



Economic Growth in the Face of Global Challenges
*Strategies for Sustainable Growth,
Demographic Resilience, and Social Equity*

Digital Transformation of Cultural Heritage in Small Towns of the Republic of Moldova: A Model of Interregional Cooperation and Entrepreneurial Acceleration

Gheorge Diaconu. Lector universitar
Academia Muzica Teatru si Arte Plastice
e-mail: gdiaconu@mail.ru , ORCID:
<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0601-7275>

Aurel Musteata PhD , AO “BeUp”
Academia Muzica Teatru si Arte Plastice
e-mail: amusteata@gmail.com, ORCID:
<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6985-9518>

Ion Baranula , AO “BeUp”,
cercetator AMTAP, UTM
e-mail: ibarabula60@gmail.com,
<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2204-6410>

Why small towns and village matter in digital transformation

Why Small Towns Matter in Digital Transformation

- **Cultural heritage** is a strategic asset for sustainable development
- Small towns in Moldova face infrastructure gaps but have high cultural value
- Digital tools offer new opportunities for inclusion, tourism, and innovation
- The study focuses on building a scalable, cooperative model for change



<https://www.undp.org/ro/moldova/publications/evaluarea-potentialului-de-dezvoltare-durabila-oraselor-mici-din-valea-fluviului-nistru>

The **Intercultural Cities programme (COE)** aligns with the **SDGs** by promoting inclusive governance, cultural diversity, and social cohesion - essential for sustainable urban and rural development.



Highlights:

- Promotes local democracy and citizen participation (SDG 16)
- Supports inclusive urban policies (SDG 11)
- **Fosters cultural innovation and entrepreneurship (SDG 8, 10)**
- Encourages **intercultural education** and **dialogue** (SDG 4)

Moldova's small towns can benefit from ICC principles by building inclusive digital heritage platforms and promoting multicultural creative ecosystems.

Research Objectives

- Explore how digital tools can preserve and **activate local heritage**
- Identify success factors from EU-funded projects
- Propose a model that **integrates entrepreneurship** and **regional cooperation**
- Promote participation of small towns in European cultural networks

Methodology

Mixed-methods approach:

- Case studies of 3 EU projects (**Be.CULTOUR**, **AMAZING AoE**, **INACO**)
 - Expert interviews (local authorities, NGOs)
 - Secondary data: EC reports, scientific literature

Tools used: Participatory mapping, storytelling analysis, ecosystem mapping



The “**diversity advantage**” is real also in business, and there is sound evidence that diverse team, enterprises and communities have strong economic powers and strategic potential in **terms of productivity, creativity, problem-solving and innovation**. But to achieve the diversity advantage societies need to ensure not only equal rights but also equal opportunities for all, including in the **economic sphere**. The **local governments** can help realise this potential by means of **innovative** and **inclusive economic policies**

European Integration Fund and with the support of the Migration Policy group (MPG), can be aimed at fostering more efficient local policies in support of **migrant-owned SMEs** and migrant entrepreneurship as part of wider diversity and inclusion policies



Core Elements of the Transformation Model

- **Digital cultural mapping:** geolocation of heritage assets
- **Storytelling platforms:** create emotional connection to place
- **Entrepreneurial acceleration:** support creative start-ups
- **Interregional cooperation:** share practices and build common tools



Digital cultural mapping :

- Identification and tagging of tangible and intangible cultural heritage
- Use of GIS tools and open-source platforms (e.g., QGIS, ArcGIS, Mapbox)
- Visualization of heritage sites, monuments, and stories on interactive maps
- Enhances access for tourism, education, and local development planning

"Mapping is not just about where things are - it's about connecting people to place and memory through digital means."



Supporting Creative Start-ups in Cultural Heritage

Focus Areas:

- Incubation programs for cultural and digital start-ups
- Access to micro-funding and mentoring
- Skills training: digital tools, marketing, storytelling
- Promotion of public-private partnerships (PPP)

Goals:

- Foster youth-led innovation in heritage-based entrepreneurship
- Create local jobs and sustainable cultural businesses
- Scale successful models across interregional networks

What We Learn from Europe

Comparative Case Table:

Project	Main Focus	Tools/Methods	Outcomes
Be.CULTOUR	Civic engagement in tourism	Toolkits, networks	New strategies, co-creation
AMAZING AoE	Cross-border green tourism	RGD TIM, joint plans	Integrated destination models
INACO	Climate resilience of heritage	WebGIS, training	Risk reduction, digital tools



Co-funded by the European Union



Integrated Model for Moldova's Small Towns and villages

Integrated Model for Moldova's Small Towns

- Combines cultural digitization + creative economy governance
- Relies on multi-stakeholder partnerships (municipalities, NGOs, businesses)
- Emphasizes scalability and adaptability
- **See diagram:**
- Visualizes how heritage, innovation, and entrepreneurship intersect
- Demonstrates process flow from local mapping to EU-level integration

Diagram include interaction between:	
1	Local Cultural Mapping
	Identification & geolocation of heritage assets
	Community engagement & storytelling
2.	Digital Tools & Platforms
	GIS, AR/VR, mobile apps
	Digital archives & storytelling platforms
3	Creative Industries & Start-ups
	Entrepreneurial acceleration
	Innovation hubs, cultural tourism products
4	Municipalities & Local Governance
	Support policies, funding access, public-private partnerships
	Infrastructure for creative ecosystems
5	Interregional & EU Networks
	Cross-border cooperation (e.g. Horizon, Interreg)
	Access to best practices and EU cultural agendas

(Figure 1 **Digital Transformation Model** here — schematic showing interaction between digital tools, creative industries, municipalities, and European networks)



Conclusions & Policy Implication

- Digital heritage can drive inclusive growth in small towns and rural areas

Successful models share:

- Local engagement
- Interregional networks
- Entrepreneurial support

For Moldova, this means:

- Capacity building
- EU cooperation
- Long-term policy commitment



Final Thoughts

Towards a Creative and Connected Future

- Moldova's small towns and villaes (LaG) can become laboratories of cultural innovation
- Digital tools must be embedded in local ecosystems, not added superficially
- With proper support, these towns can join the European creative economy
- The model proposed is replicable beyond Moldova

Alinierea cu „Strategia europeană pentru patrimoniul cultural pentru secolul XXI” (Strategia 21) și politica UE



S Social component
Promotion of social participation
and good governance



D Territorial and
economic development
with due regard for the principles
of sustainable development



K Knowledge
and education
with the contribution
of research and training