

# Recycling Romania's Communist Past as an Entrepreneurial Project. Two Case Studies

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**Abstract:** *The article analyzes two case studies of recent cultural entrepreneurship from Romania, namely the Communist Consumer Museum in Timișoara and the Ferestroika Museum in Bucharest. Based on secondary literature about recent entrepreneurial developments in post-socialist countries and on participant observation, the article aims to construe the internal advantages and weaknesses of the two museums, as well as the opportunities and threats which exist in their regional and national entrepreneurial ecosystems, in order to identify possible means by which the two endeavors can withstand the current period, marked by economic turbulence. The article argues that while such projects are part of a larger entrepreneurial ecosystem, at a worldwide level, which relies heavily on retromania (i.e. the usage of past models for present and future projects), they also present several local specificities, as their contribution is not only economic, but nuances the ways in which younger generations interpret a communist past they never lived in reality.*

*Keywords:* cultural entrepreneurship; post-socialist brands; post-communist memory; nostalgia; museum.

**JEL Classification:** M130, I250

## 1. Introduction

The article focuses on two entrepreneurial projects which have made use of actual artifacts from the socialist period, with the purpose of creating not only economic, but also cultural value. The first case deals with The Communist Consumer Museum in Timișoara, a collection of socialist artifacts gathered in a permanent exhibition. The second case study is Ferestroika in Bucharest, a private museum centered around a communist apartment. The article will present briefly the historic context of how Romania has dealt with its communist heritage in recent times. Based on secondary literature dealing with post-socialist history, cultural entrepreneurship, and the link between tourism and regional development, the article will construe the two case studies in the framework of a SWOT analysis, based on information obtained through participant observation and oral history interviews, in order to underline the main strong points and weaknesses of the two museums, as well as how the latter can profit from opportunities and cope with the threats of the current pandemic. The article thus serves as a starting point for further analysis of how cultural entrepreneurship can survive and even develop during a period marked by economic instability.

The Communist Consumer Museum started out as a cultural venture in 2015, at the initiative of a so-called Collective, a group of artists who had already set up an alternative theater and a bar and were looking to provide a space and purpose for a collection of socialist era artifacts which they had gathered over a period of several years. As one of the Museum's founders, Ovidiu Mihăiță recalls: "Don't ask me how I got the idea, because I don't know what to answer.

[...] We just collected all these objects for five years, myself, my friends, and people who come to our bar and theater. [...] I started collecting these because of my obsession with records, I used to collect them." (Mihăiță, 2015). Housed in the basement of an interwar era villa, the Museum comes across more as a warehouse of objects from a by-gone era, arranged according to the rooms and utilities of a communist era apartment (a living room, a kitchen, a storage closet, etc). The Museum exhibits a wide diversity of household communist objects, which range from Romanian beer brands, milk and yogurt bottles, to children's toys, cosmetics, furniture, and clothing. Music aficionados will also find a record and tape collection, mostly Romanians music and children's stories albums, released by the socialist Electrecord record company. Apart from old communist Romanian brands, one can also discover contraband merchandise, a reminiscence of the fact that Timișoara is located in the vicinity of Hungary and Serbia (formerly Yugoslavia) (The Communist Consumer Museum).

Opened in November 2018, by a young family, the Ferestroika Museum is based on a three room apartment, owned by the grandmother of one of the entrepreneurs. The name of the Museum is a world play of the Romanian word *fereastră* (window) and the term *Perestroika*, coined in the USSR during the 1980s, to define a political movement which called for reforms inside the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Instead of modernizing its interior and refurbishing it, the entrepreneurs decided to add more artifacts from the socialist period, namely the 1980s and turn it into a palpable experience of communist history, addressed primarily to foreign tourists, as well as locals.

