

Proceedings

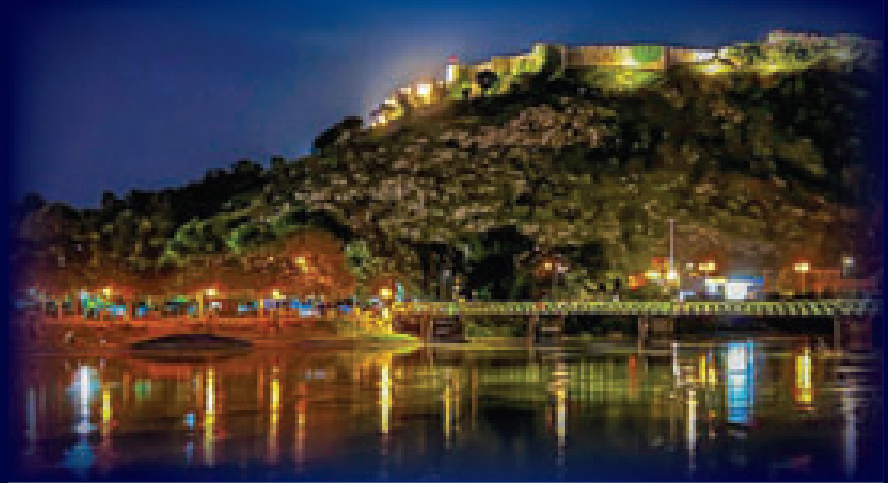
International & Interdisciplinary Conference

“Development in Turbulent Times”

20th Annual International & Interdisciplinary Conference of Int. Partners

5th Annual Conference of Center for School Leadership (CSL – AADF)

6th Biennial International Conference of Balkan Sociological Forum (BSF)



University Luigj Gurakuqi Shkoder, ALBANIA
14-15 November 2025

- 180 Papers - Presentations ● 275 Authors, Co-Authors, and Contributors ● 26 Countries ● Plenary Session, Special & Joint Sessions, Permanent Thematic Sessions
- Ambassador for Peace Awards ● Award for Excellence in Research and Practice ● Best Partnership Award
- Students for a Good Society
- 11th Biennial AIS-ALBSA Assembly



GJAKOVA 2026

From Shkoder Albania 2025 to Gjakove Kosovo 2026
21st Annual International & Interdisciplinary Conference:

“Towards an Intelligent Society: Challenges & Opportunities”

University Fehmi Agani Gjakove, Kosovo
May 22-23, 2026



... Tetovo (2016) - Tirana (2017) - Mitrovice (2018) - Durres (2019) - Prizren (2020)
- Korce (2021) - Gjilan (2022) - Vlore (2023) - Pristine (2024) - Shkoder (2025)
- Gjakove (2026) - Skopje /Tetovo (2027) - Peje (2028) - Tirana (2029) ...

Chair of the Conference:

Prof. Asoc. Dr. Drilon BUNJAKU - Rector, University Fehmi Agani Gjakove, KOSOVO

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www.sociology.al; www.isa-sociology.org

**WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING YOU IN
GJAKOVE - KOSOVO IN MAY 2026...!**

Proceedings

20th Annual International and Interdisciplinary
Conference of AIS-ALBSA & Int. Partners

5th Annual Conference of Center for School Leadership (CSL – AADF)
&

6th Biennial International Conference of Balkan Sociological Forum (BSF)

Organizing Institutions:

University Luigj Gurakuqi Shkoder, ALBANIA
CSL – AADF Center for School Leadership, ALBANIA
Universal Peace Federation, UPF
LTC Agency & Polis Publications
University of the International Studies Roma (UNINT), ITALY
University Fehmi Agani of Gjakova, KOSOVO
South East European University, NORTH MACEDONIA
University Haxhi Zeka Peje, KOSOVO
National Association of Sociologists (ANS), ITALY
Public University Kadri Zeka Gijilan, KOSOVO
University Aleksander Moisiu Durres, ALBANIA
University Fan S. Noli of Korca, ALBANIA
AAB College, KOSOVO
University of Mitrovica Isa Boletini, KOSOVO
University Ismail Qemali Vlora, ALBANIA
University Ukshin Hoti Prizren, KOSOVO
Dardania College, KOSOVO
Institute of Sociology, Demographic Research and Innovation (ISDI), KOSOVO
Institute of Science and Technology - INSI, KOSOVO
International Sociological Association, ISA
Balkan Sociological Forum, BSF
Albanian Institute of Sociology - Albanian Sociological Association
(AIS-ALBSA 20th Annual International Conference)

Place & Time:

University “Luigj Gurakuqi” Shkoder, ALBANIA
14-15 November 2025

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ALL ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES (2006-2026)

21st Annual International Conference

"Toward an Intelligent Society: Challenges & Opportunities"
University Fehmi Agani Gjakove, Kosovo: 22-23 May 2026

20th Annual International Conference

"Development in Turbulent Times"
University Luigj Gurakuqi Shkoder, ALBANIA, 14-15 November 2025

19th Annual International Conference

"Well-being in the Challenging Times"
AAB College, KOSOVO: 15-16 November 2024

18th Annual International Conference

"Social Capital and Public Sphere in Contemporary Society"
University Ismail Qemali Vlora, ALBANIA: 10-11 November 2023

17th Annual International Conference:

The role of Technology in the Shaping of Society
University of Gjiilan Kadri Zeka, KOSOVO: 11-12 November 2022

16th Annual International Conference:

Education and Culture in Contemporary Society
University Fan S. Noli of Korca, Albania: 5-6 November 2021

15th Annual International Conference:

Comparative Studies in Modern Society; Balkans in European and Global Context
Universiteti of Prizren Ukshin Hoti, KOSOVO: 6-7 November 2020
(Postponed from November 2020 to 19-20 March 2021, due to Covid-19 Pandemic)

14th Annual International Conference:

Social institutions in Contemporary Society
[The Interaction between Education, Family, Religion, Politics, and Economy]
Durrës-Albania: 15-16 November 2019

13th Annual International Conference:

Continuity & Change; Balkans in European, and Global Context
[Balanced Perspective of Past, Present & Future]
Mitrovica-Kosovo: 16-17 November 2018

12th Annual International Conference:

Good Society – a multidimensional Approach
Tirana-Albania: 17-18 November 2017

11th Annual International Conference:

Education & Sustainable Development: the future we are creating
Skopje-Tetovo, North Macedonia: 18-19 November 2016

10th Annual International Conference:

How Migration is shaping the Contemporary Society?
Pristine-Kosovo: 20-21 November 2015

9th Annual International Conference:

Law and values in contemporary society
Tirana-Albania 21-22 November 2014

8th Annual International Conference:

Democracy in Times of Turmoil: A multidimensional approach
Durrës –Albania: 22-23 November 2013

7th Annual International Conference:

Identity, image, and social cohesion in our time of interdependence
Vlora-Albania: 26-28 November 2012

6th Annual International Conference

Education in turbulent times: The Albanian case in European and global context
Tirana-Albania: 21-22 November 2011

5th Annual conference:

The social problems: their study, treatment, and solutions; Albania in global context
Tirana-Albania: 7-8 June 2010

4th Annual International conference:

Twenty Years of Democratic Transformations: Albania in East European Context
Tirana-Albania: 10 December 2009

3rd AIS International Conference:

World Economic Crises and its impact on the Albanian Economic and Social Life
Tirana-Albania: 22 May 2009

2nd Annual International Conference:

Issues and Models of Communitarian Organization
Tirana-Albania: 27 June 2008

1st Annual International Conference:

Political pluralism and Albanian political thought
Tirana-Albania: 15 June 2007

Funding Meeting and the Founding AIS Conference:

Sociology in Albania and the need of its Institutionalization
Tirana-Albania: 21 November 2006; Tirana International Hotel

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I. SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE, CONFERENCE CORDINATORS & LOCAL ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Chair of the Conference:

Prof. Dr. Tonin GJURAJ – Rector, University “Luigj Gurakuqi” Shkoder, ALBANIA

(In alphabetic order)

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Lorenc EKONOMI – *University Fan S. Noli of Korca, ALBANIA*
Mentor ALISHANI – *University Ukshin Hoti Prizren, KOSOVO*
Nurtene DEVA – *University of Mitrovica Isa Boletini, KOSOVO*
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Robert ÇITOZI – *University of Sports Tirana, ALBANIA*
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Sergiu BALTATESCU – *University of Oradea, ROMANIA*
Shkelqim FORTUZI – *University Aleksander Moisiu Durres, ALBANIA*
Svetla KOLEVA – *Bulgarian Academy of Science, BULGARIA*

Conference Coordinators:

Prof. Dr. Blerta DRAGUSHA – *Vice Rector, University “Luigj Gurakuqi” Shkoder, ALBANIA*
Dr. Jola KEPI – *Executive Director, Center for School Leadership, CSL-AADE, ALBANIA*

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Prof. Dr. Bresena KOPLIKU – *Director of Scientific Research and Internationalization; University Luigj Gurakuqi Shkoder, ALBANIA*
Dr. Ledian XHAKOLLARI – *Univrsiteti Luigj Gurakuqi Shkoder, ALBANIA;*

AIS-ALBSA Executive Committee

Ina XHAKOLLI – *Center for School Leadership, ALBANIA*
Eurona LEKA – *Center for School Leadership, ALBANIA*

Coordinators of partner institutions:

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Prof. Assoc. Dr. Besim GOLLOPENI – *UMIB & Institute of Sociology, Demographic Research and Innovation - ISDI, KOSOVO*

Chair of the conference Secretary:

Elda SOKOLI KUTROLI – *Albanian Institute of Sociology, AIS, ALBANIA*

II. GENERAL CONFERENCE PROGRAM

REGISTRATIONS:

Registration Desk: 14 November 2025, beginning 09.00
University “Luigj Gurakuqi” Shkoder, ALBANIA

Adress: Universiteti i Shkodres “Luigj Gurakuqi” **Rectorate**
Sheshi “2 Prilli” Shkoder, ALBANIA

[Dossiers: Conference Book/Proceedings, detailed information for the participants...]

OPENING CEREMONY AND PLENARY SESSION

Conference Hall, A3 – Rectorate: 10.00-11.20

Moderator:

Prof. Dr. **Blerta DRAGUSHA** – Vice Rector, University “Luigj Gurakuqi” Shkoder **ALBANIA**

Welcome to Albania and the University of Shkodra

Prof. Dr. **Tonin GJURAJ** – Rector, University “Luigj Gurakuqi” Shkoder, **ALBANIA**

Welcome to Shkodra, a city under rapid development

Mr. **Benet BECI** – Mayor of Shkodra Municipality

Mrs. Mirela Kumbaro – Minister, Ministry of Education and Sport, **ALBANIA**

Welcome to the 4th Annual Conference “Leadership and Management in Education”

Dr. **Jola KEPI** - Executive Director of Center for School Leadership (CSL)

Twenty Annual International Conferences – a Unique Example of a circulating institution Kosovo – Albania

Mr. **Skender DYRMISHI** – Ambassador of the Republic of Kosovo in Albania

Mr. **Jacques MARION** (France) – Chairman of Universal Peace Federation for Europe and Middle East

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ORGANIZING INSTITUTIONS

Awards:

Ambassador of Peace

Mr. **Jack MARION** (France) – Chairman of Universal Peace Federation for Europe and Middle East

&

Mr. **Gani RROSHI**

General Secretary, Universal Peace Federation, the BALKANS

Award for Excellence in Research and Practice & Best Partnership Award

Leke SOKOLI - Coordinator of the Conference Partner Institutions

& Scientific Secretary of the Commission of Academic Contribution Evaluation.

FROM SHKODER, ALBANIA TO GJAKOVE, KOSOVO

Next International Conference

21st Annual, International & Interdisciplinary Conference of Int. Partners

& 6th Annual Conference of CSL – AADF

“Toward an Intelligent Society: Challenges & Opportunities”

University Fehmi Agani of Gjakova, KOSOVO: 22-23 May 2026

Prof. Dr. **Tonin GJURAJ** – Rector of University “Luigj Gurakuqi” Shkoder, ALBANIA

Prof. Assoc. Dr. **Drilon BUNJAKU** – Rector of University Fehmi Agani of Gjakova, KOSOVO

PRESENTATION OF THE CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Prof. Dr. **Bresena KOPLIKU** - Director of Scientific Research and Internationalization; University “Luigj Gurakuqi” Shkoder, ALBANIA

CONFERENCE HALLS/ROOMS

Opening Ceremony and Plenary Session:

Conference Hall, A3 – Rectorate; 10.00-11.20

“Sustainable Development and Peace”

Special Session of the Universal Federation of Peace: Academic Senate Hall; 12.00 – 13.30

Presentation Sessions

Library and Faculty of Economics (6 Conference Rooms), 12.00 – 17.00

Special Sessions of Partner Institutions (for on/offline presentations)

FIRST DAY OF THE CONFERENCE: 14 NOVEMBER 2025

5th Annual Conference of School Leadership (CSL – AADF)

Presentations

Parallel Sessions of the CSL 5th Conference

14 November 2025: 12.00-17.00

20th International & Interdisciplinary Conference of International Partners

Presentations of the first day: Conference Thematic Sessions (TS01-TS14), Parallel sessions

November 2025: 12.00-17.00

3rd Annual Scientific Session of the Universal Federation of Peace “Sustainable Development and Peace”

14 November 2025

Academic Senate Hall: 12.00 – 13.30

Keynote Speaker:

“The strong Correlation of Sustainable Development and Peace”

Dr. **Romina GURASHI** - VicePresident of Albanian Sociological Association (ALBSA), University of International Studies (UNINT) Roma, Italy

SECOND DAY OF THE CONFERENCE: 15 NOVEMBER 2025

Presentations of Second Day

(Offline presentations)

University of Shkodra

15 November 2025: 10:00 – 13:00

6th Biennial International Conference of Balkan Sociological Forum (BSF)
(1st Session)

Chair: Prof. **Sergiu BALTATESCU**, President of Balkan Sociological Forum
University of Oradea, Romania

Special and Joint Sessions of the Second Day

Institutional Partners (Online presentations)

15 November 2025: 10:00 – 13:00

CONCLUSIONS, CLOSING CEREMONY & CERTIFICATES “FOR PARTICIPATING AND PRESENTING THE PAPER”

with the signature of University of Shkodra - Rector and/or Conference Coordinator
(After the last presentation of each Conference Session)

3RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE SCIENTIFIC SESSION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE FEDERATION (UPF) & ALBANIAN INSTITUTE OF SOCIOLOGY (AIS)

“Peace and Development”

University “Luigj Gurakuqi” Shkoder Albania

14 November 2025: 11.30 - 13.30

Academic Senate Hall

Chairs

Dr. **Saemira PINO**

Vice President of the Universal Peace Federation UPF ALBANIA

&

Mr. **Gani RROSHI**

General Secretary, Universal Peace Federation, the BALKANS

Keynote Speaker:

“Peace and sustainability beyond war: reimagining development in post-conflict societies”

Dr. **Romina GURASHI**, Vice-President of Albanian Sociological Association (ALBSA), University of International Studies (UNINT) Roma, Italy

“The Challenges of Peace in Europe and Middle East”

Mr. **Jacques MARION**

Chairman of the Universal Peace Federation for Europe and the Middle East

“Global Peace Index 2025. Albania & West Balkans

Prof. Dr. **Leke SOKOLI**

Albanian Institute of Sociology (AIS)

University of Tirana, ALBANIA

“The difficult road toward a sustainable Peace. The lessons of history - Shkodra and beyond”

Mrs. **Majlinda LAÇAJ**

Chairwoman of the Regional Peace Council for Shkodra Region

Director of the Historical Museum of Shkodra

“Interfaith Dialogue as a Mechanism for Peace & Coexistence”

Prof. Assoc. Dr. **Genti KRUJA**

General Secretary of the Interreligious Council of Albania

President of Religions for Peace of Europe

&

Mr. **Oltion KOLA** (PhD Cand.) – Bedër University, Albania

“The Education System and Peace”

Dr. **Rudina ALIMERKO**, University Ismail Qemali Vlora, Albania; Executive Committee of Albanian Sociological Association (ALBSA)

“The education of Peace”

Prof. Assoc. Dr. **Ledia KASHAHU**

University Aleksander Moisiu Durrës, Albania

Faculty of Education, Department of Pedagogy

“About the psychology of peace”

Prof. Dr. **Fatmir VADOHEJ**

University Luigj Gurakuqi Shkoder, Albania

“Regional integration in the practice of the role of Universal Peace Federation”

Mr. **Ali LAÇEJ**

Coordinator of the Albanian’ Peace Council in the Balkans

Open discussions/professors, students, other participants

III. ABSTRACTS OR FULL PAPERS

3RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE SESSION OF UPF & AIS

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int. Conf.150/UPF*

Peace and sustainability beyond war: reimagining development in post-conflict societies

Romina GURASHI

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The research explores the complex and often neglected nexus between war, environmental degradation, and sustainable development. While international agendas increasingly link peace and sustainability, these discussions are often limited to societies untouched by conflict. Yet, as recent wars demonstrate, the question of sustainability becomes most acute precisely where violence has left deep material and social scars. Drawing on sociological theory (Galtung 1969; Gurashi 2023) and recent evidence from Ukraine and Gaza, the paper examines how war reshapes the ecological foundations of life. Armed conflicts, as documented by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP 2023) and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI 2022), contaminate water, air, and soil, destroy biodiversity, and undermine human health for generations. In post-conflict contexts, this environmental toll intersects with fragile governance, social dislocation, and economic collapse, raising fundamental questions about how societies can rebuild on ecologically devastated ground. The discussion reflects on the sociological implications of conflict pollution and on the need to integrate ecological restoration into peacebuilding strategies. Drawing from contemporary debates on sustainable peace, it considers how reconstruction efforts might evolve from short-term humanitarian responses to long-term ecological and cultural regeneration. Through the cases of Ukraine's contaminated farmlands and Gaza's collapsing water systems, it invites reflection on how sustainable development

can emerge amid ruins, and how environmental repair may become a condition for social healing. Ultimately, peace and sustainability appear as mutually constitutive processes rather than sequential goals. Their integration requires not only institutional coordination but also a cultural reorientation – one that redefines development as a form of coexistence among humans, societies, and ecosystems, transforming destruction into a horizon of regeneration.

