

# Internationalization of Higher Education in Post-Soviet Small States: Realities and Perspectives of Moldova

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*Internationalization of higher education has become a priority for many universities in post-Soviet small states. Focusing on international communication networks, student mobility, or international curriculum development, universities invest human and financial resources to prepare graduates to meet global challenges. Globalization and post-Soviet independence have promoted emerging patterns of international education strategies and new approaches to managing international activities. This study explores current trends of university internationalization in post-Soviet Moldova as understood and interpreted by Moldova state universities' administrators. International Relations Department officials who are responsible for the design and implementation of international education programs discuss their perceptions of post-Soviet small state international outreach strategies, smallness and marginalization, and the unique aspects of academic internationalization in Moldova. Respondents' diverse internationalization techniques and expectations illustrate the importance of academic dialogue with post-USSR small states and raise possible standards for international collaboration with Eastern and Southern European universities.*

## Higher Education and Global Developments

Mental programmes do change, but slowly and not according to anyone's master plan. Changes take decades, if not centuries. If the inheritance of the Roman Empire still separates Belgium from the Netherlands, two countries in intimate contact for over 2000 years, one should not believe one can change the minds of Serbs, Russians or Albanians within a few years...we better take mental programmes as given facts.

(Hofstede, 2001, p. 11)

Irrespective of their economic development and political inclinations, the post-Soviet small states are experiencing an increasing demand for access to higher education. This is partly because such states have entered into "an accelerated process of multidimensional global changes encompassing the fields of economy, finance, science and technology, communication, culture, politics and education" (Gacel-Avila, 2005, p. 123). University graduates in Chisinau, Riga or Vilnius are expected to adequately react to these changes by meeting the demands of globalization. As a result, post-Soviet small states universities are "not immune from global-minded preoccupations" (Altbach, 2002, p. 27). Internationalization of curricula, growing student and faculty mobility, academic exchanges and research joint ventures, play an important part in the current life of local higher academic institutions. Western universities offer post-Soviet small states universities different opportunities for knowledge exchange and sharing. Small states universities in their turn explore opportunities and try to reconsider their internationalization mission, tasks and responsibilities in the context of new academic collaborative priorities.

State universities in the Republic of Moldova are at the centre of global outreach higher education policies. Moldova has paid serious attention to the internationalization of higher education as a major tool to supply its educational system with current international curricular and

methodological innovations. International outreach creates a foundation for up-to-date research and development in the transitional post-Soviet economies and builds regional multi-level collaborations (Kushnarenko, 2010). Academic institutions in Moldova generate knowledge for collaborative academic plans with foreign universities (Cojocari & Tvircun, 2010; Birladeanu, 2008) and become centres of social change (Kushnarenko, 2010).

A widely intensifying and growing impact of internationalization of higher education on Moldovan universities explains the current effort to improve their existing curricula, research networks, internal organizational structures and modes of communication in order to meet the demand for new trans-border activities. State universities in Moldova tailor their internationalization policy frameworks according to the requirements of their foreign counterparts' collaborative program format (Abrahamsson, 1993) and re-establish university-government relations in order to better manage financial and human resource pressures. Numerous strategies have been suggested for improvement on how to speed up university global outreach (Altbach, 2002; Marginson & Sawir, 2006), increase international student flows (Altbach, 2002), and design joint curriculum development activities (Kushnarenko, 2010; Cojocari, 2008). However, little has been said about what Moldovan international education policy leaders think about higher education internationalization, how they define it and understand the university mission in the global academic setting.

Mundy (2005) recognizes that many nation-states have been unevenly affected by globalization processes and "competition states" (Mundy, 2005, p. 47) have arisen as a result of globalization. In the contemporary geopolitical environment "the growing tensions between powerful localising and globalising forces increasingly mean that local issues cannot be understood without reference to the global context" (Crossley & Holmes, 2001, p. 396). With this in mind we investigate: (1) what post-Soviet Moldovan academic leaders think about current global academic competition and impact of globalization on educational restructuring (Mayo, 2009) of contemporary Moldovan university, (2) what impact the perception of smallness can have on the shape of international operations, (3) how post-Soviet small states demonstrate their unique way in setting collaborative networks, and (4) whether ex-USSR small state universities experience a dominant influence on policy and international education joint venture operational management from foreign universities. We explore why Moldovan international education university policy makers consider international education activities as their current institutional policy priority. We pay particular attention to the definitions used to frame internationalization, methods to evaluate institutional infrastructure, the human and financial capacity to carry out internationalization, and Moldova's potential as a small post-Soviet state to participate, compete and collaborate globally.