Unlike the Communist Consumer Museum in Timișoara, which is free of charge, Ferestroika offers three main types of services, starting with the simplest one, a one hour and thirty minutes visit with a historian as a curator, which, as of September 2020, costs 18.75 EUR or more. There are also the possibility to visit the museum at night, as well as that of an interactive dinner, with produce considered typical of the late socialist period, as well as national dishes and beverages. All options include an English speaking touring guide and the museum social media as a PR means, as well as its own website, which briefly presents its services. The Museum brands itself as a "touch and feel" experience, which would make it different from other museum experiences. While the offer would seem minimal to a local who either remembers most of the artifacts and produce in the apartment-come-museum, or actually still has some of them at home, the experience is presented in detail as an exotic one for foreign tourists coming from beyond the former Iron Curtain, for whom "the communist experience" would seem like an exotic adventure. The entrepreneurs who have started the project use the "exceptionalism" of the grim 1980s period in Romanian history as a brand in itself, in order to create economic value, while also allowing classes of young pupils to take tours of the museum, in order to provide an educational value for the project.

### 1.1. Account of Historical Context

The image of the communist past in post 1989 Romania has undergone several phases over a period of more than 30 years. These phases have been marked by political changes and economic crises, as well as

by Romania's accession into the European Union and NATO, during the 2000s. At the same time, one can argue that there has not been a generally accepted discourse on Romania's communist past and that gaps have been created within society, as well as within the Romanian political realm. While views in Romanian society over its communist past constitute a topic which is more difficult to tackle and which is highly dependent on generational transition, those within the political realm have shifted throughout the so-called transition period which arguably lasted until Romania's entry into the European Union, in 2007.

While the Romanian Communist regime's official status and abuses were the subject of intense scrutiny for reasons that often had to do more with present-day political battles than with serving moral causes of the past, there was another form of recuperating and making use of the communist past, albeit one that was unofficial and strongly connected to aspects of everyday life. This form of nostalgia was part of a larger phenomenon, one which journalist Simon Reynolds has called "retromania" (Reynolds, 2011, pp. 1-4), but which, nevertheless, had its own regional and local specificity. While initially it was more of a Romanian form of *ostalgie*, marked by generational change, the passing of time, it soon became a source of cultural and economic capital for various ventures and private entrepreneurs. Romanian entrepreneurs more or less copied models of such projects they encountered in foreign countries, but adopted them to local contexts. Based on participant observation and oral history interviews conducted over the past eight years, it can be argued that this was a typical case of demand that was followed by supply. An

increasing level of autochthonism and resurgent nationalism in the contest of consumerism triggered a demand for former socialist brands, as well as for socialist cultural and everyday artifacts.

Apart from this, one should also mention another factor which has proven decisive in this brand resurgence. The entrance of Romania into the European Union in 2007 has also meant a significant increase in the number of foreign tourists and the emergence of a tourist market aimed at attracting international tourists with local, "Romanian" brands (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2020, pp. 36-52). This interest has gone beyond the area of "socialist heritage", including other aspects of Romanian national history as well, but it contributed to the development of a local market dedicated to former socialist brands. As argued, this resurgence included brands of everyday consumer products, ranging from alcoholic beverages to skincare products. In most cases, the revitalization of these brands proved to be a successful one and it allowed their marketing companies to further develop sub-brands based of the initial products. In such cases, the companies profited from the advantages of products that had already gained a cultural and social capital among older audiences, but presented an interest with younger audiences as well. This meant low expenses for PR and marketing campaigns, as well as usage of former employees, who were already experienced and professionally trained in the manufacturing of such goods.

Thus, it can be argued that a series of entrepreneurs throughout the 2010s have taken advantage of a series of brands which either were created and established during the socialist period, or were remembered as part of

a socialist legacy and integrated into a larger, nationalist one. As already seen, the issue of branding and the usage of brands provided these entrepreneurs with numerous advantages, both from the perspective of marketing and of manufacturing networks. Their clients have been numerous and diverse and included different generations, as well as different social class members. One observation should be made in this latter regard: while socialist brands were addressed to larger audiences, there were also new brands presented as pertain to the interwar or even prewar periods and their cost and branding made them rather exclusive to urban, middle-class consumers.