Keywords: *Sustainable Peace, Environmental Sociology, Post-Conflict Reconstruction, Structural Violence, Ecological Justice*

N° 2025 Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.144/UPF

Global Peace Index 2025. Albania & West Balkans

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This paper refers to the 19th edition of the Global Peace Index (GPI), which ranks 163 states according to their level of peacefulness, covering 99.7 per cent of the world's population. Produced by the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), the GPI is the world's leading measure of global peacefulness. Methodically GPI uses 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators to measure the state of peace across three domains: the level of Societal Safety and Security; the extent of Ongoing Domestic and International Conflict; and the degree of Militarisation. Key findings of GPI 2025 include (1) the fact that there are currently 59 active state-based conflicts, the most since the end of WWII and three more than the prior year, and (2) the nearly two-decade trend of declining militarization has also been reversed, with 106 countries experiencing a deterioration in militarization in the past two years. As is logical, last in this ranking is Russia – the country with the greatest responsibility for the problems the world is experiencing. In this index, the Western Balkan countries rank between 34th and 64th (Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Serbia). Albania is the 52nd (with 1812 points). This index confirms the strong correlation between peace and development (the central theme of this conference): the countries that score best in the GPI are those where development is harmonious and sustainable. Albania could and should have a place of honour in this ranking, like Slovenia (9th), Croatia, or the Baltic countries. Peace and tranquillity within us are, it seems, a challenge that must be won...

Keywords: *Global Peace Index, Societal Safety, Peace and Development, West Balkans, Albania.*

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.145/UPF*

The Education System as a Strategy for Promoting Peace

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Faculty of Human Sciences

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Education plays a pivotal role in shaping sustainable and peaceful societies, being regarded not only as a process of knowledge transmission but also as a strategic mechanism for developing social, moral, and civic capacities. Based on scientific research on peace education, learning processes enable the development of critical thinking skills, ethical awareness, and competencies for the constructive management of conflicts. This study aims to analyze the role of the educational system as an effective strategy for building and promoting peace, grounded in the Sustainable Development Goals and the Vision of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. Inclusive and quality education contributes to the development of sustainable societies, the prevention of conflict, and the enhancement of civic participation. The study holds particular significance as it reflects a multidimensional approach, where education is treated as a social strategy that influences the formation of responsible and cooperative individuals and, at a broader level, the consolidation of peaceful societies. The key strategies for peace building include the integration of education on human rights and democracy, the development of critical thinking and ethical reflection, as well as the use of innovative teaching methods that foster participation and interaction. In this regard, the educational system as a strategy for peace building represents an important field of study that requires the integration of educational policies, innovative methodologies, and universal values to achieve a long-term impact on social and cultural development. The findings indicate that when the educational system is integrated with clear strategies for peace education, it can significantly contribute to the formation of a more tolerant and sustainable society.

Keywords: *Educational system, peace, strategy, sustainability.*

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.148/UPF*

Peace Education: Conceptual Foundations, Developments, and Future Directions

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Peace education represents a transformative pedagogical paradigm that nurtures values of nonviolence, empathy, and social justice through knowledge, critical reflection,

and participatory learning. This article offers a comprehensive analysis of peace education in Albania, situating it within the nation's broader sociocultural and political transformations. Employing a theoretical and document-based methodology, the study examines Albania's educational policies, curricular reforms, and institutional initiatives since 2015. Findings reveal a gradual yet significant integration of peace-oriented principles—particularly within human rights and civic education frameworks—aligned with the country's post-communist democratization and European integration aspirations. Despite these advances, systemic challenges persist in teacher training, curriculum coherence, and community participation. The discussion underscores the necessity of embedding peace education through whole-school approaches, participatory pedagogies, and partnerships between schools, universities, and local communities. Drawing on international models and the Albanian context, the article highlights both achievements and constraints in developing a culture of peace within education. It concludes by proposing strategic directions for strengthening peace education through comprehensive curricular design, continuous teacher professionalization, and inclusive community engagement, while identifying the need for empirical research on its impact in Albanian schools.

Keywords: *Peace education; Albania; Curriculum reform; Teacher education; Community engagement; Culture of peace*

N° 2025 *Uni.ShkodraInt.Conf.* 149/ UPF

Post-Secular Diplomacy and Interfaith Dialogue for Peace

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Religions for Peace of Europe

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Oltion KOLA

Bedër University College Tirana, ALBANIA

(PhD Candidate)

In the post-secular era, the intertwining of religion and diplomacy is becoming a crucial element for building peace and global coexistence. Religion has returned to the center of international diplomacy, acting as a factor that directly influences identities, values, and conflicts. Consequently, modern diplomacy requires a more ethical, inclusive, and sensitive approach to the cultural and spiritual dimensions of societies. Interfaith dialogue emerges as a diplomatic instrument with high potential for mediation, trust-

building, and the prevention of extremism and hatred. Through the cooperation of religious, educational, and state institutions, it contributes to strengthening social cohesion and enhancing resilience against polarization. The example of Albania, its academic institutions of religious communities, and the Interfaith Council of Albania—as a successful model of coexistence—demonstrates that religion can serve as a source of peace, justice, and education. Its work at both national and international levels, in collaboration with international organizations and academic institutions, highlights the power of dialogue based on spiritual values and moral conscience. In this context, post-secular diplomacy does not view religion as an obstacle but as an essential partner in building a fairer and more sustainable world. It seeks a diplomacy of conscience, where interfaith cooperation becomes the foundation for peace, human dignity, and shared well-being.

Keywords: *Interfaith dialogue; peace and coexistence; religion and diplomacy; Interfaith Council of Albania; interreligious tolerance.*

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.164/ UPF*

The difficult road toward a sustainable Peace. The lessons of history – Shkodra and beyond

Majlinda LAÇAJ
Shkodra Historical Museum
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The pursuit of sustainable peace has never been a linear process. History demonstrates that peace is not simply the absence of conflict but a continuous effort of cultural understanding, social cohesion, and collective memory. Shkodra, one of the oldest cities in the Balkans, embodies a rich historical legacy where co-existence, artistic expression, and intercultural dialogue have often prevailed even amidst tensions. This paper explores how the historical experiences of Shkodra—its religious harmony, cultural resilience, and role as a crossroads of civilizations—offer valuable lessons for building long-term peace in contemporary societies. Through a historical and sociocultural lens, the study highlights the importance of cultural heritage, community engagement, and intergenerational education as pillars of peacebuilding. Extending beyond Shkodra, the paper reflects on how local experiences can shape global narratives of reconciliation and development. The findings emphasize that sustainable peace requires not only political agreements but also trust-building, cultural diplomacy, and inclusive social identities rooted in shared memory and mutual respect.

Keywords: *Sustainable peace, Shkodra, history, cultural heritage, social cohesion, reconciliation.*

5TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP (CSL – AADF)

“LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATION”

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.05/CSL-AADF*

The ethics of communication in conflict situations: The role of institutional actors in the school environment

Aida HAXHIU

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This study presents a real-life conflict situation in a 9-year school in Durrës, serving as a case for analyzing the role of ethical communication and institutional cooperation in handling delicate school matters. The event begins with a complaint from a parent against a teacher, followed by the involvement of the school administration and the psycho-social service. However, the way the case is managed—excluding the teacher from the investigative process and lacking full transparency—reveals serious gaps in institutional ethics and professional communication. The analyzed case shows that the absence of a clear ethical protocol and limited understanding of institutional responsibilities lead to biased decision-making, lack of fair mediation, and a compromised sense of professional security for the teaching staff. The teacher feels excluded, the administrator acts unilaterally, and the psycho-social service loses its mediating role, becoming instead an informal evaluator. In response, this project proposes the development of an ethical protocol for conflict management in schools, ensuring equal inclusion of all parties, documented procedures, and fair, informed decision-making. School leaders must be trained to serve as guarantors of a climate of trust, while psychologists and social workers should maintain a neutral and mediating role throughout the process. The aim of this study is to inspire institutional reflection and action toward a healthier communication culture, where ethics are not just theoretical concepts, but practical guiding principles for all educational stakeholders.

Keywords: *communication ethics, school conflict, institutional protocol, school leadership, psycho-social service, professional inclusion*

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New partnership in education: Changing roles in the teacher-student-parent triangle

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Contemporary educational transformations have brought significant changes to the roles of teachers, students, and parents, creating a new collaborative and inclusive partnership. The teacher is no longer merely a transmitter of knowledge but also a guide and supporter of students' socio-emotional and technological development. The student takes an active and co-creative role in the learning process, benefiting from digital tools and exposure to global cultures. The parent becomes an engaged partner, supporting not only academic achievements but also the emotional and social well-being of the child. Key challenges include academic pressures, technological distractions, teacher burnout, and high parental expectations, which require ongoing adaptation and collaboration. Building a climate of trust, active student involvement in decision-making, and continuous training for all stakeholders are crucial for developing a more effective and sustainable educational system. This collaborative model is essential for addressing modern challenges and fostering the holistic development of students within an improved learning environment.

Keywords: *Teacher-student-parent triangle, educational partnership, teacher role, parental engagement, student participation, communication and collaboration*

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Developing fraction understanding through the Pirie-Kieren theory in fifth grade

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This study is part of a broader research agenda investigating the role of the Pirie-Kieren theory in fostering mathematical understanding in primary education. After examining its application in third and fourth grades, the current research focuses on fifth-grade students. An experimental design with a control group was employed, involving 150 students from three primary schools across different regions of Kosovo.

In the experimental classes, specially designed teaching materials and methodological guidelines were developed in accordance with the stages of the Pirie-Kieren theory, while traditional teaching approaches were used in the control classes. At the end of the intervention, all students completed a common test of ten tasks aligned with the curriculum learning outcomes. The results revealed clear and statistically significant differences between the groups. Students in the experimental group achieved a higher mean score of correct responses ($M = 7.73$) compared to the control group ($M = 5.37$). An independent-samples t-test confirmed this difference as significant ($t = 7.536$; $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the average fulfillment of learning outcomes reached 75.86% in the experimental group versus 46.70% in the control group. These findings demonstrate that the Pirie-Kieren theory provides an effective and sustainable framework for the gradual development of fraction understanding. The study highlights its potential to serve as a valuable model for contemporary mathematics instruction in primary education.

Keywords: *Pirie-Kieren theory, fractions, mathematical understanding, primary education, experimental study*

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The role of probabilistic concepts in the development of learning competencies in pre-university education

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This study addresses the importance and role of probabilistic concepts in developing learning competencies in pre-university education, focusing on the enhancement of students’ analytical and critical skills. Probability, as a fundamental branch of mathematics, not only represents a tool for understanding and modeling uncertain phenomena but also significantly influences decision-making processes and logical thinking. Through theoretical analysis and empirical studies, this research explores how integrating probabilistic concepts can positively impact the development of students’ core competencies, such as problem-solving skills, statistical thinking, and understanding risk and uncertainty. The research is supported by data collected from questionnaires, involving 102 students and 7 mathematics teachers. The analysis of results highlights the perceptions and experiences of participants regarding the teaching and learning of probability, emphasizing the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to increasing probabilistic awareness. The findings suggest that probabilistic concepts, when addressed in a structured and appropriate manner, can contribute to improving students’ cognitive and social competencies, preparing them for the challenges of a complex and data-driven society. This research also contributes to the academic literature by offering recommendations for enhancing teaching methods and the practical applicability of probability.

Keywords: *Probabilistic concepts, pre-university education, analytical competencies*

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Ethical Challenges of Integrating ChatGPT in Educational Leadership: Insights from the Albanian Context

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The increasing use of artificial intelligence in education has opened new horizons for institutional management and educational leadership, while simultaneously raising complex ethical dilemmas. This paper critically examines the use of ChatGPT by leaders of pre-university institutions in Albania, focusing on the ethical challenges arising during its integration into professional practices. The analysis is grounded in international literature on AI ethics and is intertwined with the Albanian legal framework, including Law No. 69/2012 "On Pre-University Education," Law No. 80/2015 "On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions of the Republic of Albania," and Law No. 9887/2008 "On the Protection of Personal Data." The findings indicate that Albanian educational leaders perceive ChatGPT as a tool with significant potential to enhance administrative efficiency, support decision-making processes, and foster institutional innovation. However, its use is accompanied by pronounced ethical challenges related to the accuracy of information, professional integrity, transparency in application, protection of sensitive data, and digital inequalities between urban and rural schools. The study also highlights the risk of technological dependency and the potential erosion of professional autonomy among leaders in the absence of structured training programs. The primary contribution of this study is the provision of an analytical framework that aids in understanding the ethical implications of ChatGPT usage in Albania and offers concrete recommendations for educational leaders and policymakers. The paper advocates for the development of dedicated ethical codes, professional training programs, and national policies for the integration of AI tools in education, ensuring that technological innovation aligns with principles of fairness, transparency, and data protection.

Keywords: *ChatGPT, artificial intelligence, educational ethics, educational leadership, institutional management.*

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Instructional content - Critical thought - Competence: A model for competence-based curriculum implementation

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Building students' competences in school requires an approach that goes beyond the simple transmission of information. This paper proposes the triad Learning Content – Critical Thinking – Competence as a conceptual and practical model to explain the process through which scientific and social knowledge is transformed into functional competence. Learning content is understood not merely as information to be memorized, but as a developmental resource with the potential to stimulate students' cognitive activity (Bruner, 1996; Shulman, 1986). This potential is activated through critical thinking – a deliberate process of analysis, reasoning, and reflection (Facione, 1990; Paul & Elder, 2006; Brookfield, 2012) – which enables students to transform symbolic representations of knowledge into meaningful internal structures and functional attitudes. Competence, as a measurable and assessable component of the curriculum, represents the learner's ability to use acquired knowledge, skills, and attitudes in real-life contexts (OECD, 2018; European Commission, 2018). Through practical examples from classroom situations and developmental assessment tools, the paper demonstrates how the triad creates a complete cycle of competence-building: from content, through critical thinking, to manifested competence. The model aims to provide both a theoretical and practical framework for teachers and curriculum developers, as well as a solid basis for preparing students for international assessments such as PISA.

Keywords: *Instructional content, critical thinking, competence, competence-based curriculum, PISA*

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Intelligent Education in an Intelligent Society and the role of Education Leadership

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When a student who starts school today completes his/her studies, it is estimated that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be one million times more powerful than in his/her first

day of school. Meanwhile, the power of computer processing doubles every two years, and the power of language processing is tripling every two years (Kisinger, Schmidt & Huttenlocher, 2024). This means that the world is moving towards an Intelligent Society (IS) i.e., a society that (on the one hand) takes into account, evaluates, appreciates, and use effectively different forms of intelligence and (on the other hand) denies, avoids, and refuse its dangers forms (e.g., Instrumental Intelligence) doing everything in the function of quality of people's life and the maximum fulfilment of their interests. The paper presents different forms of intelligence, from IQ, Emotional Intelligence, Social Intelligence etc., including eight forms of the 'multiple kinds of intelligence' theory developed more than 30 years ago, by Harvard University. The paper presents some important concepts for Intelligent Education (IES), its key "Components & Benefits", such as: Personalized Learning, Real-time Feedback, Innovative Teaching Methods, Accessibility and Inclusivity, and naturally Efficiency – all key components of the leadership and management of education. This analysis resulted in some practical conclusions for adapting and improving leadership and management in education in Albania and beyond.

