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Continuous/lifelong learning and educational infrastructure: urban study

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Abstract

In this article, we refer to lifelong learning infrastructure, as can be observed and accessed by the subjects of this study near their home/location, in accordance with the recommendations of the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning.¹

In order to estimate the accessibility and access to education and lifelong learning, we conducted a case study on a street in Chisinau. We note that in the Republic of Moldova, the processes of education reform through modernization have focused mainly on intellectual aspects (curriculum, teacher training, textbook reform), while “material”/infrastructure aspects (training environment and means of education) were given less attention, citing lack of financial means or division of responsibility between authorities at different levels.

In this context, we note that in 2020, Chisinau, along with 54 other cities in 27 countries around the world, joined the UNESCO Global Network of “Learning Cities”. Selected cities are outstanding examples of locations where lifelong learning can become a local reality. We analyze development strategies at different levels in order to pursue the objectives related to ensuring quality education from the perspective of lifelong learning.

Keywords

lifelong learning, educational infrastructure, education, municipality, public authority, strategies

Introduction

Among the first prospective features of the 21st century, with a positive semantic charge, enunciated in the early 2000s, were those related to education: the age of

¹ *Memorandum on lifelong learning*, Brussels 2000, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Ac11047> [accessed: 13.05.2022].

education, the age of knowledge, the knowledge society, the educational city, the organization of learning, the city of learning, the educational infrastructure.

In the mid-1990s, it was agreed not only that education and lifelong learning help to maintain economic competitiveness and employment, but also that education is the best way to combat social exclusion. Lifelong learning has become the common guiding principle for the new generation of community programs in education, training and youth.

The European Council, held in Lisbon in March 2000, marked a turning point in setting the political and action direction in the European Union. “It simply came to our notice then. The patterns of learning, work, and life are changing rapidly. This involves not only adapting the individual to change but also changing the ways of action already established. The conclusions of the Lisbon European Council confirm that the move towards lifelong learning must be accompanied by a successful transition to a knowledge-based economy and society.”²

More than 20 years have passed. But has our society become an “educational city”? Does an individual have the opportunity to learn throughout his life – anytime, anywhere, according to his grandchildren?

Methodology of the study on urban infrastructure for permanent learning

The analytical approach is based on the comparative presentation of studies on lifelong learning in the Republic of Moldova, conducted 7 years later, in the period 2007–2020, an analysis of the status quo opportunities on lifelong learning in Chișinău and the analysis of infrastructure at the level of a street in the municipality, in order to argue the need to increase the access of the population of all ages to quality educational services as close as possible to their home and supported by ICT-based equipment, where necessary.

Permanent learning infrastructure: analytical approach

During the years 2000–2020, several studies in the field of lifelong learning and adult education were conducted in the Republic of Moldova. We mention three of these studies, conducted at a distance of 7 years: Motivation for adult learning from the perspective of the concept of lifelong learning. Doctoral thesis, Liliana Poștan,

² *Ibidem.*

2007,³ Adult education in the Republic of Moldova, Summary of the sociological study, DVV International Moldova, “Sociopolis” Research and Consulting Center, 2014,⁴ The uncertain path to adult qualification. An analysis of lifelong learning inequalities in the Republic of Moldova. Development Partnership Center 2020.⁵

Based on the studies, conducted in 2007, 2014, 2020, we state the arise of life-long learning in the Republic of Moldova during the years 2007–2014, followed by a “plateau”/stagnation period, marked by the implementation of the Government Decision no. 616 of 18.05.2016 On the approval of the Methodology for external quality assessment in order to authorize the provisional operation and accreditation of study programs and institutions of technical, higher education and continuing education and the Regulation on calculating fees for services provided in the external evaluation of the quality of study programs and technical, higher and vocational continuing education institutions, the Government Decision no. 193 of 24.03.2017 On the approval of the Regulation on continuing adult education. Although, in 2019, the Regulation on the validation of non-formal and informal education, approved by the MECC Order no. 65 of 24.01.2019, was implemented, the researchers highlight the inefficiency of the lifelong learning model in Moldova and a downward dynamic of adult education, compared to the period 2007–2014, which was a period of momentum, upward and “plateau”.

