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## SUCEAVA ON CAMERA: THE COUNTY COUNCIL AND LOCAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY ROMANIA

### Abstract

In post-communist Romania, regional self-identification has undergone significant change. Particularly, a paradigm shift occurred in relation to 20<sup>th</sup> century Romanian historiography (I have in mind the national communist as well as inter-war historic narratives). The literature and the promotional films of Suceava County Council (i.e., the local government branch) are a case in point. They are designed to advertise tourism products in travel marts and various media outlets. Next to the story of a multi-faith/ethnic community, particular images and symbols are employed in order to craft the public identity of the county. A regional iconography gradually emerges on screen as more video content about Suceava is being produced. Capturing the essence of Romanian Bucovina on camera is a challenge steeped both in the history of the Habsburg Duchy and in that of the Moldavian principality (whose northernmost part was incorporated into the Habsburg Empire in 1775). Next comes the attempt to ‘touristify’ natural sites of environmental interest. History and nature are narrative tropes that amount to a coherent story delivered to natives and visitors alike. Despite the industrial scarring of the landscape well known to the natives, areas of woodland and countryside are on display. City life is largely ignored for the sake of a multicultural history of Bukovina mainly located in a rural setting. Screening Suceava has everything to do with identity-building. The rhetoric of regional self-designation seems to rank high on the local political agenda. The cosmopolitan Austro-Hungarian Bukovinian identity is obviously at odds with the ethno-national legacy celebrated in the so-called ‘Northern monasteries’ of Moldavia or in the Suceava fortress of Stephen the Great (who was built into an icon of Romanian historiography). The recreational opportunities of Suceava County are marketed to tourist boards, hotel chains, etc. as the retention of a Mitteleuropean distinctiveness. Explicitly, it is ‘something’ that has stayed with the indigenous population ever since the Austrian state set out to instruct the natives in the arts of life. There is a video side effect to the story. The mountainous countryside of Suceava is sold to the public as being peopled by men and women in national dress, a community dramatically different from all other surrounding areas of 21<sup>st</sup> century Romania.

Keywords: promotional films, regional identification, Bukovina, Suceava, Romania

### 1. Bukovinian heritage off and on screen<sup>1</sup>

The advance of heritage industry in post-communist Romania is obvious. Specifically, “the reproduction of social memory and heritage landscapes” (Potter and Modlin, 2015: 1) in the narratives

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of the sustainable development and ecotourism (Matei & Chirita, 2011; Pomeanu, Teodosiu, Ene Popa, Boutin, 2013) has impacted on regional self-identification patterns. Undoubtedly, the exploitation (rather than preservation) of regional features of scenic or historical interest is well under way in Suceava County. The development of the countryside requires the commodification of heritage resources. Specifically, place identity is on display as a means to bring about social change. Rural communities aim to become destinations for tourism. It is safe to say that Suceava County Council attempts to generate growth and the holiday business benefited from the public campaigns of the local branch of government. The sheer number of guidebooks and TV spots that promote, for example, Suceava County encourages me to assume that the tourist industry targets customers who do not have regular contact with outdoor work. As a matter of principle, they are urbanites who would want to stay in country houses or on farms. Importantly, they find out about the scenery and wildlife of remote Romania from the TV set or from travel marts. Promotional films (re-)interpret regional heritage: the narrative tropes of history and nature suit the demands of those who self-identify with Suceava as well as of the public invited to spend time and money in local resorts. The video content draws on national iconography associated with traditional images of Romanians. At the same time, the people of the county argue for their civilized, central European identity. On screen, they make the point of “the Habsburg project of modernity” (Janowski, Iordachi & Trencsényi, 2005: 5) inherited from the ethnic Romanians of Bukovina. As far as the indigenous public is concerned, the result is visually familiar yet the message is far from typical. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Romanian modern culture had to say something else about the North of Suceava County: simply put, yet another Romanian province was returned to the motherland in 1918. Habsburg Bukovina<sup>2</sup> was effectively erased from Romanian history books and, to some extent, from public view throughout the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century (Miclea, 1976; Iacobescu, 1993; Van Drunen, 2015). Conclusively, the principality of Moldavia was the main concern of public storytelling about the past, both in communist media and history textbooks.

The post-communist county of Suceava, nevertheless, looked back at its almost 150-year history (1775-1918) as a Habsburg dominion (Janowski, Iordachi & Trencsényi, 2005: 54). Local media, companies, and state run institutions traced back their history to the time of Bukovina or claimed some sort of Bukovinian legacy<sup>3</sup>. In other words, Romanian Bucovina is a means to put on display a new interpretation of cultural geography with regards to issues of self-identification. Apparently, notions of place and belonging are extricated from the issue of nationalism, which is however in the mainstream of Romanian life. The regional designation of Bucovina is used for marketing and business purposes.

