Therefore, rural tourism involves any way of exploiting the rural space, and needs to fulfil a number of limitations (Blanca, 2004, p 52), such as:

- To be a tourism niche, opposed to mass tourism (sea-side, cultural, urban tourism etc);
- To build sustainable natural and cultural heritage;
- To involve the active participation of the local population;
- To encourage and maintain traditional activities of the region.

**Table 1 - Concepts of rural tourism**

Organizations/Specialists in rural tourism	Definitions for rural tourism
Rural houses organisation of France (1955)	“Entire touristic capitalization of rural world, that has as protagonist and recipient of its profile its own rural society”
Henri Grolleau (1987)	“A concept that includes organized tourist activity that is led by the local population, based on a closed connection with the natural and human surrounding environment.”
CREST Resource Center (2008)	“Touristic activity carried out in rural areas, consisting of a relaxing integrated offer, facing a demand whose motivation is the contact with the local surrounding environment and the networking with local society”.
WTO	“Recreational activities, accommodation and related services offer, of rural areas, addressed, in general, to the population of the cities that is looking for holidays linked to nature and to the local population”.

Contemporary forms of tourism development led to an increasing demand of the interest shown by city dwellers to rural areas, people focusing travel aspirations towards traditions, folklore and purity of nature. This fact has encouraged a specific tendency for rural areas visitors, being driven by a set of incentives that constitute a psychological process that is decisive for human beings.

The return to nature is the first and most important touristic leitmotiv for many categories of age, gender, profession or social status. This effect, induced by the necessity of relaxation, healthcare, increase of the physical

and spiritual comfort, demonstrates that the modern man cannot separate from the natural lifestyle, and their contact with rusticity has positive effects and maintains the human equilibrium.

At the same time, through the initiation into the secrets of craftsmanship and traditional occupations with local characteristic, tourists can revitalize a series of latent skills, stimulating, at the same time, their creativity, inhibited by the monotony and the routine of daily activities. Last, but not least, the relaxation, the curative fresh air, the fresh food and fruit consumption and / or the encouragement of direct forms of socializing are very motivational aspects for those who want to fully benefit from the unconventional prophylactic treatments, so common in the countryside world. With the support of these memorable “rustic therapies”, the touristic villages can compete or, on the contrary, increase the value of the curative regimes offered by the spas.

In the rural tourism sphere, there cannot be absent the motivations related to sport, hunting, sport fishing, climbing and walking, which obtain, in this manner, an authentic accent, making place for playful-recreational initiatives, imagination and individual talents.

Simultaneously with the increase of the importance of rural tourism, there is outlined a series of difficulties related to the intensification of the competition in the field, the minimization of traditional markets and the diversification of the tourism offers from the sphere of sustainable tourism, which imposes the necessity of differentiation, of using the methods and techniques of marketing, as a saving solution meant to support the diminution of the negative impact on the environment.

The tourism marketing in the rural sphere represents the systematic, coordinated and concentrated orientation of the stakeholders’ policy from tourism to the optimal satisfaction of the needs of certain groups determined by the consumers and, in strict economic terms, obtaining a certain profit.

In this case, the promotion - seen as a pillar of the marketing mix - consists of an ensemble of communication approaches which aim at the permanent transmission, in various ways, of some messages intended to inform, both the potential clients, and the tourism operators, on the characteristics of rural touristic services offered for commercialization, in order to consolidate a positive image and to cultivate a favourable attitude which supports the act of sale (Nedelea, 2010).

Advertising, publications (catalogues, posters, maps and routes, guidebooks and services guides or flysheets), public relations, fairs and Internet constitute the main instruments of communication with the market. But, from rather financial reasons than strategic-tactical, the rural tourism agents prefer to manifest themselves, especially via online media.

With the achievement of a website of rural tourism destinations, a large range of information about: tourist accommodation establishments and the accommodation capacity, eateries, amusement possibilities, routes and touristic resources, general interest information (etymology, history, physical-geographical conditions, accessibility, social-economic profile, perennial events) can be made available for tourists.

Because the characteristics of the touristic product cannot be analysed directly, before the purchase, the accommodation establishments, at least, are dependent on a series of communicational vectors which intermediate the supply and demand relationship, helping the possible consumers to make a decision regarding the purchase of touristic services.

