Chapter 22

Tourism for Development in the Republic of Moldova:
Empowering Individuals and Extending the Reach of Globalization

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ABSTRACT

Can globalization be socially inclusive through new 2.0 digital initiatives? This is the thought-provoking question we ask in this article, with a special focus on the Republic of Moldova. Part 1 begins with a reflection on the intersection between globalization, development studies and the current Moldovan context. Part 2 is devoted to the promising field of emergent tourism, and more particularly, tourism 2.0, a blossoming concept that we try to uncover. Part 3 presents a concrete application with the example of Moldova Tours 2.0, a digital initiative in the field of tourism 2.0 in the Republic of Moldova. Various aspects of this project are highlighted and analyzed.

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Moldova is a small (33,843 sq. km) relatively densely populated country with a rich History. She gained her independence, and became a sovereign country on 27 August 1991. Moldova is in South East Europe, sandwiched between Ukraine and Romania in the north of the Balkan Peninsula. The distance between the North and the South is 350 km, and between the West and the East, 150 km. The Republic of Moldova adopted her constitution in July 1994, and became a democratic republic (endorsing the separation of the legislative, executive and judicial powers), functioning under the Rule of Law. The legislative power is exercised by the Parliament, which is elected for four year-terms. There have been eight parliamentary elections since 1991. The latest parliamentary elections were held in Moldova on 30 November 2014. The elections were admittedly more a loss than a victory for the pro-European coalition, because center-right parties were obviously divided by sharp tensions. The pro-Russian So-

cialist Party, comprised of former communists, emerged as the winner of the 2014 elections. It was the strongest party in Parliament, with 20.51% of votes.

Yet, these facts are seldom known outside the small circles of specialists, journalists and commentators of this rather tormented region of the world. But what do people really know about the Republic of Moldova? Will they eventually book a flight to the capital Chisinau? Unfortunately, the Republic of Moldova does not quite enjoy a good reputation abroad: (oft-amplified) stories of poverty, trafficking of human organs, prostitution, and conflicts involving minorities abound.

As the BBC (2015, para12) states:

Moldova is one of the poorest countries in Europe, and has a large foreign debt and high unemployment. It is heavily dependent on Russia for energy supplies, and Russia has not hesitated to take advantage of this fact as a way of exerting economic pressure on Moldova.

In reality, Moldova presents a more appealing outlook and potential; small roads winding through the vineyards, sunflower fields and verdant pastures, bucolic and romantic waterfalls, beautiful monasteries carved into the limestone cliffs, not to forget the festive spirit that reigns in Chisinau, the capital. Part I will sketch out a synthesis between globalization trends and modern developments in the Republic of Moldova. Part II investigates the issue of tourism, and the underlying causes behind the disappointing figures in this small country. Part III puts forward a groundbreaking socially inclusive 2.0 digital initiative aimed at reconciling the dynamics of globalization with development trends in the Republic of Moldova.

THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND GLOBALIZATION

Background

One Country at the Crossroads

Globalization is an umbrella term employed to describe a multi-factor causal process, which results in an increased level of interconnectedness between national economies, regional blocks, financial, capital, and information flows, and also people across the world. Globalization is a derivative of the terms "globe" and "global", which refer to an interconnected whole. It arguably originated with the industrial revolution in Great Britain in 1640, or with the French revolution in 1789. Other authors (O'Rourke & Williamson, 2002) date the phenomenon of globalization back to the nineteenth century. The common denominator of the often nebulous, definitions thereof, is a wide-ranging process of change that entails "social, cultural, economic, and political interdependencies and consequences" (Marsella, 2012, p. 456).

The Republic of Moldova signed an agreement of association with the European Union in Vilnius in 2014 (BBC, 2015). The EU being deeply involved in the globalization process, it is self-evident that the Republic of Moldova too is integral to globalization. The latter is not only circumscribed to the political and economic spheres, but also the cultural one. The results of the cultural integration of the Republic of Moldova into globalization may already be observed by the most vigilant observers. Thousands of Bessarabia's natives work abroad today. Some of them will eventually return, but others have decided to establish, to set new roots in their country of adoption. They do not leave Moldova alone, but often with

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