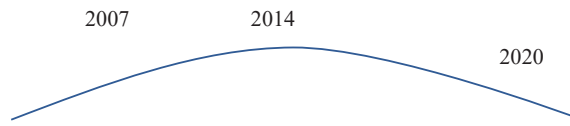


Figure 1. The evolution of adult education in the Republic of Moldova, according to studies from 2007, 2014, 2020

The 2007 study found that “in the last decade, lifelong learning has been a priority on national and international political agendas. The European Year of Lifelong Learning – 1996, demonstrated how much interest there is in lifelong

³ L. Postan, *Motivation of adult learning from the perspective of the concept of lifelong learning. Thesis*, Chisinau 2007, http://catalog.bnrm.md/opac/bibliographic_view/417904;jsessionid=9F6EC [accessed: 13.05.2022].

⁴ DVV International Moldova, Center for Investigations and Consulting “Sociopolis”, *Adult education in the Republic of Moldova, Summary of the sociological study*, Chisinau 2014, <https://www.dvv-international.org.ua/ro/moldova/publicatii> [accessed: 13.05.2022].

⁵ Chisinau Development Partnership Center, *The uncertain path to adult qualification. An analysis of lifelong learning inequalities in the Republic of Moldova*, Chisinau 2020, https://eef.md/media/files/files/raport_educatia_adultilor_2020-cpd_8175375 [accessed: 13.05.2022].

learning at all levels and has contributed to influencing international and national policies. Although with slow steps, the Republic of Moldova is shaping strategies and policies in the field of adult education throughout life.”⁶

The 2014 study states: “The regulatory framework, including the Code of Education, refers to lifelong learning and continuous education, but overlooks the notion of ‘adult education’,”⁷ while the 2020 Study alleges that, “The lifelong learning model in Moldova is inefficient. In recent years, the share of employers facing an acute skills shortage is increasing. This problem is characteristic of several sectors of the economy, whether we refer to services, industry, dynamic sectors or sectors of the consolidated economy.”⁸

2007	2014	2020
Strategies and policies in the field of adult education in the Republic of Moldova are slowly taking shape	The Education Code refers to lifelong learning and continuing education, but omits the express notion of “adult education”	The lifelong learning model in Moldova is inefficient

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Key message no. 6: Bringing learning closer to home.

Objective: To provide lifelong learning opportunities as close as possible to the beneficiaries, in their own communities and supported by ICT-based equipment, wherever they are required.

Source: Memorandum on Lifelong Learning.¹⁰

The education and training infrastructure is an essential factor in the educational process with direct effects on students. In the decision-making process on investments in educational infrastructure, decision-makers face, in the context of

⁶ L. Poștan, *Motivation of adult...*, *op. cit.*

⁷ DVV International Moldova, Center for Investigations and Consulting “Sociopolis”, *Adult education in...*, *op. cit.*

⁸ Chisinau Development Partnership Center, *The uncertain path...*, *op. cit.*

⁹ *Memorandum on lifelong learning...*, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ *Ibidem.*

planning and organizing the school network, two categories of challenges: the location of the infrastructure and the quality of the design of effective teaching and learning environments.

The location of the educational infrastructure influences the educational/learning success of students through a number of factors, such as distance from school and commute time, school segregation, the number of students enrolled and the way it operates in different shifts, but also the links between schools and labor market players. For example, decisions about the location of investments in educational infrastructure determine distance from school and commuting time, both of which can have a negative effect on students' involvement, participation and school retention. Minimum infrastructure standards ensure a basic level of quality, but research has shown that a significant part of the variation in educational outcomes can be determined by differences in learning contexts.¹¹ In this context, we specify that we define as "students" people of different ages, including adult students.

In the Republic of Moldova, the processes of education reform, through modernization, have focused mainly on intellectual aspects (curriculum, teacher training, textbook reform), while "material"/infrastructure aspects (training environment and means of education) were given less attention, citing lack of financial means or division of responsibility between authorities at different levels.