According to Buhalis (1997, p.85), “the greater the degree of perceived risk in a pre-purchase context, the larger the consumer tendency to seek information about the product is”. The need for information, especially in the virtual space, is justified by the characteristics of the touristic product and by the expectations that the future tourists have, related to the future touristic destination.

Monitoring through Social Media is the most in vogue form of market research, and the conversations from the web 2.0. sphere offer an incredibly explicit perspective on the tourism consumption. This can allow a more profound understanding of the travel motivations, attitudes and possible frustrations towards a rural touristic area or in comparison with the services offered/ made. Many times what you “found out” can be used in order to improve the rural product and can be a rapid and efficient modality of feedback, but which implies a systematic, laborious approach.

It is essential to listen to what people say about the touristic product, to speak with the possible clients and to ask the former clients to disseminate information on social networks, Facebook and Twitter.

The social networks “help you connect and communicate with people you know”. ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)). The importance of Facebook for tourism is represented by the incommensurable opportunity of instant connection with friends from all over the world.

Facebook signifies, more than any other online operation, the wave of changes brought by Social Media. When we say that we stepped in the Facebook era, we refer, thus, to a whole set of socializing and collaboration instruments.

The most used tactics of efficiently using Facebook in the touristic marketing are:

- A short, to the point language will be used, in order to pinpoint. Posting short messages, those which have less than 80 characters obtain a number of views by 27% greater than in the case of the longer ones;
- Choosing the hours of posting according to the category of public (it was found that the number of viewers, and implicitly the views increases by about 25% after the office hours);

A Facebook page from the tourism field will have a bigger audience on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, when “friends” make plans for the weekend. Also, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays are proper days to

promote a restaurant, cultural event or an action from the rural environment (<http://www.blog-seo.ro/2013/12/14/cand-anume-e-mai-bine-sa-postezi-pe-facebook/>).

## II. RURAL TOURISM IN BUCOVINA AND ONLINE MARKETING

There are few places in Romania where culture, tradition and religion reunite. History, culture and customs, natural beauty, rich cultural communities and friendly people are part of the mosaic of the region situated in the North of Romania. Bucovina is the perfect example which engrafts on this affirmation. Although it is included probably among the first national areas from the point of view of the touristic potential, Bucovina was for a period of time a place where the absolutely necessary investments were not made in order to raise the economic level. Although it was realized the importance of this beneficial side for the development of the region (many local businessmen and common people setting their minds upon the touristic activities), from the point of view of the increase of the living standards, the future development of the region and the integration of people in the class of small businessmen, few things were done.

Bucovina is among the regions of the country with a non-negligible touristic potential, being one of the places where tourism can return to the origins. Building on this state of affairs, it is worth mentioning a series of aspects which favour the inclusion of Bucovina in the rural touristic destinations, like: keeping and emphasizing the traditions and customs specific to different periods of the year and related to the daily life of the people, the persistence among people of craftsmanship – viewed as a way of life, elements of local gastronomy specific to the multicultural zones or a series of cultural - artistic manifestations. To all these elements of rural culture and civilization, there are added the elements which belong to the natural heritage which, also in this case, lead to the same purpose of increasing the value of the touristic destination, through many modalities of spending the free time.

This part of Romania is also characterized by the lack of major pollution, noise and stress factors, mixing the air quality with the offered degree of comfort. The air purity and the promotion of ecological food products are other advantages for the Bucovina zone. The tourism supply is diversified, the destination being chosen both by the tourist who wants an active holiday, and also by those who have as motivation the recovery and relaxation.

The rural tourism of Bucovina became visible in the virtual space, mainly, because of the campaigns of promoting the villages and the cultural - artistic events with folkloric purpose from the region, where traditions and customs, which still excite the interest of tourist, are kept. The classical campaigns, also present in Social Media, like Easter in Bucovina, Christmas in Bucovina, the Route of the Painted Easter Eggs, “Hora” Traditional Dance of Bucovina, attract each year, more and more tourists through the Internet and the social networks.

Also, the booking sites recommend a large range of accommodation options in Bucovina, so that tourists have the possibility to room in rural or agritourism boarding houses, after virtually seeing the establishments.

