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**Moldoviței Valley - tourism, heritage and sustainable  
development**

*- PhD thesis summary -*

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## **Introduction**

The rural area, due to its specific characteristics, has been the subject of numerous studies in the field of tourism. Considered true "citadels" preserving a way of life anchored in the ancient traditions and customs, villages have become landmarks in defining and strengthening the identity of a nation. Defined in opposition to everything that is urban (busy life rhythm, pollution, stress, etc.), rural area is presented, especially in terms of tourism, as an ideal destination for those wishing to escape the hustle and bustle of cities and wish to rediscover the values of the past.

### **Keywords:**

**{rural area, tourist potential tourist image, destination branding, Moldovița Valley}**

## **Chap. 1. Theoretical and methodological aspects**

### **1.1. Questions and hypotheses**

The main problem observed in field, is that Moldovița Valley tourism resources are poorly exploited, poorly capitalized and poorly promoted and the area "functions" under the real possibilities. According to these observations and taking into account also the observations on the field, it was formulated the first hypothesis of this research: the low level of tourism development of Moldovița Valley is largely due to poor tourist communication to the public and poor visibility on the tourist market.

Invariably, however, the concept of visibility also refers to the concepts of image, brand and promotion, all these acting as premises of tourist motivation that can stimulate or slow down tourist consumption in the study area. Very important are also the roles of the accessibility, the probability of producing natural disasters (floods, landslides) or even deterioration of tourist resources due to uncontrolled human activities.

Therefore, one of the research directions of this thesis was the identifying of the current status of the existing tourist resources and identifying how they are used, protected and valued. Based on these aspects was formulated a secondary hypothesis as follows: lack of concrete measures to protect tourism resources has led to occurrence of serious changes in their structure resulting in the decrease of the tourist attractiveness of the study area.

### **1.2. The research purposes and objectives**

This PhD thesis aimed to identify, present and analyse the tourism phenomenon in Moldovița Valley area, intending to be a work that aimed to exceed the descriptive level and

which, as a result of scientific demarches, allows the proposal of viable solutions and forecasts.

### **1.3. Methodology**

The methodology used for the present study was mostly based on the study of the bibliography and fieldwork that helped for a correct identification of all tourist attractions and specific tourist activities from the area. For an accurate inventory of the accommodation units the research started from a database created by consulting various tourist websites, the information being subsequently verified in the field.

In order to create the cartographic material a number of specific information sources were used such as 1:25,000 scale map of Romania and orthophotomap for Suceava County, and there were also used some specific GIS programs like Global Mapper 11, ArcGIS, PhilCarto. Another important method used was the survey by interview and, in order to find out which is the current tourist image of Moldovița Valley, a questionnaire was applied to tourists accommodated in the area.

### **1.4. Concepts and notions**

#### **1.4.1. Tourist patrimony, tourist potential, tourist resource**

Erdeli, G. and Istrate, I., (1996) provides a fairly concise definition of tourism potential stating that it consist of all natural, economic and cultural-historic elements, that presents certain possibilities for tourism exploitation, have a specific functionality and therefore constitute the basis for tourism development.

Regarding the concept of tourist resource, the Government Ordinance no. 58/1998 states that it is composed of natural and human components, which by their specific qualities are recognized, recorded and valued through tourism, to the extent they are not subject to a full protection regime.

Thus, the tourist resource is in itself a tourist attraction because, being already exploited by tourism, it comes out of anonymity and enters into the tourist circuit. In short, tourist resource is nothing but capitalized tourism potential. The same government ordinance clearly defines the concept of tourist patrimony representing all tourist resources and tourist structures made for economic profit through tourism activities. Gheorghilaș, A. (2008), attracts attention that within tourist patrimony enters also the general factors of human existence such as hospitality and customs.

#### **1.4.2. Perception - image - motivation: a triad of success in tourism and key elements in tourist promotion**

Although there are many studies dealing with issues of perception and image in tourism it is noted that attention was directed rather towards analyzing the influences and effects they have in the whole tourist process and not to their rigorous theoretical delimitation. Moreover, given the intimate and indissoluble connection between the two terms, they were often treated as synonyms. But, over time, the way people perceived the rural areas has greatly changed.

Tourism has become therefore a "fashion industry", where there is a strong link between tourism demand and the concept of status and image. Both tourist perception and tourist image are concepts of particular importance since they mark the way tourism actors act and react. From the local community that perceive their living space as their "home" to tourists that perceive the same space as a consumer good and tourist developers who see the place as a source of profit, the two concepts are very complex and omnipresent.

#### **1.4.3. Tourist competitiveness**

Defined as the degree to which a nation in free and fair market conditions can produce goods and services that pass test of international markets, while managing to maintain and increase the real income of its citizens (Kotler, 2001) competitiveness is the mainstay of all economic fields. The existing tourist attractions and resources of a certain tourist destination are the key elements that contribute to the differentiation between destinations and include: geographical position, natural and human tourist resources, different kinds of events and other leisure activities and animation plus tourist infrastructure (Kotler, Ph., 2001).

#### **1.4.4. Sustainable development and sustainable tourism in rural areas**

Although there are many studies about sustainable development and sustainable tourism especially after the report called "Our Common Future" drawn up by the World Commission of Environment and Development in 1987, which defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", many researchers believe that the theoretical concepts are not yet sufficiently analyzed, discussed and understood. Although the definition formulated in the Brundtland Report is the most frequently used, it is considered incomplete and the majority of the scientific world that has focused especially on the theoretical framework agreed with the fact that any attempt to define sustainable tourism

should emphasize the importance of three components: the natural environment, the social and the economic framework.