Keywords: *Intelligent society, multiple kinds of intelligence, Intelligent Education, Education Leadership.*

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Multiculturalism and Interculturalism: Comparing Paradigms for Educational Leadership

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This paper retraces the debate between the main scholars of the multicultural approach and those of the intercultural approach, recently developed in the United Kingdom. After emphasizing the peculiarities of multiculturalism, concerning the recognition of diversities and the inclusion of foreigners, the comparison of such model with the actual challenges faced by the United Kingdom, marked by the dynamism and differentiation of ethnic minorities, leads to consider some of the intercultural theses as a better approach for representing and reacting to ethnic and religious diversities. Particular attention is given to the implications of both paradigms for educational leadership, with schools and learning environments considered as crucial spaces for intercultural dialogue and social cohesion. Finally, the applicability of interculturalism was tested on the case study of Quebec, through a revision of the theories of Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor.

Keywords: *educational leadership, intercultural education, minorities, diversity, multiculturalism, social cohesion*

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.102/CSL-AADF*

Strategic directions for the development of pre-university education in the 21st century: challenges and perspectives

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Pre-university education in the 21st century faces profound transformations driven by globalization, technological development, labor market dynamics, and global challenges such as climate crises and pandemics. This paper analyzes the strategic directions for the development of pre-university education by focusing on five fundamental pillars: the integration of digital technology, the transition toward competency-based curricula, the promotion of equity and inclusion, education for sustainability and global citizenship, and the evolving role of the teacher in this new context. The study is based on a comprehensive review of international literature (OECD, UNESCO, World Bank, etc.) and employs a comparative analysis method to highlight key trends, challenges, and future perspectives. The findings emphasize that the success of pre-university education depends on the ability to integrate technology without reinforcing inequalities, to balance global competencies with local needs, and to strengthen the role of teachers as facilitators of learning. The paper concludes with recommendations for sustainable education policies aimed at fostering an inclusive, innovative, and equitable education system.

Keywords: *pre-university education, 21st century, competencies, digital technology, equity, sustainability*

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Building emotional literacy, empathy, and compassion in early childhood: an integrated program for ages 3 – 6

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This program proposes an integrated framework for emotional education in early childhood, targeting children aged 3 to 6 years. Structured into progressive modules, it focuses on three fundamental dimensions: (1) emotional awareness and expression,

(2) emotional regulation and self-control, and (3) empathy, compassion, and self-compassion. The program adopts a developmental perspective, differentiating learning objectives and activities across ages three, four, five, and six to align with children's cognitive, emotional, and social capacities. Through play-based, artistic, and interactive methods, children learn to identify and name emotions such as joy, sadness, anger, and fear, and to understand their opposites—sharing, calmness, safety, and comfort. They are guided to recognize emotions in others, develop empathy, and begin cultivating compassionate and self-compassionate responses. The inclusion of compassion and self-compassion as educational components represents a significant innovation in the Albanian context, where these concepts are rarely addressed in professional practice. The pedagogical approach emphasizes experiential learning, the integration of art and storytelling, and the active involvement of educators in modeling emotional literacy. The program also introduces reflective practices for teachers and caregivers to enhance their own emotional awareness and supportive communication. Expected outcomes include improved emotional vocabulary, enhanced self-regulation, greater empathy and pro-social behavior, and the early development of self-kindness and resilience. By embedding emotional and compassionate learning in preschool education, the program aims to contribute to the holistic development of children and to foster emotionally intelligent, empathetic, and socially responsible future generations.

Keywords: *Emotional education, early childhood, experiential learning, empathy, (self) compassion*

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Cultivating emotional intelligence and compassion in primary and lower secondary education: an integrated program for grades 1–9

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This program presents a comprehensive framework for emotional education designed for students aged 6 to 15, covering grades 1 through 9. Rooted in developmental psychology and social-emotional learning (SEL) theory, the program promotes the gradual acquisition of emotional awareness, regulation, empathy, compassion, and ethical decision-making. It acknowledges that children enter primary school with diverse emotional backgrounds—some lacking early emotional learning or having experienced adverse conditions—and builds progressively across grade levels to strengthen both emotional literacy and resilience. The curriculum emphasizes language development through an expanded emotional vocabulary in Albanian, recognizing the cultural need for verbal expression of emotions. It also integrates bodily and nonverbal awareness, helping students connect physical sensations with emotional states. Compassion and self-compassion are woven throughout all modules, not as standalone topics but as integral components of emotional understanding, social behavior, and personal responsibility. Methodologically, the program relies on experiential learning, role-play,

reflective writing, and group discussions, ensuring continuity and depth as students mature. By the final cycle, learners are equipped to reflect critically on emotions, manage stress, make ethical decisions, and act with empathy in complex social contexts. This longitudinal approach aims to cultivate emotionally intelligent, socially responsible, and compassionate individuals capable of contributing positively to their communities.

Keywords: *Emotional education, self-compassion, empathy, emotional literacy, emotional vocabulary, compassion-based education*

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Leadership and management experiences in implementing the dual education model in Kosovo

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The implementation of dual education in Kosovo represents a major step toward connecting schools with the labor market by combining classroom learning with professional practice. This study explores how leadership and management in vocational education have shaped the implementation of the dual education model during the 2023/2024 academic year. It focuses on the experiences of directors and managers in vocational schools and Centers of Competence, highlighting their strategies in guiding staff, building partnerships with businesses, and ensuring the quality of training. Using interviews with school leaders and an analysis of official documents, the study identifies both achievements and challenges in this process. Leaders reported that the dual education model increased student motivation, improved collaboration between schools and employers, and enhanced the reputation of vocational education. However, they also emphasized the need for stronger management systems, clearer legal frameworks, and better preparation of teachers and mentors to support practical training. The findings underline that effective leadership, characterized by vision, coordination, and adaptability, is crucial for sustaining this model in Kosovo. Strengthening management capacities at school and municipal levels, alongside closer cooperation with the private sector, is essential to make dual education a lasting bridge between education and employment.

Keywords: *Dual education, educational leadership, school management, vocational education, labor market*

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**The leader, the environment,
the atmosphere in the school,
TALIS-as instrument to measure it**

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This paper explores contemporary approaches to school leadership and their interrelation with the school environment, atmosphere, and collaborative climate. It focuses particularly on the TALIS instrument developed by the OECD as a tool for measuring the effectiveness of these dimensions within educational institutions. The central hypothesis proposes that a renewed and evidence-based conceptualization of the school environment and climate can serve as a foundation for democratizing school governance in Albania. By employing meta-analysis as the primary research method, the study seeks to synthesize theoretical and empirical insights to establish a coherent framework linking effective leadership, collaborative school culture, and democratic governance. The paper argues that the implementation of successful international models of school leadership, aligned with contemporary notions of a positive and encouraging school climate, can foster a more participatory and transparent governance structure in Albanian schools. TALIS is examined not only as a measurement instrument but also as a methodological standard and model adaptable to the Albanian educational context. Grounded in contemporary literature, the study reinforces the validity of its main hypothesis and concludes with recommendations for improving educational policies and promoting democratic practices in school management across Albania.

Keywords: *school leadership, school environment, school atmosphere, collaborative climate, TALIS*

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School leaders as agents of development in turbulent times: the experience of transformative training in Albania

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In today's educational reality, school leaders face ongoing and unpredictable challenges: curricular and legal changes, rapid technological advancements, and the repercussions of social, economic, and demographic crises. In this context, leaders cannot remain mere administrators; they must act as transformative leaders (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Fullan, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020) – capable of mobilizing staff, fostering a culture of collaboration, and steering schools toward sustainable development. The work is based on the experience of the School of Directors of Pre-University Educational Institutions in Albania, a national initiative aimed at the professional development of educational leaders. The analysis includes reflections from participants and concrete cases from school management practice, aiming to highlight the connection between transformative training and the development of visionary, leadership, and managerial competencies. The methodological approach is both theoretical and practical, combining the principles of transformative leadership with the professional reflections of leaders during the training process (Day & Sammons, 2016). The findings emphasize that effective training for leaders goes beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge, impacting the development of skills for managing change, fostering pedagogical innovation, and ensuring inclusivity in every school. Through practical examples and reflections from participants, the paper argues that leaders prepared as change agents become strong pillars of institutional development during uncertain and turbulent times. The study contributes to the understanding of the role of educational leadership in transforming sustainable and inclusive schools amidst a backdrop of continuous change.

Keywords: *Transformative leaders, training, sustainable development, innovation*

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Augmentative Alternative Communication for Inclusion & Challenges of School Leadership

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Augmentative Alternative Communication is an effective intervention modality that offers a range of techniques and strategies, for children with language disorders. Although many

infants acquire their language, speech, and communication skills without any problems, research indicates that a growing percentage of children are exhibiting complicated communication demands. A child's ability to communicate is a key skill that is required for their development. Being an important part of society, schools have a responsibility to address children's needs by fostering an inclusive environment and establishing effective communication channels at all times. The degree of understanding and suitability of these systems at the "Sevasti Qirjazi" school chosen for an Albanian pilot project is noted in this study. The findings showed how the use of alternative augmentative communication systems, such as sign language practice in inclusive school settings, improved the communicative abilities of children with language disorders. Additionally, it enhanced efficient methods for assisting children in need of augmentative alternative communication while providing a friendly approach and a welcoming environment for all practitioners and users within the school community. It takes ongoing skills and training of communication partners, as well as the potential to enrich all areas of daily life with AAC tools, to transform Augmentative Alternative Communication into a language that is utilised in all situations of the child's life. The school as a diverse community should promote the social and academic achievement of children, playing an integral role in their success.

Keywords: *Communication, augmentative, alternative, language disorders, communication systems*

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Challenges of Leadership in the International School Sector

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This paper critically examines the evolving dynamics of global education governance and policy mobility through the lens of neoliberalism and internationalization. Drawing on Ball's (2010, 2013) analyses of policy networks and the neoliberal imaginary, the study situates international education within the broader framework of global policy flows and the privatization of educational governance. The work of Hayden (2006) provides a foundation for understanding the historical and sociocultural contexts of international schools, while James and Sheppard's (2014) insights into ownership and profit motives illuminate how market logics shape institutional governance and identity. Building on the theoretical models of policy borrowing and translation proposed by Phillips and Ochs (2003), Winstanley (2012), and Burdett and O'Donnell (2016), the paper interrogates how educational ideas are selectively appropriated, recontextualized, and at times distorted as they traverse national and institutional boundaries. Finally, Robertson's (2012) notion of glocalisation offers a counterpoint to homogenizing narratives of globalization, emphasizing the hybrid and localized adaptations that emerge within transnational education spaces. Together, these perspectives reveal the tensions between global policy convergence and local educational realities, highlighting how neoliberal policy mobilities reconfigure notions of educational purpose, governance, and equity in the international school sector.

Keywords: *Education governance, international schools, glocalization, neoliberal policy, leadership.*

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The impact of crises on educational leadership models: From traditional style to new adaptive approaches

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Global and local crises have exposed the weaknesses of traditional leadership models in educational institutions. Many leaders have been found unprepared to manage the emergencies in which society, in general and the education system in particular, found themselves. While some others have known how to successfully face these challenges, leaving their comfort zone and their leadership style by adopting new practices in their leadership. This paper aims to analyze the evolution of educational leadership styles and the impact of crises on the way leaders manage under pressure. The methodological approach for this study was a literature review. The results clearly showed that crises have accelerated the transformation of educational leadership models. The study contributes to the theory and practice of educational leadership, providing a deeper understanding of how crises can catalyze positive change. The results can help improve leadership training programs, develop leaders who are better prepared for emergencies, and build more flexible and sustainable institutions. As recommendations for the future, we support the idea that educational leadership should focus on developing adaptive capacities, which prepare the school not only to survive the crisis but to emerge stronger from it by ensuring continuity in its direction.

Keywords: *Educational leadership, crisis, adaptive leadership, traditional style, educational innovation*

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.98/CSL-AADF*

Leadership in the Integration of Artificial Intelligence in primary education: Challenges and opportunities

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How can primary school classrooms be transformed into laboratories of critical thinking, creativity, and innovation? In 2025, Albania took a historic step by introducing artificial intelligence (AI) for the first time in the fourth-grade curriculum. Students

learn fundamental concepts of computational thinking, coding, data processing, digital content, and online safety, while developing creativity, curiosity, and problem-solving skills that prepare them for an increasingly technology-driven world. This study examines how school leadership can make this transformation possible: leaders who create vision, support teachers, and ensure access to resources and training can foster an innovative and inclusive school culture. The analysis includes practical strategies and methodological approaches connecting theory with the concrete experiences of fourth-grade classrooms and addressing potential challenges in implementing technology in primary education. The expected outcome is a practical guide for Albanian school leaders and teachers, demonstrating how AI integration can be achieved ethically, creatively, and sustainably, transforming schools from places of passive learning into dynamic spaces where students actively experiment, create, and grow.

Keywords: *Artificial intelligence, primary education, school leadership, digital competencies, educational innovation*

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Students of Translation and Translation Text Difficulties

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Nowadays, students of translation encounter translation problems although they use when needed translation tools like Trados to help them. The aim of this paper is to identify students' difficulties in two courses in Master of Science in Professional Translation. From observation classes, students' difficulties in translating English text vary from vocabulary and phraseology to grammatical forms, syntax, some discourse and sometimes-cultural conventions. The difficulties of students in translating texts were mainly due to the lack of vocabulary and sometimes-proper grammatical conventions. One of the most typical errors is word for word translation. Even when assisted by translation tools, students leave it as given, few try to change and adopt strategies in writing sentences properly preserving cohesion and coherence and target language conventions. If we compare two courses Translation of General Texts from English to Albanian with Reverse Translation General Texts from Albanian to English, students' errors in translation are encountered more in the reverse translation course, because the two languages differ a lot from each other. To overcome difficulties students were exposed to a vast number of texts from different content and to the use of dictionary of translation that contain fixed terms or expressions used for various text types. Suggestions are made when students are taught to create their own vocabulary list, to read more and to get used to a variety of translated audiovisual materials to identify problems as many students lack background on text content.

Keywords: *Text translation difficulties, general informative texts*

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Assessing the impact of educational applications on students’ resolution of school exercises: A critical academic approach

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In recent decades, the widespread adoption of mobile technology has brought about a significant transformation in the field of education, particularly in the ways students acquire knowledge and approach the resolution of school exercises. Educational applications installed on smartphones have become everyday tools, especially among younger students in developing countries such as Albania, where schools are increasingly integrating technology as a supportive element in teaching and learning. From a psychological perspective, these applications may influence the development of self-regulated learning, intrinsic motivation, and problem-solving skills (Zimmerman, 2002). Based on Bruner’s (1966) constructivist theory, learning experiences are more effective when students actively interact with the material, and the use of educational applications can facilitate such interaction, especially in environments outside the traditional classroom. According to Rogers (1983), autonomy and a sense of personal control are essential for meaningful learning—qualities often encouraged by personalized digital platforms. However, developmental psychology suggests that the uncontrolled use of technology may negatively impact the development of critical thinking, long-term knowledge retention, and students’ intellectual independence (Clark & Mayer, 2016; Winne & Hadwin, 1998). Recent studies emphasize that while the use of educational applications may increase initial engagement, it does not necessarily guarantee improved academic outcomes or the development of metacognitive skills, especially when the usage is passive or dependency-based (Kucirkova, 2018). Considering these dynamics, this paper aims to critically assess the impact of educational applications on students’ performance in solving school exercises in the context of Albania. The analysis integrates psychological, pedagogical, and technological approaches to better understand the effects of these tools on knowledge acquisition and the formation of study habits among youth. Furthermore, the study investigates whether the use of such applications enhances or undermines the ability to think independently and to tackle complex academic tasks.

Keywords: *Technology, teaching, learning, application, autonomy*

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Privacy and Data Protection in the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Albanian Education vs. European Union

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The integration of artificial intelligence in education offers opportunities for personalized learning and broader access to information, but raises significant concerns regarding the privacy and data protection of students. In Albania, the absence of a dedicated legal framework for the use of AI in education creates risks related to unclear data collection, uncontrolled processing, and unfair profiling of student information. These legal gaps increase the likelihood of violations of students' rights and algorithmic discrimination. In contrast, the European Union has established strict standards for data protection in AI-enabled education. Under the General Data Protection Regulation, any processing of student data requires a clear legal basis, data minimization, and the safeguarding of subjects' rights, including the rights to information and correction. The new EU Artificial Intelligence Act 2024 classifies the use of AI in education as a high-risk technology, requiring full transparency, mandatory privacy impact assessments, and human oversight in decision-making processes. This comparison highlights the urgent need for Albania to develop comprehensive data protection policies, align national legislation with European standards, and implement mechanisms that ensure transparency, accountability, and the protection of students' rights in the use of AI in education.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, privacy and personal data protection, privacy impact assessment, harmonization of legislation with the EU*

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Self-evaluation and collaboration in school improvement. The Challenges for Leadership

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This paper is based on the analysis of the improvement of teaching in schools which have the responsibility for meeting the demands that society has for the education of students. This responsibility must be proven; by giving us convincing data about their successes and with a clear work plan for improving its situation. The school

through the self-evaluation process must know how well it is working and how it is working. The methodology based on this study consists of the analysis of a group of schools within the framework of the project “Improving the quality of teaching in 9-year basic education”, today with an extension throughout the country and at all levels of Pre-University Education of AF, self-evaluation is not seen only to cope with the inspection, but as a new relationship in the management of the school, but also in its improvement. It is also based on the methodology of internal evaluation of schools, in monitoring the implementation of the improvement plan. Through self-assessment formats, where the necessary instruments are provided, managers identify priorities for improvement and define clear and measurable competencies for this improvement. At the institutional level, self-evaluation creates a culture of collaboration between teachers, administrators, and students, becoming a shared instrument for improving the school environment. It allows for objective analysis of pedagogical practices and administration, promoting data-based decision-making and continuous reflection. As a result, self-evaluation is not simply an evaluation tool, but a collaborative process that increases transparency, motivation, and joint intervention for the development of a more effective and quality school.

