

**SUSTAINABILITY - WHY CULTURE MATTERS –
A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN MOLDAVIAN AND
ROMANIAN APPROACH ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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Abstract

This paper aims to assess if the perception and understanding of Sustainable Development is linked to the cultural background, namely the Cultural Dimensions established by Geert Hofstede or not. This research aims to evaluate if there are differences between Romanian and Moldavian civil servants concerning the way that sustainable development is being implemented. Considering the fact that the territory of today's Republic of Moldova was once part of Romania, the study tries first to identify if the Scores for the cultural dimensions of Geert Hofstede are similar or not and, further, to seek out if there are any correlations between these scores and the way sustainability is being adopted. For this, an extensive questionnaire has been submitted to Civil Servants from the City Halls in Moldova and Romania. Additionally, interviews with decision makers have been carried out. This Study is part of a post-doctoral fellowship and the findings will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the concept of Sustainability, in general and, in particular of its motto: "Think globally, act locally!" Additionally we hope it will provide some considerations on the "footprint" culture leaves on every aspect of "the way people communicate, perpetuate and develop knowledge about and attitudes towards life" (Clifford Geertz, 1973)

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1. Introduction

Sustainability is the paradigm that was established some thirty years ago. What this paper aims to stress out is the fact that its understanding might be influenced by culture, or, in other words, by the “means through which people communicate, perpetuate and develop knowledge about and attitudes towards life” (Clifford Geertz , 1973). Thus, the way the community understands to use the limited resources in order to meet the social, environmental, economic, technological standards might be influenced by the values, rituals, symbols and heroes of the society.

Romania and the Republic of Moldova have a long common history. As a popular site indicates (<http://migratie.md/node/111>), the Getho-Dacian civilization is dated back to the VI-I centuries B.C., and was spread throughout the territory of Romania and Moldova. After the defeat of 105 B.C. - Emperor Trajan conquers the territory of Dacia and the local population was romanized, taking from the conquerors their language and advanced culture of the Roman Empire. In 271, Emperor Aurelius evacuates of the Roman legions from these territories, and so the “migrating nations” epoch (Goths, Huns, Avars, Slavs) began, which ended up with the formation of the Moldovan feudal state in 1359. This state included territories from today’s Romania and Moldova. In 1812 as a result of the Russian-Turkish Peace Treaty, which was signed in Bucharest, the eastern part of Moldova situated between the Prut and Nistru rivers, named Bessarabia, was annexed to the Russian Empire, thus becoming a Russian province until 1918. In this year, in the aftermaths of World War I, the supreme authority of the Bessarabian state decided to unite with Romania. Still, it was a short-lived Union, as it just lasted 22 years, till 1940, when the country was annexed by the Soviet Union. It was just one of the many consequences of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 1939 in this region. In this context, Moldova functioned as a territorial entity within the USSR. The change came during the last decade of the 20th century. On the 27th

of August 1991, Republic of Moldova became an independent and sovereign State. The maps below indicate “Great” Romania, after the first World War, that included Moldova and, on the right today’s national boundries.



This common history of these neighbouring countries has led to common culture, to a common “software of the mind”(Hofstede, 2010), concerning both practices and values. So, the two populations share symbols, heroes and rituals, which, in term, lead to common values. The fact that they have the same language and religion, important cultural factors, contributed to this fact, even though the Russian influence in Moldova cannot be ignored.

2. Administrative systems

Although every aspect of life is influenced by values of the society, these also impact on the more “objective” context, like the administrative organization of the countries. So, some general information about the 2 countries should prove helpful. Moldova has a population of around 4.1 million people, with a per capita income of 3,415 USD (2013) and a score of the Human Development Index of 0.663, in 2013, ranking 114 of 187 countries. According to its constitution from 1994, Moldova“is a sovereign and independent state, unitary and indivisible.” It is a democratic republic and its fundamental law is similar to many West –European ones. One major

difference to Romania is the fact that the president isn't elected direct by the citizens, but by secret vote of the Parliament members. It's also the parliament which approves the general direction of the internal and external policies of the state. The "think global, act local" imperative is influenced by the administrative structure. The central public administration authorities are the following: the government, 16 ministries, extra-ministerial central authorities (agencies and bureaus) and de-concentrated services. There are 932 territorial-administrative units, divided in 897 "level one" units and 35 "level two" units. Level one refers to cities (municipalities) and villages, while level two include 32 "raions"(counties), the municipality of Chisinau and Balti and the Autonomous Territory Unit of Gagauzia. The National Strategy of Development of the Republic of Moldova 2012-2020, which aims to bring sustainability in the center of the debate has been adopted.

