



UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES IN BUCOVINA – AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM

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Abstract *Bucovina – a historical region located in the North of Romania – is famous for its cultural-historical and ethno-folklore heritage that generates great tourism attractiveness. This paper examines how the presence of UNESCO World Heritage Sites has influenced the sustainable development of tourism in Bucovina over the last two decades, this label being an important marketing tool in world tourism and its presence ensuring a great deal of visitors to a particular tourist destination. An analysis of the evolution of the main tourism indicators (accommodation capacity, number of tourists, number of overnight stays) associated with this tourist destination will be made along with a comparison of the tourist activity in two localities featuring UNESCO monuments (Gura Humorului and Sucevita), and a classic destination in Bucovina (Vatra Domei resort).*

Key words:

*tourist destination;
sustainable tourism;
UNESCO World
Heritage, religious
tourism, Bucovina*

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1. INTRODUCTION

During the last years, the influence of the UNESCO World Heritage label on the tourist destinations has increased. This recognition represents an opportunity to reinvent the destination, to innovate, to improve resources and products allocated for tourism, and to segment the tourism offer.

In this paper, it is analyzed the influence of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites on tourism activity in the historical region of Bucovina (Romania). The existence of religious assets listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as well as the implementation of a coherent tourism strategy on

the level of the destination has contributed to the tourism development in this area.

According to UNESCO, Romania has a long tradition as an enduring society, being one of the oldest sustainable rural civilizations in Europe, and at the same time rich in natural resources and featuring a way of life in harmony with nature.

For Romania, sustainable development is not one of several possible options, but the only rational prospect for advancement as a nation.

Bucovina, as tourist destination, has developed due to its natural and cultural resources. In the same time, the hospitality industry has had a

positive evolution, sustaining and supporting the growth of tourism in this area.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the document *World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme* (2012), it is highlighted that UNESCO World Heritage properties are important travel destinations, which, if managed properly, have a great potential impact for local economic development and long-term sustainability.

Although the main purpose of UNESCO recognition is to preserve and conserve these sites, this has meant in many cases a significant increase of number of tourists, especially from other countries, generating a strong relationship between these cultural assets and tourism (Breakey, 2012).

United Nations explain that the aim of the World Heritage Sites is to create jobs, to promote local activity through arts and craft, as they foster tourism and generate revenues.

Referring at the presence of the World Heritage Sites in a destination, Iașu et al. (2018) concluded that this aspect has been frequently used as a means of tourism promotion and increased attractiveness of a destination.

However, according to Prideaux (2002), the UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHS) label implies a character of singularity for the respective site and hence a greater tourism potential. It is also worth mentioning that Pop and Coros (2016) sustained that tourist attractions are important for any tourist destination and the presence of a UNESCO

Heritage Site is supposed to increase the attractiveness of a destination.

Caust and Vecco (2017) emphasized that the awarding of a UNESCO status immediately bestows a national and international profile upon the site or practice. While the recognition acknowledges something that it is unique in the world, it also draws the world's attention to this uniqueness. Depending on the nature of the site/heritage/practice, it is then in an excellent position to be marketed by the concerned nation as a special and attractive tourist destination.

Increasing numbers of tourists at the World Heritage Sites require an effective cooperative commitment and coordination among all stakeholders in the heritage and tourism sectors in order to develop this activity on a sustainable basis.

According to the World Tourism Organization: "*Sustainable tourism satisfies the needs of the incoming current tourists and of those of the host region in the context of protecting and increasing the chances and opportunities for the future. It is seen as a way of managing all resources so that economic, social, and aesthetic needs are fully met, thus preserving cultural integrity, essential ecological dimensions, biological diversity, and the current lifestyle.*"

However, Golja, Slivar, Dobrila (2017) stated that sustainable tourism has a low influence on the environment and local culture, although it supports and generates income, employment, and ensures the conservation of local ecosystems. The quality of the tourist destination depends on its natural and

cultural environment and its integration into a local community.