Keywords: *Self-assessment, collaboration, quality of education, reflection, school development, institutional improvement*

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Digitalization as a development strategy in School Management in turbulent times

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In times of global disruption—such as health crises, economic instability, social unrest, and rapid technological change educational institutions are confronted with multifaceted challenges that necessitate adaptive and strategic leadership. School leadership, as a foundational element of educational quality and institutional resilience, must adopt approaches that not only ensure organizational continuity but also foster sustainable growth and innovation. Within this context, digitalization has shifted from a peripheral support mechanism to a central component of effective educational governance. This paper examines digitalization as a strategic development framework in school leadership, emphasizing the role of digital policies in shaping organizational culture and practice. Such policies encompass a range of initiatives, including the formulation of guidelines for the pedagogical and administrative use of digital technologies, investment in infrastructure, development of digital competencies among educators and administrators, implementation of data protection protocols, and the promotion of equitable access for all learners.

The strategic adoption of digital policies enables school leaders to manage resources efficiently, support continuous professional development, and engage stakeholders in participatory decision-making processes. Furthermore, digitalization facilitates greater transparency, promotes inclusive practices, and enhances the capacity of schools to respond effectively to both current and emergent challenges. Drawing on empirical case studies and practical experiences, this contribution seeks to initiate a critical dialogue on the opportunities, complexities, and ethical considerations associated with digital transformation in education. It argues for a reconceptualization of school leadership—one that is resilient, forward-looking, and capable of leveraging digital tools to support educational equity, innovation, and institutional sustainability in an increasingly uncertain global landscape.

Keywords: *Digitalization in education, development strategy, school leadership, turbulent times, educational innovation, digital transformation*

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Smart pedagogy: The use of applications and sensors in modern teaching

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The transformation of education in the digital era has led to a rethinking of teaching processes, calling for a more advanced and specialized pedagogical approach. Traditional teaching is gradually giving way to interactive and personalized models that harness the potential of technology, including educational applications, digital didactic tools, and intelligent sensors. In this context, specialized pedagogy involves not only adapting content to meet the needs of students with different abilities but also integrating new methods grounded in real-time data analysis. These methods are supported by electronic sensors that monitor student interaction, attention, and progress. The incorporation of digital assistive tools into teaching has significantly improved student motivation and performance, enabling the creation of more inclusive, flexible, and personalized learning environments. From the use of tablets and educational software to intelligent systems that track progress and suggest pedagogical interventions in real time, technology is becoming a key factor in enhancing the quality of education. Research guiding this study has shown that the use of assistive technologies, including electronic sensors, has a direct impact on improving the educational experience of students with special needs. Applications specifically designed for children on the autism spectrum, when combined with sensors that measure focus and visual

engagement, have proven effective in increasing student participation and autonomy in completing tasks. These developments highlight the need for ongoing teacher training in the use of assistive technologies, as well as the development of inclusive educational policies that embrace pedagogical and technological innovation in support of every child. This study explores the interplay between specialized teaching and assistive technologies, focusing on their potential to foster 21st-century competencies in students. Emphasis is placed on the necessity of continuous teacher professional development in the effective use of didactic technologies, as well as the formulation of sustainable and inclusive educational policies that support their integration into the education system.

Keywords: *Teaching, specialized pedagogy, technology, applications, assistive digital didactic tools, electronic sensors*

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Teacher professional development as a key factor for educational quality in times of change

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Professional development of teachers plays a crucial role in ensuring high-quality education, especially during periods of social and educational change. Drawing on my 15 years of experience as a history teacher and my role as coordinator of teaching quality across four schools in Peshkopi, Albania, this study examines practical strategies that enhance teacher competencies and improve learning outcomes. The focus is on continuous training, collaborative workshops, peer observation, and reflective practices that foster innovation in pedagogy. By analyzing both qualitative feedback from teachers and classroom observations, the study identifies key factors that support effective professional growth, including mentorship, access to updated resources, and structured evaluation systems. Results indicate that schools with organized professional development programs achieve higher teaching standards, increased student engagement, and better adaptation to curriculum changes. This paper emphasizes the importance of creating a sustainable framework for teacher development that aligns with national education policies and international best practices. The findings contribute to understanding how structured professional development initiatives can strengthen educational quality, enhance teacher motivation, and ultimately benefit student learning, particularly in contexts of social and educational turbulence. The study also offers recommendations for school administrators and policymakers aiming to implement effective professional growth programs in similar educational settings.

Keywords: *Teacher professional development, educational quality, teaching innovation, school leadership*

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**The library that united:
Building inclusive educational spaces through literacy,
emotional learning, and community engagement**

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Background: Recent educational research emphasized the importance of inclusive, community-oriented environments that promote literacy and social cohesion. Yet, in many schools, libraries remained underused as dynamic spaces for intercultural learning and emotional development. Aim: This study investigated the initiative “The Library that Unites”, which aimed to transform the school library into a participatory learning space integrating literacy, creativity, and socio-emotional education through community-based activities. Methodology: Adopting a participatory action research approach, teachers, students, parents, and local institutions co-designed programs such as reading circles, cultural storytelling, and creative workshops. Qualitative data were collected through focus groups, classroom observations, and reflective journals to assess students’ engagement, empathy, and critical thinking. Findings: Results indicated that students’ active participation enhanced reading comprehension, empathy, collaboration, and socio-emotional well-being. The project also contributed to fostering a more inclusive school culture rooted in respect, creativity, and shared learning. Implications: The initiative provides a replicable model for reimagining school libraries as central spaces for literacy and civic education. It illustrates the transformative potential of educational environments in shaping resilient, culturally aware, and socially responsible citizens.

Keywords: *Inclusive education, literacy development, school library, community engagement, socio-emotional learning, educational innovation.*

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**The school vision and its importance.
Instructional leadership through
the quality coordinator**

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This study is in the field of education in terms of school leadership. The importance of recognizing and implementing the best models of school leadership is becoming increasingly necessary. For the realization of this study, the method of observing cases of application of school leadership in Albania and the identification of findings based on the best contemporary models according to the theories of T. Bush was used. How does the quality assurance coordinator affect the improvement of school leadership and the challenges for its application, and the current challenges for effective functioning? The qualification of current and aspiring leaders should be based on the best contemporary styles of school leadership and not on the imitation of practices according to the models of everyday life.

Keywords: *Vision, school, quality, leadership*

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**From innovation to interaction:
a case study on the impact of ChatGPT
on student learning behaviors in High Education**

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This study aims to examine the use of ChatGPT as an innovative tool in the dynamics of teaching and effective learning, with a particular focus on its role in fostering critical thinking and emotional intelligence, as well as analyzing its impact on students' learning behaviors. The purpose is to evaluate how the use of this generative technology contributes to educational innovation, either by promoting or limiting the development of critical thinking and active learning practices. The methodology is based on a combined theoretical and empirical approach: on the theoretical level, the study reflects on a literature review concerning digital pedagogy and critical thinking, while on the practical level, case study methods were applied. The participants were Master's level students, and the research involved analyzing the content of submitted academic assignments as well as observing the dynamics

of student group discussions. The results revealed that ChatGPT was widely used by students, indicating that it facilitated easier access to information. However, concerns emerged regarding over reliance, which may hinder independent reasoning and critical argumentation. On the other hand, positive outcomes were observed in group interactions, suggesting that controlled use of this technological tool enhances emotional awareness, communication skills, and social sensitivity, thereby strengthening emotional intelligence. Furthermore, it fostered collective discussion and reflection, making the learning process more collaborative and interactive. In conclusion, the study suggests reflective methods that encourage students to compare ChatGPT's responses with scientific sources, in order to cultivate critical thinking skills an essential foundation for developing future leadership competencies.

Keywords: *Educational innovation, critical thinking, learning, ChatGPT, interaction*

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Teachers' perceptions of bullying and its impact on students' academic achievement: A study in primary schools

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This study aims to evaluate teachers' perceptions of the presence and impact of bullying on students' concentration, engagement, and academic achievement, as well as their role in preventing and managing this phenomenon. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative data collected through a survey with 30 primary school teachers (grades 1–5) and qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews with 6 teachers. The results indicate that, although some teachers remain neutral regarding the presence of bullying, the majority perceive it as a prevalent issue that negatively affects students' motivation, classroom participation, and learning outcomes. Teachers report that aggressors often face behavioral and academic difficulties, while victims tend to show lower levels of self-confidence, engagement, and performance. Most teachers feel relatively prepared to intervene, yet they highlight the absence of clear institutional protocols and insufficient professional support. Moreover, collaboration with parents is considered essential for effectively addressing bullying cases. The study suggests the need for strengthening school protocols, providing continuous teacher training, and ensuring greater involvement of school psychologists and parents to foster a safer and more supportive learning environment.

Keywords: *Bullying, parental perceptions, school collaboration*

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Reinforcing and hindering factors in high school students' academic success

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The learning process and academic achievement represent a multidimensional issue influenced by various factors, often highly complex. Verifying the effect of these factors provides the basis for developing new approaches to advance this process. Previous studies have identified numerous factors that have both positive and negative impacts on students' academic achievement. The current study examines the effects of self-confidence, students' learning strategies, and school evaluation as reinforcing cognitions, as well as anxiety, failure avoidance, and insecure control as hindering cognitions, on final academic outcomes measured by end-of-year success. The research was conducted using a survey method, where high school students self-reported on the investigated variables through questionnaires administered in their classes. The study confirmed that self-confidence, focused learning, and school evaluation had a positive impact on students' academic achievement, whereas anxiety, failure avoidance, and insecure control had a negative impact. Students reporting higher levels of reinforcing cognitions in the questionnaires were also those with better academic performance, while students with lower levels of these characteristics showed lower academic achievement.

Keywords: *Reinforcing cognitions, hindering cognitions, academic achievement, motivation*

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The phenomenon of bullying among adolescents and the Challenges of School Leadership

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Bullying is a phenomenon that is rapidly spreading in our country. One in five adolescents is bullied, while globally this statistic is one in three adolescents. An adolescent is considered bullied or victimized when they are repeatedly subjected to negative actions by one or more peers over an extended period. The rise in bullying can be attributed to several factors, including increased violence in schools, families, and society at large. Teachers

often pay insufficient attention to students' behavior, focusing primarily on delivering lessons and maintaining order during class hours. Additionally, school administrators tend to adopt a passive or indifferent attitude toward this serious issue. The weakening of the school-family-community relationship has further contributed to the problem. Bullying has significant effects on adolescents' emotional well-being, social interactions, and academic performance. It deteriorates their physical, mental, and emotional health, and can cause long-term damage to self-esteem and confidence. The consequences often extend into adulthood, affecting future family dynamics; individuals who grow up in violent environments may later replicate the same patterns of aggression and frustration within their own families. To combat this issue, schools must implement comprehensive prevention policies aimed at reducing bullying and its negative consequences. Clear procedures for reporting incidents should be established, involving teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. Disciplinary actions, including expulsion for persistent aggressors, should be enforced. Increasing the number of school psychologists and security personnel, along with providing teachers with specialized training from psychological experts, enhances the ability to recognize and effectively address bullying. Psychologists should also hold regular meetings, debates, and discussions with students to raise awareness and encourage open dialogue about bullying.

Keywords: *Bullying, adolescents, psychological violence, indifference, anger, aggressive teasing*

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Egocentrism – A challenge in preschool education

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Egocentrism is a typical behaviour among preschool children, which should be overcome during the second level of socialization. Children with pronounced egocentrism create distracting situations and place both teachers and parents in

difficult positions when it comes to management. Based on the needs of preschool education teachers, this paper addresses egocentrism as a natural trait in the cognitive and emotional development of preschool-aged children. The paper analyzes its impact on the learning process and social interaction within preschool institutions. The aim is to identify appropriate pedagogical strategies to manage and guide this developmental phase toward more successful socialization. The methodology followed is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. A meta-analysis of theoretical studies, along with interviews conducted with teachers and parents, provides the data on which the study is based. The paper concludes that egocentrism is a natural developmental phase in children aged 2 to 7 years. However, for teachers, egocentrism hinders cooperation, the effective functioning of the teaching process, and the normal flow of interactive activities in preschool. The main finding is that in order to effectively manage egocentrism, teachers should apply cooperative games, repeated rules, and modelling of empathetic behaviour. This is a complex process, and teachers require more professional support and resources to address this phenomenon. Teacher training programs, in cooperation with parents, are considered essential to developing shared methods and models for modifying egocentric behaviour in children. The paper offers several recommendations for teachers, parents, and preschool administrators.

Keywords: *Egocentrism, preschool education, socialization, rules, play*

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Innovations and challenges in ELT in the Albanian context: the case study of Elbasan high schools

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English Language Teaching (ELT) in Albanian schools has undergone significant transformation in the recent years, driven by curriculum reforms, digital integration, and alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). English, which is introduced from the first grade, provide students with longer exposure and a stronger foundation in communicative competence. Innovative practices such as project-based learning, cross-curricular approaches and the use of digital tools in Smart Labs and online platforms have enriched classroom experiences. Furthermore, national and international initiatives, including professional development programs and Erasmus+ projects, have contributed to teacher growth and the modernization of pedagogical practices. Despite these achievements, ELT in Albania continues to face challenges. Urban and rural schools face unequal access to resources. This creates disparities in learning opportunities. The exam-oriented culture often prioritizes grammar and memorization over authentic communication and learner autonomy.

Additionally, while some teachers embrace new methodologies, others struggle with limited training in ICT use, inclusive education, and innovative assessment strategies. Student motivation and opportunities for authentic language practice outside the classroom also remain limited. This paper discusses both the innovations and the challenges shaping the ELT in Albanian schools, by emphasizing the case study of the High Schools of Elbasan, highlighting best practices while addressing systemic constraints. The analysis emphasizes the need for sustained teacher support, digital literacy, and inclusive approaches to ensure that ELT continues to meet global standards while responding to local realities.

Keywords: *EFL, innovations, challenges, curriculum reform, high school.*

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Learning Outcome, Student Achievement & Competence from Measurable Goal to Evidence of Achievement

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The paper examines the essential role of Learning Outcomes (LOs) in building the components of competence—knowledge, the ability to apply knowledge (skills), and attitudes—within the framework of the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC). LOs are defined as clear and measurable statements that guide the learning process, linking curricular content with purpose, assessment, and the development of critical thinking. When formulated according to the SMART principle—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound—LOs serve as an effective tool for functional learning. The paper distinguishes between LOs, Student Achievement (SA), and competence, emphasizing that SAs represent concrete evidence of the fulfillment of a given LO. Through practical examples, it is argued that LOs are a central instrument in planning and assessment, as well as a catalyst for deep and reflective thinking in the process of building competence components. The discussion also addresses challenges in practice, including unclear formulations, the absence of assessment rubrics, and the reduction of SAs to numerical grades—all of which hinder the accurate measurement of competence acquisition. The paper concludes that only SMART LOs and authentic SAs, evaluated in the function of building competences by students, enable the development of meaningful and transferable learning.

Keywords: *Learning outcome, SMART LO, student achievement, competence, curricular content*

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Challenges of leadership when ethics is covered by compromise

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This paper presents a critical analysis of cases of consequences when the code of ethics is violated in the functioning of an educational institution and brings an argumentative experience for the management and structuring of human relations through ethics and discipline committees in public schools. The theoretical framework is based on the theories of institutional ethics, procedural justice and mechanisms of organizational silence (the silent organization), which help in the decomposition of forms of bias and distortion of the role of the whistleblower. The methodology is qualitative and exploratory, using as a source of data the author's own testimony, official institutional documents, and minutes, testimonies of the parties and discursive analysis of meetings. The paper concludes that the failure to respect the code of ethics, the practice and mentality of excessive tolerance, indifference, silence in the face of cases of inappropriate behavior often creates an institutional culture that treats justice as a risk, not as a necessity of the democratic functioning of the school. In conclusion, this situation brings important reflections on the relationship between written ethics and ethics lived in practice, raising the need for a deep review of the way institutional committees' function in the field.