On camera, post-communist Suceava County fuses the iconography of Romanianism (i.e., Romanian nationalism) with narratives about historical Bukovina. Nonetheless, there is something of a breakdown in the relation between iconic images of revisionist national history and the narrative framework of a Bukovinian past. The classic historiography of the nation state delivered a version of Romanian history that did without most of the values preached by the cosmopolitan city of Czernowitz (i.e., by the multi-ethnic citizenry of the Habsburg Crownland: Jews, Ruthenians, etc.). At odds with the tenets of Romanianism, the idea of ‘Bukovina’ getting more and more attention is now being made consistent with the master story of the modern Romanian nation. While appropriating the language of European regionalism by means of its Habsburg lineage, the filmography of Suceava County brings about dramatic change: the urban landscape of multi-racial Czernowitz, iconic for Bukovina, is increasingly fading away into the woodland of a Romanian Bucovina. Irrespective of the rather meagre evidence that the Habsburg Duchy survived in today Suceava (be that the county or Suceava municipality), promotional films show the way the natives like to think of themselves in a way tourist guidebooks cannot possibly match. Off camera, Suceava County Council is an information broker with an agenda of its own. The amount of money spent by the council/central government on films that

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<sup>2</sup> I use the spelling ‘Bucovina’ in order to point to the use made of the term in present day Romania, particularly in Suceava County; the German spelling ‘Bukovina’ is meant to convey the historical, Habsburg crownland now divided between Romania and Ukraine.

<sup>3</sup> To name but a few of them: the privately owned TV station *BucovinaTV*, state-run institutions *Bucovina Fire Brigade of Suceava* (my translation of *Inspectoratul pentru Situații de Urgență Suceava*), *Bucovina Cultural Center* (my translation of *Centrul Cultural Bucovina*), companies *Arcadia – Bucovina Medical Center* (my translation of *Arcadia-Centrul medical Bucovina*), etc.

promote the hospitality industry of the area is proof of commitment to a new future for Suceava County as Bucovina.

The path taken by the holiday business seems to have been the only available one. The unremarkable communist urban development in Suceava County wiped from the face of the ground most heritage buildings that survived into the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Effectively, this narrowed down the choices of post-communist entrepreneurs and cultural elites: building a sense of belonging to and relationship with the place had to consider areas of environmental interest. Furthermore, reconstructing the region after industrial scarring associated with the mining industry<sup>4</sup> has yet to begin, which means that recreational areas were handpicked so that they had no prior involvement with former coalmines. The above-mentioned sense of local identity and pride could only be reinforced if the natives of Suceava were to consider what was left untouched by the communist past. Although conservation areas show the value placed by the community on old forests and biodiversity<sup>5</sup>, large tracts of derelict land pose dangers to wildlife as well as to the indigenous population.

Off and on camera, Bucovinians have particular associations with a secluded mountainous woodland and grassland. This is what has come to be considered a visual trademark of local self-identification. The setting befits the 21<sup>st</sup> century outdoor culture, with cycling, rafting, climbing, or snowmobiling activities in the spotlight. The appreciation of the place leads to environmental concerns that, eventually, are duly mentioned. However, the heritage of Habsburg Bukovina is intangible rather than man-made while Romanian Bucovina is proud of the crowning achievements of the Moldavian principality: the painted churches and monasteries Moldavian princes built in order to celebrate victories against Ottoman Turks.

Except for medieval Moldavian civilization, the story told by promotional films

resonates more with the notions and practices of heritage through the gathering together of residues, memories, local artefacts, traditions and individual pastness in genealogy. Linkage with place is thus achieved through a concept of its past, and time linkage with the past is achieved through place and its continuities. (Staiff & Watson & Bushell, 2013, 8)

This is to say that whatever present day Bucovina has to offer, it is a far cry from the brick and mortar heritage of the built environment German-speaking civilization brought to the North of the Moldavian principality beginning with 1775. As previously said, the Moldavian principality had already reached a stage of development that allowed indigenous communities to build monastic and military establishments prior to the Austrian occupation of the region. Nevertheless, modern city life in the area was a German speaking affair up to the interwar period and, possibly, after. What is more, the cause of Moldavian heritage conservation was greatly advanced by the open involvement of Habsburg administration in the protection of historic places. For example, even if most churches and monasteries have been in use, at least one of them (i.e., Putna, where Stephen the Great is buried) together with Suceava fortress had to be rebuilt to their present appearance<sup>6</sup>. In Bukovina, archaeological work on historical sites began at the time when present day Suceava was part of the easternmost province of the Habsburg Empire.

Interest in local history developed the belief that information about the past should be made available to everyone. Ever since, the obvious changes brought to the landscape by archaeology and conservation practices are particularly significant to place identity in Suceava. Information gathered from the material remains of Moldavian settlements in the area was deemed of highest importance. It is safe to say that recording the past of a Romanian-speaking civilization legitimated the claims of

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<sup>4</sup> Tarnița and Fundu Moldovei are the two most important ones.