## 2. Literature Review

A selective bibliography for the themes under consideration in this article can be grouped in three major clusters. First, one already finds a considerable amount of literature dealing either primarily, or partially with the Romanian communist and post 1989 historical and economic context. In his seminal work on Romanian economic history, *România și Europa. Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500-2010)* Bogdan Murgescu draws on a comparison between several states (Denmark, Ireland, Romania, and Serbia), in order to analyze why certain states have managed to develop from an economic point of view, while others have failed in the process. Murgescu argues that while economic "catching-up" or breakthroughs are possible, they are not frequent, and that one cannot apply the dichotomy of a successful/failed state to the same case study over a continuous period of time. From this point of view, economic breakthroughs were not possible

in the case of Ireland during the interwar period, or in the case of socialist Romania, but they were achievable in Denmark (1885-1914) and Ireland (1987-2007) (Murgescu, 2010, pp. 485-486). Murgescu argues that in order for a state to develop economically, there are a multitude of steps to achieve, which go beyond the mere economic spectrum and include a plethora of political and cultural factors.

Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger tackle the issue of consumption behind the Iron Curtain and acknowledge that the issue of consumer experience under communism still stirs interest from tourists and scholars. According to Bren and Neuburger, consumption in communist Europe had its own rhythms and should not be confused with "consumerism", which refers to the Western model of a society that is driven by corporate strategies, whose purpose is to create and then fulfill consumption (Bren and Neuburger, 2012, pp. 3-5). Similarly, approaches by other scholars on a regional level have shown that while certain patterns can be drawn based on case study analysis, there are also a series of particularities for each state. While Bren and Neuburger identify differences in socialist experiences, Smallbone and Welter argue that, likewise, one cannot consider the market economies as uniform, especially when it comes to the role of the state within the economy. Smallbone and Welter identify a series of characteristics for post-socialist economies, among which the fact that capital cities have a much larger entrepreneurial development than the province, but consider that, when analyzing post-socialist states, it is more suitable to position them differently within a continuum, which leads from central planned economies at one extreme to liberal

market conditions at the other (Smallbone and Welter, 2009, pp. 226-227). In a similar vein, Kovács and Zentai go beyond the stereotypes of the Homo Sovieticus, as a subject of the socialist state, and argue that Eastern Europe's capitalism was driven more from the inside than from outside, with entrepreneurs who were more active and inventive than meets the eye (Kovács and Zentai, 2012, p. 3).

While economic differences exist from one state to another, they are also noticeable in a diachronic perspective, even for limited periods of time. Thus, analyzing the period 2008-2016, Bălan notices a decrease in employment from 2007 until 2011, followed by an increase in 2012 and 2013 and stable increase for the years 2014-2016 (Bălan, 2018, pp. 128-139). Despite such positive trends for Romania, there remain sectors in which progress is slow. For our analysis, the relation between universities as research hubs and the entrepreneurial ecosystem is of primary importance. In this sense, Herman and Nistor consider that in Romania this collaboration is still weak and limits the flow of knowledge (Herman and Nistor, 2017).

A second cluster of bibliography focuses on the issue of creative entrepreneurship, with particular attention given to the relation between museums, tourism, and entrepreneurial activities. The authors taken into account deal with a wide range of topics, from general assessments of culture and cultural goods, to specific issues pertaining to how modern museums function in an economy driven by tourism. Of distinct interest for our analysis is David Throsby's definition of cultural goods as experience goods, leading to an increased future consumption based on present consumption (Throsby, 2010, p. 16).

This type of cumulative demand is crucial for the development of cultural entrepreneurial projects. Bonita M. Kolb takes a similar approach on creative industries and cultural organizations as businesses, while acknowledging that certain cultural workers reject such a definition, considering that art and commerce should be distinct activities (Kolb, 2015, p.7). Kolb takes into account present day technological advancements which allow artists and cultural entrepreneurs to take on the role of distributors and marketing agents and address potential clients directly. She pays attention to one of major traps for such cultural entrepreneurs, who become so fascinated with their own cultural products, that they forget they are active on a market where their product is just one among many (Kolb, 2015, p. 132). This latter aspect is construed even further by Mukti Khaire, who sheds light on the importance of social norms in the determination of value. According to Khaire, conceptions of value must be accepted between the agents who form the market, in order to ensure a successful exchange (Khaire, 2017, p. 8). These general assumptions apply also in the case of museums as cultural endeavors. Bernice L. Murphy acknowledges the importance and special condition of museums as being endowed with a public duty to preserve, share, and pass on cultural heritage (Murphy, 2016, p. 39). Coman reinforces this assessment, underlining the economic value of museums, besides their social and educational one (Coman, 2018, p. 71). Grigore underprops the economic aspect of cultural projects, pointing out the contribution of cultural tourism to the annual national income of those states which have sought to preserve cultural heritage and develop tourism as a service (Grigore, 2017,