Keywords: *Ethics, transgression, manipulation, discipline, compromise*

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Educational leadership development and student wellbeing: the role of principals in creating supportive school climate in Albania

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This paper aims to empirically examine the approach of Albanian school leadership toward student well-being and the promotion of a culture of happiness. The study was conducted in six schools in the city of Korçë, all of which shared a common characteristic: their principals had completed the Compulsory Preparatory Training Program for Pre-university Education Leaders (CSL). A total of 12 in-depth interviews were conducted with principals and deputy principals. The data were subsequently analyzed and coded into categories

and themes using grounded theory methodology. The study presents three key findings. First, the interviewed school leaders acknowledged a strong correlation between students' emotional and social well-being and their academic performance. Second, the findings highlight the importance principal's place on identifying students who demonstrate poor academic performance or who exhibit challenges related to social and emotional well-being. Third, the research indicates that these schools foster a learning culture in which student well-being is regarded as a foundational condition for effective learning. This particular perspective on student well-being and happiness appears to be influenced by national policy directives that emphasize the development of human capital and position education as a critical instrument for economic growth and national development.

Keywords: *Leadership in education, school leaders, student well-being, student achievement*

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The most frequent problems in Albanian language tests in the fifth grade

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The article analyzes the most frequent errors identified in 5th-grade Albanian language tests across several schools, aiming to provide practical recommendations for teachers. The study takes a dual approach: it examines both the mistakes made by students and the flaws in the design of the tests themselves. Common student errors include grammar and word usage (29.3%), spelling (22.0%), reading comprehension (19.3%), written expression (16.0%), and sentence construction (13.0%). These reflect a need for improved teaching strategies focused on language rules and comprehension skills. In terms of test design, several issues are identified: unclear or ambiguous questions (21.6%), questions outside the curriculum (17.3%), a focus on rote memorization (30.0%), and inappropriate difficulty levels (10.0%). Such problems can misrepresent students' actual knowledge and cause unnecessary confusion or stress. The article emphasizes the importance of creating balanced, curriculum-aligned tests using a detailed test blueprint. According to educational regulations and research, a well-structured assessment should reflect learning objectives, maintain fairness, and support student development. Based on personal teaching experience and academic studies, the author suggests that both accurate evaluation and clear test design are essential for meaningful learning outcomes. Recommendations include using creative teaching methods, focusing on areas with frequent errors, encouraging critical thinking, and offering constructive feedback. Ultimately, the article calls for collaboration among educators to improve testing practices, ensuring that assessments not only measure

knowledge effectively but also help students grow confidently in their use of the Albanian language.

Keywords: *Grammar and spelling errors, test design flaws, curriculum alignment, student assessment, teaching strategies, constructive feed*

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The Albanian family in depopulation and its impact on Schools

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Albanian family is undergoing one of the most challenges times due to its massive numbers of family members who are migrating or leaving the country. The society itself is manifesting massive change of cohesion since the population is shrinking and is the family. The depopulation is dramatic and the data from INSTAT support this theory. The aim of this paper is to shed lights on the effects that depopulation has on the Albanian family. We will employ qualitative and quantitative approach with data from INSTAT, with case studies of families in urban and rural communities. The bulk of the study will be the correlational paradigm, thus studying the effects of depopulation on the Albanian family.

Keywords: *Depopulation, family decrease, rural migration, liquid society, school*

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The role of leaders in school quality

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School leaders in Pre-University Education in Albania play a key role in improving the quality of teaching and student development. Key leaders including principals and teachers with team leadership roles or teaching quality assessors, etc., are key points in

the implementation of positive and successful reforms and developments in schools. They must be able to inspire, organize and manage resources effectively to create a stimulating learning environment, where all students and the parent community are involved. Various challenges such as the lack of physical and learning resources, technological changes and the need for professional development require a flexible leadership approach focused on collaboration and continuous improvement. In this context, the development of appropriate leadership models is fundamental to guaranteeing a quality and equitable education in Albania. The main points that this presentation will focus on, based on qualitative and quantitative data collected from different school principals, are: 1. The main challenges faced by principals in Pre-University Education in Albania; 2. Collaboration between principals and their pedagogical staff; 3. Use of learning management systems (LMS); 4. Use of digital platforms for communication and assessment, etc.

Keywords: *Leadership, challenges, collaboration, LMS, digital platforms*

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Aspects of the professional profile of school principals in pre-university educational institutions: a study with School Leaders

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This study examines several aspects of the professional profile and the experience of responsibility of school principals in pre-university educational institutions within the DRAP Korçë. The sample includes 258 school principals, categorized by certification status, experience, and age. The instrument used combines structured statements with open-ended comments, enabling both statistical and narrative analysis. Findings indicate that certified school principals report more consistent self-assessment, greater clarity in law implementation, and lower emotional exhaustion. The experience of uncertified school principals fosters intuitive competence but does not guarantee continuity in human resource management or moral reflection. Statements with lower averages are associated with emotional fatigue and institutional dilemmas. Authentic comments reveal daily concerns related to staff motivation, conflicts, and communication with parents. The study introduces an original approach by treating the school principal as a mediating figure between legal requirements and school realities. The recommendations aim to strengthen reflective training, mentoring, and the development of institutional relationships as mechanisms for sustainable and sensitive leadership.

Keywords: *school principal, professional certification, emotional exhaustion, institutional relationships*

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Transformational Leadership in Early Childhood Education in Albania

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This study explores the role of transformational leadership in early childhood education settings in Albania, influenced by the Reggio Emilia approach. Transformational leadership is characterized by practices such as inspiring a shared pedagogical vision, encouraging teacher autonomy, and supporting reflective professional growth. These practices contribute significantly to creating positive, collaborative, and emotionally supportive institutional culture. In Albania, there is a recognized gap in leadership training and professional development for early childhood leaders. As a result, transformational leadership is increasingly seen as both a necessary innovation and a priority within Mandatory Preparatory Training Programs for early childhood leaders. Leaders equipped with transformational skills are better positioned to support teacher motivation, emotional well-being, and professional identity, factors that are essential in Reggio Emilia-inspired contexts where co-learning, relationship-building, and teacher inquiry are central values. The study finds that preschool principals who demonstrate transformational traits such as inspirational motivation, individualized support, and intellectual stimulation create environments where staff feel more cohesive, less stressed, and more engaged in continuous learning. This leadership approach enhances not only team dynamics but also promotes high-quality teacher-child interactions and fosters innovative pedagogical practices. By integrating the core values of Reggio Emilia into everyday leadership, transformational leaders play a crucial role in shaping joyful, inquiry-based learning environments that benefit both educators and children. The research underscores the import once of transformation al leadership development in early education, particularly in transitioning systems like Albania's, where the potential for transformative change is significant.

Keywords: *transformational leadership, motivation, early childhood leaders, Reggio Emilia*

20TH INTERNATIONAL & INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE

OF INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

“DEVELOPMENT IN TURBULENT TIMES”

THEMATIC SESSION 01:
CULTURE, ARTS, PUBLIC SPHERE
AND COMMUNICATION

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**The lack of a ballet school in the city of Shkodra,
and in the entire northern area, as well as the request**

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The lack of a ballet school in the city of Shkodra, and in the entire northern area, as well as the request of many parents that the state public school have a ballet-dance art sector, gave me the impetus to develop and present this ambitious project and at the same time realistic. Taking into consideration the author's experience and dedication, the author has time to work voluntarily in a project aimed at perfecting and increasing the quality of teaching and bringing it closer to contemporary standards, both in the music sector and in that of visual arts. As you know, Shkodra inherits the musical values of great colossus such as Česk Zadeja, Tonin Harapi, Pjetër Gaci, Gjon Kapedani, etc. and in that of figurative arts, it is protected by the art and culture of Indromeno, Lulan, Danish Jukni, etc. The “Prenk Jakova” Artistic High School, being the only art school in the Northern Area of Albania, which includes the District of Shkodra, The Great Highlands Puke, Lezha, through this project, which

the author has been working on for years and with great effort the author managed to finish it, within a very short time it can reach contemporary European standards and the students who will qualify in this school will be ready to compete at all levels of contemporary schools. Within this project, the introduction of the art of classical dance, ballet, is also foreseen, with the expansion of which we enable the school “Prek Jakova” to never have exhaustion in the registrations of the first cycles, in which our school has always had deficiencies. Allow the author to express her conviction that the ancient city of Shkodra deserves this project in aid of Albanian art and culture. Extending it to the primary cycles, the introduction of classical ballet dance gives the only art school for the northern area, longevity and a flow of enrollments and a flow of students in primary schools.

Keywords: *Classical ballet, artistic curriculum, modern object class, reestablishment*

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Mind/Set: Metaphors of Breakdown in “The Bell Jar” and its Albanian Translation

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This paper offers a comparative study of metaphorical constructions of psychological breakdown in Sylvia Plath’s “The Bell Jar” and its Albanian translation “Kambana e Qelqtë”. Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory and translation studies, the research explores how metaphor serves as a vehicle for expressing emotional fragmentation, alienation, and the disintegration of self. The study investigates how linguistic and cultural differences affect the rendering of metaphors that encode mental states, and what is gained or lost in translation. By identifying key metaphorical patterns and comparing them across the two language systems, the analysis seeks to illuminate how metaphorical language articulates psychological suffering and how translation negotiates between fidelity to the source and resonance with the target audience. The findings suggest that while some metaphors are directly transferred, others undergo semantic shifts, revealing broader challenges in translating the language of distress and identity crisis. This cross-linguistic metaphor analysis contributes to both literary studies and mental health discourse. The paper is grounded in qualitative, example-based analysis and provides insights relevant to both translation practitioners and scholars interested in the intersection of language, literature, and psychological experience.

Keywords: *Metaphor, comparative, breakdown, translation, literature*

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Art as a spiritual tool, its role in resilience and spiritual development in times of crisis

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This paper is inspired by the theme of the conference and offers a personal reflection on the creative and pedagogical experience, as well as on the impact of art in society. Visual art, through my experience as both an artist and a teacher, is and remains a high spiritual guiding tool that helps individuals face crisis, uncertainty, and external disorder by offering the possibility to create and develop an inner spiritual order and resilience in turbulent times. Beyond what is often perceived as an aesthetic communication, art is fundamentally an inward act of reflection and enlightenment. It acts as a spiritual guide, creating opportunities for self-awareness and confrontation with reality. During the creation of an artwork, we see that art can establish deep connections with oneself and with others, offering hope and spiritual strength, especially in times of crisis when a possibility for change, spiritual salvation, and resilience is needed. This paper aims to emphasize that art, through creativity and reflection, plays a special and irreplaceable role in the spiritual development of individuals and in shaping collective resilience, helping to preserve human and spiritual values. As a spiritual instrument, art is a real opportunity to create a healthy and reflective mindset, which is essential to maintain integrity and humanism, especially in difficult periods and times of crisis.

Keywords: *Visual art, spiritual guidance, creative experience, realistic thinking, spiritual development, artistic resilience, spiritual crisis, philosophical reflection*

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The literary world of Kadare's characters: a polyphony of voices

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Ismail Kadare is regarded as one of the greatest creators of European and world literature. The epic breadth of his narrative, viewed from multiple perspectives, sheds light on the inner world of his characters, from their dreams, desires, and faith, to reflections on life and death, as a mirror of the Albanian world, with all its lights and shadows. Under the

constraints of ideocratic systems, he produced genuine literature by creating some of the most extraordinary characters and personalities. They represent every social stratum, both in their physical and moral traits, conveying the emotions and spiritual concerns of a creator who sought to see the Albanian and Albania from a different lens. Kadare's novel, seen in its full complexity, unfolds as a literary universe in which hundreds of his masterfully crafted characters establish a delicate balance within a whole made up of ordinary, surprising, and unforgettable details. A true master of diverse aesthetic means, Kadare created multifaceted characters who, through their varied perspectives on life and the world, whether individually or collectively, give rise to a distinctly Albanian philosophy. Though he first appeared on the literary scene as a poet, it was the brilliance of his novels that would elevate him to the pinnacle of contemporary fiction. Kadare's novels are above all novels of character, encompassing within themselves a multitude of names, figures, and types across different times and settings. Their typology and categorization according to recognized character types demand time, reading, and rereading. Kadare's body of work spans a vast expanse of communication across time and space, exerting a profound influence on the development of Albanian literature.

Keywords: *Character, typology, characterization, writer, novel, time, universe*

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Cultural heritage during socio-economic transition: the case of the men's chamber and stone towers in northern Albania

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This study examines the impacts of socio-economic and political developments in unstable times on the preservation and development of the men's chambers and stone towers in Northern Albania. The men's chambers and stone towers are not only essential elements of Albanian cultural heritage, but also symbols of identity and social organization in northern communities, promoting cultural tourism. In the context of the challenges of rapid change, migration, economic development, this study analyzes the ways in which these cultural and social structures are adapting and often placed at risk. In particular, the focus of this study is on the potential of cultural tourism as a means to preserve and promote the men's chambers and stone towers, contributing to local economic development and strengthening community ties. Through an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical, anthropological and economic methodologies, the research aims to identify the most effective practices for heritage management in this region and ways to address the challenges posed by time and modern developments in Albanian society.

Keywords: *Men's Chamber (Oda), heritage, cultural tourism, migration, community*

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Multiculturalism and its relations with minority-identity vulnerabilities and majority-identity anxieties

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With the erratic rise of a populist, majoritarian nationalism in the world, this paper considers the view that the clash is not between universalism and identitarianism but over the value or recognition to be accorded to different group identities. While multiculturalism has been concerned with the normative status of minority identities, it has been counterposed, sometimes aggressively, by those who bemoan the neglect of majorities and their identity-based anxieties. This paper focuses on how we can tackle and lessen the polarisation fostering mutual distrust and threatening the national, democratic citizenship upon which any multiculturalist project must be built and which multiculturalists, together with others, must defend. The suggestion is that this does not mean giving up on multiculturalism but involves developing a multicultural national identity to which all citizens can have a sense of belonging.

Keywords: *Multiculturalism, depolarization, dynamics of majority-minority identities*

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The Albanian language primer of the year 1898

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During archival research at the Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo, in the fund – Ministry of Finance, there are several documents concerning the 1894 Thalloszy project, sent from Vienna, about the proposed Albanian script letters for writing and printing, including some examples and an Albanian language primer from the year 1898. At the beginning of the Thalloszy project, the need for compiling an Albanian alphabet is emphasized, accompanied by some examples of letters and a brief historical overview of the use of writing in the Albanian regions, especially in Shkodër. Then, some examples are given for the regions of Durrës, Prizren, Tirana, etc. The Primer, Part I was printed in 1,000 copies at the Halzhausen Printing House in Vienna. The idea for printing this book was proposed by the Austro-Hungarian consul in Shkodër, Mr. Ippen. He noticed that some Catholic schools in Albania were using a different primer, so he got in touch

with the Archbishop of Shkodër, Monsignor Gerani. The printing of the primer and all other preparatory work was entrusted to L. Thalloczy. This book has 42 pages. The title of the primer is: “SELTERRI I PAR PER SCO A FI ORE T’SCEPINIIS” The book begins with the writing of letters in beautiful script, such as o, a, e, i, j, u, t, r, m, v, c, and continues by connecting them, first in syllables, then in longer sentences, and finally in texts, adding new letters in the following texts that incorporate the new letter, such as k, l, s, gh, etc. At the end, it presents some names of people, cities, and some texts, such as “Runiu finii!” All these texts are divided into two chapters, written in a very beautiful script, mostly in handwritten letters and to a lesser extent in printed letters.

Keywords: *Thalloczye, Ippen, Shkoder, alphabet, letters, archive*

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Inevitable natural language processing Case of Social Media in Albania

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Introduction: The scope of this work is to better understand the impact of social media into the Albanian language, where many words used in various social networks have entered as borrowings. These words are characterised by a transformation of meaning, where they either lose the original meaning or gain a new one. Is social media changing the language? **Literatura Review:** This change is related to computer-mediated communication on social media, which is a significant tool for enlarging lexical meaning of words and may also enrich the Albanian language vocabulary (Thomai, 2006), especially for low-source languages (Partha, 2025). Hence, there are computational methods and tools used for language-centered empirical analysis of CMC (Evert 2022) that can shed light on influence of this new communication. (Shukurullayeva, 2024). **Methodology:** This work will try to make evident the old and new meanings of such words and analyse the semantic changes in the corpus created in this respect. The research consists of a collection of social media terms used in Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp applications, which have gained a new meaning that is different from the one all speakers of Albanian language know. Therefore, this work dwells on a comparison between the “old” and “new” meaning. **Findings/ Results:** Based on analysis, it is definitely proven that enlargement of lexical structure of words from various sources consists also of the enrichment of a language and vocabulary, due to the increase of expressive force of the language. **Conclusions:** Hence, every new meaning is the same as the birth of a new word. Today’s users are not deforming the Albanian language; they are just setting it free from wooden structures, because the original meaning of the word may be a metaphor of the new meaning.