3. TOURIST ATTRACTIVENESS OF BUCOVINA DESTINATION

Eight of the monasteries and churches from Bucovina are listed in UNESCO World Heritage List – Arbore Church, Voroneț Monastery, Humor Monastery, Moldovița Monastery, Probota Monastery, Patrăuți Church, The Monastery of Saint John in Suceava (since 1993), and Sucevița Monastery (since 2010).

In concordance with UNESCO description, the churches and monasteries of northern Moldavia, built from the late 15th century to the late 16th century, with their external walls covered in fresco paintings, are masterpieces inspired by Byzantine art. They are authentic and particularly well preserved. Far from being mere wall decorations, the paintings form a systematic covering on all the facades and represent complete cycles of religious themes. Their exceptional composition, the elegance of the characters, and the harmony of the colours blend perfectly with the surrounding countryside landscape.

Although lately it could be considered "the engine of the development of tourism in Bucovina", it should be mentioned that tourism in Bucovina does not comprise only monasteries with external frescoes.

The diversity of the landscapes, the vast areas covered with forest, the rich hydrographical network, the springs with mineral waters, the spectacular landscaping, and the microclimate

suitable for tourism activities, the cultural heritage, the multiculturalism of the area, the traditional architecture, the existence of crafts preserved remaining unaltered from the ancient times, the folk customs and ways – all these aspects support and represent the very foundation of the development of this economic activity in Bucovina.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology comprise the statistical analysis of secondary data (statistical data available online, provided by the National Institute of Statistics). The statistical data take in consideration the entire Suceava County. In addition, for Vatra Dornei, Sucevița and Gura Humorului, were analyzed the accommodation capacity (number of beds) and two tourism demand indicators (number of tourists, number of overnight stays) between 2001 and 2017.

The goal of this research is to determine the influence of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in attracting tourists to Bucovina. The analysis of the main tourism activity indicators is aimed at emphasising the role of these cultural assets in Bucovina in attracting an increasing the number of tourists on the long run.

5. RESULTS

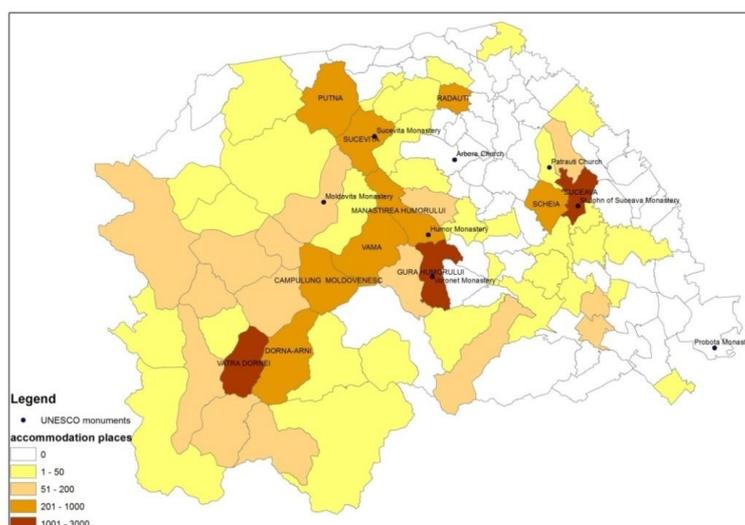
As it has happened across the entire country, the economy of this region has undergone important changes, marked by a shift from the industrial and agricultural activities to services, and here an important role is played by tourism.

Natural and cultural conditions have been important factors that have led to the development of this tourist destination, being important at both national level, but also contributing to its international notoriety.