The specifics of the environment, in its genuine form of "place of existence", is a concern that is lost in the history of human civilization. Man has always sought to make sense of the environment, to define himself, to locate himself in the world, according to this environment. Characteristically, man is not guided by a detached, contemplative understanding of the world, but is involved in what exists and what is happening around him. There is an organic relationship between the concept of place and that of function. According to the researcher Magdalena Dumitrana, this report is bidirectional and refers to: – The influence that the place has on the individual; – The influence that the individual has on the place.¹²

Local and regional authorities are the ones that provide the infrastructure for access to lifelong learning, including childcare, transport and social assistance services. Therefore, mobilizing the resources of local and regional authorities in support of lifelong learning is essential. Localities may have different characteristics

¹¹ National Center for the Development of Vocational and Technical Education. European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, *Strategy for modernizing the educational infrastructure 2017-2023*, Romania, https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/Strategie%20SMIE_2017docx_0.pdf [accessed: 13.05.2022].

¹² L. Postan, *Environment and space: starting points for the educational approach of the child-friendly school*, [in:] E. Coropceanu (ed.), *Higher education: traditions, values, perspectives*, Vol. 2, Chisinau 2019, p. 157–160.

and programs, but they all share a distinctive, unique note of the place as well as a certain identity. The distinctive character, specific to the community of origin of the people and even to the region, provides trust and shapes social networks. These resources are important to give meaning to learning and to support positive learning outcomes. The various local opportunities for access to lifelong learning are a guarantee that people are not forced to leave their home region/homeland to study and train, although they must be able to do so and experience such mobility, and that should become a positive experience in itself. For some groups, such as people with disabilities, physical mobility is not always possible. In some cases, equal access to learning can be achieved by bringing learning to the beneficiary.¹³

In this context, we mention that in 2020, Chisinau, along with 54 other cities in 27 countries around the world, became part of the UNESCO Global Network “Learning Cities”. The selected cities are outstanding examples where lifelong learning can become a local reality. The UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities promotes political dialogue, peer learning and collaboration between member cities. Thus, Chisinau will have access to global projects aimed at lifelong learning. According to the Mayor of the capital of the Republic of Moldova, “Lifelong learning is a necessity, and in this sense, we want to become a best practice city. Moreover, this concept can contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which focuses on ensuring a qualitative inclusive and equitable education by promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, but also by creating inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable public spaces.”¹⁴

Joining the UNESCO family, Chisinau has several advantages, such as: participation in the network of communication and cooperation with member cities; application, jointly with other member cities, to international projects; sharing landmarks and good practices through communication channels in the UNESCO global network of learning cities; application to the UNESCO “Learning City Award”¹⁵.

According to the Strategy for the sustainable socio-economic development of the urban space of Chisinau (2020), the following objectives are stated in the chapter Education:

¹³ *Memorandum on lifelong learning...*, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Chisinau City Hall, *Chisinau has been included in the UNESCO global network of learning cities*, <https://www.chisinau.md/libview.php?l=ro&idc=403&id=31091&t=/Presa/Comunicate-de-presa/Municipiul-Chisinau-a-fost-inclus-in-reteaua-globala-UNESCO-a-oraelor-care-i> [accessed: 13.05.2022].

¹⁵ I. Ceban, *Chișinău a fost inclus în rețeaua globală UNESCO a orașelor care învață. Care sunt avantajele pentru capitală*, <https://ionceban.md/ion-ceban-chis-ina-u-a-fost-inclus-in-n-ret-eaua-globala-unesco-> [accessed: 13.05.2022].

- Setting up an educational direction in the field of PR technologies for certain industries (eg tourism);
- Establishment of international educational centers (in Eastern European countries) for specialists in the field of automotive industry;
- Creation of social programs to improve the economic literacy of the population (partly related to the economic field, the social sphere).¹⁶

Case study: The example of a street

“Ion Creanga” Street with a length of 1840 meters is a main street in the Buiucani district of Chisinau. The street is named after Ion Creanga – an important personality of Romanian culture and education, and that represents an important symbolism for urban development in cultural and educational terms.