## **Chap. 2. Moldovița Valley - framework**

### **2.1. The geographical location**

Situated in the north - north-eastern part of Romania, Moldovița Valley is a subunit of Bucovina Mountains, being assigned by Feredeiu Mountains in the west and by Obcina Mare Mountains in the east. Moldovița River springs from the Veju top from Feredeiu Mountains and has, in its upper course (known as Argel), a transverse direction, demarcating Moldovița depression from Brodina Mountains in the north. Throughout the valley, about 50 kilometers long, there were born several localities, their historical evolution being closely connected with the history of Moldovița monastery. The settlements were grafted especially along the main valley where the valley recorded increased widths but, at the same time, were also fructified the tributary valleys whose names gave the present localities names (eg tributary Paltinu - village Paltinu, tributary Demacușa - village Demacușa).

Thus, the study area, called Moldovița Valley is superposed on Moldovița river basin that overlaps almost perfectly over the administrative limits of the following communes: Moldovița, Vatra Moldovița and Frumosu plus Strâmtura village from Vama commune. Therefore, Moldovița Valley comprises the following villages: Argel Rașca, Putna-Săcrieș, Demacușa, Moldovița (villages of Moldovița commune), Vatra Moldovița, Ciumârna, Paltinu, Valea Stânei (villages of Vatra Moldoviței commune), Frumosu, Dragoșa, Deia (villages of Frumosu commune) and Strâmtura (a village that belongs to Vama commune). The river basin closure point is the confluence of the river Moldovița with Moldova, confluence which takes place on the territory of Vama but only Strâmtura village overlaps entirely within the studied basin.

### **2. 2. Historical references**

Moldovița Valley history was marked by several important events that influenced later socio-economic development of the area. The construction of the Moldovița monastery by Alexander the Best, around 1410, is actually the formal entry of the area into the history. With a relatively short existence of approximately 120-130 years, the monastery was destroyed after a landslide, its ruins being now included in the tourist circuit. Moldovița monastery which can be seen today, was founded by Prince Petru Rares, built in 1532 and painted in 1537 (Iacobescu, 2004). Until the annexation of the northern part of Moldova

(1774) to the Habsburg Empire, Moldovița river basin and the settlements founded here were directly subordinate to the administration of the monastery.

During the Austrian occupation, the area was colonized by Germans, Hebrews, Ruthenians and Hutsuls but the Romanian population remained permanently majority. After the Second World War, the share of ethnic groups changed substantially, the Jews being fully expropriated and the majority of Germans returned to their places of origin. The area is still inhabited by significant groups of Hutsuls and Ruthenians, especially in the northern half of the basin. Once the political events of 1989, the community began to gradually recover the values of democracy with all the tests of the transition to a market economy and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures (Iacobescu, 2004).

### **2. 3. Evolution and demographic trends in Moldovița Valley**

The numerical dimension of the population has not changed substantially in recent years. Moldovița Valley had for the year of 2012 a population of over 13,000 inhabitants and the most populated commune is Moldovița. The analysis by age groups for the same year indicate an imbalance in the share segment aged <4-9 years, which indicates a sharp decline in birth rates.

Of a particular interest for the present study is the rather high share of the population aged between 20 and 44 years, which indicate the presence of a segment of a population able to support the economic vitality of the area. Moreover, relatively high share of the population older than 60 years (especially women) is seen as an advantage if we consider that, in terms of agritourism activities the woman is primarily responsible for the success of this kind of business (food preparation, housekeeping).

Regarding the current ethnic structure of Moldovița Valley, the Romanian population holds supremacy by 96%, while the remaining 4% it is claimed in the majority of Ukrainian speakers (the most common) and Germans. It should be noted that in terms of Hutsuls, they preferred to declare themselves either Romanians (thanks to mutual affinities) either Ukrainians (due to linguistic similarity), but many of them preferred not to declare this aspect.

### **2. 4. The economic development**

In order to identify and analyze the current state of local economical development, there were gathered data concerning the evolution of businesses, from 1990 to 2011. The data

were extracted from the site [www.firme.info/suceava/](http://www.firme.info/suceava/) as it is among the only specialized websites containing updated information at village level, including the year of 2011.

Briefly, there are noted the years of 1998, 2001 and 2008 as years with intense economic activity in terms of numerical evolution of firms. Wood processing is one of the best represented economic activities for the study area. Next to it stands the activities related to wholesale trade and retail and less represented are the individual enterprises and those related to accommodation and food serving.

### **Cap. 3. Tourist potential of Moldovița Valley**

#### **3. 1. Natural tourist potential of Moldovița Valley**

##### **3. 1. 1. The tourist potential of Moldovița Valley relief**

The main feature of the landscape lies in the succession of three major units framing the study area (with a north-west south-east direction): Feredeiu Mountains in the west, Obcina Mare Mountains in the east and between them the Valley of Moldovița River. Therefore, the relief does not impress with spectacular forms but attracts through its gently-sloping landscapes, perfect for hiking or horseback riding. There are also some geomorphological elements of tourist interest, especially near Vatra Moldoviței, as Trei Movile Pass over Feredeiu Mountains and Ciumârna Pass over Obcina Mare Mountains. Those interested can also visit the geologic attraction from Trei Movile which is characterized by the presence of black shales. Increased accessibility of the relief and the multitude of trails of different degrees of difficulty, increase the attractiveness of the area. Unfortunately, a large part of the hiking trails weren't maintained over time so that nowadays it is very difficult to identify the marks.

##### **3. 1. 2. The tourist potential of Moldovița Valley climate**

In terms of climate, Bucovina Mountains and therefore Moldovița Valley are located to the north-eastern province of Central Europe with a moderate temperate continental climate having continental influences from the east and subatlantic (boreal) influences from the north (Gugiuman, 1960, Mihailescu, 1969 cited in Chiriță, 2004). Regarding the temperature, the coldest month is January, with average temperatures between  $-4^{\circ}\text{C}$  (in the valley) and  $-7^{\circ}\text{C}$  (the highest peaks of Feredeiu Mountains) and the warmest month is July with a monthly average of  $17.6^{\circ}\text{C}$  (Chiriță, 2004). The most favorable period to visit Moldovița Valley, is the period from June to October, with emphasis on August and September which are characterized by low rainfall and a very low nebulosity. However, if

tourists want a holiday in an area with snow, they should choose Moldovița Valley between November and early March.