<sup>5</sup> The most famous conservation areas of Suceava County are managed by the Suceava Forestry Directorate. The local branch of the National Forest Authority even commissioned a film for English-speaking audiences I will later come back to.

<sup>6</sup> It is worth mentioning the name of K. A. Romstorfer who, on behalf of Habsburg authorities, carried out restoration work at Suceava fortress, Putna monastery, etc. Romstorfer's work had to do with the late 19<sup>th</sup>- early 20<sup>th</sup> century cataloguing of Moldavian medieval vestiges demanded by the administration of the crownland (Eagles, 2014: 96-97; 111-112; 138-141). Part of the post-communist revival of interest in Austrian Bukovina is the name of the publishing house of the Bukovinian Museum of Suceava, namely *K. A. Romstorfer Press*.

modern Romania to Austrian Bukovina<sup>7</sup>. On the contrary, nowadays the Habsburg heritage helps define Bucovina as a central European region cut off from the turmoil of the Balkans that threatens to spread into Mitteleuropa. Once the association with German-speaking Europe is secured, the Bucovinian self-image is defined in contrast to Moldovan<sup>8</sup> regional self-identification.

In order to show what Bucovina is and what it is not, Suceava County on camera appropriates part of the rhetoric Romanian self-identification is traditionally known for: the counterparts of Bucovina are Western Civilization and the Balkans, with the Jewish community, USSR, and present day Ukraine somewhere in the background. Vatra Dornei, the most popular resort of the county, sets an example meant to fit in with the history of Bucovina, which is seen as a model. In several video productions commissioned by the town hall or the local hospitality industry, the resort and its proximity are elevated to something of a regional entity. Namely, the Vatra Dornei resort is referred to as the ‘lands of Dorna’<sup>9</sup>. This is nothing short of a *pars pro toto* figure that takes Vatra Dornei for Bucovina and, sometimes, Bucovina for its most iconic woodland area, Vatra Dornei.

As early as 1957, Freeman Tilden’s first principle of heritage interpretation stated that “any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile” (Tilden, 1977: 9). Keeping this in mind, the return to what appears to be a pre-modern regional self-identification in Suceava County is an effective public relation tool meant to re-build the image of Suceava County. The attempt to stress the value of cultural diversity rather than national distinctiveness is widely appreciated in today’s Europe. Most likely, this narrative of place and belonging answers the needs of visitors and the natives alike. Importantly, the Bucovinian notion of belonging is significant inasmuch as it is rooted in a place delineated by ‘the gathering together of residues, memories, local artefacts, and traditions’ rather than tangible heritage.

Like everywhere else in the world, Romanian heritage tourism is a choice motivated by profit. Yet the “the economic value of heritage can be based in its ideological significance” (McMorran, 2008, 334), explicitly in national self-identification patterns.

## 2. The Advertorial as a Tool of Regional Self-Identification

In 21<sup>st</sup> century Romania, the strengthening of regional self-identification occurs as a result of several factors. Among them, the tourist industry and the rich legacy of particular areas are worth mentioning. For example, the North-eastern Romanian county of Suceava has developed a rather coherent visual narrative<sup>10</sup> that effectively shapes the self-image of the community. On camera, the story is told on behalf of the area’s hospitality industry. Local business is widely perceived as the answer to economic challenges that have engulfed the county since the demise of communism in Romania.

TV spots and promotional films profess the “conscious detachment from the East” (Brechtfeld, 1996: 2), i.e., of disengagement from the overwhelming Moldovan regional self-identification of the area. On screen, Suceava County is a far cry from the rest of Romania, a country that struggles with the perception that it might belong to the Balkans instead of Central Europe. To cut a long story short, most of present day Suceava County was the Southern half of the Habsburg Duchy of Bukovina up to 1918.

<sup>7</sup> Bukovina was ‘Austrian’ inasmuch as the circumstances of neighbouring Transylvania (with its mostly Hungarian administration at the time of the Dual Monarchy) were nowhere to be seen in Czernowitz (that had a large Jewish community alongside Romanian and Ukrainian ethnic groups), not to mention in the Bukovinian countryside that was sparsely populated with Hungarian-speaking settlers.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Moldavia/Moldavian’ designates the historical Romanian principality while ‘Moldova/Moldovan’ designates both the modern region of Moldova, now part of Romania, as well as a former Soviet republic, currently the Republic of Moldova; both Romanian Moldova and the Russian occupied Eastern part of the principality (1812), also known as Bessarabia, were part of medieval Moldavia.

<sup>9</sup> My translation of “Țara Dornelor”

<sup>10</sup> I have already discussed at length Bukovinian identification in the print culture of Suceava county at the time of the communist regime (“Regional Identification in Present Day Romania. The Case Study of Suceava County”, *Messages, Sages and Ages*. Volume 2, Issue 1, Pages 7–16, ISSN (Online) 1844-8836, DOI: 10.1515/msas-2015-0001, August 2015).