Thus, tourism in Bucovina registered spectacular increases during the period 2001-2017, during which the number of tourists increased by 2.5 times (from 151,370 to 385,676), and the number of overnight stays increased 1.8 times (from 461,095 to 815,732).¹

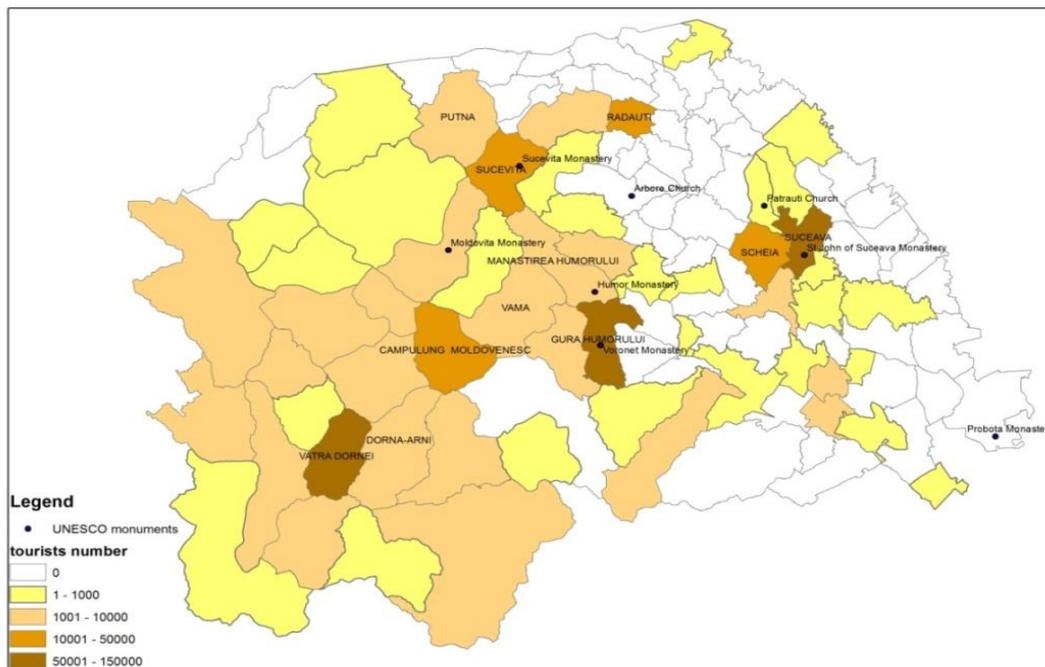
The analysis of tourist activity in Bucovina accounts for a large territorial concentration. As regards the accommodation capacity, a high concentration is observed in several localities with important tourist attractions or placed along the tourist flows. The most representatives are main urban centres i.e. Suceava, Vatra Dornei (a traditional tourist destination), Câmpulung Moldovenesc, Gura Humorului, and certain rural

localities, some of them featuring UNESCO monuments (e.g. Sucevita, Humorului Monastery), and other cultural and religious monuments representative at national level (e.g. Putna), preserving a rich ethno-folkloric heritage (Vama, Ciocanesti), or localities located in the periurban are of Suceava (Șcheia). A similar situation is also registered in terms of tourist traffic and number of arrivals. 26.3% of tourists accommodated in Suceava County (101.412 tourists) stayed in the county seat. The second locality in terms of tourist traffic is Gura Humorului (69,874 tourists, 18.1%). It is remarkable that both localities feature monuments included in the UNESCO heritage. In recent years, rural tourism has grown rapidly at the level of this destination, and the presence of UNESCO monuments has favoured the development of tourism in localities such as Sucevita or at Humorului Monastery.



Graphic 1. Distribution of Tourist Accommodation Capacity in Suceava County (2017)
Source: our own representation; data obtained from <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>

¹The statistical data cover the level of Suceava County, as this county is synonymous of the tourist part of the region of Bucovina.