Romania is a democratic republic, after a bloody revolution that took place in December 1989, which has overthrown the communist regime. The population of Romania is around 20 million people, while the per capita GDP is 9.499 USD (2013). In 2013, the HDI was 0.786, ranking 50 out of 187 states. The Parliament is divided in two chambers, representing the legislative power. The executive is the government, which has several ministries under its supervision and other organs and autonomous administrative authorities. The territory is divided in 42 counties, cities and communes (is similar to the smallest administrative division in France, Italy, Switzerland, etc., governed by a mayor and communal council), each level having deliberative and executive authorities. The public administration of the territorial administrative units is grounded on the following principles: Decentralization, local Autonomy and the deconcentration of public services. The National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania Horizon 2013-2020-2030 was approved by the Romanian Government on the 12th of November 2008 and complies with the EU priorities.

3. Methodology of research

The aim of the research was to find out if there are similarities or differences between the Romanian and Moldavian society in the way sustainable development is being understood and implemented, although the later might be influenced by other factors (resources, political priorities). For this, a questionnaire has been developed, on the basis of Geert Hofstede's study of the cultural dimensions, which describes the effects of society's culture on the values of its members, and how these values relate to behavior using a structure derived from factor analysis. Another reason for this research is that the countries scores on the dimensions are relative, as we are all human and simultaneously we are all unique. In other words, culture can be only used meaningfully by comparison (Hofstede et al., 2013).

The questionnaire used, relies on the Values Survey Module 2013, but included also 4 additional questions to it and consisted in 34 questions. From this, 28 were content question and 6 demographic questions. The first referred to the 6 cultural dimensions, which are "empirically based on anthropologically meaningful personal values dominant in the respective nations" (Hofstede, 2013) namely:

Power distance "expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede, 2012, p.68).

Individualism vs. Collectivism: *Individualism*: in this societies, individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families only; *Collectivism*: individuals expect their relatives or members of a particular in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. (Hofstede, 2012, p. 96)

Masculinity vs femininity: Masculinity represents a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material reward for success. Society is more competitive. Femininity stands for a preference for cooperation,

modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life. Society at large is more consensus-oriented (Hofstede, 2012, p. 141).

Uncertainty avoidance dimension expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity (Hofstede, 2012, p.187).

Long-term vs. short-term orientation: Long-term oriented societies foster pragmatic virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular saving, persistence, and adapting to changing circumstances. Short-term oriented societies foster virtues related to the past and present such as national pride, respect for tradition, preservation of "face", and fulfilling social obligations (<http://geerthofstede.nl/dimensions-of-national-cultures>).

Indulgence vs restraint Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms (<http://geerthofstede.nl/dimensions-of-national-cultures>).

Additionally, another theme was introduced in the questionnaire, which included other aspects relevant to sustainability: the use of resources, the social welfare and economic stability. For this, a function with weighted variables has been established. The assumption is that every culture has a shared set of core values and norms guiding their member's behavior. So, the way we relate to the environment, as a resource provider or as part of a system that includes humans is culture-linked and can relate to the dimensions Masculinity-Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance and long or short term orientation. The preoccupation for the community's welfare, or the lack of it, indicates a relation with the implicit basic assumption of any culture and might be linked to the dimensions Individualism-Collectivism and Power Distance. Similarly, the way we relate to the satisfaction of needs is depending on the values that each culture has, promoting Restraint or Indulgence. The

initial considerations indicate that some of the cultural dimension can be related to all trinomial elements: ecology-economy-social. For this, the further analysis of the date will indicate the strongest correlations between each of Hofstede's dimensions and sustainability.

The research didnot focus on Hofstede's model of organizational culture, as this may vary from different causes, even in the same national culture. In order to establish national differences, the values of the dimensions were established by using, as sample, the public servants from 4 different public administrations: two in Romania and two in Moldavia. In this way, the research collected data from matched national samples of individuals, or in Hofstede's words: "matched means similar in all measurable respects except their nationality".

Considering the size of the sample, there were 43 questionnaire field out by Public Servants in Moldavia (from Donduseni and Colibasi) and 55 by Romanian ones (from Fagaras and Sibiu). The questionnaires have been filled out in 2 phases: In August 2014, in Donduseni and Colibasi administration and September-October, in Fagaras and Sibiu.