At this stage of the investigation our aim is to indicate the current issues and challenges confronted by Moldovan university administration as they attempt to internationalize university functions.

### **Moldova and Higher Education**

Moldovan state universities are teaching and research state universities with the average student body of approximately ten thousand students and one thousand staff members (The National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova, 2011). Each university designs its own strategies for internationalization. The universities attract students from all over Moldova, as well as the neighbouring post-Soviet states. They have also developed numerous international partnerships with higher education institutions in Europe, Asia, Africa, and North America. The Moldovan state universities have close relations with universities in Romania, Estonia, Lithuania, and the Ukraine, and have developed vibrant academic networks using technology as a major source of

communication. Collaboration with international organizations and associations is facilitated and administered mainly by international university-partners and various international organizations, such as the American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS, Renaissance Foundation, British Councils, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Romania-Fulbright International Educational Exchange Program (The Ministry of Education of Moldova, 2012). These relationships have provided Moldovan universities with opportunities to participate in international academic projects and to distance themselves from Soviet legacies. During the Soviet era, higher education training and academic research were artificially separated from each other, while so-called basic research was conducted under the auspices of various research institutes of the Republic of Moldova Academy of Sciences. Moldovan universities were deprived of research funding, precluding their participation in research projects.

### **Internationalization of Higher Education and Post-Soviet Small States**

Internationalization of Moldovan higher education attempts to overcome the post-Soviet legacy by proposing activities that could and serve as a tool to improve curricula, give an opportunity to participate in joint academic projects and serve as an alternative funding source for research and innovations. In this respect, internationalization efforts follow the UNESCO World Conference on “Higher Education in the XXI Century: Vision and Action-2000,” which prescribed internationalization of higher education as an integral part of the institutional missions for world universities and academic systems (Gacel-Avila, 2005). Each institution of higher education is called upon to envisage the creation of an appropriate structure and mechanism for promoting and managing internationalization (UNESCO Conference Final Paper, 2005). Many countries, including small post-Soviet states, are reconsidering university missions and reorganizing management structures in order to facilitate international collaboration more effectively.

Various international collaborative networks penetrate the post-Soviet ex-autonomous academic systems, none of which have managed to escape this process. Small states universities realize that they cannot meet the demands of the globalized world acting alone. However, the strengths of indigenous academic systems, the privileges of autonomy and the necessity “to protect national cultural identity with the growing ability to compete internationally” (Fim’yar, 2008, p. 12) remain the core of local university visions and missions (Chicus, 2012). Certainly, focusing on local identity may contribute to the successful performance of national economies and educational systems in the post-Soviet environment, but they may limit their institutional strategies with regard to global outreach. The increasing variations and trends towards international collaboration among institutions of higher education in post-Soviet small states and foreign universities have never been more vibrant and kaleidoscopic. Small states universities seek to develop a more systematic approach to the marketing and exporting of their educational products and services. The Moldova State University and the “Ion Creanga” State Pedagogical University, for instance, consider international collaboration to be an important element of their missions and make considerable efforts to provide their students with international and intercultural skills, responding to the needs of contemporary global labour markets (Cojocari, 2011).