### **3. 1. 3. The tourist potential of Moldovița Valley hidrography**

The rich river basin of Moldovița river has been largely influenced by the relatively constant rainfall regime. During summer rains, frequently floods occur, the local authorities having embanked many areas to protect shorelines and prevent flooding. Regarding underground waters, these sometimes have a special chemical composition. However, the tourist valence of water is provided mostly by the role it plays in the local landscape.

### **3. 1. 4. The tourist potential of Moldovița Valley flora**

Situated in the middle of forest area, Moldovița Valley is known for its qualitative wood. The vast majorities are coniferous forests mixed with deciduous but also the pure spruce occupies large areas. Regarding the meadows, they are of secondary anthropic origin, being installed on former deforested areas. Grassland vegetation (with predominance of hayfields as way of exploitation) is rich in diverse flora comprising many plants often used in alternative medicine. It is also worth noting that there are some areas protected by law as Ciumârna Reservation and Senator Paleontological Reservation. To these are added two Sites of Community Importance (SCI), part of the European ecological network Natura 2000, namely, the Roșoșa and Loben Forest Reservations (both protecting areas of pure spruce older than 100 years), located on the territory of Moldovița comuune (GAL Bucovina Mountain, 2010).

### **3. 1. 5. The tourist potential of Moldovița Valley wildlife**

The fauna includes species specific to medium and low mountains, having a hunting fund rich enough to support moderate activities specific to hunting tourism. Ichthyofaunistic speaking, Moldovița Valley is situated on the grayling (*Thymallus Thymallus*) and barbel (*Barbus meridionalis*) area and its tributaries on the trout area (*Salmo trutta fario*) (GAL Bucovina Mountain, 2010). Unfortunately, the densities of these species records decreases after 1989, due to sawdust water pollution and irrational fishing (Chiriță, 2004).

Bird fauna is represented by numerous sedentary, seasonal or passage birds but what draws the attention of tourists are the large birds, in danger of extinction due to abusive hunting as the capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*) and the grouse (*Tetrastes bonasia*) (Nedelea, 2007). In order to protect bird fauna, Feredeul Mountains were declared a protected natural

area under the Natura 2000 program in order to protect especially three rare species of woodpecker.

### **3. 2. Human tourist potential of Moldovița Valley**

#### **3. 2. 1. Cultural and historical fund**

The cultural-historical fund imposes in the tourist patrimony of the study area through its originality, diversity and uniqueness at national and global level. The first rank tourist site is occupied by Moldovița monastery which is considered as a defining element, a “centrus mundi” of the local tourism (Nedelea, 2007). The paintings of Moldovița monastery are until today, along with those of Probota monastery, one of the most precious and charming ensemble of monuments of Prince Petru Rareș (<http://www.crestinortodox.ro>).

Another important tourist attraction of the same kind is the monastery museum, where there is exposed The Golden Apple, a symbolic trophy given to the monastery in 1976 by the International Federation of Journalists and Writers (FIJET) as an expression of appreciation for the efforts that the nuns made by taking care of the sanctuary. Very attractive are also the other places of worship from Moldovița Valley even if they do not have the advantages of Moldovița monastery (UNESCO patrimony) as The Holy Virgin Protection Monastery from Moldovița village, the Church of Michael and Gabriel Holy Archangels from Vatra Moldoviței and St. Nicholas Church of Ciumârna.

The communes are home to several museums and exhibitions that host many valuable exhibits, evidence of the history and traditions of the area. In the village of Moldovița it stands the Village Museum founded in 2003 for preserving and promoting the Hutsuls culture and the Lucia Condrea private collection of painted eggs, founded in 2008, which impresses with thousands exhibited painted eggs, mostly unique creations of Mrs. Lucia Condrea, artist craftsman consecrated and recognized worldwide.

Vatra Moldoviței prides itself with Paltinu Ethnographic Museum, Valea Stânei Ethnographic Exhibition and Vatra Moldoviței cultural community center exposition which, despite their small sizes, hosts pieces of great value but unfortunately are insufficiently promoted. If for Vatra Moldoviței village, the Moldovița monastery is the main tourist attraction, for Moldovița it is the forestry train known as mocănița, having over 100 years, a true symbol of the capital role that the wood industry played in the evolution of the settlements.

### **3.2.2. The material and spiritual rural culture**

#### **3.2.2.1. The traditional architecture**

The traditional architecture is a reflection of the dominant economic profile based on the logging industry and livestock. Houses are built of pine wood, along with other building materials such as stone and brick (Iosep, 1983). The traditional house from Moldovița Valley is the typical Bucovina house constructed of fir round logs with a foundation of sandstone blocks (Nedelea, 2007). Besides the Romanian houses, there are a few traditional Hutsuls houses made of fir and yew trunks joined by wooden nails. Most of them can be found in Moldovița and Argel, one of the oldest in the area with over 300 years being located in Moldovița. Due to Austrian occupation even today one can see several houses built in the German style although the German community is constantly decreasing.

#### **3.2.2.2. Heritage and ethnographic values**

The handicrafts - woodworking art reduced to production of several items for domestic and pastoral use such as spoons, kegs, sticks, some of which are sold as souvenirs during various local festivals. Unique in the world are the masterfully painted eggs, this craft being passed down from generation to generation and is one of the best preserved traditions often used in tourism promotion.