With the help of the County Council, public relations campaigns run by local businesses make a point out of Mitteleuropa.

The cosmopolitan city of Czernowitz (Frunchak, 2010), which used to be equated with Bukovina, is a distant memory. As the promotional films show, the city goes unmentioned even today. However, the hospitality industry of the area succeeded in conflating the terms of Suceava and Bucovina. There is no doubt that the overlap between ‘Suceava’ and ‘Bucovina’ in tourist guidebooks and TV spots leads to confusion. Irrespectively, Bucovina is the greatest tourist asset of Suceava County. Its mountainous heartland, the painted monasteries, and the fortress of Suceava come together in an appealing mix of adventure and myth that remotely recalls documented history.

When it comes to Bucovina on camera, it is difficult to distinguish between paid and unpaid video content. Most of the times, the remote region of Suceava comes to life as the stuff of legend. In fact, the promotional films are closer to the genre of undisclosed advertorials than to old tales about the German-speaking administration of the Habsburg Duchy, stories supposedly handed down to the present-day people of Suceava by word of mouth. When it comes to re-enacting the past of Suceava, video content is wrapped up to look like media coverage of events that have actually taken place. Explicitly, the opening of heritage centres, market fairs with Bucovinian-made food, or amusement parks built around the theme of outdoor experiences are the customary focus of promotional films set in Suceava County.

For the most part, the so-called Northern monasteries as well as other vestiges of Moldavian civilization featured prominently in the print culture of socialist Romania. The current success enjoyed by the hospitality business of Suceava builds on the good name the above-mentioned cultural and historic resources have ever since the times of the communist regime. However, the Habsburg past was ignored: for the most part, the multi-ethnic makeup of the crownland was considered the end-result of Viennese social engineering. As a matter of principle, the city of Czernowitz went unstated, not to mention the Romanian territorial losses to the Soviet Union in the aftermath of World War II (i.e., the Northern half of the duchy together with the capital city of Czernowitz itself).

Obviously, footage on Suceava County was readily available at the time of the communist regime. Nonetheless, it is safe to say that throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the regional name of ‘Bucovina’ as well as the Habsburg designation of ‘Bukovina’ had hardly made it on screen. TV documentaries and feature films were shot on location in Suceava, yet most of them focused on the UNESCO listed churches and monasteries of the area. For obvious reasons, Suceava<sup>11</sup> on camera does not have much in common with post-communist Bucovina on camera. Alongside tourist guidebooks, the effort to capture the brand of Bucovina on screen resulted in quite a number of promotional films. Mostly they make sense to a Romanian audience rather than to English-speaking tourists who happen to travel in Suceava County<sup>12</sup>.

## 2. 1. Slide-show versus camerawork

Broadly speaking, post-communist film production falls into two categories.

First of all, there are the older films (produced in the late 1990s early 2000s) of the County Council, which stand for a hands-on-approach to marketing. They eulogize a mythical Bukovinian land

<sup>11</sup> The seat of power of Moldavian princes up to 1564, the town and the name of ‘Suceava’ have always been on the map of modern Romania (not to mention on that of the Moldavian principality). However, the size of Suceava county and even its capital were subject to change throughout time. For instance, from 1938 up to the takeover of Northern Bukovina by the Soviet army, Czernowitz was the first city of the county. Ever since the communist reform of public administration in 1968, Suceava is the second biggest county of Romania and the municipality of Suceava is the head town of the district.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Forceville’s paper on notions of Dutch and ‘Dutchness’ in the short film *The Chinese Wall* (2002), “Interpreting The Chinese Wall knowing Dutch and Dutchness” (2015), gives insight into the culture-bound meanings customarily conveyed by the films of ‘minor’ national cultures. When it comes to video content shot in foreign languages, relying on English subtitles is sometimes misleading, to say the least. Of course, recreational activities and environmental concerns do not actually pose a challenge. Yet, the pre-modern regional identity of Bukovina, merged with the ethno-nationalism of Romanian self-identification, is somewhat difficult to follow particularly as recorded in promotional films.

as if recognition of local distinctiveness necessarily entailed absence of change, i.e., prevention of social and economic development that were nevertheless plain to see in post-communist Romania. On the one hand, they do not have opening credits and if it were not for the name of Suceava County Council, one would have trouble to assign the authorship of such works. On the other hand, they are basic slideshows with soundtrack. So to say, such titles are not motion pictures as much as pictures in motion. To name three of them, I have in mind *Bucovina*, *Suceava Logging Heritage*, and *Bucharest Fair*<sup>13</sup>; essentially, they come across as self-congratulatory marketing tools. Setting and characters are selected for their approximation of the traditional stereotypes regarding the countryside of the North, to some extent already in place in Romanian print culture.