4. Scores in Moldova

Considering Hofstede's dimensions, the scores in Moldova for them are as follows:

Power Distance Index, $PDI = -0.15 + C$ (PD)

Individualism Index, $IDV = -7 + C$ (IC)

Masculinity Index, $MAS = 3.5 + C$ (MF)

Uncertainty Avoidance Index, $UAI = -35.85 + C$ (UA)

Long Term Orientation, $LTO = 13.05 + C$ (LS)

Indulgence vs. Restraint Index, IVR= 37.9 + C (IR)

Regarding the Sustainability Dimension, a function has being used, to weight the answers of the respective question, SUS= 1.76

5. Scores in Romania

Power Distance Index, PDI= 14.25 + C (PD)

Individualism Index, IDV= 5.6 + C (IC)

Masculinity Index, MAS= 23.45+ C (MF)

Uncertainty Avoidance Index, UAI= -57.45 + C (UA)

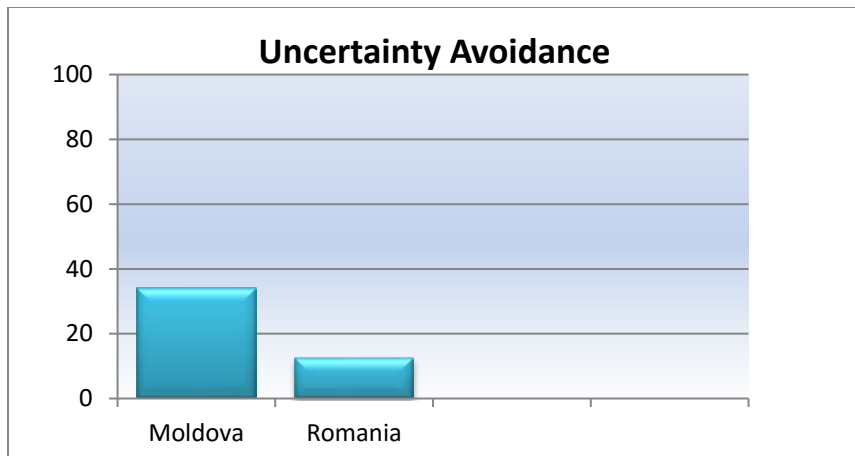
Long Term Orientation, LTO= 11.8 + C (LS)

Indulgence vs. Restraint Index, IVR= 39.9 + C (IR)

SUS = 1.96

6. Comparative analysis of results

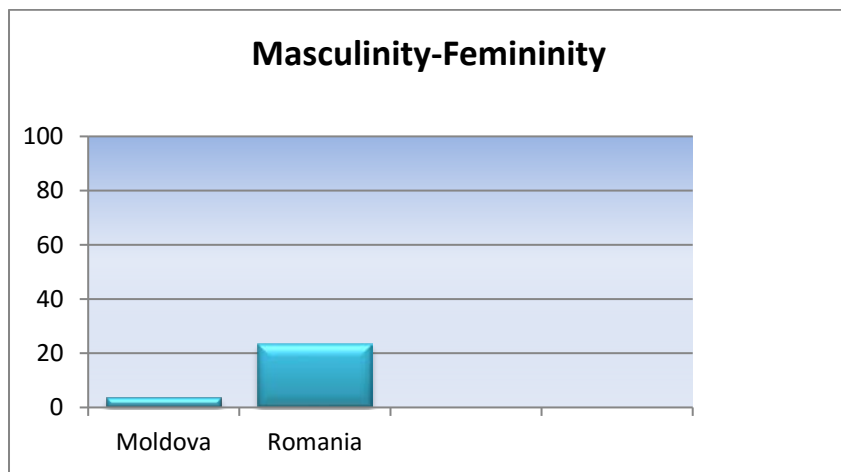
As previous mentioned, the countries scores on the dimensions are relative, as culture can be only used meaningfully by comparison. So, by comparing the results for each dimension in Romania and Moldova we can detect some significant difference regarding some aspects. The biggest different is related to Uncertainty Avoidance dimension. The UAI can range between 0 and 100 and the higher the value, the bigger the level of Uncertainty Avoidance.



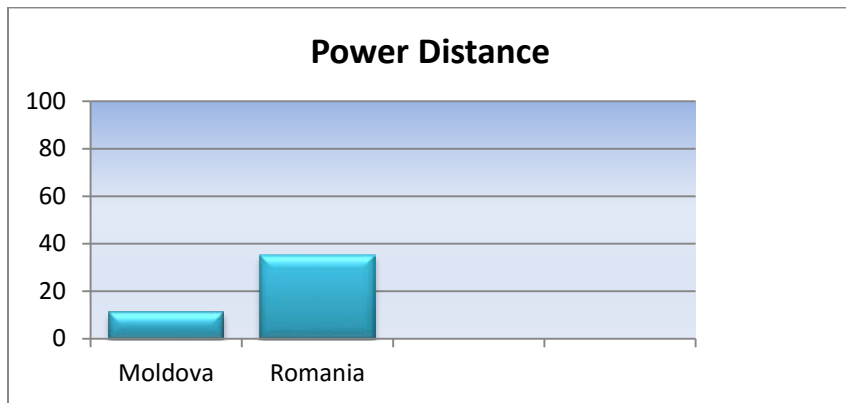
With regards to this aspect, Moldova scores 21.6 points higher than Romania. This suggests that there are differences regarding stress-levels, the orientation on rules, perceived health state and the knowledge a manager should have. Higher anxiety levels, defined as fear of the unknown and ambiguity, leads to the permanent thrive to reduce uncertainty. According to Hofstede (Hofstede 2012), the anxious cultures tend to be expressive cultures. People from these cultures seem more active, agitated, emotional and aggressive than those with lower UAI, which are characterized as calm, relaxed, retained and lazy.