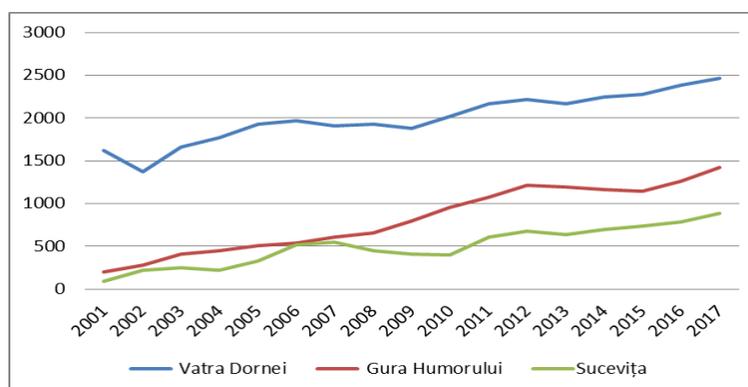


Graphic 2. Distribution of Tourists Flows in Suceava County (2017)

Source: our own representation; data obtained from <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>

It is particularly interesting the analysis of the evolution of tourist activity in two localities (Sucevita and Gura Humorului) that feature UNESCO monuments compared to a tourist destination where spa and mountain tourism activities prevail (Vatra Dornei).

Referring to the accommodation capacity, in the analysis area could be observed that in Sucevița there was a 9.6 times increase in the number of accommodation capacity, from 92 beds to 888 beds between 2001 and 2017. In addition, in Gura Humorului the increase was of 7.0 times, from 201 beds to 1,421 beds. Comparatively, in Vatra Dornei the increase was of 1.5 times, from 1,623 to 2,462.

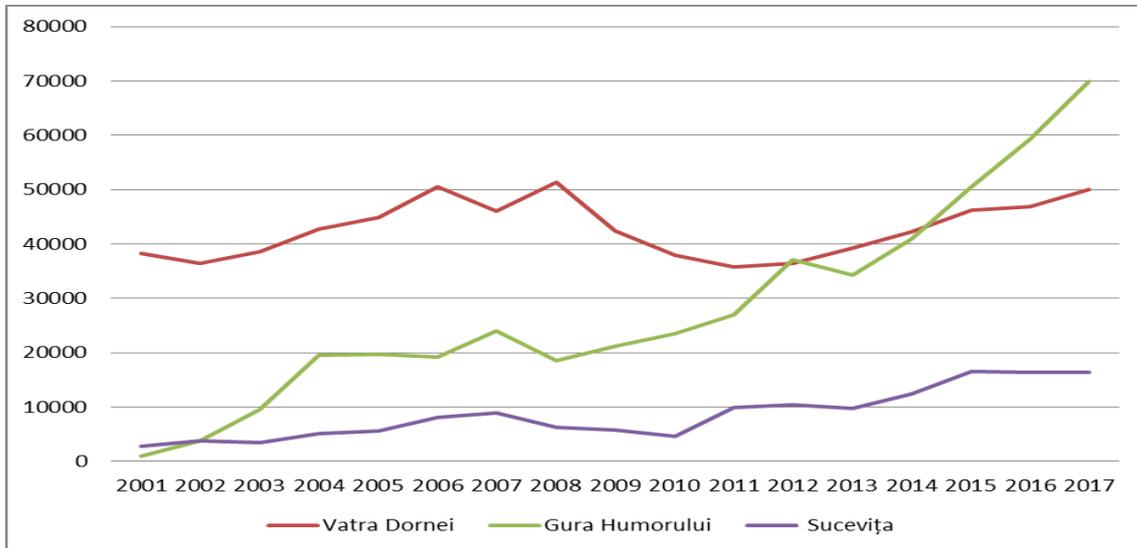


Graphic 3. The Evolution of the Accommodation Capacity (Number of Beds)

Source: our own representation; data obtained from <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>

Spectacular growths in terms of the number of tourists are related with the localities situated along the main tourist flows, towards the monasteries of Bucovina – Gura Humorului and Sucevița. Thus, between 2001 and 2017, the value of this indicator

