Diaspora Engagement and Local Administrative Capacity: A Case Study of Hometown Associations (Asociațiile de Băștinași) in the Republic of Moldova.

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Abstract: The Republic of Moldova, where approximately one third of the population resides abroad, increasingly relies on diaspora engagement to strengthen local governance. One form of cooperation between the diaspora and local authorities is the Hometown Association (Asociația de Băștinași), a community-based organization initiated by local residents and diaspora members to contribute to the development of their home localities. These associations represent a hybrid model of civic engagement, financial participation, and co-governance, operating as a bridge between diaspora communities, local residents, and local public administration.

This article investigates how Hometown Associations function as instruments for building the institutional capacity of local public administrations in the Republic of Moldova. Drawing on a framework that identifies four dimensions of administrative capacity, policy and project management, transparency and trust, financial and resource mobilization, and innovation and technical skills transfer, the study examines how diaspora engagement strengthens each dimension in practice. Methodologically, the research is based on a qualitative single case study of Sireți, Strășeni district, drawing on five semi-structured interviews with actors representing each level of the governance mechanism: the local administration, the association, the national network, and the international donor.

The empirical evidence shows that Hometown Associations contribute to local administrative capacity through a structural interdependence between associations and local administrations, each holding resources the other cannot access independently. This partnership strengthens project management competence, introduces financial transparency and accountability mechanisms, mobilizes external funding through co-financing arrangements, and facilitates the transfer of innovation and technical skills. At the same time, the findings reveal that these gains rest on conditions that remain structurally fragile, particularly the dependence on voluntary labor and the absence of core institutional funding for associations.

The article concludes by examining the conditions under which this model could be adapted to other post-communist contexts facing similar developmental and institutional challenges, with particular attention to Romania as a replication candidate.