The drive to carve out a place for Bukovinian distinctiveness where, despite everything, Romanianness<sup>14</sup> goes unchallenged is self-evident. The fact that the promotion of the region inadvertently touches on political issues (such as the Romanian claim to the territory of Austrian Bukovina, disengagement from Moldovan self-identification, etc.) makes all the more startling the lack of film credits. The producers seem to have failed to distinguish between filmmaking and the print equivalent of promotional films. Although the viewers must have been aware that local businesses and/or the County Council pay for the information they get, the diffuse authorship of such films seems to help with the development of storytelling about the Bukovinian community on screen and off screen. One can only assume that the purpose of reporting on the forestry heritage of the area, nature trails and rafting is to advance the agenda of the County Council alongside that of the holiday business.

Beyond doubt, local government bodies (i.e., Suceava County Council, Vatra Dornei town hall, etc.) act as brokers in the transmission of information between Bucovinians and the rest of the world. The English speaking<sup>15</sup> world is acknowledged as the main target of marketing, irrespective of the German credentials of Bukovinian heritage. The short film *Bucovina* is the case in point of the slideshow approach to customized advertising.



Plate 1 (Bucovina; computer generated imagery with the name of Suceava County Council in Romanian superimposed on the 3-D world map)

One way or another, *Bucovina* makes it a challenge to determine the director or the cinematographer, despite the opening sequence that points to the County Council. As a matter of principle, one customary way of determining who says what to whom is to lean on the authority on whose behalf the statements about Bucovina are made. At the same time, the unknown screenwriter shows the actual location of Suceava on the map. The privilege of local self-government means that the name of the County Council is plastered all over a three-dimensional globe map (plate 1). Hopefully, the bird's eye view of planet Earth helps put Suceava on the map of worldwide tourism. Computer generated imagery does not take filmmaking a step further, on the contrary, exposes the viewer to a sequence of frames that are both blurred and dark.

<sup>13</sup> *Bucharest Fair* is my translation of the words "tîrg\_bucuresti" superimposed on the left upper corner of the slideshow; *Suceava Logging Heritage* is my translation of *Programul Turistic "Drumul Lemnului"*, otherwise known as 'the road of wood' (available at <http://www.drumullemnului.ro/en/index.html>, retrieved on 19.09.2015); *Bucovina* is actually a title card that, possibly, indicates the title of the film too.

<sup>14</sup> Răzvan Sibii's writing on the narratives of self-identification in the mainstream of Romanian life throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century offers a view of the overlap between Romanianism and Romanianness in the country's popular and literary cultures.

<sup>15</sup> Most of the promotional films have English subtitles.

Once the debate on location is settled, Suceava literally dissolves into the establishing shot of Bucovina. Finally, the customary rhetoric of regional (self-)identification emerges on screen (plate 2). The opening of the film frames images in a mediated shot that relegates filmmaking to a visual aid meant to advance the above-mentioned agenda of the public relation campaign. The film itself seems to supplement written and spoken information: viewers are expected to experience the artwork of a digital postcard as if they were observing the scene first hand.

A self-reflecting image of Bucovinian society emerges as a result of placing characters within an already fictionalized setting. The slideshow as a structural device effectively conveys a sense of shared identity, which is the central piece of the regional marketing strategy undertaken by Suceava County Council. This rather awkward manner of displaying photographs comes to stand for both regional self-identification and media coverage of self-identification. In the mainstream of local communication, particular images and symbols are employed in order to craft the language that would ultimately define the self-image of the county.

Coming back to *Bucovina*, everything should make sense the moment two children in national dress are shown in the foreground, while what appears to be a third character heads for the centre stage (plate 2).



Plate 2 (*Bucovina*, a three shot of two kids in the foreground and a third character that appears to be a woman; they are framed in such a way that hardly constitute a group; the kids are facing away from the viewer while the woman is coming towards the camera)

Obscured by the word 'Bucovina' (that also conceals half the face of one of the children), she makes her entrance from the background. This is an attempt at an iconic image: grassland and woodland all rolled into one in order to show the environmental credentials of Suceava. A traditional wooden house and a church are photoshopped to give the picture the feeling of local heritage and Christian traditions. Next, the slideshow develops further the previously mentioned themes. The unspoiled nature, the painted monasteries and churches, and last but not least, the facilities of Vatra Dornei resort are in the limelight.

The other film under scrutiny does not bring much else to the viewer. Although most of the photographs are new, *Bucharest fair* is a rerun of *Bucovina*. They are not all new, which comes to prove that the iconography of Bucovina is consistent enough throughout most of the films of the County Council. Strangely enough, even the above-mentioned three shot makes a comeback in *Bucharest Fair*. However, now the colours are bleached, the girl and the woman in the background are gone, yet the summer hay harvest and the spruce woodland of Bucovina are hard to miss (plate 3).