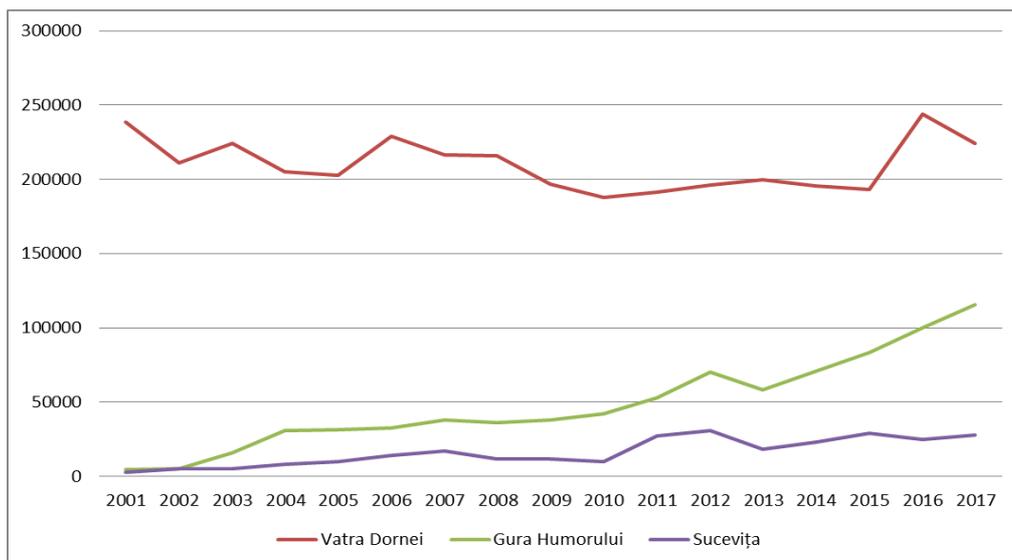
increased in Gura Humorului by 73.7 times, from 974 to 69,874 and in Sucevița by 5.9 times, from 2,735 to 16,342. In the same period, in Vatra Dornei the number of tourists increased only 1.5 times, from 38, 212 to 50,031.



Graphic 3. The Evolution of the Accommodation Capacity (Number of Beds)
 Source: our own representation; data obtained from <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>

Regarding the overnight stays in the analysis target area, a remarkable fact is that between 2001 and 2017 a slight straightening of tourist number is

remarked, correlated with the fact that after 2010, the statistics present an increase in the number of overnights stays.



Graph 5. Evolution of the Overnight Stays between 2001 and 2017
 Source: our own representation; data obtained from <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>

The number of the overnights increased by 23.6 times in Gura Humorului, from 4,885 to 115,512 and by 8.8 times in Sucevița, from 3,112 to 27,643. In the same interval, the number of overnights decreased by 6.1% in Vatra Dornei from 238,608 to 224,044. It is remarkable that in 17 years, Gura Humorului has turned from a marginal locality placed on the tourist map of the county, into an important tourist destination, exceeding the number of tourists of Vatra Dornei – a tourist resort of national level, renowned both for its skiing slopes and for its spa facilities!

6. CONCLUSIONS

The enlisting of the frescoed monasteries in the UNESCO World Heritage represented a huge opportunity for the development of tourism, both within rural settlements (Sucevita, Vatra Moldoviței, Humor Monastery), but also in Bucovina (e.g. Gura Humorului), and it seems that this opportunity has been fully exploited.

Tourism development was possible – on the one hand due the measures taken to protect, preserve, and restore these sights (by means of government and European funds) – and on the other hand, due to the actions taken to promote the cultural heritage.

The hospitality industry has developed in the last years through an increase in the number of tourist accommodation units. Most accommodation units are small and consist mainly of hostels or tourist villas, being structures developed by the local population, resulting in the fact that a great deal of

the money earned from tourism remains within the community.

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