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[00:02 - 00:33] Male Voiceover: Welcome to Protecting Hope. Stories of successful sustainable tourism. Join us as we travel the globe listening to impactful stories about how sustainable tourism to protected areas contributes to environmental conservation, local economies and human well-being. This podcast is brought to you by the Centre for Protected Area Management at Colorado State University, in partnership with the US Forest Service International Programs Office, and is supported by funding from the US Agency for International Development.[🎵 soft music]

[00:39 - 00:44] Female Voiceover: Episode. Sustainable Tourism Means Love with Elena Scobioala.

[00:48 - 01:21] Ryan Finchum: Hello everyone. My name is Ryan Finchum. I'm the director of our Center for Protected Area Management at Colorado State University, and I'm going to be one of your hosts of this podcast, Protecting Hope. Welcome everyone. Today I'm with Elena Scobioala, who works for the US Forest Service International Programs as their Moldova project coordinator. Thanks, Elena, for joining me today in our Protected Hope podcast, where we interview people from around the world to dive deeper into sustainable tourism. Thanks for being here.

[01:21 - 01:25] Elena Scobioala: Well, hello, Ryan. Thanks for the invitation. Very glad to be here.[chuckles softly]

[01:26 - 01:30] Ryan Finchum: Great, great. Well, why don't you start off by just telling us a little bit about yourself?

[01:30 - 02:11] Elena Scobioala: Well, yeah. Let me introduce myself. I'm Elena, I'm based in Chişinău, the Republic of Moldova. I grow up here, and I do my work here. I'm happy to be hopefully a good professional for my country and to contribute to the sustainable development of my country. As you said, currently, I am a local coordinator for the US Forest Service International Programs Office, doing work for Moldova, supporting all US Forest Service initiatives in my country.[🎵 soft music]

[02:13 - 02:37] Ryan Finchum: For people that may be listening from Latin America or other parts of the world that maybe don't have as much experience with Moldova, what are some of the highlights that we should know about, you know, the sustainable tourism or the tourism opportunities more broadly in Moldova? Besides the wine. We've heard about the wine,[Elena

chuckles] but what... You know, what are, what are some of the things that people come to see in Moldova, especially on the natural and cultural side?

[02:39 - 05:12] Elena Scobioala: Moldova is an emerging destination that aspires to become a sustainable tourism destination. That's our goal. The long term goal. It's important to know that Moldova is an off the beat path of destination. It's not so visible. Maybe not so much worldwide. But it has a lot of things to offer to the visitors. Although we are at the crossroads of civilization, Eastern, Western, and our historical destiny was stormy, I would say. Life in Moldova is still simple. It's peaceful and untouched. It's really good to visit Moldova in springtime, in summertime, autumn. This is the season starting late March until October. So that's the time to visit Moldova for tourism. And what are the opportunities? What you'll see here? Except the wineries that you already mentioned.[Ryan laughs] Moldova is a wine destination, definitely. We have 150km of the so-called wine road. Exceptional and unique underground cellars. It's basically a wine town with a network of streets, of roads of 75 miles. We have also the biggest wine collection recorded in the Guinness Book. Well, except the wine,[both laugh] which is definitely a reason to visit Moldova. We have delicious traditional Moldovan food. We have a rich culture. There is a number of festivals related to wine, but not only[Ryan laughs] to that.[chuckles softly] And we have beautiful nature sites, a few natural reserves, two national parks with the wetlands, the Ramsar zones, biosphere area. Cultural sites such as medieval fortresses from 17th century, 18th century.

[05:13 - 06:24] Elena Scobioala: Cave monasteries, nobles mansions. We have a very interesting authentic handicrafts, pottery and handmade rugs. So you can go and learn by doing a handicraft rug. Rural life is brilliant here in Moldova. It's really authentic. And you can accommodate in a peasant house, in a guest house and participate in agricultural activities. Also, we can offer some outdoor activities such as birdwatching, hiking, cycling in the Kodori of Moldova, in the Orheiul Vechi area, and in other areas. Paragliding. There are perfect conditions in a few places. Even we don't have mountains, but we have a hilly country and good wind.[soft music builds] Perfect for paragliding. Some kayaking is also recommended for the visitors. So, yeah, a lot of opportunities, I would say. So you are really welcome.[both laugh]

[06:27 - 06:35] Ryan Finchum: I wonder if you might just share, from your perspective, you know, what does sustainable tourism kind of mean to you in the Moldova context?

[06:37 - 09:12] Elena Scobioala: To me, sustainable development of tourism means, first of all, caring. Caring for people, caring for nature. It means respect for the local heritage. It means love for people, nature and culture overall. It means a commitment. It means a commitment, definitely, of those who... Actually, of all of us. All of us, and I refer to tour operators, to public authorities, to civil society, to NGOs, to everybody, to visitors, to everybody who is in contact with the tourism, tourist attractions from the country. So basically that's a commitment of all of us to protect and enhance the environmental and cultural heritage. At the same time, sustainable tourism, to me, means a balanced development. It means a compromise. A compromise of what visitor needs are, of what the local communities expectations and rights are. What benefits the operators, tour operators have. So, definitely, they do tourism activity for business, first of all, and they want to[unintelligible] benefits from their activity. And that's also a compromise on how to ensure environmental protection, decrease of degradation, how to diminish negative impacts of tourism. Because tourism is a growing industry, as you said, we are all happy and looking forward for more visitors. But at the same time, if you don't manage tourism in a sustainable way, then that might be a problem. And instead of being a positive thing for the entire country, it can ruin lives sometime. So that's why it should be a compromise that we all have to find.