How can a rural tourism site or a Facebook account convince viewers to visit / access it again? The reasons that can determine tourists to return are precision, clarity, quality and the multitude of available information. In case in which viewers have the possibility to subscribe to a newsletter or to join a Facebook group, the chances to periodically refer to the information or to recommend to friends theoretically increase exponentially, but, this is not a common practice on the sites that promote rural tourism. Other means of increasing the views on Internet could be the national tourism portals (for example *turismrural.ro* or *turisminfo.ro*), which attract thousands of viewers through supplies, and package tours at offer prices.

On the other hand, Facebook tends to become the most fervent vector of the touristic distribution of the North region of our country, known as Bucovina. Among the touristic villages that enjoy an intense promotion on Facebook, more representative, with well-administered pages, that offer different touristic information and which have a considerable number of viewers, there are: Vama, Sucevița, Marginea, Putna, Pojorîta and Mălini. A special statute has the touristic village Voroneț, included from an administrative point of view in the town of Gura Humorului.

**Vama** enjoys promotion on Facebook because, on the page of the locality, useful information is constantly posted, both for the sons of the village, and for the (potential) tourists. From this point of view, the Facebook account of the locality is accessed enough, having 1882 likes in June 2016. It is offered information related to its geographical location, customs, traditions, local events etc, but, for more information, there is a link to the official site of the commune. The attractiveness of this page is due also to the fact that the touristic profile of the commune is well illustrated, images from the area with the most representative touristic attractions are posted, and also the opinions of those who are from the locality or who have visited, at least once, this beautiful destination at the root of Rarău mountain.



**Figure 1. The Facebook page of Vama**

Source: [www.facebook.com/pages/ComunaVama-Inima-Bucovinei](http://www.facebook.com/pages/ComunaVama-Inima-Bucovinei)

The touristic magazine of the commune of Vama (Figure 2) helps those who visit Bucovina, offering information about the commune concerning: local traditions and customs, Romanian traditional clothing, local gastronomy, accommodation establishments, local and neighbourhood sightseeing and journeys.

The main local attractions of the commune: the Workshop for decorating eggs and the International Museum of Decorated Eggs - Letiția Orsivski, The Sculpture Workshop of Dragoș Olaş, St. Nicholas Wood Church, Nicorescu Museum House, the Ethnography Museum, Voda’s Pillar and the House of the Potter are explicitly presented on the Facebook account.



**Figure 2. Tourism Magazine of Vama**

Source: [www.facebook.com/pages/ComunaVama-Inima-Bucovinei](http://www.facebook.com/pages/ComunaVama-Inima-Bucovinei)



**Figure 3. Pictures of the Boletus Festival**

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Comuna-Vama-Inima-Bucovinei>

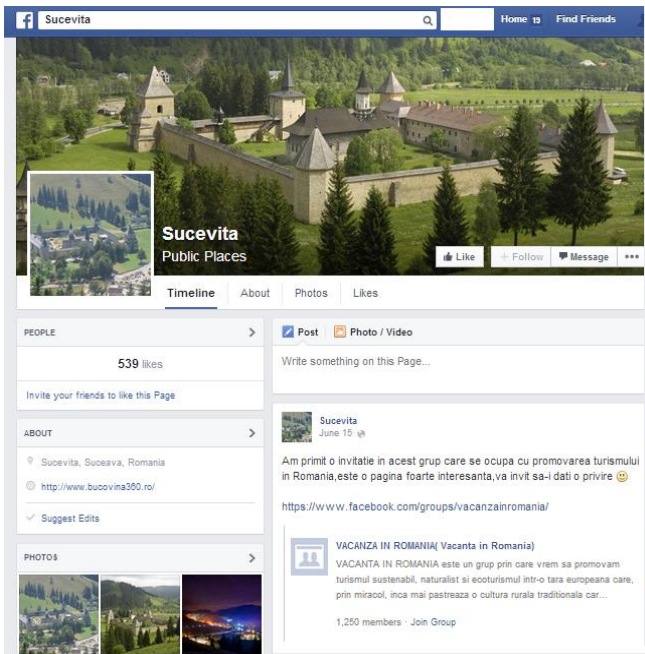
Aurelia Badale, the president of the Tourism Association of Vama – Bucovina, appreciated, within an edition of the Boletus Festival that, “it is a balance of the ended season and the launch of the offers for the winter season or even for summer ” <the next season>. The start-up of such an initiative aimed at the sustainable capitalization of the local heritage, namely, the berries and mushrooms on the local plan and not to export them at low prices (Figure 3).