p. 1). In the contemporary urban landscape, Joshua Decker is thus optimistic for the future of museums as inclusive and diverse entities, while manifesting worries for the social environment, in which museums will function (Decker, 2018, pp. 20-21). But while museums become more diverse, so will their entrepreneurial ecosystems become more complex and more dynamic, as Motica rightfully notices (Motica, 2018, p. 40).

Given the complexity of cultural entrepreneurial systems and the particularity of museums as endeavors with multiple cultural, economic, and patrimonial aspects, one needs to take into account two other major factors, which influence the development of museums in a context such as post-socialist country. The third bibliographical cluster is thus dedicated to the specificities of regional development and small firms and to the personal aspect of entrepreneurial development. Regarding the first aspect, Burns and Dewhurst point out that small firms have the advantage over larger companies when it comes to labour relations (Burns and Dewhurst, 1989, p. 399). In their assessment, they rely on data collected from the US, between 1960 and 1976. While such an assessment bears the mark of historical contextualization and should not be applied in general at face value, it does shed light on small firms as the basis for economic regional development. Arrak et al. confirm the importance of regional specificity with a case study from Germany, which proves that regional cultural background has an influence not only on the economic development of the region, but, implicitly, on a person's entrepreneurial behavior (Arrak et al, 2020, p. 110). This latter aspect, as evidenced by Alvi and Carsrud, is of crucial importance and

remains an understudied phenomenon in itself (Alvi and Carsrud, 2017, p. 94). After all, as Bridge et al. notice, it takes entrepreneurial people in order to start a small business (Bridge et al, 1998, p. 282). Notwithstanding the fact that not all people are born to become entrepreneurs (Hsu, 2015, p. 108), there are certain processes by which people discover their entrepreneurial skills and interact with other agents from the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Thus, education and training play a major role in starting up and managing an entrepreneurial activity (Marinescu and Toma, 2013; Marinescu et al, 2017). It is through education that people discover the tools to change the system, to add social value to an economic activity (see Newey, 2018, pp. 13.-30). Del Giudice et al. summarize all these aspects even better, when they point out the importance of transforming the know-how into "know why and "know what to do" (Del Giudice, 2014, p. x). Education is responsible for external motivation (Ianole, 2007, p. 173), as well as, even more importantly, for inner motivation and inspiration (Grigore, 2013, p. 206).

### 3. Research Methodology

The article relies primarily on qualitative methods of analysis, namely participant

observation for the two case studies under scrutiny, the Communist Consumer Museum in the city of Timișoara and Ferestroika, in Bucharest. In this article I employ the method as defined by DeWalt and DeWalt: "a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture." (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011, p. 1). While I did not undertake the work of an ethnographer per se, I have collected oral history interviews with the cultural entrepreneurs who have started the museum in Timișoara and I visited the museums, while observing their online activity and within social media networks for a period of almost a year, starting in the autumn of 2019. When needed, the article makes use of quantitative analysis and statistics, in order to underline certain points, or to support certain claims.

For the comparative analysis of the two case studies, I have developed a SWOT analysis in two tables, one for each museum, which will be discussed in the following subsection.

Table 1: SWOT Analysis for The Communist Consumer Museum in Timișoara.