Plate 3 (*Bucharest Fair*, a fair-haired boy peering into the distance, as if trying to find someone or something lost)

It is only fair to say that there is something definitely new in the make-up of *Bucharest Fair*. For more than half of the run time (a total of 14 minutes and 40 seconds), this second slideshow-film features a rather famous folk song: “the cuckoo’s calling in Bucovina”. “The cuckoo’s calling” is well known throughout Romania and various artists and bands covered the original song.<sup>16</sup> Played in a loop for about 9 minutes, the folk version of the song is a soundtrack that conveys the sense of regional distinctiveness and national pride at the heart of current Bucovinian self-identification.

The last slideshow-film has a mixed character. The total run time of *Suceava Logging Heritage* (henceforth *SLH*) is 19 minutes and 5 seconds. The first part (6 minutes and 45 seconds) is nothing short of a slide show (plate 4). The last part is actual footage of lumberjacks showing off their skills in the heartland of the county. Traditional but also modern wood-based crafts involve some basic tasks with the goal of fostering a common language for Bucovinian identity. Carving, chain saw wielding, or wood chopping show an exotic world of wood, always on display at typical post-communist Bucovinian woodfairs (plate 5).

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<sup>16</sup> My translation of “Cântă Cucu-n Bucovina”. *The Cuckoo’s Calling* is generally believed to be a folk song, yet it is a national statement emerging from the political establishment of the Old Kingdom of Romania (the union of Wallachia and Moldavia, prior to the incorporation of Transilvania, Bessarabia and Bucovina into the Greater Romania in the aftermath of World War I). In 1904, Spiru Haret and Nicolae Iorga (two of the most respected Romanian statesmen at the time) commissioned the Bukovinian scholar Constantin Mandicevschi for the lyrics of the folk song. *The Cuckoo’s Calling* was meant to commemorate 400 years from the death of Stephen the Great in the Old Kingdom (<http://dragusanul.ro/constantin-mandicevschi/>). The lyrics written by Mandicevschi have a bitter edge and obvious political meanings for Romanian nationals. Czernowitz and the town of Rădăuți are the landmarks of the crownland, and the young men of Romanian Bucovina are called upon to guard the country’s borders. The Bucovinian local folk music scene is one of extraordinary richness. Vasile Mucea (1933-2011) is a music legend of Romanian-speaking Bucovinians, who experienced first-hand the partition of the region into Romania and USSR in the aftermath of World War II (“Vasile Mucea 1933 – 2011”, 2013). As a result, his birthplace, Bilca, is now a border village (the surrounding area North of Bilca, i.e., Crasna, Carapciu, Storjineț, is presently Ukrainian territory). His music conveys the Romanian experience of war, namely the folk memory of WWI and WWII (his father and brother fought on the Romanian side against USSR, widely known in the area as ‘the Russians’). According to his lyrics, they ‘trampled on Bucovina’. Many share his view of Romanian recent history and, particularly, the afterlife of *The Cuckoo’s Calling* in the country’s popular culture is plain to see. A number of other Romanian artists covered the song over the years: possibly, the most famous is Grigore Leșe. However, less mainstream music listeners seem to pay attention to the piece. I have in mind *Adrian Naidin Band* that recorded a jazz cover of the classic *cuckoo* theme whose lyrics quote Vasile Mucea’s indictment of Russian imperialism. Much in the same vein, the folk metal band *Bucovina* released in 2010 “Duh” (Extended Play); the third track “Straja” (The Guard, my translation) covers the same folk song; conclusively, some of Mandicevschi’s lyrics found their way again into the mainstream of 21<sup>st</sup> century Romanian popular culture.





Plate 5 (*SLH*, old-school lumberjack)



Plate 4 (*SLH*, wooden house being built)

Most of the times, the editing and camerawork of *SLH* come across as being conspicuously clumsy (plate 6).

In other words, Bucovinians in national dress mingle with tourists and everybody else in the crowd. Consequently, the public cannot refrain noticing some phony-looking axe-wielding men in traditional costumes. Among regular fair visitors, they are particularly out of place whenever the camera catches them off guard. Everything happens as a result of the way the master scene method is employed in *SLH*. The cinematographer makes some questionable choices that result in having the viewers feel in the middle of things with no contextualising shots to cut to as the story unfolds.

For example, one cannot tell apart the master shot from the over the shoulder one. The answering shots do not match the coverage on the previous one, which makes film storytelling particularly difficult to follow. Instead of the still pictures that plagues the previous films I already mentioned, *SLH* provides plenty of such examples for the public to ponder on.



Plate 6 (*SLH*, the crowd, the wooden artefacts, and the shooting method of *SLH*, later to be rediscovered in other promotional films)

The use of slideshow proves that the very idea of film as language is relegated to a visual aid. The promotional films are a narrative medium that lends itself readily to the practice of reporting on local events. Reporting for television outlets should explain the diffuse authorship of video advertising paid for by Suceava County Council. Based on (some) facts, sanctioned by the authority of local government, and delivered by an unknown correspondent, the purportedly objective information about Bucovina is, for all intents and purposes, an undisclosed advertisement in which those who commissioned the films have a vested financial interest.