Laic and religious holidays are of particular importance for local people as they still respect the sanctity of the church, certain agricultural and pastoral occupations and family life. Within the rich ethno folk treasure of Moldovița Valley there are the winter customs related to the celebration of Christmas and St. Basil, in which the carols have a very special place (Nedelea, 2007). On the 25th of March, the Annunciation Monastery from Moldovița village is celebrating its patron through a specific ceremony any many believers and tourists participate in order to take part at this unique event.

Another important event of the year is the celebration of Easter, when the famous decorated eggs are exhibited and many tourists come to buy them. In Moldovița commune one can admire the remarkable wedding customs of the Hutsuls which are different from the traditions from other localities, full of colours and symbolism. Much awaited are the Moldovița Days which are organized each year on the 15th of August along with the celebration of the patron of the local church – The Assumption of Virgin Mary. Another important traditional event is the Festival of Hutsuls - From Obcini songs echoes and the Painted Egg Festival.

## **Cap. 4. The tourism infrastructure on Moldovița Valley**

### **4.1. The transport infrastructure**

The road access into the study area is along the valley of Moldovița river on county road DJ 176 Vama-Moldovița and on the national road DN 17, which connects the towns Rădăuți and Câmpulung Moldovenesc traversing Paltinu and Vatra Moldoviței villages (intersecting DJ176) and further through Ciumârna village crossing the mountains at Ciumârna Pass. The rail access Vama – Frumosu - Moldovița, extension of Câmpulung Moldovenesc - Suceava railway magistral was restricted in 2010, as the railroad was partially destroyed and covered with water as a result of strong floods. Regarding the condition of communal roads, they are unpaved, raising some access problems especially during winter time or floods.

At the moment there is in progress a project in partnership with Breaza commune that aims to build a road linking Moldovița and Breaza communes over Feredeiu Mountains but, unfortunately, the project stagnates due to lack of funds. Moreover, it is taken into consideration the modernization of the northern section of Argel - Brodina (extension of the 176 DJ) road, which is currently accessible only by SUVs.

### **4.2. The accommodation infrastructure**

In the study area, the majority of guesthouses are classified with 2 or 3 Daisies and they are usually located either as an extension of the private households or even inside them while boarding houses are fewer in number but remark on the field due to their new architectural style and larger size. It is observed that Vatra Moldoviței village occupies the leading position holding the highest number of accommodation units (fact easy to explain given that there is the main tourist attraction – Moldovița monastery). Also, it is noted the concentration of these pensions are in the vicinity of the convent, while the nearby villages the number of lodging is much lower or equal to zero.

The neighboring village Moldovița ranks second with a total of 12 guesthouses, most of them located near the village center, where there are also the main tourist attractions. Strâmtura village recorded in recent years a noticeable increase in the number of pensions, the presence of European route 576 representing an important advantage. Regarding Frumosu commune only in the village with the same name there are present the guesthouses (5 in number), while in the villages of Deia and Dragoșă they are missing. In the northern part of the study area (villages Argel, Rașca, Putna-Săcrieș) it is noted the absence of accommodation units which creates a gap at the local level, the lack of accommodation

constituting itself as a limiting factor in tourism development. Briefly, however, Moldovița Valley has overall 46 tourist accommodation units, most classified with 2 or 3 daisies, giving a total of approximately 750 seats.

#### **4.3. Services of local and tourist interest**

Of great importance for tourism and for the local community are the public food services, sanitary facilities and technical utilities (electric power, water, gas, sewage system) that provide the optimum functioning of both tourism activities and everyday activities of the locals. In the context of public food units, in the area there are many mixed stores, small in size but with a quite large variety of products. Sanitary facilities are represented by the individual medical cabinets in Argel, Moldovița, Vatra Moldoviței and Frumosu villages and the presence of three pharmacies. Important to note is that in the study area are provided and insurance services (life, health, goods, in case of accidents, etc.) and in Moldovița village there are two bank offices (including cash machines).

As for fueling motor vehicles within Moldovița Valley there are two filling stations in Moldovița and Vatra Moldoviței villages. The postal services are provided across the entire studied area with branches in Argel, Moldovița, Vatra Moldovița and Frumosu. Electric power supply is provided from the national medium voltage network distribution that comes from Câmpulung Moldovenesc station although there are still some households in peripheral areas that do not benefit from this service. Heat is produced individually and water supply is made also individually from underground sources through microsystems or through wells.

### **Cap. 5. Moldoviței Valley tourism - evolution and trends**

#### **5. 1. Tourist circulation in Moldovița Valley**

Tourist travelling in a region is mainly characterized by the following indicators: the evolution of tourist number, number of nights and occupancy rate (Ciangă, 2001). Regarding the evolution of the number of tourists, according to data taken from the official site of the National Institute of Statistics for the past ten years, it can be observed the high number of arrivals that characterized 2004 and 2007, followed by a continuous decrease. The situation is roughly similar for overnight stays indicator though Moldovița has shared quite spectacular growth for 2011 that can be explained by the reintegration of Mocănița (the forestry train) into the tourism offer. Regarding the average duration of stay (calculated as the ratio between the number of nights and number of arrivals), there is a continuous change in the preferences of

tourists. Thus for 2005, Frumosu was the one who recorded the highest length of residence, in 2009 Vatra Moldovița and for 2007 and 2011 stands Moldovița.

Regarding seasonality, as dominant feature of the tourist activity, it presents a main maximum in the summer, more precisely, in August and two secondary maximum levels, one in winter (December) and one in the spring (April - May ). The analysis of the nights spent in the same period of time, indicates the preference of tourists for about the same intervals. However, it is noted that tourists prefer to spend more nights in Moldovița village, probably due to lower accommodation prices.

Calculated as a ratio by dividing the number of arrivals to the seats in use, the occupancy rate actually summarizes all the tourist activity. The analysis shows that this indicator has never recorded, at least at the official level in the past decade values over 50%, the highest values being those of 2003 with 48% and 2011 with 45%. Nevertheless, the accommodation units continues to exist and provide services, often in good condition, which makes us question the accuracy of the information presented officially.