Case Study	Internal Factors		External Factors	
	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p><b>The Communist Consumer Museum (Timișoara)</b></p>	<p>✓ The first such entrepreneurial project in Timișoara and, arguably, in the country, it has the advantage of building a brand for itself.</p>	<p>✗ The concept can be applied by other ventures as well, either locally, or at a national level.</p>	<p>✓ The Museum can make use of its extensive collection in order to open a second hand store and, thus, provide the basis for a new project.</p>	<p>✗ The current pandemic represents a major threat for all three ventures created so far by the Cooperative</p>
	<p>✓ Does not require any special maintenance staff.</p>	<p>✗ The amount of artifacts that are crowded in a relatively narrow space can be confusing to some of its viewers.</p>	<p>✓ The fact that Timișoara has been designated a European Capital of Culture for 2021 can provide significant opportunities for the Museum.</p>	<p>✗ The bar represents a commercial activity, while the theater and museum represent cultural activities, which have all been closed due to government restrictions.</p>
	<p>✓ Makes use of a space that was readily available</p>	<p>✗ It is financially dependent on the other business of the Cooperative</p>	<p>✓ The Cooperative has not yet made significant use of online and internet based strategies, in order to strengthen its visibility and brand.</p>	<p>✗ Possible increases in landlord fees, which would make the ventures unsustainable.</p>
	<p>✓ Makes use of a considerable collection of communist era artifacts, in order to create a space that is both entertaining, educational, and fascinating.</p>		<p>✓ Timișoara is situated in the region of Banat, which has become a cultural brand in itself. Furthermore, the city is close to two major European capitals, Budapest and Vienna.</p>	<p>✗ Administrative problems and cultural strategy for the city.</p>
	<p>✓ It does not require an entrance fee.</p>			



Table 2. SWOT Analysis for the Ferestroika Museum in Bucharest.

Case Study	Internal Factors		External Factors	
	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<b>Ferestroika (Bucharest)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ It requires a minimum maintenance staff, which is represented by the entrepreneurs themselves.</li> <li>✓ Makes use of an apartment which is the property of one of the entrepreneurs' relatives.</li> <li>✓ It is situated in the Romanian capital and it is easily accessible, as it is close to the city's metro network.</li> <li>✓ Offers guided tours during daytime, as well as during night time, in Romanian and in English.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ The concept can be applied by other ventures as well, in Bucharest, or in other major Romanian cities.</li> <li>✗ Starting at 18,75 EUR per museum visit, <del>Ferestroika</del> is a rather expensive venture, which is oriented toward foreign visitors.</li> <li>✗ As the venture is situated in a bloc of flats, it is dependent legally on the other landlords' agreement to function.</li> <li>✗ The entrepreneurs have adopted an explicit anti-communist attitude, which is easily explicable through Romania's own communist experience (the grim 1980s). This can, however, limit the selection of their clients.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The Museum already provides a wide variety of services, but could expand this selection, including city tours and products, either new ones, with brand printed on them, or second-hand items from the communist period.</li> <li>✓ The Museum is situated in the Romanian capital, famous for its communist buildings (most notably the Palace of the Parliament).</li> <li>✓ The Museum could connect to tourism companies which target clients specifically attracted by the communist heritage of Eastern European countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ The current pandemic represents a major threat for the museum, even though it has re-opened at the end of August 2020, under special conditions.</li> <li>✗ Administrative problems and cultural strategy for the city.</li> </ul>

#### 4. Results and discussion

As one can notice from the above tables, the two enterprises under scrutiny present a series of similarities, as well as poignant differences. Both ventures have developed a pioneering activity in their cities; The Communist Consumer Museum was established in 2015 and has had “a rather powerful impact” (Mihăiță, 2019) on the other two ventures developed by the Cooperative. Ferestroika was set up in 2018 and enjoyed a similar impact on Bucharest’s entrepreneurial ecosystem (Coșman, 2018). Both ventures make use of spaces that were readily available to their entrepreneurs; The Cooperative which established the Communist Consumer Museum first started with a theater, Auăleu, set up in 2005. After they moved to a larger place, they also started a more lucrative venture, in order to support their cultural initiative. Thus, the bar Scârț Loc Lejer came about in 2009. Two major factors led to the establishment of the Communist Consumer Museum. First, it was the fact that several members of the Collective had amassed a rather large collection of everyday items from the communist and post-communist eras and needed a place to house them. The second aspect was that the old house which they had rented had an unused basement and attic, which could be put to good use (Mihăiță, 2019). Ferestroika was based on an apartment in a bloc of flats from the communist era, which was the property of one of its founders’ relatives. Instead of renting it to other persons, or to a firm, the entrepreneurs refurbished the apartment, to look like one from the communist period and turned it into a museum (Coșman, 2018).