According to Kushnarenko (2010) the majority of post-Soviet small states universities are currently looking for strategies for incorporating innovations and research made in collaboration with foreign universities into their own systems. Small post-Soviet states approach higher education internationalization with different amounts of resources, interest, expertise and openness. Moldovan universities, in particular, consider their involvement in international endeavours as a serious step towards their understanding of foreign university academic traditions. The independence from Russia, with the increasing transparency of the national borders and the

emerging academic and workforce mobility gave Moldovan institutions the chance to redesign their internationalization strategies in order to actively participate in global education networks. For instance, close connections and wide institutional collaborations with Romanian universities have proposed a range of student/staff exchanges and curriculum development initiatives to improve Moldovan university pedagogies, university administration and international program management (Cojocari, 2008). Collaboration with faculty and instructors from Baltic post-Soviet small states helped to train emerging Moldovan academic leaders to speed up academic innovations in sciences and propose the necessary organizational changes in student services at Moldovan state universities (Kushnarenko, 2010).

### **Methodology**

There are many ways on how to investigate academic internationalization activities. On one hand, international educators employ various tools to research relationships between international policies in higher education and their actual implementation (Kushnarenko, 2002). The dynamics of internationalization and international academic mobility challenge researchers to develop new cross-cultural interview methodology paradigms (Cojocari & Tvircun, 2010). On the other hand, taking into consideration the evidence from current research on international partnership developments and collaborations (Crossley & Holmes, 2001), researchers meticulously structure their investigation, using old and tested methods of cross-cultural investigation. In our research we use qualitative research methodology because of its ability to focus a researcher on cross-cultural attitudes to internationalization operational techniques. We notice that qualitative research methods are flexible in adapting researcher-interviewing skills to investigate sensitive cultural social contexts and international partners' reaction towards challenges of internationalization in action. It was obvious for us that to conduct qualitative research in an intercultural environment was a challenging task. We paid special attention to a role culture plays in the investigation and its influences on sharing knowledge and expertise in cross-cultural contexts.

Culture is the most complex and changing context, "an intertwined system of values, attitudes, beliefs, and norms that gives meaning and significance to individual and collective identity" (Adler, 1998, p. 236). We realized that a cultural component of the internationalization investigation depended on our specific interpretations. We noticed that the researchers' bias, manipulation of research design and direction, and consideration of himself/herself as a representative of a certain cultural group can have a major influence on the results of the research. We conducted eleven interviews with university international outreach policy makers/administrators of the Moldova State University in Chisinau, the State University "Alec Russo" in Balti, and the State University "Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu" in Cahul who guide international education initiatives. These universities have a reputation of strong commitment to internationalization in order to improve their curricula. Our interviewees were chosen by the recommendation from the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova and due to their active participation in the Ministry's Higher Education Internationalization Policy Committee. At their universities they are responsible for the development and implementation of university internationalization plans.

The interviews took place in April 2012 in Chisinau, Moldova. During in-depth, open-ended interviews, the administrators were invited to share their experience with international education innovations. We asked administrators to emphasize how internationalization affects their university mission, identity, educational practices and management. It gave us an opportunity to understand post-Soviet small state universities' capacity to cope with internationalization challenges. We employed qualitative coding to organize information and analyze the meaning of the data collected. The chosen research design is flexible to allow for new themes to emerge from

the investigation. We analyzed the administrators' answers employing the computer N6 software package, which assisted with coding and categorizing the interviews. We identified cross-case patterns according to the key themes based on our research questions; in the section below we summarize these patterns in narrative form.

### **Findings: Interpretations of Internationalization**

We now consider the interview data and would like to begin with a definition of higher education internationalization in Moldova, as understood and performed by university administrators. We continue with the specification of their key experiences in the field. Here, too, we explain the origin of interest in an international collaborative action and define obstacles and highlight necessities for its sustainability.