The promotion of the local events is backed also by the web type network of the travel agents from the locality. The most important sponsors and locations for the points on Facebook being the boarding houses Bucovina Lodge, Mugur de Fluier, Lidana, Casa Călin, Casa Aurora, Casa Bianca, Casa Lucreția, Casa Ott and Pensiunea Ștefan.

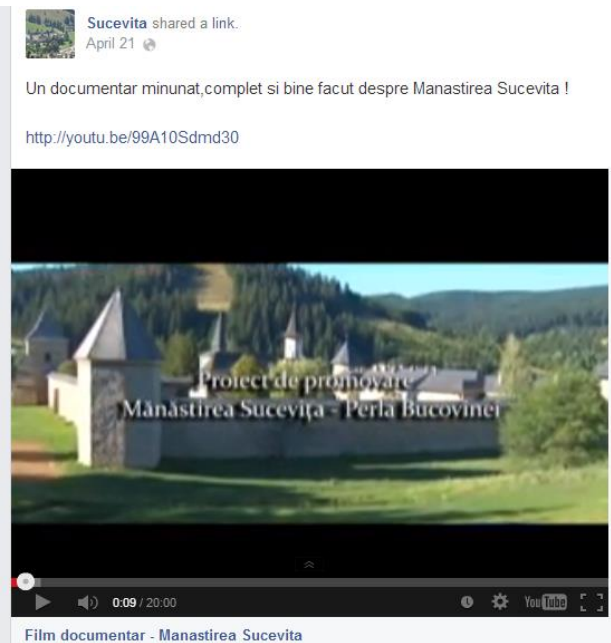
Through the local Facebook accounts, it is thoroughly described the local gastronomy based on boletus / mushrooms and promoted online within the festival: boletus appetizer, honey mushrooms appetizer, eggplant and mushroom appetizer, honey mushroom, boletus and orange agaric salad, and also boletus thick soup, honey mushroom cabbage rolls, boletus white sauce stew, homemade honey mushroom roll, boletus pancakes, platter with good food and boletus salad, blueberry cakes, cakes in form of boletus etc.

For many, Sucevița is a bunch of memories ... for others, an amazing place to spend the holiday. Briefly, Sucevița is a piece of heaven, with mountains, fresh air and plenty of green grass, a village of hardworking people, beautiful girls, and especially full of traditions, which are worth being known for their true value“ (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sucevita/>).

Unlike Vama, the Facebook page of the commune of Sucevița is not sufficiently well administered, yet, the commune enjoys promotion on Facebook, mainly, due to the images with elements of attractiveness in the natural environment posted (Figure 4), and, subsidiarily, due to a documentary of presentation of Sucevița Monastery (Figure 5), monastery recently registered on the list of the world cultural heritage UNESCO.



**Figure 4 - Facebook page of Sucevița**  
Source: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sucevița/>



**Figure 5 - Documentary film presenting Sucevița Monastery**

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sucevița/>

The commune of Putna has a complete and well administered Facebook page, with many recent posts. Alongside the presentation of the locality of Putna and a series of images that emphasize the attractiveness of the natural environment from the North of the Obcina Bucovina, on the Facebook page of the commune of Putna there are also posted images from the days of the commune and the Patron of Putna Monastery (named “Jerusalem of the Romnian nation” by Mihai Eminescu). Also, images and films with customs and traditions of the place are posted (Figure 7), and a documentary about Putna’s area (Figure 6).



**Figure 6 – “Hoinar” in Bucovina – comuna Putna” Documentary**  
Source: <https://www.facebook.com/putnapeoples>



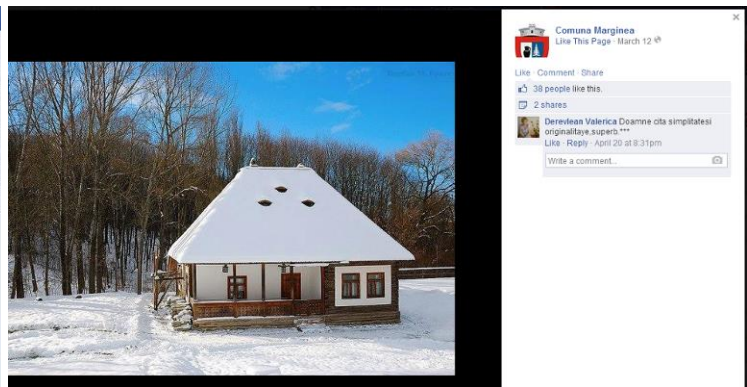
**Figure 7 - Commercials promoting the traditions of Putna**