One needs to underline a very important similarity between the two ventures.

Both museums are not only private ventures, but also alternative types of museums, where visitors can interact in a more direct way with the items on display. The founders of Ferestroika, among whom several are graduates in humanities from the University of Bucharest, acknowledge this aspect more openly and turn it into a lucrative advantage, as can be seen from their “Touch-Taste-Learn” concept. This aspect also becomes relevant from one of the services they provide, the opportunity to taste “typical snacks and drinks”. The difference between the two museums comes from the way they charge for the services they provide. The Communist Consumer Museum in Timișoara does not charge any fee for its visitors, who can simply walk in, have a look, and touch the items on display. There is no description or special care given to these items, as they are simply stacked inside the basement, mostly according to the category to which they belong. Ferestroika, on the other hand, pays more special care to the items it has on display and even includes a detailed guide of every room inside the “communist apartment”. While the items in the Communist Consumer Museum show their history not only from the communist era, but also from the second hand markets they were collected from, the ones from Ferestroika are ready to use in an everyday context. In the latter case, this aspect is differentiated also in terms of price for its services. As can be seen from Table 2, these start from 18,75 EUR per visit and increase accordingly depending on the type of service the clients require.

These two differences, in terms of service and cost, reflect in the financially lucrative purposes of the two ventures. The Communist Consumer Museum’s purpose is

that of providing PR for the two other ventures of the Collective from Timișoara. It is part of a marketing mix, with the function of promoting two other products (the theater and the bar) in the same place, at no cost (no price). From this point of view, the Collective has only invested in promoting the existence of the Museum as such, with no extra care to any of its items. As can be noticed from its online impact on Google, Tripadvisor, or from social networks (Facebook), the Museum confirms the impact ascribed by one of its founders. Thus, the Museum from Timișoara has a 4.5 rating out of 5, from 87 reviews on Tripadvisor and is part of 12 things out of 82 to do while visiting the city. Similarly, it enjoys a 4.6 rating on Google Reviews, out of 319 reviews written by users, at the time this research was conducted. On Facebook, one of the major social networks, The Communist Consumer Museum has 3990 followers and 3894 people who have liked it, which is a sign of appreciation on the aforementioned social network. Ferestroika, on the other hand, enjoys a higher rating (5 out of 5), from less reviews on Tripadvisor, while on Google Reviews it has 4.9 stars out of 5, from a significantly lower number of reviewers than that of its counterpart from Timișoara (32). On Facebook, Ferestroika has 1752 followers and 1686 likes, less than half the figures for the Communist Consumer Museum. The explanation for this aspect lies in two major aspects. First of all, Ferestroika was created three years after the Communist Consumer Museum, namely in 2018, meaning it has had less time to build its own brand. Second, the prices Ferestroika charges for its superior services mean that it has created a more selective clientele for itself, which directly contributes to the museum's profits. It is also less

accessible, as potential visitors need to program their visit in advance. This is in sharp contrast with the Communist Consumer Museum, whose purpose is to draw in a larger numbers of visitors, who become potential clients for the Cooperative's bar and theater.

Both ventures share several similar weaknesses. The most important weakness is that the concepts they have developed in Romania, based on previous experiences from abroad, can be replicated by other ventures as well. Combined with other weaknesses, such as their dependence on more lucrative business (such as the bar of the Collective, in the case of the Communist Consumer Museum), or on legal acceptance from fellow landlords (as is the case for Ferestroika), such a weakness can have a considerable negative impact over time. Both ventures possess several assets in order to minimize the first, and most important, weakness. The Communist Consumer Museum has amassed a considerable collection of artifacts from second hand shops, flea markets, and collectors. Several of these artifacts are more and more difficult to obtain and they constitute valuable items on display, which draw the visitors' attention, regardless of the space where such items would be presented. Ferestroika has the advantage of owning its own space for display and has invested a considerable amount of time and effort in shaping this space according to the entrepreneurs' vision. Furthermore, in both cases, the theoretical and historical knowledge of the entrepreneurs are important assets and play an essential role in their vision for their own ventures. Any new ventures which would start in such a market would have to better the two museums' material and knowledge endowment, in order to create a space for themselves, particularly

if such new ventures would start in either Bucharest, or Timișoara. On the other hand, in order to adapt to such new challenges, the two enterprises could address the specific features of the communist regime in their local contexts and thus gain a strategic advantage over any new competitors. Regarding this latter aspect, The Communist Consumer Museum already has a minor advantage, due to its collection of contraband merchandise, specific to a border city.