Keywords: *Social media, meaning, words, change, communication*

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Coke Studio's "Sound of the Nation": Cultural Development in Times of Terror

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This paper explores the role of Coke Studio Pakistan as a site of cultural development during a period of heightened terrorist violence and national crisis. Emerging in 2008 under the slogan "Sound of the Nation," Coke Studio offered not just music, but a symbolic narrative of hope, plurality, and continuity at a time when Pakistan's public sphere was deeply fractured. The study examines how the platform became a cultural and emotional refuge, producing an inclusive national soundscape that resisted both silence and sectarian fragmentation. While development is often framed in economic or institutional terms, this paper approaches it as symbolic, affective, and identity-based, especially in contexts where traditional development infrastructures are under stress. Drawing on frameworks from soft power theory, and postcolonial critique, the paper analyzes selected performances—including Tajdar-e-Haram, Jugni, Bibi Sanam Janem, and Pasoori—to show how Coke Studio projected narratives of resilience, sacredness, regional diversity, and aesthetic renewal. These songs functioned as cultural interventions, subtly challenging dominant narratives of fear while providing emotional scaffolding for a fragmented society. The paper also critically engages with the tensions inherent in corporate-sponsored cultural production. While Coca-Cola's branding raises questions about the commercialization of national identity, the platform nonetheless enabled an alternative form of development—one grounded in symbolic capital, emotional survival, and the aesthetic performance of unity. Moreover, this paper argues that in turbulent times, culture itself becomes a terrain of development, and that platforms like Coke Studio must be taken seriously as agents of both affective reconstruction and nation-building.

Keywords: *Coke studio, cultural development, music diplomacy, soft power, Pakistan*

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Pilgrimage as ecological praxis: Ritual, waste, and collective responsibility in Sanatan Dharma

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In Sanatan Dharma, pilgrimage, or tirtha-yatra, is more than a sacred journey towards the divine; it is also a collective expression of ecological and social principles. Events like the Kumbh Mela, Char Dham Yatra, and annual river pilgrimages attract millions,

creating a vibrant cultural atmosphere while also leaving a substantial ecological impact, particularly through the generation of waste. This paper explores pilgrimage as an ecological practice—a ritual setting where the concepts of dharma, shuddhi (purity), and seva (service) converge with modern issues of sustainability and zero-waste living. Utilizing textual sources such as the Vedas, Puranas, and Dharmashastras, along with ethnographic studies of recent yatras, the research illustrates how rituals like river bathing, offering biodegradable materials, and communal feasting reflect an ethic of cyclical use and respect for the Panchamahabhutas (five elements). It also examines the conflict between tradition and modernity: while consumerism and plastic culture challenge these sacred spaces, new zero-waste efforts by religious trusts, NGOs, and local communities highlight the enduring ecological awareness within Sanatan Dharma. By viewing pilgrimage as both a challenge and a chance for ecological renewal, the paper posits that religious gatherings can act as testing grounds for collective behavior, promoting ecological responsibility through spiritual values. It proposes that when seen through a zero-waste perspective, Sanatan Dharma pilgrimages can evolve into transformative social movements, integrating faith, community, and sustainability in response to global environmental challenges.

Keywords: *Pilgrimage (Tirtha-Yatra), zero-waste living, Sanatan Dharma, ecological responsibility*

THEMATIC SESSION 02:

POPULATION, MIGRATION AND DIASPORA

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.85/02*

Migrant mediators as promoters of mutual learning during the pandemic: evidence from international research

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The Covid-19 pandemic generated an unprecedented global crisis, but it also triggered unexpected forms of resilience. This ambivalence is particularly evident in migrant communities: while the health emergency exacerbated the vulnerabilities of irregular, temporary or seasonal migrants, it also highlighted the crucial role of “migrant mediators”. With a strong sense of belonging to their country of origin but also firmly embedded in the social fabric of their host societies, these individuals acted as intermediaries between migrants and not-migrants, enabling mutual learning processes during the crisis. This contribution draws on qualitative research conducted in three European cities to explore the pandemic’s impact on Bangladeshis in London, Peruvians in Milan, and Turks in Stuttgart. Semi-structured interviews show that migrant mediators supported both their communities of origin and the wider society by sharing essential information, engaging in care practices, and promoting dialogue among local stakeholders. In London, for instance, Bangladeshi “Covid Champions” emerged as an informal network that assisted disadvantaged people and collaborated with local authorities; in Milan, Peruvians contributed significantly as nurses and healthcare workers in hospitals and private homes; in Stuttgart, the German Turkish Forum and the Turkish Islamic Union of Religious Affairs facilitated communication and cooperation between institutions and local communities. The findings reveal how migrants have served as a vital resource in responding to the pandemic across Western societies. In addition, they demonstrate that the crisis also opened spaces for solidarity challenging the dominant neoliberal logic and reaffirming the transformative potential of the mutual learning.

Keywords: *Migration, Covid-19, mutual learning, comparative research*

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Glocal care chains and their multiplier effect on migration: The case of Peruvian in Milan

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The global care chain is a well-established concept used to analyze the series of personal links between people worldwide, based on paid or unpaid care work. It highlights the often-invisible networks connecting employers and care workers in receiving societies, as well as the families of migrant care workers left behind in sending countries. In this paper, we argue that glocal care chains—specific, localized divisions of care labor within receiving societies—also emerge and exert a multiplier effect on migration. Our primary data come from interviews with 840 Peruvian migrants in Milan, conducted between 2022 and 2024. This group is predominantly female and primarily engaged in elder care for Italian families. Italian welfare policies, which provide cash benefits rather than formal caregiving services, incentivize families to hire undocumented migrants at lower wages. As a result, middle-aged Peruvian women are more likely to secure care work, as employers often favor their experience. Although younger women face greater difficulty accessing such jobs, they frequently find employment as babysitters for the children of Peruvian care workers. Many middle-aged Peruvians either bring family members to assist with childcare or hire younger compatriots. Thus, the demand from Italian families for migrant care workers initiate the first wave of migration, while family reunification and intra-community caregiving needs fuel a second wave—creating a locally embedded, glocal care chain.

Keywords: *Care worker, domestic worker, care chains, migration to Italy*

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Administrative division of the municipality of Prizren and its evolution over the years

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The territory of Kosovo has continuously been attractive from the perspective of territorial appropriation and political influence since the past, mainly by neighboring

states. From this point of view, the territory of the Municipality of Prizren cannot be considered separately. The administrative division of the Municipality of Prizren has not been sufficiently addressed from a scientific standpoint so far. The purpose of this research is to examine all available documentation and other data that directly or indirectly provide information on the administrative division and its evolution over the years within this territory. This paper aims to present, in a chronological manner, the administrative division and the evolution of the administrative boundaries of the Municipality of Prizren, as well as to display the collected materials in tabular and cartographic form. For the preparation of this study, research methods based on contemporary methodology will be used. In particular, the comparative method has been applied to identify differences in the administrative extent of this region over time, while the cartographic method has been employed to illustrate some of the findings obtained through this research.

Keywords: *Administrative division, evolution, Municipality of Prizren, territory, settlement, borders*

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Rethinking youth emigration in the 21ST century: a national study on university youth in Albania

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The emigration of youth, in the 21st Century, has been different from the previous movement of university youth, in Albanian society. The history of Albanian emigration is facing the new challenges of youth as high-skill workers as the potential of contemporary emigration force, from 1990 till 2025! Emigration trajectories have changed the shapes, and influence in the construction of society's structure. The university youth emigration planification, just after university graduation, is a crucial point of view and a critical issue to be the focus of the study. It brings out the challenges to rethink the emigration of youth in the literature and in the policies, as an emergent call for all social and political institutions. This research will focus on the potential of youth and planification for emigration, while they are in the university education process. The research is based on the national level, includes all public universities in Albanian (n=7), and focuses on the champion of (N=1010) students of social sciences. The research hypothesis focuses on the potential emigration of young youth, by analyzing planification due to the current pushing factors.

Keywords: *Rethinking emigration, emigration in 21-st century, Albania, university youth, national level research*

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**Migration Waves, Shifting Identities:
The Sea as both Uniting
and Dividing Factor in Arbëresh Culture**

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The historical waves of migration, cultural preservation, and the formation of a shared identity are closely linked with the sea, a liquid space that represents survival and resilience in the Arbëresh communities of Italy. This study examines the role of the sea in Arbëresh folklore, mythology, poetry, and oral tradition, revealing its significance as a symbol of the lived experiences of migrant groups and the boundaries between geographical and existential realities. The article draws on literary works that see the sea as a place where identity forms on both personal and collective levels, and it explores how the sea serves as a dual entity for the Arbëresh, a connection to their past homeland and the community where they have rebuilt their identity, but also a barrier that encompasses longing, departure, and symbolic repatriation. The examination of narratives, literary works, and folklore indicates that the Arbëresh community has employed the image of the sea to preserve memories of displacement, to reinforce ethnic identity, and to guarantee cultural continuity over the centuries. The sea serves as a significant migration route and a dynamic repository of cultural heritage, where language, myths, rituals, and shared experiences are safeguarded through memory and symbolism.

Keywords: *Arbëresh, sea, cultural memory, diasporic identity, migration narrative*

THEMATIC SESSION 03:

EDUCATION AND SPORT

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.*28/03

Adapting teaching to the developmental needs of pupils in the primary education system

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Educational contexts are constantly adapting to the impacts of various events at the local, national and global levels, such as pandemics, violence, economic crises and various social challenges. For this reason, students and teachers often experience learning and teaching as a stressful process, even traumatic in some cases for the community. The curriculum responds to social and economic changes. It is renewed based on changes and according to the internal laws of its development. Descriptive assessment in primary education is specific and based on the age and psychological development characteristics of children 6-11 years old (IZHA 2018, 30). In the quantitative study conducted with 63 bachelor's degree students in the Primary Education branch at the “Aleksandër Moisiu” University of Durrës, and 13 teachers of the primary education at the “Jan Kukuzeli” Art School in Durrës, with a focus on exploring the perception of the participants on the challenges posed by the current curriculum implemented in pre-university education institutions regarding the fulfilment of pupils' developmental needs, it was found that only 33.3% of them believe that the current curriculum adapts to the developmental needs of students, in terms of cognitive, emotional, social and physical aspects. Strategies for promoting social and emotional learning are not integrated into daily lessons in a continuous and sustainable manner, according to the students' perception, while according to professionals, social learning is significantly encouraged. Teaching practices should be based on the abilities of each child by encouraging children themselves to exercise choice, building a full understanding of the world around them. Teachers should align curriculum goals with learning activities, as well as provide specific support to stimulate and extend children's interest, involvement, and learning in the primary education system.

Keywords: *Primary education, child development, teaching*

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Sport the main physical, mental and emotional strength

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Education and Sport are two closely related dimensions of child and youth development. This study aims to identify the importance of sport as a key factor that complements the educational process. Sport plays a crucial role in reducing excessive use of technology, especially mobile phones, by offering students healthier alternatives of spending their free time. Regular physical activity not only improves physical well-being but also contributes to mental and emotional stability, reducing stress and increasing concentration. Through questionnaires conducted with parents, students, and teachers, it was observed that students engaged in sports activities show higher academic performance compared to their peers who are less physically active. The findings highlight that sport helps children and adolescents to manage time more productively, strengthening discipline, teamwork, and self-confidence. In conclusion, sport is not only a tool for physical health, but also an essential component of the educational process, influencing positively learning outcomes and emotional balance. Educational institutions and families should therefore encourage and integrate sports activities as part of daily routines, ensuring holistic development of students.

Keywords: *Education, sport, academic performance, mental health, productive time management*

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Conflicts in school environments and how to resolve them peacefully

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The concept of conflict is very broad and at the same time quite complex. The word conflict usually has a negative meaning and is understood as the opposite of cooperation, harmony or peace. Most people think of conflict as a destructive and undesirable process that should be avoided, prevented and eliminated. However, conflict is more complex than it seems; it is a social phenomenon with different interests, it is a common and essential characteristic of human beings. We can choose how to express our energy for conflict resolution. When conflict is expressed and treated constructively, it can

serve as a catalyst for personal, social, political transformations and more. Conflict as a phenomenon that complicates relationships in the educational system if not resolved creates problems and disrupts the harmony and understanding to be formed and educated, students in school environments and beyond. If again for subsequent assessments there are objections, the conflict becomes more severe and the positions of both parties become almost hostile. Regarding conflict as a concept, there are two views: a) Traditional view of conflict: it arises from troublemakers; it is a negative phenomenon; it should be avoided; it should be resolved. b) Contemporary view of conflict: it is inevitable in human relationships; it often has value and brings benefits; it is a natural result of change; it can be managed. Conflicts in schools occur: teacher-principal, teacher-student, student-student, teacher-parent, teacher-teacher, child-parent and between principals. In this article will be explained several ways how the different types of conflicts can be handled and resolved.

Keywords: *Conflict, compromise, violence, quarrel, peace, education*

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The importance of social infrastructure in the education of early childhood in turbulent times

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The paper includes: 1-Introduction, the context. Determination of insecurity. Why do we say that society today lives in unstable turbulent times? Society is moving away from the first phase of modernization known as: "Solid Modernization". It has entered in another new phase which is unstable, insecure, and changeable. This phase is known as the phase of "Liquid Modernization". Life has become mobile, with no shape, with no center of gravity, hard to control, unpredictable. 2- The consequences of insecurity in children. Reflection. Children's rights card; this insecurity touches all dimensions of psychological, emotional, social, knowledgeable, physical, and health development leaving long-term footprints in the future; 3-Family, society: Parenting challenges, Institutional care and educational challenges, Questionnaires for parents and teachers. 5- Research work, gathering and analyzing data. 6- New effective strategies in children's education facilitating the negative consequences of circumstances and the creation of a motivational terrain to progress in the future as well. 7- This topic is

worked by an extensive experienced professional in children's development with the aim of exploiting all the human, professional, intellectual and creative capacities to facilitate the negative consequences of this new reality that directly affects in children's wellbeing and development.

Keywords: *Education, emotional wellbeing, emotional balance, compatibility, strategy, technology*

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Teaching English as a foreign language in collective classrooms: developing effective practices

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Multi-grade classrooms, or also known as collective classrooms (klasa kolektive), have recently become a continuous reality in many educational contexts, especially in rural or limited resources areas in Albania. Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in such contexts constitutes a real challenge, as the EFL teacher has to deal with students of different age groups and educational needs, as well as with different language proficiency levels. The main aim of this study is to address research questions on the practices which are currently used in such educational contexts for EFL teaching, as well as on the practices and strategies which enhance students' engagement, motivation and foreign language acquisition in collective classrooms in rural areas of Korça district. The theoretical framework of this study will mostly constitute on language learning theories, task-based teaching, differentiated instruction models etc. A special attention will be dedicated to previous studies dealing with collective classrooms in Albania. In order to fulfil the aim of this paper, a survey research methodology will be employed for data gathering and analysis. By the means of questionnaires, we will gather data on the strategies employed by EFL teachers in collective classrooms, the challenges to which these teachers are faced, as well as on the practices and strategies which could result effective for whole class inclusion. The sample of this study will constitute of EFL teachers which have previously taught or currently teach English in collective classrooms. The expected results of this study include the identification of effective practices and strategies of EFL teaching in collective classrooms. The data resulting from this study will provide valuable insights into the way EFL teachers manage collective classrooms, balance curriculum requirements, and integrate interactive practices or strategies for whole-class inclusion.

Keywords: *Collective classrooms, EFL, practices, strategies, effective, rural*

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The role of trade unions in the empowerment and professional development of teachers during challenging times

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The role of trade unions in teachers' empowerment and professional development has been an issue of interest for a very long time. Teachers face many challenges during their work in a daily basis, this due to issues such as maintaining workload, following continuous professional development trainings and workshops, and having access to tools and opportunities for future growth. In this context, trade unions are considered to be a main actor in protecting teachers' rights and interests, enhancing collaboration, as well as offering opportunities for teachers' training and development. The main aim of this study is to answer these research questions: "How do trade unions contribute in teachers' professional development and empowerment?"; "Do trade unions provide member teachers with the adequate resources for enhancing their abilities and professional knowledge?" The theoretical framework of this study will be mainly based on the legislative responsibilities of trade unions in protecting teachers' rights and interests, as well as on theories of social capital and empowerment. These perspectives provide the necessary background, in order to analyze the way a union membership influences teachers' motivation, collaboration, and career advancement. The study will be based on a quantitative methodology, where by means of a questionnaire, member teachers of FSASH trade union in the city of Korça will share their perceptions on the support provided by the trade union on training sessions, professional development and empowerment. The results expected by this study consist on the identification of the models which portrait the positive role of trade unions in supporting teachers' professional growth and development during challenging times, improving their working conditions, as well as empowering them in their daily work.