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/putnapeoples>

The commune of Marginea is presented on the social network, having, in June 2016, 2029 likes (<https://www.facebook.com/ComunaMarginea>). On the Facebook page, there are posted images from the area regarding customs and traditions of the place, craftsmanships, traditional houses (Figure 9), traditional clothing (Figure 8), different local events and a series of posts of the locals and tourists who visited at least this commune.



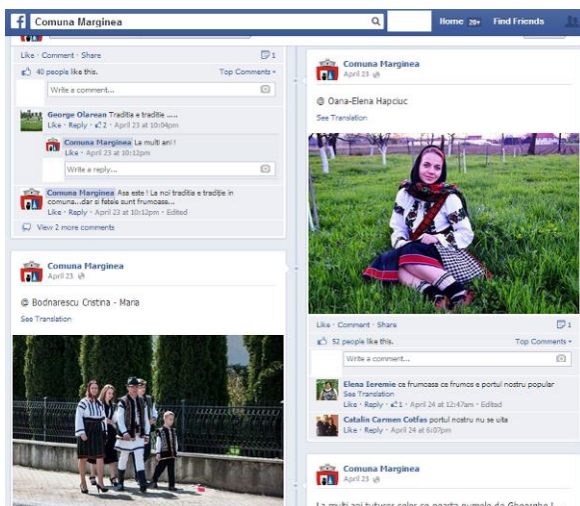
**Figure 8. Facebook page of Marginea**  
 Source: <https://ro-ro.facebook.com/ComunaMarginea>



**Figure 9. Traditional house in Marginea**  
 Source: <https://ro-ro.facebook.com/ComunaMarginea>

Also, the marketing strategy of the commune is focused on the promotion via online Media (Facebook) of some spots / descriptive / presentation films of the touristic resources and of different zones with a social - economic and civic profile from Marginea. Also on the Facebook page of Marginea commune, tourists can view a short documentary about the craftsmanship that brought the fame of the locality (Figure 10).

The center of black ceramics Magopăț is situated in the center of the locality and represents one of the few traditional craftsmanship associations that still produce black ceramics, which became well known throughout Romania. The Marginea ceramics belongs to the Horodiștea - Florești culture, the most flourishing period of Geto - Dacian ceramics.



**Figure 9. Marginea traditional clothing**  
 Source: <https://ro-ro.facebook.com/ComunaMarginea>



**Figure 10. Marginea black pottery**  
 Source: <https://ro-ro.facebook.com/ComunaMarginea>

The most important elements of a Facebook page, whether it is of a locality or of a boarding house, are: the message that it transmits (Figures 11, 12), the design of the page, the updating rate and the consistency of the posted information. The page of a touristic accommodation establishment must have, at the same time, both the information and relaxation role. When creating the Facebook page of a touristic accommodation establishment, it must reflect all of its important aspects and, at the same time, match the Facebook style.

The Facebook page of the commune of Marginea tries to place in the collective touristic mentality the idea that Bucovina, in general, and Marginea, particularly, are truly unique in this part of Europe. In this respect, we can refer to a quotation of Nicolae Iorga who suggests that "...in the entire space inhabited by the Romanians, there is no other relatively small land area like this, which comprises such beauty and such wealth in memories...". Consequently, the special rustic purposes and the intrinsic value of the region make Marginea/Bucovina a "must see" destination of Romania.

The catering of the tourists from Bucovina is frequently associated with the accommodation, the tourist being served with traditional food in boarding houses or houses transformed in guest houses, within a very pleasant, comforting environment. Thus, on Facebook pages, the potential clients can admire, in images, the traditional food that will be served on the table if they visit that establishment. At the same time, they can analyse the online information together with the opinions of the former visitors.