We did not find statistical data regarding the number of inhabitants on Ion Creanga Street, but the population of the Buiucani sector in Chisinau is estimated at cca 160,000 inhabitants, so we guesstimate that on Ion Creanga Street live about 60,000 inhabitants. In the box below, we list the sites located on “Ion Creanga” street, the educational establishments being marked in bold:

Table 1. Objectives located on “Ion Creanga” street, including educational and research institutions

1.	1 – The State Pedagogical University “Ion Creangă”
2.	1b
3.	2 – Bus Station
4.	4/2 – The Education, Youth and Sports Department
5.	4
6.	4 – “Foto-Blits”, Ltd “Elcom-TV” (en)
7.	4A – Kindergarten no. 54
8.	5 – The Administration of the Dendrarium Park
9.	6/1
10.	6a
11.	6/2
12.	6v
13.	6b – MOTOCURIER Ltd (en)
14.	6/3

¹⁶ *Strategia pentru dezvoltarea durabilă socio-economică a spațiului urban*, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pULixaazMFtGgADWLcvoiNdgDVw5jxEI/view> [accessed: 13.05.2022].

15.	6/4
16.	9
17.	10/5 – Corporation for Rural Funding
18.	10/1
19.	11b
20.	11
21.	12/1
22.	13/1 – “Argos” Caffè
23.	13
24.	13 – “Control lux” Ltd Store & Bar
25.	14/1
26.	16/1
27.	18/1
28.	20/2
29.	20
30.	22/1 – “Beluno” Casino
31.	22/2
32.	22/2 – Office
33.	22
34.	24 – Policlinic no. 4 (Family Doctors Centre no. 4)
35.	32 – EKO Furniture
36.	32 – Industrial Goods Store
37.	39/3 – Bar-Terrace
38.	39
39.	39/2
40.	41
41.	43a
42.	43 – Clock Repair Workshop
43.	45/1 – Moldstock
44.	45 – Institute of Economics, Finance and Statistics, Republican Technical-Scientific Library
45.	47/1 – Market
46.	47/2 – Sports Club “Speranța”
47.	47/1 – Moldstock
48.	49/5 – Fantastic.md – online store
49.	49 – Doza no. 5 (Flacara)

50.	49 – Residential Complex “Basconslux”
51.	53/1
52.	54 – Beauty Salon “Coquette”
53.	55
54.	57 – Kindergarten no. 113
55.	58 – Residential Complex with subway parking in construction
56.	59B – Hostels of the Vocational Lyceum no. 1
57.	59 – Vocational Lyceum No. 1
58.	62/2 – Kindergarten no. 87
59.	62
60.	62 – Sports-club “Atol”
61.	64/1 – Library
62.	64
63.	66 - Milavitsa Lingerie Store
64.	66
65.	68
66.	68 – „Bucuria” Sweets Store
67.	68/1 – La o bere
68.	70 – E-games room
69.	70
70.	72
71.	74
72.	76
73.	78
74.	80 – Theoretic Lyceum “Dante Alighieri”
75.	80 – Hostels of the Republican Lyceum of Real Profile
76.	80 – Theoretic Lyceum “Dante Alighieri”
77.	82/1
78.	82/4
79.	82/2
80.	82/1 – TARGOVISTE Library
81.	84/1,2,3
82.	84/2 – Garages
83.	84 – Belsugul Țării (Commercial Center) (en)
84.	84 – Punguța Supermarket

Of the 85 locations on “Ion Creanga” Street, 10 are educational, of which: an administrative institution, a research institution, a university and 2 libraries, and another 5 are early education and general education institutions. We note that on the street “Ion Creanga” is not located any institution or organization of non-formal education or adult education and training. We establish that the educational infrastructure provides the ratio of 1: 6000, an educational institution with 6000 inhabitants.

According to SDG 4: “Ensuring quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all”, one of the goals to be achieved by 2030 is „to build and modernize the infrastructure in educational institutions to meet the needs of children, girls and boys and people with disabilities and providing a safe, non-violent and inclusive learning environment for all.”¹⁷

Access to 24-hour and on-the-go education services (including Internet-based learning) allows us to make the most of our learning time as efficiently as possible, wherever we may be at the same time. densely populated can build multiple partnerships in diversity, using lifelong learning as a driver of local and regional regeneration. The city, the meeting point of ever-changing groups and ideas, has always been a magnet for innovation and debate. The urban environment excels in all kinds of learning opportunities, both for young and old, from everyday street life to extremely dynamic businesses.