## 2. 2 Professional films and outdoor culture

The second kind of promotional films display less to no regard for the slideshow device. They were produced mostly since 2010. These titles try to move on from the tradition of providing the audience with the written story of Bucovina rather than with storytelling according to the formal conventions of mainstream cinema. However, a number of 3-minutes TV spots (that were broadcast by public and commercial stations back in 2010) still described the famous painted monasteries of Suceava

much in the same manner *SLH* did. For example, Humor, Moldovița, Putna, Sucevița, and Voroneț enjoyed similar media coverage in which slides sum up their main points of interest. Having the same title as the names of the UNESCO listed churches and monasteries, the five advertising spots market Romania to foreign tourists.



Plate 7 (Monasteries Romania, the end credits)



Plate 8 (*Voroneț*, slideshow superimposed on the image of the monastery)

Beyond doubt, the camerawork and editing are finally present in *Suceava Forestry Directorate Hunting Film*<sup>17</sup> (henceforth *SFDHF*). The cinematic devices of mainstream filmmaking help contemporary audiences relate to the social background of Suceava County. Like the previous short films, the two other promotional films I will approach, *Tourisme Vert Roumanie* and *Outdoor Tourism*, are subsidised either by central or local branches of government. As a result, Suceava County Council and/or The Ministry for Regional Development and Tourism are duly acknowledged in the credits.

Among the titles I have already mentioned, *SFDHF* is possibly the most professional piece of promotional journalism. Among the most obvious features of the film are the convention of seamless editing, camera movements that add to the shots, and shooting on location. The target of *SFDHF* is the community of English speaking hunters. Consequently, the population of big game animals in Bucovina places into an entirely new light the narrative trope of Suceava's untouched nature. So far, there seems to have been no moral objection to either trophy hunting or 'commercial' hunting. If one is to judge from the resources poured into the making of *SFDHF*, it seems that, as a matter of principle, hunting is booming in Suceava County (plate 9).



Plate 9 (*SFDHF*, medium long shot of an adult male deer in the woodlands of Bucovina)

The sought-after trophy animals are sold to big-spending hunters from Western European countries. Although wildlife conservation seems to be of no concern, in the public arena of Bucovina outdoor tourism benefits from all the attention it gets. Blind spots, if not various instances of plain contradiction in terms, are conspicuous in the story told to the public by promotional films. Particular examples go

<sup>17</sup> Suceava Forestry Directorate Hunting Film is my translation of the words "film vanatoare Directia Silvica" superimposed on the left upper corner of the screen.

hand in hand with the narrative of Bukovinian multiculturalism and Romanian ethno-nationalism that are called upon to foster a new sense of regional self-identification in present-day Suceava County.

The County Council's partnership with the French Departement Du Nord seeks to give international exposure to the same issues that should define the mountainous heartland of Bucovina. Vatra Dornei resort and its proximity, the so-called 'Lands of Dorna', gain the recognition of French film professionals who portrayed the place as anything but Bukovinian. Their film goes by the name of "Tourisme Vert Roumanie" and it effectively expunged the Habsburg heritage from the story of Romanian Bucovina.

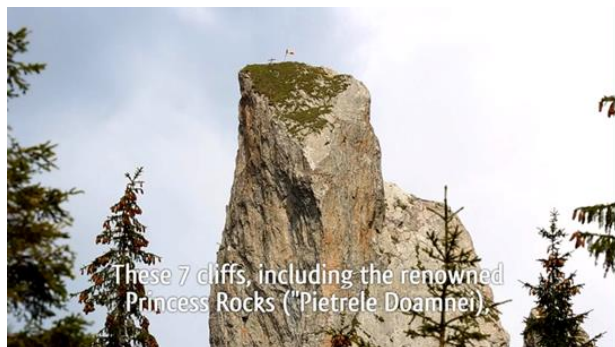


Plate 10 (Tourisme Vert Roumanie, the Romanian flag and the cross on top of an iconic Bucovinian landmark, The Princess' Rocks)

Conclusively, all holidaymakers in search of authenticity are invited to learn about the great outdoors. Romanian Bucovina provides plenty of opportunity to enjoy the wild areas of Vatra Dornei. The assumption is that visiting Suceava should pave the way to a healthy lifestyle. Above all, young people are the ones expected to preserve the Bucovinian countryside once they have experienced the joys of Romanian countryside in Suceava County.



Plate 11 (*Outdoor Tourism*, skiing and other winter sports: snowmobiling activities, extreme sports, etc.)

Bucovina on camera helps assign new meanings to the territory away from human land use in Suceava County. Extended recreation facilities and the high levels of existing woodland make the area a playground of whoever loves action sports. According to *Tourisme Vert Roumanie* and *Outdoor Tourism*, getting to know the heartland of Bucovina is something of a life-changing adventure. In particular, the debate about nature conservation in Bucovina is bound to gather momentum and promotional films work up the sense of urgency regarding the need for more government-designated nature reserves. Awareness of environmental issues is growing and the general interest in the environment and local conservationists are likely to become more politically engaged.