One also needs to discuss the two ventures' attitude toward the political era they have chosen to represent and how this impacts or might impact upon their financial and cultural capital. Both the Communist Consumer Museum and Ferestroika refrain officially from any political stance. While the Communist Consumer Museum simply presents an accumulation of everyday objects with no explanation of their historical context, or origin, Ferestroika openly mentions on its website that "the project does not contain ideology or political opinions and is entirely dedicated to educational and cultural purposes". Yet, in the case of Ferestroika there is a tension between such a claim and the project's explanation on the same web page, that its educational purpose stems from the fact that "the Romanian society as a whole has the tendency to idealize the communist era as a time of less social, political and economic challenges." While the latter statement is true, as proven by recent surveys (see IICCMER, 2011, pp. 90-92), the tension between educating young Romanians about their past and entertaining foreigners, while teaching them about Romania's brand of national communism might affect the image of the museum as authentic and, implicitly, its revenues.

The two museums benefit from a range of opportunities which are provided by their place of origins. Timișoara is one of Romania's major tourist, cultural, and economic centers. The fact that it was designated as a European cultural capital for the year 2021 can provide a major boost for the city in terms of tourism ventures. From this point of view, The Communist Consumer Museum had garnered enough visibility and cultural capital, to place it in an extremely advantageous position, which could be used by the Cooperative in order to develop its business projects even further. Bucharest, on the other hand is Romania's primary tourist destination, when it comes to tourists who are fascinated by its communist heritage. Ferestroika could use this resource of cultural capital, by widening its network of collaborations, in order to draw in tourists who are aware of Bucharest' major tourist attractions, such as the Palace of Parliament. The fact that both cities have airports connected to major European and international airline routes also serves as an opportunity. Neither museum has so far attempted to include its offer in tourist packages provided by national or foreign companies. In this sense, one should mention the existence of specialized tourism and cultural ventures that focus on providing itineraries of communist heritage from former socialist states in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. One such example is Soviet Tours, which already offers tourism packages for Romania and Bulgaria, with sightseeing focused primarily on communist heritage. Yet, as one can notice, neither museum is part of such transnational networks.

The Communist Consumer Museum has not yet promoted its venture on the internet, while Ferestroika has created its own

professional website, which summarizes its main services, but remains vague about the specific features of those services. In the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, both projects could resort to online promotion and development of their services. By providing online tours, as well as e-commerce services, these ventures would find alternative sources of revenue for their activity, and they would increase their visibility and further establish their brand. Given the economic and political unpredictability of the current situation, a short term objective for both enterprises is to gain as much cultural and financial capital as possible, as quickly as possible, in order to withstand any unforeseen changes in the near future. In this sense, their adaptability to online services might prove essential in overcoming the shortages that the current pandemic has brought and continues to bring.

In a political and cultural context which is still marked by nostalgia, ostalgie, as well as by public debates on the turmoils of the communist period, The Communist Consumer Museum and Ferestroika could still benefit from their object of interest for years to come.

## 5. Conclusions

The two case studies under scrutiny for this article are an example of the interactions between a young entrepreneurial ecosystem and its interactions with political changes and cultural debates at a local level, as well as larger phenomena, which go beyond geopolitical borders of past and present. They exemplify the entrepreneurial creed of creating profit out of resources that are scarce, or that have not yet been seen by others as having the potential for providing any kind of value. This latter aspect has been influenced by several factors, out of which two are worth mentioning: one has to do with the lack of a strong entrepreneurial culture in Romania, the other one is largely influenced by the ongoing debates in Romanian public sphere about the present value of communist material heritage. It is worth noting that the benefit brought forth by such projects is not only financial, but also cultural and social. Such projects provide an important contribution to a nuanced discussion about the legacy of socialism, while providing young entrepreneurs with new models of how to create a start-up and develop an entrepreneurial project.

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