## **5. 2. Tourist flows in Moldovița Valley**

Unfortunately, there is no official data on tourist flows for the study area as most of the official statistical data presents the situation for the entire county of Suceava. In order to identify the trends in tourist flows for Moldovița Valley a questionnaire was made and applied to tourist accommodated in the area. The questionnaire consisted of 28 questions, 5 of them aimed to describe the group so it included questions about age, gender, educational level, etc. The remaining questions focused on identifying some tourist features referring to the motivation for choosing the area as a tourist destination and on the perception held before and after the holiday.

Regarding the tourist's place of origin (the most important aspect in the analysis of tourist flows), there is a preference for the Valley Moldovița among those coming from Moldova region, from the counties of Botosani, Bacau, Iasi, Suceava and Neamt. According to information taken as a result of the survey by interview among accommodation units owners it can be concluded that Moldovița Valley area is visited by tourists from all Romanian regions, remarking, along the counties of Moldova, the counties of Cluj, Timis and Hunedoara. Tourists originating from France and Belgium are considered "regulars of the house" although the palette of foreign tourists is more diverse, including those from Germany, Austria, USA, Australia or Israel which often choose this area as a holiday destination.

### **5. 3. The typology of tourists who choose Moldovița Valley as a tourist destination**

Moldovița Valley is visited, according to the results of the questionnaire, by tourists aged between 15 and 45 years who choose to spend 2 or 3 days in a pension, during weekends or in summer holidays. Because accommodation and catering prices practiced are relatively small, Moldovița Valley is preferred by low and middle-income tourists. In means of transport the results of the questionnaires indicated a clearly preference for cars.

In conclusion, most of the tourists who frequent Moldovița Valley can be classified in the typology of those who practice an individual mass tourism (Cohen, 1972), characterized by partial use of specific facilities of organized mass tourism (acquiring a tourist product made of accommodation and food services), but taking many individual decisions regarding daily tourism activities.

### **5. 4. Tourist promotion, distribution and communication in Moldovița Valley**

Currently, the tourism promotion of Moldovița Valley is undertaken at a relatively low level, aspect that was also remarked by the surveyed tourist as only 46% of them were satisfied with the quality promotion while, 28% were not and 26% were impartial. Regarding the most frequently used means of information, respondents ranked the Internet first.

As part of Bucovina tourism region, the study area is most often included in the presentation and promotion programs designed for the whole area of Bucovina. It was noted that most of the times the valley is presented rather punctual, the main attraction mentioned being the Moldovița monastery. Regarding the direct promotion through brochures, booklets and maps, this is very poor, except some guesthouses that have some promotional flyers and some brochures containing information about Moldovița monastery that can be acquired on the spot.

According to the analysis carried out in the virtual world of Moldovița Valley tourism was observed that the study area is mostly promoted by the websites accommodation units located here. Most units have their own websites and the information founded is not only about the existing services but also offers short presentations about the area and the nearby attractions. Most times, however, to find the official websites of guesthouses, the tourist is forced to insist during the search because the websites do not appear on the first page of the search result.

Generally, pensions are found on different specialized sites like <http://www.turistinfo.ro/>, <http://www.lapensiuni.ro/> or <http://www.infopensiuni.ro/> that

provides a large and varied database of accommodation units organized on localities and classified according to the level of comfort offered. Problems arise when on these websites are found a number of pensions that either don't function anymore or have their contact details changed or even modified their tariffs and possibly their comfort category. This creates confusion and great inconvenience to tourists, giving the impression of unprofessionalism, lack of interest, while causing great harm to the general tourist image of the area.

Promotion in the online has other drawbacks because it allows including the promotion of occasional accommodation units that are not signaled on the ground. These, though offers accommodation and food services in appropriate circumstances, do not exist legally. Unfortunately, there are also many guesthouse owners, particularly agritourism pensions owners, which are older and thus, less familiar with the tools of virtual promotion, that do not have direct control over how their offer is submitted, the information found in the online being outdated and incomplete.

Regarding the tourist promotion on the ground through tourism signs and information panels, this is considered insufficient, 30% of the tourists surveyed said they sought help from the locals for guidance while 14% stated very clear that the tourist information on the ground are very hard to find and felt confused.

## **Cap. 6. Branding Moldovița Valley**

### **6. 1. Rural destination's branding**

It is true that, at present, rural tourism is a product that does not rely its competitive strategy on brands, but undoubtedly those destinations that have the ability to develop one will take ahead of the others in the fight for tourists (Solsona Monzonís, 2008). One of the key aspects in the development of rural destination brand is its connection with the global brand, with the territory in which it is found, because the latter has a greater promotional capacity and a stronger presence on the tourism market so it should take advantage of it.

Thus, the rural destinations brands or micro-brands need to know how to take advantage of the synergies offered by the higher brands where they are included (Solsona Monzonís, 2008). A hierarchy of brand destination at national level was described by Stăncioiu et al. (2011) and involves the following order: the country brand - Romania, the regional tourism brands components - in this case, Suceava County, the local community brand – Bucovina and the local tourism brands / individual brands - Moldovița Valley.

## 6.2. Moldovița Valley - a possible successful tourist micro-brand

A complex plan for creating the brand in seven steps was conducted by Bill Baker, (2007). The plan proposed the analysis of a broad range of aspects in order to determine both the initial state in which a certain place brand is (in this case the plan has the role of stimulate and revitalize the place brand) but, at the same time, it is useful if one want to create a brand from zero. Although conceived for small towns, the proposed plan can be easily applied and adapted to rural areas as it is based on the principle of building the brand from inside to outside, starting with the identification of specific characteristic of the target community. The seven steps proposed are presented below in a synthesized version and adapted to rural areas.