According to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova instructions *On International Cooperation in Higher Education* (2012), Moldova considers values of the national education system as the major engine in implementing plans of internationalization. Moldovan universities, according to a university administrator, believe that internationalization of higher education is an important element of strengthening its national academic tradition "because we have enough to be proud of and to share." Comprehension of foreign academic cultures, receptivity to foreign curricula innovations, new technologies, methods, academic services and products happen through sharing local knowledge with international partners. The university leaders tended to express the common concern that their institutions have the major responsibility to educate future "managers of the Moldovan economy" through "preparing them for the challenges and opportunities brought by globalization." Internationalization constitutes one of the major components of their academic plans, motivates and guides the local academic agenda. And it is up to them to establish new policies and priorities. The new independent academic and administrative context has prompted a greater demand for international network development meshing with university values. When asked to identify the elements of national culture that promote internationalization, respondents highlighted the following: importance of free mobility of people, high moral standards, top quality teaching and student oriented university environment, and value of cultural exchanges. Moldovan universities historically have been promoting indigenous cultural values which encourage a desire for free people movement among countries and continents. Moldovan best faculty are the pioneers in new teaching methodologies often designed in collaboration with partners from universities in the neighboring countries. A teaching philosophy of Moldovan faculty is a student oriented approach which promotes an innovative course delivery and fosters learning environment which is challenging, interesting and thought provoking. One of the Moldovan administrators commenting on current innovations in international curriculum development mentioned the necessity to improve the international program financial support, revise management of faculty international activities and reward internationalization pioneers. Clearly the administrators take those initiatives into account by focusing on internationalization.

The administrators' aspirations coincide with the Moldovan Ministry of Education's recent declarations to act in unison with UNESCO slogans, highlighting that: "The Ministry will continue to give special attention to cooperation with international and regional bodies such as the Council of Europe, European Union, the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, UNESCO and CIS" (Ministry of Education of Moldova Declaration on International Cooperation, 2012b). The Moldovan international academic developments confirm the determination and desire to prepare global-minded graduates. A well-developed network of seventeen state universities in Moldova and the advisory role of the Ministry of Education created a somewhat unique mechanism for preparing national cadres according to the current economic and social needs of the home country.

The internationalization aspirations of former Soviet small states are accompanied by a focus on national issues. This assumes a global consciousness paradigm development through “local” internationalization activities, which tips the scales in favour of “internationalization at home/on campus” and “international diploma without leaving the country” initiatives. The focus on the national dimension of internationalization, particularly through its local operational parameters, may lead to creating, as one administrator noticed, “the Joint International and Development Education Centres at Moldovan major state big cities.” The creation of such academic centres in collaboration with foreign universities was further interpreted as an option for training the Moldovan future work force because: “it is cheaper, quicker, safer and will calm the families of our students knowing that their kids are learning from the best international professors at their home country.”

However, a growing number of the Moldovan political and economic elites are preoccupied with their aspirations for more border openness, travel abroad, international academic activities and opportunities for international exchanges. New international public-private partnerships also encourage young people to travel more extensively internationally. Among the recent examples are the Moldova State University educational administration initiatives with University of Uppsala (Sweden), Moldovan-Romanian academic joint ventures in science and technology and the Area Studies Curriculum Development Programs with leading European universities. Such exchanges and collaboration play an important role in the development of Moldovans’ global consciousness, give an opportunity for students to understand other cultures, and for staff to reconsider their existing standard of teaching.

The administrators were asked to define internationalization and explain what they understood by the term. An administrator defines internationalization as “a set of academic activities designed to promote convergence in academic and organizational strengths of Moldovan universities overseas. It is an important mechanism to share and borrow what we/Moldovans consider is necessary to our system...and activities, which promote tolerance to different cultures and pride for our own.” Another interviewee added that “international education is a set of offshore and domestic academic initiatives and an opportunity for us to promote our university growth through the connections and comparisons with foreign educational institutions according to the priorities indicated by a Moldovan university. It is an opportunity to...[implement] global phenomenon in local conditions.” Knowledge of other systems has become for Moldovan universities a necessity as problems they encounter require an international approach and joint planning. To achieve this, however, they try to deal with the dilemma of preserving their national values while participating in global networks. Institutional collaboration among Moldovan universities and foreign university partners constitutes one of the most important conditions for nurturing trust and mutual understanding through indigenous knowledge sharing, respect of and interest in the Moldovan academic traditions. While the administrators expressed their concern with economic globalization – which represents a competition for markets, exclusion and marginalization, rising unemployment, ethnic conflicts and environmental challenges – they describe the internationalization of higher education and cultural exchange as positive aspects of globalization, and call internationalization, “globalization with a human face.”