[09:13 - 10:58] Elena Scobioala: Also, for me, sustainable development of tourism, that's a very pragmatic and realistic approach. Especially of those who develop tourism in some areas.

Because we should be wise in using the resources for the long term, to benefit of them as much as possible. And you know what? We always, when referring to sustainable development, refer to the next generations. Yeah, we do everything for the next generations. But very often, and most of us, actually think for the very short term and we care about our lives. So it's just, in writing, looking forward to the next generation. But most of the people still look for their benefits. So being realistic and pragmatic means even for yourself to use the resources, being aware of the limits and being aware that you want to use these resources not only this year, but in five years, in ten years, in 20 years to develop your business. So being wise in using the resources in a such way that not only the next generation, thinking about the next generation, but yourself, you'll benefit of these resources. So having this approach, a very pragmatic and realistic, that can be very helpful. Understanding the limits, being aware of what happens. Well, yeah, overall, this is sustainable tourism to me.

[10:58 - 12:33] Ryan Finchum: Yeah. Which actually spells out that it's a very complex area, right? It's a, it's a, it's a complex concept to try to meet all of those different stakeholders that have different kinds of interests and goals and needs and trying to bring them all together. But the vision that you've outlined, I mean, I think Moldova needs to consider who may be their next minister of tourism.[both laugh] But that vision, I mean, you know, in so many places around the world, also like local communities or national, even at the national level, you know, people are often very excited about the prospects of tourism. And sometimes it goes very well, and sometimes it can very quickly get to the point where local communities go, why did we get into this in the first place? Now it's a now we're dealing with a nightmare, you know, a nightmare scenario of too much visitation, too much stress on local resources, very little benefit coming to the local community. And so, you know, having that vision that you've outlined in advance to really ensure the rights are really focused on that word that you mentioned, making sure we understand the rights of the local community and that they're addressed first, you know, at a minimum, alongside all the other interests, but probably first, making sure that we get the local community peace right is so important. So, yeah, thank you for that vision. I really, I really appreciate that. [♪] I wonder, before we wrap up, if you would be willing to share with us, what about sustainable tourism gives you hope for the future?

[12:33 - 13:39] Elena Scobioala: I think that by adopting the sustainable development principles in tourism, we ensure that we humans have a future. And, for this, we need a lot of things to do. But, first of all, education. And I love a person, Jane Goodall. Maybe you've heard about her. I'm sure you've heard about her.[Ryan laughs] And she was saying sometimes that "only if we understand, we will care. Only if we care, we will help. Only if we help, shall we all be saved." So I'm really inspired by what she said. And that's a credo of my life as well now, and that gives me hope.

[13:40 - 15:10] Ryan Finchum: That's wonderful. Yeah, yeah. The, yeah, I mean, Jane Goodall I think has inspired so many of us with this idea of hope. And, you know, it's also in one... to a certain degree, part of the inspiration. She is part of the inspiration for this podcast because she was almost, you know, she started using this word hope, I want to say, maybe several decades ago. And I think sometimes in this space of nature conservation and tourism, we get so focused on the pragmatic, what we have to implement, that sometimes we don't step back and realize that hope is a really powerful concept for helping to shape the future. And we need to remind ourselves that, actually, there's hope everywhere. And if we can find a way to cultivate that hope and bring it forth and share that hope with others, that hope can grow. And, you know, I just want to mention, you know, this question isn't supposed to be for me, but because you mentioned it, it's the first time in all these podcasts that we've done that somebody mentioned the importance of love as a component in sustainable tourism. And I, and I just think that's so powerful in today's day, where there's so much, it seems every time you turn on the television, there's so much

division and in war and, you know, political conflict and things like that going on all over the world. And so, if sustainable tourism can do a small part in helping to grow and not only hope, but love around the world, I think, we don't have to go to bed questioning the importance of our work ever, right?

[15:10 - 15:43] Ryan Finchum: We can go to bed every night knowing that we've maybe contributed just a little bit to making the world a better place. So, thank you so much, Elena, for your time today. I really appreciate you joining us. I wish you lots of luck with your work with the Forest Service International Programs, but also more broadly on working to develop sustainable tourism opportunities in your beautiful country, Moldova. To all of our listeners, thanks for being a part of this podcast and participating in our Sustainable Tourism Community of Learning and Practice. We'll talk to you all soon.

[15:43 - 15:54] Male Voiceover: Thank you for listening to Protecting Hope. To find links and resources from today's episode, visit the Center for Protected Area Management's website or follow us on Instagram and Facebook.

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