Keywords: *Trade union, teacher empowerment, professional development, social capital*

The effect of walking and a recreational program on strength and balance enhancement in individuals aged 55 to 65

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The primary objective of the study is to identify a comprehensive recreational training methodology that integrates recreational walking with physical and coordination exercises, aimed at enhancing lower limb strength indicators, balance, and biomechanical parameters of specific movements in individuals aged 55–65 years. The study included 60 healthy participants from Tirana, aged 55–65 years, both male and female, who were categorized into a control group and an experimental group. Both groups participate in laboratory examinations. Method: The experimental group participates in a 12-week recreational training regimen, allowing adequate time for the reformative process and attainment of anticipated alterations in physical-functional and psychological conditions. This duration is split into multiple training periods. The training stages are structured around weekly leisure cycles, comprising 3 recreational activities and 4 training sessions, with a weekly duration ranging from 180 to 240 minutes. During the 60-minute training sessions, two tasks are addressed using specialized units, focusing on strength, balance, and recreational walking. These consist of 20 strength exercises, 13 balance exercises, and 12 recreational walking models. The recreational training process was monitored and assessed using particular laboratory tests: the “Isokinetic Dynamometer” for quantifying lower limb strength and the “Leonardo Mechanograph” platform for evaluating balance. The results indicate an enhancement in the analyzed indicators of this study: lower limb strength, balance, and biomechanical strength indicators, as well as IMT and heart rate indicators, among others. Conclusion: The training regimen implemented with participants aged 55–65 demonstrated successful and applicable outcomes for accomplishing the anticipated objectives, attributable to the multifaceted structure of the training program.

Keywords: *Nature excursions, specialized recreational activities, demographic 55–65 years, equilibrium, life quality*

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Balancing tradition and modernization: Insights from teachers on the transformation of Albanian society

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This study explores the perceptions of teachers and student teachers regarding the changes needed in Albania, focusing both on the teaching profession and on broader social domains such as family, economy, politics, culture, and legislation. The research is guided by three questions: How do participants perceive the necessary changes in these key domains of Albanian society? What priorities do they articulate for the transformation of the teaching profession and its status? And how do their perceptions reflect the tension between preserving traditional values and embracing modernization in the Albanian context? The sample included 380 participants (78.2% female and 21.8% male) with diverse demographic characteristics in terms of age, educational level, and area of residence (73% urban and 26.1% rural). Data were collected through an open-ended survey instrument administered online and analyzed using thematic coding. The findings highlight that participants link the improvement of the teaching profession with better working conditions, appropriate salaries, greater respect, and reduced bureaucracy; in the family domain, they emphasize moral values, respect, and solidarity; in the economy and politics, they stress the importance of stable incomes, employment opportunities, and a more accountable, corruption-free political culture; while in culture and legislation they point to the tension between tradition and emancipation, as well as concerns about law enforcement and the protection of vulnerable groups. Overall, the study suggests that teachers' perceptions express a comprehensive vision for societal transformation, where the advancement of education is closely connected with economic, political, and institutional reforms, requiring a balanced approach between tradition and modernization.

Keywords: *Teachers, education, economy, politics, culture, legislation*

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Connecting pre-university and university education through the ESEP platform

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The continuous digital transformation of education is reshaping how institutions at different levels interact, collaborate, and share knowledge. The European School

Education Platform (ESEP) represents a comprehensive online environment designed to strengthen connections between pre-university and higher education systems across Europe. By integrating opportunities for joint projects, teacher training, and international networking, ESEP enables educators and students to collaborate beyond institutional and national boundaries. This paper explores the role of ESEP as a bridge between schools and universities, focusing on how it facilitates the exchange of best pedagogical practices, promote innovation in teaching, and encourage a seamless transition from secondary to higher education. Case studies from schools and universities engaged in ESEP-based partnerships highlight the platform's effectiveness in supporting interdisciplinary learning, digital literacy, and a shared European educational culture. Moreover, the research emphasizes that ESEP not only enhances the quality of teaching and learning but also nurtures social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, and the European dimension of education. The findings suggest that consistent participation in ESEP fosters professional growth for educators, increases students' preparedness for university life, and contributes to building a sustainable and collaborative educational ecosystem. Ultimately, the platform stands as a powerful instrument for connecting educational communities and aligning pre-university and university education with the goals of the European Education Area.

Keywords: *education, e-twinning, projects, AI use in education, collaboration*

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Anxiety, locus of control, and their impact on the well-being of students in the physical education program at the University of Shkodra, Albania

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The global COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021) had a profound impact on various aspects of individuals' lives, including physical health and psychological well-being. Even after the pandemic subsided, its effects on mental health remained evident. This study aims to analyze the impact of anxiety and locus of control on the well-being of students in the Physical Education Bachelor program at the University of Shkodra, during the period from October 2021 to March 2022. The research was conducted on a sample of 138 students and focused on their experiences with COVID-19, coping mechanisms, vaccination status, anxiety levels, and type of locus of control. Most students had not contracted the virus (47.1%), and a significant proportion had received two vaccine doses (47.8%). Among those who had not contracted COVID-19 (n=65), most had received 0 or 2 doses, while among those who had contracted it once (n=63), the distribution was more balanced. Results showed that the majority of students exhibited low anxiety levels (level 1, n=98), a smaller

portion had moderate anxiety (level 2, n=35), and very few experienced high anxiety (level 3, n=5). The distribution of vaccine doses across anxiety categories did not reveal a clear relationship, suggesting that variations in anxiety were not significantly influenced by vaccination status. Overall, students adhered satisfactorily to health protection measures and managed the post-pandemic situation well. However, statistical analyses did not indicate a significant relationship between anxiety levels and locus of control. These findings highlight the need for further research on the psychosocial effects of the pandemic and the factors associated with students' well-being in the post-COVID period.

Keywords: *COVID-19, vaccination, anxiety, locus of control, students*

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Educational policies and their role in pedagogical ethics: an analytical approach to education for sustainable development

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Teaching for Sustainable Development (ESD) necessitates not only current content but also the incorporation of ethical teaching practices within the educational process. This paper offers an analytical theoretical framework regarding the influence of education policies in steering instruction towards ethical principles and sustainable development. The methodology merges a conceptual review of pertinent literature with empirical data collected from 30 semi-structured interviews conducted with a cohort of pre-university educators. The results indicate that educational strategies that emphasize teaching ethics enhance teaching effectiveness and cultivate responsible individuals capable of addressing social and environmental challenges. This study underscores the importance of aligning educational policies with teaching ethics as a crucial prerequisite for attaining quality education and fostering a sustainable society.

Keywords: *Educational policy, pedagogical ethics, education for sustainable development, analytical approach, ethical values*

Burnout among psychosocial service workers in Albanian schools

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Psychosocial service workers in Albanian schools play a crucial role in supporting students' emotional, social, and educational well-being. They help students navigate individual and family difficulties, contributing significantly to a safe and inclusive school environment. However, their daily work is often characterized by high emotional demands, excessive administrative responsibilities, and high expectations from school leadership, parents, and the wider community. These conditions make them especially vulnerable to burnout — a syndrome marked by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. This study aims to explore the prevalence of burnout among psychosocial workers in various schools in Tirana, identify key contributing factors, and analyze the impact on their mental health and professional performance. The research employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative data from structured questionnaires with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews with school psychologists and social workers. Preliminary findings highlight several stress-inducing factors: high workload, an overwhelming number of students per specialist, lack of resources and infrastructure, inadequate or non-confidential working spaces, limited collaboration from school staff, misunderstanding or undervaluation of their role by teachers and administrators, stigmatization of psychosocial services, complex student cases requiring specialized care, and administrative overload. The discussion emphasizes the urgent need for supportive policies, targeted training programs in stress management, and the establishment of professional supervision mechanisms. Ultimately, addressing burnout is not only a matter of staff well-being but a fundamental condition for ensuring the quality of psychosocial services and fostering a healthy, inclusive, and supportive school climate for all students.

Keywords: *Burnout, psychosocial services, schools, Albania, mental health*

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Using free Artificial Intelligence tools by teaching assistants to support children with special needs in primary education (case study)

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of free artificial intelligence (AI) programs on the socio-emotional and academic development of children with special educational needs in the context of inclusive primary education. The research employed empirical pedagogical observation of two 5th-grade pupils from the “Urani Rumbo” and “Koto Hoxhi” schools in Gjirokastrë, diagnosed with moderate intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder. Over a three-week period, both students engaged with three free adaptive AI programs. Progress was assessed in communication, emotional stability, and comprehension using the standardised Behaviour Observation of Students in Schools tool. Results indicated meaningful improvements in both students. For the child with moderate intellectual disability, communication initiations rose from 3 to 5 per lesson (+67%), and correct responses increased to 90%. The child with autism spectrum disorder showed an increase in initiations from 1 to 2 per class, while response accuracy reached 80%. Emotional regulation also improved: irritability decreased by 50% in both students, while confusion declined by 38% and 30% respectively. Emotion recognition in images improved to 75% in the first student and 70% in the second. Verbal expression of feelings doubled for the first student (from 2 to 4 per lesson) and emerged for the first time in the second. Empathy rose by 25% and 30% respectively. Participation in group activities increased significantly, from 3.2 to 4.6 in the first child and from 2.9 to 4.4 in the second. These findings highlight that free AI programs can serve as effective tools in inclusive classrooms, fostering communication, emotional regulation, and social participation. The study identifies patterns of successful AI implementation that enhance engagement and skill development. Insights from this research may support teachers, consultants, and specialists in applying adaptive AI programs to strengthen the educational process and the socio-emotional growth of children with special educational needs.

Keywords: *Student training, digital tools, communication skills, emotional stability*

The role of mobile activities in physical and emotional development of children aged 3–5

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Early childhood is a crucial period for physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development. For children aged 3–5 years, movement serves as a natural way of exploring, self-expressing, and growing. This study aims to promote physical and motor development through structured mobile activities, enhancing both physical and emotional well-being. The research is based on data from the national SUNRISE Albania 2024 study on motor behaviors and executive functions in early childhood, conducted in collaboration with the University of Wollongong, Australia. Methodology includes direct observation during activities, semi-structured interviews with parents and staff, and analysis of educational documentation and daily reports. Data are analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to draw clear conclusions. Findings indicate that participation in mobile activities improves physical health, emotional resilience, and social interaction. Parental and staff practices strongly influence the success of the interventions. Creating supportive environments encourages active play and reduces sedentary behavior, in line with national early childhood standards and WHO recommendations. Recommendations include staff training, continuous parent engagement, ongoing monitoring and evaluation programs, community collaboration, and securing resources for maintaining and expanding physical activity environments. This study demonstrates that structured mobile activities are essential for holistic development in preschool children and serve as a model for promoting health and well-being in early education settings.

Keywords: *Early childhood, physical development, emotional well-being, motor skills, preschool education, structured activities*

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Digital transformation in Albanian education: Progress, challenges, and policy directions

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In the past decade, Albania has taken significant steps toward the digitalization of its education system as part of broader efforts to modernize and align with European standards. Initiatives such as “Smart Lab” ICT laboratories, the creation of virtual labs, and teacher training programs in STEM fields represent meaningful investments in this direction. However, the challenges remain numerous and complex. The 2024 European Commission Progress Report highlights that digital infrastructure in schools, equal inclusion of all students in the digital process, and teachers’ technological competencies continue to be problematic. The National Education Strategy 2030 identifies digitalization as one of its main priorities, aiming to build a more accessible, inclusive, and labor market-oriented education system. Nevertheless, insufficient infrastructure, disparities between urban and rural areas and the lack of a coordinated inter-institutional approach continue to slow down progress. This paper aims to analyze key developments in the field of education digitalization in Albania, identify existing challenges, and offer recommendations for sustainable and effective policies in this area.

Keywords: *Digitalization, education, Albania, challenges, ICT, STEM, strategy 2030*

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The Role of Teachers in Using Technology for the Development of Students’ Language Competencies in Primary and Lower Secondary

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This study aims to analyze the role of teachers in using technology to develop students’ language competencies in primary and lower secondary education. The use of digital

tools in the teaching and learning process is becoming increasingly important in enhancing learning skills and promoting effective communication between teachers and students. The research was conducted at the “Abdullah Krashnica – Preshevë” School in Koretin, Municipality of Kamenica. In this institution, the primary level is composed of nine teachers, while the lower secondary level includes five subject teachers: two of Albanian language, two of English language, and one of German language. The research methodology combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Within the qualitative approach, classroom observation was conducted with four teachers (one primary teacher, one Albanian language teacher, one English language teacher, and one German language teacher) to identify ways in which technology is used during the teaching and learning process of language skills. Meanwhile, the quantitative approach is based on a structured questionnaire administered to teachers of the primary cycle and the “Language and Communication” field, aiming to measure their perceptions, attitudes, and the extent of digital tool usage in teaching. The study’s results are expected to reveal the degree of technology’s impact on the development of language competencies and the role teachers play in its effective integration into the learning environment. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how technology can serve as a motivational tool in fostering listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, thereby supporting contemporary practices of language teaching in primary and lower secondary education.

Keywords: *Teachers, primary education, lower secondary education, educational technology, language competencies*

THEMATIC SESSION 04:

POLITICS, DEMOCRACY,

INTEGRATION AND LAW

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Necropolitics, Borders, and Development in Turbulent Times: Racialized Migration in Contemporary Europe

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This paper examines the racialization of migration politics in Europe through the theoretical framework of Necropolitics (Mbembe, 2019), focusing on two key sites of migrant containment and control. Necropolitics illuminates how European states exercise sovereign over life and death, particularly in relation to racialized migrants, determining which lives are protected and which bodies are rendered disposable. The study analyzes practices at the Centre for Identification and Reception of migrants on Samos Island, Greece, and pushback policy operations along the Hungary-Serbia border, to demonstrate how systemic violence and death-in-life conditions are produced through necropower. These cases reveal a “penitentiary geography” in which migrants are confined, excluded, and racialized as threats, reinforcing hierarchical regimes of belonging. In this investigation, I argue that European migration policies operate through a racialized necropolitical regime that governs life, death, and mobility, embedding violence in both border infrastructures and everyday governance. Furthermore, the paper situates these practices within the wider context of development in turbulent times: necropolitical governance not only produces exclusion, but also destabilizes local economies and democratic institutions, entrenching social inequalities across European countries. Racial hierarchies lead to exclusionary practices and violent control of migrant bodies and this study seeks to contribute to critical migration studies, addressing how necropolitical borders reshape trajectories of development and justice in the European context.

Keywords: *Necropolitics, borders, racialization, Europe*

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Bridging the gap: Aligning Albania's whistleblower protection with EU directive 2019/1937

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This study, after reviewing the theoretical framework, will analyze the gaps in domestic legislation compared with the European Union Directive on the protection of whistleblowers. Whistleblowers, due to their work or close contact with an organization, play an essential role in protecting the public interest by reporting corrupt or illegal acts in the public or private sector. Whistleblowers may be exposed to retaliation at work, from isolation to loss of employment, but also to more serious acts that may endanger their lives. Therefore, there must be an appropriate legal and procedural framework, as well as guarantees for its implementation in practice, to facilitate this act of courage and integrity. Albania, within the framework of the Cross-Sectoral Strategy against Corruption 2024–2030, is committed to aligning its legislation on whistleblower and whistleblowing protection with Directive 2019/1937 of the European Union. This harmonization, among other things, would expand the subjects protected by the law, including persons who assist whistleblowers; would extend the whistleblower protection units to organizations with at least 50 employees; it would also provide protection for public whistleblowing; as well as providing legal assistance during the legal process.

Keywords: *Whistleblower, Albania, European Union*

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Parliamentary cooperation of North Macedonia with Kosovo and Albania in the function of European integration

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This scientific research paper analyzes the parliamentary cooperation of North Macedonia with Kosovo and Albania in the function of good neighborly policy and European integration. The major geopolitical changes in Europe shed new light on the parliamentary cooperation between the RMV and neighboring countries that have the

same strategic goal, full Euro-Atlantic integration. The research question of this paper is whether parliamentary cooperation has a positive impact on good neighborliness and the European integration process of the three countries. Parliaments have a legislative and control role in the integration process and the parliamentary bodies and especially the committees and services that are in charge of foreign and European affairs have the obligation to accelerate the process with the target year 2030, based on the adapted enlargement policy and the funds prepared for it. By analyzing the content of documents and reports from the meetings of the assemblies, conclusions are drawn on which are the topics of this cooperation that give a positive effect in this process. The leading bodies, parliamentary friendship groups and parliamentary committees develop intensive cooperation between the parties through various visits and meetings that serve to exchange good experiences and for joint actions in expressing their interests and the joint use of funds. Due to the socio-cultural similarities of the three countries, there is room for cooperation in the cultural and educational fields, where the Assemblies can play the role of bridges bringing peoples and states closer together. Another possibility is cooperation between the parliamentary services of the three parties, which helps to increase their capabilities to carry out their tasks in the integration process.