The conclusions of the Lisbon European Council (paragraph 26) propose the transformation of schools and training centers into local multifunctional education centers, all connected to the Internet and accessible to individuals of all ages; (paragraph 38) explicitly promotes the implementation of decentralized and partnership-based strategies.¹⁸

Undoubtedly, life itself is a universal educational environment. The statement of the Czech pedagogue, Jan Amos Comenius, that every individual’s lifetime is a school supports this view. Analyzed in the context of lifelong learning, the statement highlights the permanence of education, the universality of the educational environment, the empirical and eclectic nature of education and learning. At the practical level, the infrastructural capitalization of the three forms of education (formal, non-formal, informal) by the authorities, civil society, ensures visibility of education and learning, facilitates access of people of all ages to education and ensures accessibility of learning according to needs, preferences, possibilities, age, level of training/skills.

¹⁷ *Este difuzat raportul statistic privind situația social-economică a Republicii Moldova în ianuarie-martie 2004*, <https://statistica.gov.md/pageview.php?l=ro&idc=601&id=6> [accessed: 13.05.2022].

¹⁸ *Memorandum on lifelong learning...*, *op. cit.*

Table 2. Conclusions of the Lisbon European Council on approaching home learning

Recommendations	Inquiries for authorities
Transforming schools and training centers into local multifunctional education centers, all connected to the Internet and accessible to individuals of all ages	<p>What types of interesting projects and offers, as well as examples of good practice already exist?</p> <p>What types of pilot projects should Community education, training and youth programs support?</p> <p>How can mutually beneficial learning partnerships be developed profitably between education and training providers, youth clubs and local and regional development associations, enterprises and research centers?</p> <p>Have audits of citizens' learning needs and employers' skills needs proved to be positive tools for redesigning lifelong learning opportunities in certain communities and regions?</p>
Explicitly favoring the implementation of decentralized and partnership-based strategies	<p>What kind of incentives will local and regional initiatives (such as cities and regions of education) encourage to cooperate and exchange best practices at multiple levels, including transnational?</p> <p>Can local and regional authorities guarantee a fixed percentage of their budget for lifelong/continuous learning?</p> <p>What initiatives are in place to promote decentralized lifelong learning partnerships through the development of close links between European level institutions (European Parliament, Committee of the Regions, Economic and Social Committee, European Council) that have established local and regional links?</p>

We assume that, at the current stage, the functionality of lifelong learning (adult learning and education) is to be ensured from an integrated and integralist perspective, which would ensure a unified vision on the various activities: to bring together all educational practices in a single system to ensure the interconnection of its components with the set-up scope.

In 2000, at the level of European policies, the opportunity was identified to move towards integrated models of adult education, the stage of segregated development of adult learning and education practices being somewhat completed (Adult learning and education (ALE)). "Continuous learning and lifelong learning also require that different levels and sectors of education and training systems

work closely together, including non-formal areas. Here, actually working together will mean overcoming existing efforts to build bridges between different parts of existing systems. Creating an individual-centered learning network brings forward the vision of a gradual osmosis between training structures that today remain relatively disconnected from each other. This concept of a gradual osmosis creates a double challenge: first, the consideration of the complementarity between formal, non-formal and informal learning; secondly, the development of open networks of opportunities and recognition for all three forms of learning conduct.¹⁹

The informal education infrastructure, that would ensure positivism and the positive social value of the educational influence acquired on a daily basis, unplanned and unorganized, spontaneous, and unexpected, is manifested in forms such as: public opinion, neighborhood, quality of interpersonal relations, organizational culture of economic agents, public messages of local public authorities, the rhythms of neighborhood life, neighborhood level opinion makers, examples of good practice, district and neighborhood events, the tenants' habits, waste management, green spaces, condominium management. These aspects of daily life do not deliberately aim to achieve pedagogical goals, but have educational effects, absorbing the largest share of time in the life of any individual. These spontaneous, incidental influences are not selected, processed, nor organized from a pedagogical point of view.