Conclusively, multicultural issues are conspicuously absent in the above-mentioned promotional films. Although important for the way the people of Suceava County choose to represent themselves nowadays, the history of the ethnic other in Habsburg Bukovina is obviously being rewritten to suit the needs of modern self-identification in Romania. Namely, "the complex relationships of the ethnocultural or national groups in Bukovina" (Stambrook, 2004: 185) are reduced to the more intelligible form of nationalist rhetoric. In other words, everything that transcends the cultural barriers of the nation state fades away in the mist of a distant, Austro-Hungarian past. Instead, Romanian "language and culture, as forms through which [...] national conscience is fortified" (Ceașu, 2011: 44) are exhibited ostentatiously. As a result, my own approach to the films of the Suceava County Council

followed the lead of voice over narration. The stories of Suceava and Bukovina make sense if placed in the context of Romanian literary culture whose relation with the video content of local tourism marketing campaigns I have tried to delineate in my introduction. Desired identity and regional self-image should help explain everything absent in the cinematic idiom of the advertorial as a tool of regional self-identification.

### 3. Desired identity and regional self-image: Romanian self-identification in Suceava County

Since the early 1990s, tourism professionals have advertised Bucovinian self-identification in Romanian mainstream media. As a result, the public found out what visitors have to say about Suceava County and what the people of Suceava think about themselves. Purportedly, Bucovinian self-identification on camera provides factual accounts about the local hospitality industry and about tourists themselves. Attracting visitors celebrates a community culture steeped in nostalgia for a Mitteleuropean lifestyle and outdoor tourism. The mountain countryside of Suceava is sold to the public as being peopled by men and women dressed in national dress or outdoor apparel, a community dramatically different from all other surrounding areas of Romania.

Most notably, promotional films fully develop the speech mannerisms and the visuals that have come to stand for regional identity in the media of Suceava County. Most of the times, such mannerisms are exposed as defining the untouched nature of remote Bucovina, whose wilderness is supposed to make up for the shortcomings of local infrastructure. Travelling for pleasure in Suceava, on the one hand, entails appreciating the history of the place and, on the other, interest in wildlife and outdoor sports. As for the Bucovinian host, (s)he self-consciously embodies the liberality and goodwill of Central Europe. If one is to judge on what we see on screen, the charms of Mitteleuropa are hard to resist. Basically, “a market group with money, such as the tourist [...], is faced by a market group that, having little money, has to make its claim on the basis of moral rectitude, such as local people” (Howard, 2003: 103). The attempt to ‘touristify’ natural sites of environmental interest amounts to a coherent narrative delivered to natives and visitors alike. Despite the industrial scarring of the landscape well known to the natives, areas of grassland, woodland, and countryside are always on display. City life is largely ignored for the sake of a multicultural history of Bukovina.

The Moldavian legacy, the almost 150 years of German-language administration, and what used to be a multi-lingual society are the credentials of the indigenous identity in an attempt to stage the authentic representation of the past. What happens on camera is a performance everybody seems to be aware of, and especially so the Bucovinian characters. Role-playing provides employment and the gaze of (foreign) tourists pays attention to the plausibility of details regarding the cultural backing of the claims made by local businesses. Ultimately, it is a question of prestige: the locals enhance their status by grounding their self-identification in some other culture than an East European one, while stressing the unsullied environment they inhabit.

Promotional films and TV commercials suggest what the people of Suceava think about their connection to the wider popular culture of Romania whenever their environment is recorded on camera. This filmography gives insight into the failings and the blind spots of a regional culture that emerged mainly as a result of mainstreaming the story of Bukovina. However, the political undertones of the paradigm shift in the rhetoric of self-designation that Suceava citizens have witnessed are a side effect of public awareness regarding the interdependence between history, leisure, and forestry. Romanian self-identification in Suceava County was never challenged by growing awareness of place identity and even less so by the Habsburg past of the area. As the promotional films will prove, the master story of post-communist Bucovina is dramatically different from the urban, German-speaking civilization of Austrian Bukovina. One cannot watch them without grasping devotion to Romania and national aspiration, which undergird even the most casual reporting on national dress or outdoor sports.

The display of local patriotism makes the most out of commercial messages and national imagery. As off-screen narration unfolds, visuals of the Romanian flag, of rugs ornamented with the patterns of the national dress, carved wooden spoons and furniture transform Bucovina into the location of promotional films. They are stage props used in a show, deemed fit to furnish the set of fairy tales about rural heritage. Desired identity and regional self-image pursue the theme of narrative retention of Habsburg identity in Suceava County. However, Romanian self-identification patterns essentially go

unchallenged and the display of nationalism is deliberate in the promotional films subsidised by Suceava County Council.

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