**Figure 11. Welcome message of Casa Baci Guesthouse (Fundu Moldovei)**

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/CasaBaciu>



**Figure 12. Welcome message of Vila Jucan Guesthouse (Mănăstirea Humorului)**

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/pensiunea.vilajucan>

The accommodation establishments offer tourists a series of amusement activities, and absolutely necessary services for the development in good conditions of the tourism action, services offered according to the level of classification, of implication of the hosts and the desideratum of the tourists. Through Facebook, information and images with the different manners of spending free time will be made available: bonfire, grill, traditional parties with the participation of folk music artists from the area, artistic groups; organizing feasts, daily activities at the farm / farmhouse (milking, reaping, gathering and transporting hay); assistance at the traditional preparation of cold cuts, salami and sausages and at butchering the pig - one can buy traditional products of pork meat prepared by the host; participation in the activities of wood handicraft; preparing the local specialties; cart or horse-drawn sleigh trips; horse riding - for beginners; fishing, hunting in collaboration with the hunters associations; extreme sports (river rafting, paragliding); local visits at folk artisans, one day trip at the tourist attractions in the area etc.

For the increase of the number of tourists, especially, due to the Facebook promotion, are responsible also the amusement and treatment establishments from the zone of Bucovina, like Forest Ecvestru Stud from Sucevița, Escalada Park of Adventures (Ariniș, Gura Humorului) - amusement and Cacica Salt Mine - amusement and treatment.

Given the big number of users, Facebook will become in the future a decisive informational vector in the recommendation and booking of rooms in the rural and agritourist boarding houses. But, in order to be also used as a booking site, the Facebook page will have to ensure the ability of the users to check the availability of the rooms, the placement and photos of the touristic unit.

The boarding houses from the villages near the monasteries enjoy a greater number of tourists around the Easter Holiday, while those from the mountain villages and possibly which have ski slopes (Cârlibaba village) or are near the ski slopes have an upward number of tourists in the winter season.

### III. CONCLUSION

For the development of tourism in Bucovina via Social Media, a series of measures are necessary, which, finally, bring incomes, both for the local population, and for the economy of the region, as a whole. These directions are necessary in order to inform the tourists who want to spend their free time as pleasant as possible.

The necessity of the development of tourism in Bucovina, especially through Social Media space, results from the following aspects:

- Tourism in Bucovina is one of the few sectors of the economy with real perspectives of development in the long run;
- Capitalization and exploitation of touristic resources, accompanied by an efficient promotion on the market must be viewed as a source of increasing returns and development of rural areas;
- Tourism represents a somehow certain market of labour force and, practically, of reassignment of unemployed persons from other reorganized economic sectors;
- Through a harmonious and unitary development of tourism all around the territory of Bucovina, the reduction of disparities appeared between different regions will be aimed at, as now there are imbalances between the tourism from the Northern part of Suceava county (more developed) and the tourism from the highland (with more limited options);
- By promoting local tourism, respecting the principles of sustainable development, tourism may be a means of conservation and capitalization of the cultural, historical, folkloric and architectural potential of Bucovina.

In the Strategy of development of Suceava county there is a series of projects of rural tourism development in the villages of Bucovina. Alongside these projects, the development of tourism in Bucovina can be achieved through a better view in the Social Media space by:

- Implication of local authorities in promoting the villages with a touristic potential through the social networks (Facebook, Twitter, TripAdvisor etc). The pages created on these networks are meant to offer the viewers the attractiveness of the natural environment, and the anthropic environment of the historical area of Bucovina.
- The possibility of booking rooms in the countryside directly from the social network or by creating a link to the booking option. Thus, the potential clients will know the prices and the availability of the rooms and will book more easily; of course, after seeing the comments of others regarding that establishment.
- The presence in the Social Media of the touristic information centres from Bucovina, the communication with the national and international centres in the field and the standardized integration of these by interconnecting with the universal systems of bookings and creating micro-networks of online booking of rural touristic services.

The tendency of promoting via Facebook will decrease / increase the discrepancies between the rural regions with a touristic potential, will allow relevant comparisons between the boarding houses from Romania and other European accommodation establishments and, last but not least, will throw a bridge between domestic rural area and foreign tourists. Eventually, given the big number of users, in the future, Facebook will become a decisive vector in the recommendation and booking of rooms in the rural and agritouristic boarding houses. But in order to be also used as a booking site, the Facebook page must ensure the ability of the user to check the availability of the rooms, the placement and photos of the units.

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