<b>Step 1 - Evaluation and Audit - What is the place for the brand in the world?</b>	
<b>The perception</b>	As it was already highlighted, the study area has a positive perception among tourists, this fact represents an important premise, basic for any tourism development strategy.
<b>The community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Values:</b> honesty, hospitality, diligence, entrepreneurship.</li> <li>- <b>The traditions and customs</b> are in majority preserved and respected.</li> </ul>
<b>The physical attributes of the area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Climate:</b> moderate, recommended for very large groups of tourists without medical contraindications.</li> <li>- <b>Architecture:</b> mainly the traditional one (specific for Bucovina region) along with traditional Hutsuls houses and buildings with architectural borrowings from the German community and some buildings with Austrian influences.</li> <li>- <b>Transport:</b> easy road access on route 17A and county road 176; easy rail access to Vama from here the acces is possible only by road; air accessibility is ensured by the presence of airports, the nearest one being the one from the city of Suceava (80 km), following Chernivtsi (Ukraine, 112 km), Iasi (187 km), Bacau (191 km) and Targu Mures (250 km).</li> <li>- <b>Museums:</b> the presence of three museums and two ethnographic exhibitions, with traditional folk theme.</li> <li>- <b>Restaurants:</b> rural pensions mostly have their own restaurants with varied menus including traditional dishes, also in guesthouses tourists can enjoy traditional dishes prepared from local ingredients.</li> <li>- <b>Specific products:</b> the food is mostly of local origin, the non-food</li> </ul>

	products are represented especially by the handicraft objects such as painted eggs, handwoven ii (traditional Romanian blouses), icons on wood or glass, wooden household items.
	<p>- <b>The tourist attractions:</b> the study area benefits from the presence of a variety of tourist attractions, but the results of the questionnaire clearly indicate a preference for visiting the Moldovița monastery, taking a ride with the forestry train Mocănița and sightseeing.</p> <p>- <b>Events:</b> Moldovița Valley is not currently home to large events capable to attract regularly large masses of tourists although the celebration of Moldovița monastery patron is considered an important event where participate tourists from different parts of the country. The specific events of this area are mostly of local importance as the weekly fairs or diffrenet activities organized by schools (painted eggs or woven contests), the Christian holidays and the religious processions. More important are Moldovița Days, the Hutsuls Festival and the Painted Egg Festival.</p>
<b>The experience in tourism</b>	- Tourist activities in Moldovița Valley began to take shape after 1990. Currently, there is already created a tourist basic infrastructre (rural guesthouses, guesthouses, museums), but there are problems in terms of tourism promotion and training the pension owners, who moststly failed to cope with tourism seasonality or legislative changes.
<b>Trends</b>	- From a demographic point of view, the population of Moldovița Valley is in a slight decrease, although large share of young segment reveals a workforce able to invest and support the local economy. Antrprenorial spirit is also present, observing the increasing interest in opening a business. Regarding tourism activities, with all the shortcomings, there is an increase in tourist interest shown by the increase of the average stay.
<b>Tourist marketing</b>	- Tourism marketing process is situated at the moment, unfortunately, at a rather low level. The promotion of the area is focused mainly on presenting the offer in the online but this is quite poor, taking into account that the information presented is incomplete, sometimes contradictory. The presence of the study area in the tender proposed by travel agents is reduced and tourism communication on field is also deficient.
<b>Strengths</b>	- Moldovița monastery, Mocănița Huțulca, natural landscapes, traditions and

	customs, the presence of the Hutsuls, crafts, hospitality, traditional cuisine.
<b>The basic elements of the new tourist image</b>	- the natural landscapes, the cultural landscapes, Moldovița Monastery (trade mark element and a link to the image of Bucovina macro-destination) Mocănița (as differentiating element within the macro-destination), the Hutsul component, traditions and customs.
<b>Conclusions</b>	- Creating, developing and implementing a place brand for Moldovița Valley can be considered a benefic option for the future of tourism as there are also traits that bind it with the macro-destination which is part of but, at the same time, there are some differentiating elements capable to ensure its success.

<b>Step 2 - Analysis and Benefits - What will be the area known for?</b>	
<b>The brand features</b>	
<b>Values</b>	- <b>Accessibility, authenticity, patriotism, hospitality</b>
<b>Vision</b>	- <b>Promised experiences:</b> contact with nature (hiking), learning crafts, tasting traditional local food, the possibility of participation and involvement within the specific agricultural activities, participation in traditional events. - <b>Emotional benefits</b> - stress eradication, serenity, relaxation, rest. - <b>Social benefits</b> - possibility of socializing within the community, within the relationship with the host, learning some new things about the community, involving in the everyday activities.
<b>Personality</b>	- Conservative, creative, cultural, natural, warm.
<b>Elements that provide confidence</b>	- Golden Apple Award received by Vatra Moldoviței in 1975 as a symbol of recognition of the quality of tourism in Bucovina, preserved in the museum of Moldovița monastery.
<b>The brand essence</b>	- Once set "the promises" of the brand they must be tested and evaluated, as well as each of the consequences caused by any unfulfilled promise. These aspects are the preserve of specialists in the field and have not been the purpose of the present paper.
<b>Conclusions</b>	- Moldovița Valley should be known as an area where tourists can feel as in a family, where they can enjoy both activities related to visiting and

	admiring the various objectives as well as activities related to the daily life of the village.
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<b>Step 3 – The adjustment of the information - What are the relationships and the connections of the brand?</b>
As part of the tourist destination Bucovina, Moldovița Valley brand complements and strengthens its tourist image but, at the same time, has the main purpose to attract a larger number of tourists by increasing the visibility on the tourist market.