However, until recently, the international integration of various Moldovan academic institutions has been largely to “test the waters,” according to a university administrator, rather than to actively promote internationalization initiatives. A proactive internationalization group of interviewees actively supports “a more aggressive type of academic negotiations with foreign universities” and promotes “a vibrant approach to existing programs and policies via more brave

and intensive international mobility and participation in offshore research initiatives.” They believe that a “Go Global” policy will help Moldovan graduates to promote the understanding of “interdependence between peoples and societies, to develop student appreciation of other cultures and a greater respect for pluralism and multiculturalism.” In this new environment, Moldovans try to reform their way of thinking about collaboration with foreign universities. They change their approach from passive rhetoric about internationalization as a vital intellectual necessity to direct involvement into the process of communication with foreigners.

Internationalization for Moldovan universities is a challenging activity. An administrator mentioned that his university has inadequate infrastructure, financial resources and human capacity to undertake a paradigmatic change to their internationalization policies. The lack of highly qualified human resources, the difficulties in achieving internationalization goals because of lack of network models and insufficient diversification of institutional fabric (Martin & Bray, 2011) are among major challenges to pursue academic internationalization. Moldovan universities recognize that some of the post-Soviet small states universities have been marginalized, still experience an “elder brother attitude” and do not perform globally according to their potential because of “the lack of information about their universities, their research and their country as an independent sovereign entity.” An administrator respondent explains that their current difficulties with international outreach are due to the Moldovan universities’ periphery position in the Western university-dominated academic world. According to the administrators, the geographical position and membership of the small states post-Soviet club creates a combination of the following factors

- a current perception of Western colleagues as nurturing Moldovan faculty: “a lot of our exchange and joint research foreign partners still baby-sit us as an emerged post-Soviet independent child”
- self-perception of Moldova as a small state with a great potential for sharing: “we need to stop thinking in the previous categories of a small republic of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. We have more people than Estonia has (1,340,000) or Lithuania (3,187,000) or Latvia (2,217,000). We can tell the world a lot about our education and our values...we simply do not have enough opportunity to do that.”

According to the administrators, Moldova’s position as a small state enables it to have a unique contribution to internationalization because their universities are not only recipients, but also agents of internationalization. Moldova finds itself the biggest of the post-USSR small states, and associates the internationalization capabilities of its universities with current favourable demographic trends, which increase opportunities for its growing student population. An administrator highlights the emergence of a Moldovan university’s ambitious self-task agenda: “we need to pay more attention to our recent and future international research agenda, international program content and organization in terms of its appropriateness to local practices and global competition. Our periphery position in this case has an advantage: we enjoy our own right of choice and select what we need or reject relentless pressures to innovate if it carries signs of cultural degradation.” Moldova is interested in international consultation, collaboration and new forms and levels of academic partnerships (Crossley, Bray & Packer, 2011), innovative methods and approaches to research and academic practices of delivering higher education. In our discussion a Moldovan administrator focused on locality and periphery and made more emphasis on possessing and preserving indigenous knowledge having an ability to use it in world-wide arena. Universities, trying to develop their own plans and strategies to internationalize research programs, make hard choices in establishing internationalization priorities: national

and international interests should co-exist happily, tending to emphasise local priorities and accumulate knowledge and skills for an effective international dialogue.

Internationalization is connected with the search for new financial opportunities and sources. During Soviet times Moldovan universities were bound to the Ministry of Education for research subsidies to deliver a traditional research financing to their departments. Now, as one administrator noticed, there is an “understanding and desire to look outside the Moldovan borders and search for possible joint financial opportunities.” The administrators mention that their universities put time and effort to look for support from international funding agencies to financially sustain an environment that attracts creative and globally resourceful faculty to participate in international activities.

Another factor, as one administrator noticed, is a serious dependency on English as a dominant language in the current international academic discourse as “the majority of our academic research and scientific innovations are published in Romanian in the leading Moldovan and Romanian journals. Probably, they are not considered by our Western counterparts as those which are worth to translate and to pay attention to.” The dependency on English in international academic relations is one of the effects of globalization on international higher education institutions and is a world-wide phenomenon. The core priorities of Moldovan universities have been shifting and among them a serious attention has been paid to study of English as a foreign language. The discipline and research domains of ESL curricula have become broader, and the ESL extra curricula initiatives have aimed at establishing a campus-wide global orientation. The intensification of English language learning at Moldovan universities has contributed to new joint publications in English.