Public authorities, economic agents, professional and civic associations layout specific objectives related to non-formal education of citizens, at least from the perspective of the four sub-identities of the person: professional, social-citizen, marital, and parental, which are carried out through educational activities, intentional, systematic, beyond school, college, university. Urban infrastructure cannot be designed today without its elements of information and education of the population, of the taxpayers to the local budgets.

The infrastructure of non-formal education consists of museums, libraries, cultural centers, youth centers, social spaces for aging people, churches, information panels, newsstands, rest areas, communication, reading, reading cafes, cafe-type bookstores, training centers for adults, community centers for early childhood education, vocational training centers, popular universities, internet cafes, local events, festivals, etc.

Regarding the formal education infrastructure, in the Republic of Moldova, the education system, but also at the intersystem agents engage in several discussions targeting: optimization of the school network to ensure the quality of educa-

¹⁹ L. Poștan, *Some aspects of monitoring the functionality of non-formal adult learning and education*, [in:] E. Coropceanu (ed.), *Integration through research and innovation Social sciences*, Chisinau 2021, p. 107–110.

tion and management of education expenditures, technical vocational education reform, higher education reform, the regulatory framework for the provision of employees with childcare services for children up to 3 years of age.

Sustainable Development Goals

OBJECTIVE 4: Ensuring quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all Nationally/locally adjusted targets:

4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early education, care and pre-school education so that they are prepared for primary education

4.3 By 2030, increase enrollment in accessible and high-quality technical and higher vocational education

4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of young people and adults with skills needed by the labor market

4.5 Until 2030, ensure equal access to all levels of education and training for vulnerable people, including people with disabilities and socially-vulnerable children

4.a Building and updating the infrastructure of educational institutions to meet the needs of children, girls and boys and people with disabilities and providing a safe, non-violent and inclusive learning environment for all

Source: NBS.²⁰

At the political level, as early as 2000, it was recognized that the implementation of lifelong learning is possible through joint interventions and partnership initiatives. These partnerships include cooperation between ministries and public authorities in order to develop coherent policies. Systematic integration of social partners in the development and implementation of the process in line with public-private initiatives. Partnerships are developed mainly through the active involvement of local and regional bodies and civil society organizations that provide services, which are close to the citizens and are better adapted to the specific needs of the communities. Lifelong learning and life wide learning also require different levels and sectors of education and training systems, including non-formal areas, to work closely together. Here, actually working together will mean overcoming existing efforts to bridge different parts of existing systems.

Development of a person-centered permanent network brings into the landscape the vision of a gradual osmosis between training structures that today remain relatively disconnected from each other... This conception of a gradual osmosis

²⁰ Biroul Național de Statistică, *Obiectivul 4: Educație de calitate*, <https://statistica.gov.md/pageview.php?l=ro&idc=601&id=6313> [accessed: 10.05.2022].

creates a double challenge: first, the consideration of complementarity between formal learning, non-formal and informal; secondly, the development of open networks of opportunities and recognition for all three forms of learning conduct.²¹

Conclusions

The reform processes through the modernization of education in the Republic of Moldova focused mainly on intellectual aspects (curriculum, teacher training, textbook reform), and the material aspects (training environment and means of education) had a lower development, being invoked lack of financial means or division of responsibilities between authorities at different levels.

But, according to our analysis, infrastructure is an essential factor in the educational process with direct effects on students. In the decision-making process regarding investments in educational infrastructure, decision-makers face two categories of challenges: the location of the infrastructure and the quality of designing efficient teaching and learning environments.

Once the city of Chisinau became part of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities, the opportunity arose to make visible in urban infrastructure the fact that education and learning are active components of modern life. The authorities have the obligation to increase the access of the population of all ages to formal, non-formal, quality educational services, as close as possible to the beneficiaries, in their own communities.

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²¹ *Memorandum on lifelong learning...*, *op. cit.*

- DVV International Moldova, Center for Investigations and Consulting “Sociopolis”, *Adult education in the Republic of Moldova, Summary of the sociological study*, Chisinau 2014, <https://www.dvv-international.org.ua/ro/moldova/publicatii> [accessed: 13.05.2022].
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