<b>Step 4 - Creating the articulated shape - How can be the brand expressed verbally and visually?</b>
Geography is the major supplier of the basic components of tourist brands, as long as the logos or the symbols used coincide with the major regional tourist resources of the destination (Obiol, 2002). Articulated shape of the brand is indicated to use, if present, the most pregnant geographical name – in this case, Moldovița. This name is omnipresent, local toponyms are very suggestive: Moldovița river, Moldovița monastery, Vatra Moldoviței and Moldovița communes. Therefore, the proposal of a brand with the name Moldovița Valley is more than natural since the name makes direct reference to the river valley, outlining a territory dominated by it (the river basin). As for the logo, it may be focused on a particular number of symbols as the specific shape of the tower of the monastery, the outline of a traditional house or the contour of Mocănița. Also, the colors used can make reference either to the natural component, using green (in this way there is a direct connection to the present national tourism logo <i>Explore the Carpathian Garden</i> ), either to the traditional colors found on authentic folk costumes or used on painted eggs (yellow, red, black).

<b>Step 5 - Activating the brand</b>
This step requires a coherent long-term marketing plan permanently supervised.

<b>Step 6 - Assimilation and the attitudes - How will the community assimilate and support the brand?</b>
The community, as part of the tourism product must be properly informed and trained, explaining in detail the benefits and drawbacks of implementing and maintaining a tourism brand. The way the brand is understood and applied by the community, it depends

the success of the destination and the welfare of the community, so the community will be always motivated to provide quality services and diversified activities.

**Step 7 - Actions and post-actions - maintain the attractiveness of the brand -**

This last step requires creativity and a constant tracking of tourism market trends. Once developed and implemented, the brand must be maintained and sustained permanently.

**Chap. 7. Sustainable development and sustainable tourism in Moldovița Valley**

**7. 1. Local actors and their role in Moldovița Valley tourism**

In Moldovița Valley, the main local actors involved in tourism are represented both by official entities, as case of the local authorities represented by each commune mayoralty, as well as private actors - mainly represented by the accommodation and catering unit managers. Besides these, there is the local community among which there is a number of actors with different responsibilities and roles such as craftsmen and artisans, writers, teachers, etc.

With fast and visible effects on the ground are, undoubtedly, the measures taken by the local authorities, who relate particularly to the restoration of roads and bridges, road paving, strengthening the banks of watercourses, extending the electrification network, whose purpose is to improve the quality of life in villages while contributing in creating a more favorable environment for tourism.

Georg Hocevar, the current owner of the forestry train Mocănița, is a very important local actor (although originating from Austria) as his initiative to put back into operation the steam engine and to restore several narrow track sections had immediate positive effects regarding the dynamics of tourism creating in the same time new jobs. Lucia Condrea, a specialized craftsman in egg decoration also attracts, due to her international reputation, the attention and interest of many foreign tourists who came to visit the International Egg Museum. The museum acts like a magnet, contributing to the increase of the number of tourist arrivals in the area. Guesthouses administrators also play a crucial role in attracting and retaining tourists. The experience lived by tourists within the accommodation unit is decisive on strengthening Moldovița Valley reputation as an attractive tourist destination.

The Hutsuls Community is also active, among it noteworthy to mention is the writer Cassian Balabasciuc who through his books and actions, is trying to revive the traditions and crafts of the Hutsuls. The local community as a whole has an essential role in creating an

authentic and friendly atmosphere, but this is possible only if the tourist activities do not lead to radical changes in the usual way of living. The community must be trained and assisted in order to understand the exact role that it plays in the evolution of the local tourism and what are the advantages and disadvantages of assuming this role.

Moldovița river basin is included within Bucovina Mountain Local Action Group (LAG) thus, all the settlements were brought under the same "umbrella". The actions undertaken by Bucovina Mountain LAG, were focused in various areas including environment protection and tourism promotion, though most of the actions had a rather social character such as modernizing the kindergartens and schools, rehabilitating and modernizing the access infrastructure, water supply, restoration of bridges and footbridges, etc.

The local stakeholders from Moldovița Valley, through their actions, demonstrate initiative and common interest in supporting the local tourism, with all the existing shortcomings. Field observations throughout the three years of research have identified a major problem characteristic unfortunately for the majority of rural areas at national level namely, the constant altering of the cultural landscape.

As a basic tourist resource for Moldovița Valley but also as an important vector in maintaining the local identity according to sustainable development principles, generally accepted in Europe and beyond, an entire subchapter has been dedicated to analyzing this issue. Designed as a case study, the cultural landscape analysis highlighted both its specific features as well as the factors that threaten its authenticity, at the end being proposed some solutions to prevent the negative effects.

## **7. 2. Natural hazards and pollution of Moldovița Valley - limiting factors for local tourism**

For the future of any tourist destination, ensuring a safe environment for tourists in terms both politically and socially, is a priority and an essential condition in providing a quality long term tourism. Moldovița Valley although is a safe tourist destination, is facing some problems induced both by the natural features as well as by the negative effects that some human activity is causing on field. The area is affected due to particular lithological structure, by a series of landslides but more worrying are the floods caused by heavy rains. To these is added the low intensity but constant pollution that affects the natural environment, these phenomena could easily sabotage the local tourism.

Changing the way of using the land through deforestation and expansion of meadows and pastures, combined with heavy precipitation episodes can lead to the triggering of floods,

the area confronted in recent years with a series of such events (Clitnovici, 2013). Floods and strong freshets that marked the years of 2008, 2010 and 2012 are the clear evidence that the authorities should take strong and fast measures regarding the prevention of such disasters. In terms of tourism, such phenomena negatively affect in long-term the tourism image, their repeatability inducing tourists a state of uncertainty, reflected later by avoiding the area and orientation towards other destinations that offer, at least mentally, more security.

### **7. 3. Solutions and proposals for revitalizing Moldovița Valley tourism on the sustainable principles**

The solutions and proposals exhibited below focused both on the principles of sustainability as well as on stimulating the diversification of tourism services in order to diminish the effects of seasonality.