The Moldovan university administrators’ specific approaches to higher education internationalization management differed from Western universities’ approaches on many levels. As one administrator noticed “it differs developmentally in tactics, operational methods, time and resources management, etc., which do not coincide with goals and regulations of the Western international education and training management. We have different flexibility and deadline limits, different capacity to consider options and make decisions. We are different in our attitude to foreign aid, purpose of internationalization and its mandate for change.” Many administrators, particularly those who exhibited progressive and innovative approaches to international programs, mentioned the managerial structure. The centralized dimension of Moldovan university internationalization efforts – in administering, advising, coordinating, implementing and maintaining the university international activities – is evident. At the same time, the most successful programs were initiated by an individual faculty member who designed, promoted and creatively developed a certain program. One of the administrators mentioned a rapidly changing international education initiatives management discourse among Moldovan international education project managers. The Soviet system produced academic program management staff with particular kinds of knowledge and skills suitable for an authoritative system. Given the size and complexity of academic internationalization issues, as well as the time investment and changes in international project management, the current Moldovan pragmatic approach to internationalization has been successfully carried out through joint management efforts with foreign universities.

A Moldovan administrator, who for two years served as a consulting scholar for the University International Relations Ministry Department, addressed the Moldovan faculty members’ desire to collaborate with the Ministry on internationalization policy and practice issues: “What we

really need is to involve ourselves in on-going discussions of the perspectives of international education with our Ministry officials. We are dragging behind Western universities and we are out of their radar, the foreigner's openness to the outside world is amazing. With the Moldovan tempo of the commitment to international education we can lose important strategic connections, time, and enthusiasm of our own people." Moldovan state universities are divided between those with "advancement in internationalization" and the "other," which were not as active in international affairs and do not put internationalization of their institutions on a list of priorities. In order to upgrade curricula, investigate new academic markets, borrow progressive methodological approaches and build new offshore partnerships, Moldovan universities lobbied the Ministry to upgrade a state policy on internationalization. The administrators noted that "it the curriculum upgrade will bring creativity to think and possibly act outside the box in the generation of strategies, actions and commitment to international outreach, bringing- potential partners together to make a difference in the system and influence the major policy institutions."

According to an administrator, Moldovan educators, participating in new international initiatives, "push their universities forward in global outreach" by establishing "strong personal connections with foreign university faculty, trying to use every opportunity to persuade the management of international programs at their institutions to participate." The majority of international education champions in Moldova relate to the most profound current feature of modern campus: the increasing interdependence of academic life. In order to succeed in academia, faculty put their efforts into improving collaboration and the co-production of knowledge.

Achieving that, an administrator suggests that Western universities do not show enough evidence of

...sufficient knowledge of the Moldovan academic culture. It seriously weakens international collaboration. Foreign universities are polite and intelligent partners, they are good learners and try to be diplomatic in what they say and do. However, the details of their behaviour and specifics of their advising show that they are incapable of grasping the holistic picture of the Moldovan academic challenges. They do not know our rules well, or maybe they simply think that our themes are too contrasted to the academic negotiation tones preferred by foreigners.

The Moldovan academic, cultural and managerial context – drawing from a range of post-Soviet traditions – is a complex set of judgments and approaches to which foreigners are exposed. Foreign partners' ignorance of this context is natural, taking into consideration hectic personal and academic schedules. However, it confirms a certain degree of insufficient homework done by international partners. Being, as Moldovans describe their counterparts, skilled communicators and dynamic problem solvers, foreign faculty do their best in their attempt to establish "the insider's knowledge" of the current Moldovan university developmental peculiarities. Partners understand this and, when they get it right, are more than ever determined to improve existing connections and establish new ones.