There are other factors which correlate with this dimension, but which, in this particular study, cannot be used to explain the difference, per se. So, for instance, Hofstede proved a correlation between the degree of uncertainty avoidance and the maximum speed limit on highways. In applies for this particular situation, as Moldova has no highways, thus, the speed limit in Romania is, of course, higher. Another observation Hofstede makes is that gender and profession doesn't influence this dimension, but age does. So, elder people seem to have higher levels of uncertainty avoidance. Important factors, such as religion or language, cannot be used to further explain the difference in score regarding this aspect, because the two countries share the same language and religion.

Another significant difference can be observed with regard to Masculinity-Femininity. According to the obtained scores, Romania seems to be a more masculine society than Moldova (a higher. This dimension seems to be least correlated with wealth, according to Hofstede (2013). In the questionnaire, this was established by asking the importance of receiving acknowledgement, working with friendly people, living in a nice neighborhood and having the opportunity to be promoted. Amongst other factors, this dimension is influenced by age, namely as people get older, they tend to promote feminine values. At the same time, the more feminine societies tend to be more preoccupied with the welfare of others, especially the more vulnerable people, on one hand and the environment, on the other. Thus the correlation between femininity and sustainability should be more powerful, but the research didn't indicate it. In further research, factor analysis and bi-dimensional correlation might bring more light on the subject.

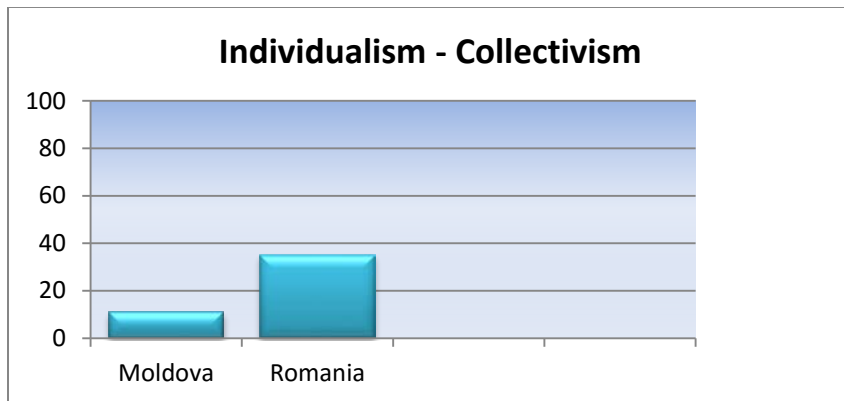


With regards to Power Distance, there is a difference of 14.4 points in “favor” of Romania, making it more susceptible to accept and comply with unequal treatment of people. In fact, this kind of treatment is understood as the stability factor of the society.



A higher PDI indicates a society in which obedience is valued. Thus, employees and citizens accept a sort of dependency towards the leaders, who are viewed as more powerful than them and deserve respect. Moreover, status symbols and privileges of superiors are considered the norm. So, subordination and hierarchy are very important.

Some differences have been found also in relation to Individualism-Collectivism. In this field, Romania has scored 12.6 points higher than Moldova, being, thus, more individualistic, but still remaining a collectivistic society.



Collectivistic societies include individuals, from early on, into strong and united groups. Throughout their life, individuals can depend on and are responsible for the wellbeing of the extended family. Most studies link this dimension with the economic strength, collectivism being usually the norm in poorer countries, where only mutual help can provide the needed resources.

The long term vs. short term orientation doesn't indicate a big difference between the two countries. It reached just 1.25 points, situating Moldova a little bit higher in this dimension.

Indulgence vs. Restraint, indicate a little difference, as well. Romania scores 2 points higher than Moldova.

Surprisingly, even if there are some considerable differences between some dimensions, the Sustainability Index indicates a very small difference in the two countries.

7. Conclusions

The initial aim of this research was to establish if there are relevant differences concerning Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the Sustainability Index between Romania and Moldova. As the results indicate, Uncertainty

Avoidance, Power distance, Masculinity-Femininity and Individualism-Collectivism indicate bigger differences than the other ones.

As the research will continue with a factor analysis and other correlations will become clearer some additional conclusions may indicate how far the cultural differences between this “related” countries go and also, to what extent, the implementation of sustainability will be affected by them.

8. References

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