#### **1. The creation of thematic itineraries**

The Hutsuls arts and crafts can be easily promoted by creating a tourist route covering visitings of some traditional houses, local craftsmen or different places evoking the legends and superstitions of the Hutsuls.

Valorisation of protected areas - Roșoșa and Loben secular forests, Obcina Feredeului Bird Reservation and Ciumârna Reservation - in order to support ecotourism and ecological education by creating "green" tourism trails.

Local churches may also be included in a religious circuit having as reference points the Moldovita monastery, Ciumârna wooden church (called the Church of Hutsuls) and the Assumption of Virgin Mary Church.

Creating thematic festivals covering the whole year. In addition to existing events (The Painted Egg Festival and the celebration of Moldovița monastery patron from March, the Moldovița Days and the Hutsuls Festival from August) there can be also organized various events to highlight local the traditions and cuisine such Harvest Festival (October) or the Feast of Romanian Blouse (May).

#### **2. Encouraging sports and nature activities**

Christmas and New Year are the only reasons that attract tourists during the winter season. Although weather and climate characteristics could facilitate, for example the construction of a ski slope, this would require too large investment and the proximity of the ski slope Gura Humorului, questions the success of such an investment. Also, it must be taken into consideration the visual impact that it would create on the landscape, as the natural component is, as noted in previous chapters, the main reason why tourists appreciate

Moldovița Valley as tourist destination. More beneficial would be the building of an outdoor ice rink, as the area meets all the necessary conditions (space, beautiful landscapes, water resources) and the investment would not be so expensive.

Mountain biking is another pleasant way of spending time in nature. However, it is not enough just to offer bicycle hire service but creating specific routes. The multitude of forestry roads represents an excellent infrastructure for this sport but these require internationally approved marking standards.

Birdwatching is seen as an activity with great success worldwide that continuously gains new adepts. The presence of Feredeu Mountain Bird Reservation represents a strong advantage and the infrastructure required for this activity is reduced largely to building small observation points inside the forest. This could also be used for observing other species, thus supporting ecotourism type activities.

Riding is also an activity that would easily fit within the tourist offer, in this way it can be valued the Hutsuls horse herd present in the area, known as a gentle and docile breed, strongly recommended for children due to small stature. Fishing and hunting - are two activities also suitable in the area albeit at a lower level because of the relatively small effectiveness of large mammals and low density of fish (which may be counterbalanced by example, by creating trout farms).

Picking herbs, mushrooms, berries - are simple activities that do not require a recreational specific infrastructure, providing pleasant experiences in nature and "raw materials" for various organic products. The only condition required is that such activity is best to be practiced under the supervision of a specialist in order to avoid picking poisonous mushrooms or plants.

### **3. Highlighting the traditions, crafts and local cuisine**

For cooking amateurs there can be organized cooking classes with regional specific, as the area is famous for its delicious dishes; such an activity meets all the qualities of an inedit experience (especially for foreign tourists less familiar with Romanian dishes): active involvement, joy of the process and of the result, promoting Romanian cuisine. At world level there is a trend in people's way of nourishing as there is a growing number of people who adopt a vegetarian type diet (ovo-lacto-vegetarian, pescado - vegetarian or simply vegetarian also known as vegan diet) and crudivor/raw diet but especially there is a strong orientation towards organic food. Thus, Moldovița Valley could easily become a requested destination for this tourism niche, as the area is rich in ecological products.

The development of some workshops with a fixed schedule and with a capacity of receiving a greater number of people is also a type of activity according to the specificity of the area. At the moment there are a few local craftsmen that provide initiation courses in their own homes but only for a limited number of people. Their visibility is thus very faint, and there are few tourists who are lucky enough to take part of such an experience.

### **Final conclusions**

Moldovița Valley is characterized by a quite large variety of attractions which can easily transform the area into an ideal holiday destination. The magnificent natural landscape, the local hospitality and the beautiful traditions still present in the daily life of the community are the strengths of Moldovița Valley tourism. However, the area is experiencing some problems, especially in terms of road network whereas communal roads are not maintained, greatly hindering access especially during the cold season. Moreover, it feels acutely the need to open access into the area and from the north, which could bring new economic vigor towards Argel and Putna-Săcrieș villages, as they experience a sharp decline of the population and are strongly dependent on wood industry.

Moldovița Valley is not currently a consecrated destination, although, as shown, it meets a number of conditions likely to assist it in achieving this goal. The study area was treated, however, throughout this paper as a stand-alone tourist destination, with a clear intention to demonstrate that, within an already consecrated tourist region, small areas may also escape from anonymity and proclaim their richness. As junior brand subordinated to Bucovina tourist region, Moldovița Valley could thus overcome its transit destination level and really become a complete and complex tourist destination.

The good communication between local actors and the orientation towards cultural and entertainment activities according to the specific of the area represents an important aspect as indicates a consensus and clarity with which they perceive the local tourism and the directions that it should follow.

As for the questions presented in the first part of the paper, they have completely found the answers, and the main working hypothesis (the low level of tourism development of Moldovița Valley is largely due to poor tourist communication to the public and poor visibility on the tourist market) was also confirmed. In the attempt to resolve the issue exhibited hypothetical this paper wanted to bring current interest solutions, so it was opted for the proposal of a set of steps in order to help the area in a possible adoption of a tourism branding strategy by creating a tourist image and identity. It should be also noted that the

steps proposed, can be easily adapted for analyzing other rural tourist areas, this paper can serve as a model of structure and analysis.

The second working hypothesis (lack of concrete measures to protect tourism resources has led to occurrence of serious changes in their structure resulting in the decrease of the tourist attractiveness of the study area) was partially confirmed. Results of the questionnaires and field analysis indicated that, of all tourism resources, the natural environment and the landscapes are considered the most attractive, which would not have been possible if they would have been found in a highly degraded state. However, as demonstrated in the case study regarding the cultural landscape, these components are currently subject to continuous changes, which slowly alter the current balance.

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