Another administrator echoes the previous observation: "the exercises of our internal management show little reciprocity with the united and disciplined managerial ensemble of international partners. Our foreign partners prevail in the speed of decision-making resulted in favour of sophisticated management practices of foreigners." It is a matter of time and commitment for Moldovan partners to lead international teams and show an example in shifting international education priorities in the light of global changes.

## **Conclusion**

We have highlighted the major internationalization issues which were indicated by those who design international programs and work on their implementation at state Moldovan universities. Those universities try to accommodate their systems to the new post-Soviet realities and global interdependence. Such adaptation requires knowledge, competence, commitment and capacity to respond to the increased challenges of international academic collaboration in higher education.

Three concluding thoughts from this investigation can be offered. The first relates to the national level, where the majority of Moldovan universities experience a lack of a coordinated and coherent national government strategy to enhance internationalization efforts. At the institutional level, universities have seen their internationalization aspirations suffer from insufficient financial and human resources. They have not yet developed the organizational and managerial capacity to negotiate as equals with international university partners. The existing managerial and logistical challenges, alongside the absence of necessary and mobile access to information, however, have not prevented Moldovan institutions from responding to proposals for international engagement. At the third individual level Moldovans have a cohort of forward thinking university faculty who are ready to initiate and perform collaboration. They see international collaboration as an activity based on the Moldovan national values and academic traditions which serve as an engine to exchange information and knowledge.

Moldovans admit that current academic internationalization activities not only occur in a context of insufficient local management, financial turbulence, national value-orientation and foreign university dominance in policy and managerial strategies, but they often happen because of a foreign partner's initiative. Design and algorithm of external aid projects (Coyne & Bray, 2006) is often crafted at Western universities with minimum involvement of small states counterparts. Western universities as collaborative partners of post-Soviet small states universities would need to do additional homework in order to consider themselves, according to a Moldovan administrator, "as a major initiator and contributor to a successful performance of small states' academic systems international outreach." Approaching post-Soviet universities Western institutions may consider a policy of small steps and expect to meet Moldovan universities in particular half-way teaching and sharing what Moldovan universities have to offer. Moldovan administrators think that internationalization content flexibility, tolerance for foreign international project management peculiarities and provision of a variety of international curricula choices will be among the major reasons for Moldovan partners to show positive developments and strong commitment to internationalization in the region.

We would like to finish with an interesting thought of a Moldovan administrator, who challenges the Western perception of peripheries and talks about the internationalization dilemma his university currently faces:

The word 'internationalization' is difficult for me to pronounce. It is a Western term and its meaning is still unclear for many here. International education, as I understand it, is supposed to be a moral category, rooted in culture and values. I am raising my voice on behalf of the so-called "peripheries" that are hesitant to participate in activities which go over our university capacity of influence. There is nobody to complain to if your partners do not respond to those invisible signals which only your culture could recognize.

It is obvious that internationalization of higher education for many Moldovan educators

is not an easy thing to plan or manage, much less accept its results. It is easier to operate in an environment which is safe, close to their heart and culture. Moldovan educators mention problems with a vague terminology usage, uncertainty with changing priorities of international higher education, reconceptualization of the role of nation-states, quality concerns and fear of unexpected consequences of international collaboration networks. It shows that serious work on various outreach scenarios is needed for Moldovan educators and their international counterparts to succeed in their collaborative aspirations. For Western universities there is a growing need "to examine the impact of changing global contexts, to document the changing nature and significance of recent and contemporary education policy priorities, and to advance the case for new and strengthened initiatives for education in small states" (Crossley, Bray, & Packer, 2011 p. 1). This also illustrates the importance of academic dialogue with post-USSR small states, and raises possible standards for international collaboration with Eastern and Southern European universities.

Internationalization forms a commitment to improve Moldovan universities' global standing. Internationalization is a major focus for Moldovan universities, and those who embrace it will benefit the most. Western universities express a current vision to prepare not just their own students, but an international academic community to meet the challenges and opportunities of our globalized life. Small state universities, though challenged with the growing degradation of their indigenous values, are optimistic about growing opportunities to investigate and further internationalize their systems.

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