Keywords: *Parliamentary cooperation, Western Balkans, good neighborliness, European integration*

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The challenges faced by humanitarian assistance

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The Sustainable Development Goals aim to end hunger before 2030 by promoting peace and justice. Humanitarian food aid has long been considered an effective tool for conflict mitigation by donors and policymakers, and it is believed to play an important role in advancing developing countries. It has been conceived as a means to save lives and alleviate human suffering in conflict situations. However, concerns have grown that this aid may have unintended consequences by worsening civil conflicts in recipient countries. Humanitarian food aid is typically provided in emergency and conflict situations, ensuring benefits for populations affected by crises. It has long been regarded by policymakers as an effective tool for reducing hunger and for preventing or mitigating conflicts, as well as shortening the onset and duration of civil conflicts. It is generally delivered in two forms, in-kind assistance and cash-based assistance. Both forms have their advantages and challenges, but studies have shown that their effectiveness in improving food security is generally similar. Policymakers confirm that food aid is an effective tool for food security. Given that food insecurity significantly impacts conflict, increasing food aid is likely to substantially improve the food situation.

But does humanitarian food aid save lives in the developing world? This question has increasingly attracted scientific attention. In fact, there are several mechanisms through which humanitarian food aid can mitigate civil conflicts. However, some scholars have argued that humanitarian food aid could actually fuel conflict. Experts have discussed about the role of digital technologies in humanitarian aid, covering applications such as conflict monitoring, refugee support, food security, family reunification, and enhancing donor impact. The International Committee of the Red Cross has emphasized that humanitarian goals and the protection of vulnerable people must remain central to technology use to avoid harm.

Keywords: *Humanitarian aid, conflict situations, food security, digital technologies*

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Education and social policy in transition time

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A far as we remember from 1990 there is transition democracy in Albania. Democracy (gr. demo - pupil, kraci - rend) is a form of government where most of the people exercise their will directly or indirectly via referendums or election of their representative deputies. This concept is taught in the right way through our democratic education system. Education refers to the process of acquiring general knowledge and developing skills and character. In Albania, the system includes compulsory basic (9-year) education and optional primary education, followed by secondary and tertiary education leading to Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate degrees. While access to education is high, the system faces challenges in quality, equity, and resources related to social policy. Social policy encompasses government principles, guidelines, legislation, and activities aimed at promoting human welfare by addressing social needs such as poverty, inequality, education, healthcare, and housing. It also refers to the interdisciplinary academic field that studies these policies, analyzing how societies respond to social problems and measure progress in meeting human needs. If these needs are not listened as will be changes are not fitted as right as they must in our schools. Education has been our value and power through the years, helping the society. So on we build our democratic system as part of integration in BE. School is the institution providing learning environments and teaching for students, often with formal and informal education. The world will accept our values, communities and the power of our results will separate us from 35 years of transition for a sustainable environment as part of BE in 2030.

Keywords: *Education, social policy, transition, sustainable environment, community, integration*

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The convergence paradox in Albanian local development: Linking agency, trust, and EU support

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A central goal of European Union (EU) cohesion policy remains regional convergence, yet candidate countries often experience uneven outcomes due to institutional fragility and limited societal capacity. This study introduces the Convergence Paradox, highlighting that regions that are most in need of EU support are often least able to absorb it effectively. Local agency and institutional trust – critical social foundations – are weaker in these contexts. Using data from a survey of 127 development professionals across Albania, combined with regression, mediation and structural equation modelling, we examine the interaction between local agency, institutional trust and collaborative governance. The results highlight the importance of relational capacities in addition to formal authority. Local agency positively influences collaborative approaches, but a significant part of its effect operates through institutional trust. Comparative analyses highlight that newly established municipalities (post-2015 reforms) face lower levels of agency and trust than historically established municipalities, limiting their ability to effectively leverage EU support. These findings further extend the theory of decentralization, emphasizing that effective governance depends on both structural reforms and the cultivation of trust and agency. The study contributes to the theoretical framework - the Agency-Trust-Implementation Triad - and provides policy insights for both Albanian institutions and EU policymakers in promoting regional development.

Keywords: *Convergence paradox, local agency, institutional trust, EU conditionality, Albania, decentralization*

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The notion of violence in Hannah Arendt's thought

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This paper examines the notion of violence in Hannah Arendt's thought, with a focus on her work *On Violence* (1970), where she develops an in-depth philosophical and political analysis of the relationship between violence, power, and authority. Arendt conceptualizes violence as an instrumental category, always tied to means rather than ends in themselves. From this perspective, she argues that violence does not constitute the essence of politics; rather, it emerges when politics fails and when the mechanisms of collective power and

authority lose their legitimacy. Unlike power, which arises from collective action and the active participation of citizens, violence relies on fear and coercion, serving as an indicator of political weakness. In her analysis, Arendt criticizes ideologies that glorify violence, such as classical Marxism, which views it as the “midwife of history.” She emphasizes that although violence can be used to overthrow an old political order, it cannot create a stable and legitimate new one. In the modern era, technological and bureaucratic developments have rendered violence more anonymous and destructive, turning it into a serious challenge for politics and democracy. In conclusion, for Arendt, violence is a temporary and limited tool that cannot replace genuine politics. True politics, according to her, is built on communication, persuasion, and collective action, placing violence outside its very essence. This paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of Arendt’s critique of violence and its relevance to interpreting contemporary political crises.

Keywords: *Hannah Arendt, violence, modernity, modern state*

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How does the stagnation in the European integration process affect public perception of the EU in the Western Balkan countries? Case study: North Macedonia

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The European integration process has long been a strategic orientation and a symbol of hope for the Western Balkan countries. However, the continuous delays and setbacks in this process, caused by internal and external factors, have significantly affected the way the public perceives the European Union. This paper aims to analyze the impact that the stagnation of integration has on the public perception of the EU, focusing on the growth of Euroscepticism, collective disillusionment and socio-psychological consequences in the region with a special emphasis on the Republic of North Macedonia. Through an interdisciplinary approach and the analysis of data from public surveys, political discourse and existing literature, the study attempts to address the central question: How does the stagnation in the European integration process affect public perception of the EU in the Western Balkan countries? In other words, the aim of the paper is to investigate this situation from the perspective of distrust, a sense of abandonment and an orientation towards geopolitical alternatives. While citizens continue to desire integration, the lack of concrete progress has created a gap between expectations and political reality, affecting not only political perception, but also the social and psychological state of the population. This paper argues that in order to maintain the credibility of the enlargement process, it is vital that the European Union re-establishes a clear, honest and consistent approach towards the Western Balkans that simultaneously contributes to the academic debate on consistency in EU foreign policy.

Keywords: *EU stagnation, EU foreign policy consistency, public perception, euroscepticism*

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Decentralization process in Albania: Decentralization or re-centralization of local government?

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This article explores the decentralization process in Albania and the offering of public services to citizens at the local level of government. The analysis of this process is based on qualitative methods, including reviewing and analyzing different documents and the legislation related with decentralization. The aim is to better understand the achieved level of decentralization, in relation with the delegation of the competencies from the central, national level of government to the local governments' units, and the crucial aspect of the fiscal decentralization or financial autonomy. The need of this study comes from the important changes that Albania is experiencing from the 1990s in different areas of life, and the integration process in the European Union, EU. The first part of the article gives a view of the historical process of decentralization in the country, from the fall of the communist regime, the approved legislation and the necessary steps in this direction. The second part presents the decentralization of public services for citizens, based on the principle that local government units know better the needs and demands of their communities, and the issues of fiscal decentralization. And the third part gives the actual state of the decentralization process, including the division of responsibilities and competences between the levels of government, which has led to some disputes about the achieved level of decentralization, in favor of the re-centralization of powers in the central level of government.

Keywords: *Decentralization, re-centralization, local public policies and services, fiscal decentralization*

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Development in Turbulent Times: Identity, Power and Transformation in Indian Society

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Contemporary India embodies the paradox of rapid economic expansion amid deepening social and political crises. With GDP growth projected at 6.5% in 2025, India remains among the world's fastest-growing economies. Yet this growth is starkly uneven: the top 10% hold over 77% of national wealth, while the majority faces entrenched barriers to mobility. Rising youth and female unemployment, alongside precarious working conditions, reveal how economic development often coexists with systemic exclusion.

Simultaneously, identity-based contestations around caste, religion, ethnicity, gender, and region have become central to public discourse, exposing how power operates in everyday life and through state institutions. This paper employs sociological frameworks of Foucault's concept of governmentality, Bourdieu's notions of symbolic and cultural capital, and intersectional analyses of caste and gender to examine these turbulent transformations. The discussion highlights how state policies such as welfare schemes, affirmative action, and digital governance navigate competing structures of power. These policies, while offering tools for redistribution and empowerment, frequently reproduce inequalities even as they open new spaces for resistance. Social movements such as Dalit advocacy, women's rights campaigns, and recent peasant protests which exemplify how marginalized identities can become sites of both domination and transformative struggle. The paper argues that India's development cannot be understood solely through economic indicators. Instead, it must be situated within the interplay of identity, power, and structural change. Drawing on decolonial and Global South perspectives, it calls for reimagining development as a pursuit of social justice one that measures progress not only in GDP growth but in the democratization of power, redistribution of resources, and recognition of diverse identities.

Keywords: *Social, growth, symbolic, power*

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The impact of Enverist Communism in Kosovo

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This study examines the influence of Albanian communism on the shaping of a significant segment of political thought in Kosovo during the second half of the 20th century. The analysis focuses on how enverism ideology impacted, in particular, illegal groups and organizations in Kosovo that engaged in propaganda, resistance, and political organization against the ongoing repression of Albanians in Yugoslavia. This ideological influence from Tirana—unique in both form and content—was neither direct nor intentional. Nevertheless, it was adopted and internalized by underground movements and various individuals as a source of inspiration for political and national resistance, serving as a kind of ideological compass. On the other hand, this ideological influence hindered and delayed the restructuring of political thought in Kosovo and its alignment with the liberal-democratic winds of change that swept across Eastern Europe in the late 20th century. The study identifies three key factors that enabled the penetration of enverism from Tirana into Kosovo: 1) The unique isolation of Albania, which contributed to its idealization among Kosovo Albanians; 2) The need of Kosovo Albanians for inspiration, hope, and political guidance amid repression; 3) The lack of independence and the persistently harsh conditions faced by Albanians under Serbian rule. The westernization of political

thought in Kosovo marks one of the most important achievements of the post-enverist period. This transformation no longer came from Tirana but was cultivated in Pristina, by a political class that embraced liberal-democratic values and redefined the political will for Kosovo's independence. This development became institutionalized through the political concept known as rugovism, emphasizing peaceful resistance and strategic patience. A key achievement of this period was the establishment of relations between the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) and the United States, with the KLA's armed struggle for independence becoming and remaining a reliable ally of the Western world.

Keywords: *Political thoughts, Enverism, Westernization, liberal democracy, KLA, Rugovism*

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The role of the 1946 Constitution in the formalization of the Albanian communist state

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The Law on Elections for the Constituent Assembly of 1945 in September, promulgated by the Antifascist National Liberation Council, decided that these elections would be free and democratic. They would ensure equality among citizens who had the right to vote and, above all, they would be secret. Not everyone would have this right; this group included the ministers of the Quisling government, war criminals and all those individuals who no longer enjoyed civil rights. Any other individual, an Albanian citizen over 18 years of age, could have the right to delegate sovereignty. The importance of these elections was very definitive for the Party, as it was considered a big step towards political maturity, to have the opportunity to show all the organizational skills and the platform that they would follow in the service of government, regardless of how it was later implemented. The elections for the Constituent Assembly were held on December 2, 1945. Over 90% of voters participated in them and 93% of them voted for the candidates of the Front. In these elections, no other party participated, because the communist regime led by Enver Hoxha had provided only one list of candidates, all of whom were affiliated with his party. Other political parties, which had had influence in the pre-war period, were suppressed or were out of the game. Since the Communist Party had extended its influence to every corner of the political and legal aspect of the functioning of Albania at that time, no other political competition was allowed.

Keywords: *Elections, legal, communism, regime*

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(Non) Recognition as a tool of influence: The case of Kosovo and Serbia

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After declaring independence on February 17, 2008, the Republic of Kosovo faced a major challenge: establishing itself as a new country. In this context, international recognition became a tool of power. It acts not only as a legal step but also as a way to build or undermine Kosovo's legitimacy abroad. This study looks at the recognition and non-recognition processes by key international and regional players, particularly focusing on the roles of Serbia, the European Union, the United States, and Russia. The methodology combines document analysis of treaties, UN resolutions, diplomatic statements, and international reports with comparative case studies. This approach evaluates how recognition and non-recognition affect Kosovo's political legitimacy. Additionally, the study includes aspects of foreign policy analysis to examine Serbia's diplomatic strategies aimed at hindering Kosovo's international integration. It also considers how Kosovo has responded by forming strategic alliances and participating in multilateral institutions. The findings show that Serbia has used "non-recognition" as a political tool to maintain its influence in the region. Meanwhile, Kosovo has pursued active diplomacy to strengthen its international standing. This process does not directly shape international balances but affects the balance of power and political relationships in the region, highlighting the changing dynamics of the international order since 2008. The study argues that Kosovo's international recognition represents a point where politics, power, and legitimacy intersect. The outcomes of diplomacy have real effects on regional stability and influence. This research enhances the understanding of recognition as a political tool and offers insights into the foreign policies of new states in contested situations.

Keywords: *(Non) recognition, diplomacy, political power, state legitimacy*

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The Citizen and Political Leadership: Towards the Structuring of Albanian Political Culture in the Republic of North Macedonia

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Political culture represents a complex dimension of the relationship between the individual and the political system, reflecting not only political worldviews and perceptions but

also the ways in which these are translated into action and civic participation. In the context of the Republic of North Macedonia, where the model of governance is built upon the principles of power sharing, the partnership between citizens and political leadership emerges as a key element in structuring this culture. However, this relationship is often characterized by a discrepancy between those who produce politics and those who are subject to it. Particularly within the Albanian community, political participation and profiling remain conditioned less by classical ideological divisions (left–right) and more by ethnic, social, communal, and religious factors, creating a distinct form of political mentality. This study aims to explore the extent to which the citizen–leadership partnership influences the consolidation of political culture in North Macedonia, by analyzing the levels of Albanian incorporation into political processes, their perceptions of representation, and the role of public opinion as an instrument of functional democracy. The expected results are intended to contribute to a broader understanding of the challenges and opportunities for developing an inclusive political culture that transcends the logic of communal affiliations and moves toward a more democratic model of civic participation.

Keywords: *Political culture, citizen–leadership partnership, power sharing, Albanians in North Macedonia, civic participation, public opinion*

THEMATIC SESSION 05:

RELIGION, COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR & SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.30/05*

Existential dilemma between Darkness and Light: Religion and literature as spiritual survival

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Uncertain times have activated a range of individual and collective abilities and sensibilities, from which human society and the individual as its nucleus have fostered resilience and hope for a safe and prosperous future. At this intersection, the paper aims to examine through faith as religion and literature as art and spiritual expression, the ethical and aesthetic courage to endure, to hope, and to transform, by approaching moral values with spiritual symbols and social resilience. Religious and literary examples of overcoming the fear of solitude, moral conflicts, or endurance after trials, as well as the inheritance of higher values such as hope, solidarity, responsibility, and renewal, demonstrate that spiritual survival, in essence, remains an irreplaceable instrument and social capital.

Keywords: *Religion, literature, social capital, resilience, ethics, aesthetics*

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.19/05*

The role of religion in softening racial discrimination

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These recent years in Kosovo have been marked cases when racial discrimination has begun to be revived as a phenomenon. Due to the consequences, it may have, it has been

addressed in media as well in other tables of discussion and organizations on behalf of fighting it and increasing the awareness of society in regards to it. Public and social reaction towards the latest case of discrimination towards a roman young guy has been punished as a case, and fought as a phenomenon, which is the cause of this research, and which witnesses for the increase of the general social awareness towards it. This research aims to contribute the increase of this awareness by providing religion as a form of education towards negative phenomena in general, and towards this form of discrimination, in particular. Considering the strength and spiritual and educational impact religion possesses, the research is significant since more than a theory, it provides it as a model as well. The way religion assesses and raises people relies only on values and as a result the white and the black are no different, except in principles. The research employs the descriptive method and is divided into main parts where this phenomenon is addressed both historically and religiously. The findings confirm the powerful role of religion in combating this negative phenomenon, while his main recommendation is that, in the field of education, religion should have sufficient space due to the influential power it has.

Keywords: *Racial discrimination, religion, education, negative phenomena, community*

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.38/05*

The modern man and the biblical archetype: Dramatic discourses in the works of Sabri Hamiti

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In Sabri Hamiti's dramaturgy, the individual is constructed as an alienated subject between the dramatic discourse and historical reality, where "fractured time," a turbulent society, and the search for narrative identity unfold as a dialectic between the self and the collective. The Hamitian dramatic fabula, as observed, emerges within multiple realities—biblical, philosophical, political, aesthetic, and cultural—disrupting the traditional unities of classical dramaturgy. The aim of this paper is to analyze the levels of representation of biblical symbolism that shape both individual and collective identity. Due to its openly subversive nature, Hamiti's dramaturgy challenges, first, the historical period itself (by confronting the horizon of expectations) and, second, provokes through cultural references, structural artistic devices, and inversions of established knowledge. The specific objective of this study is to trace the ways in which biblical models are recontextualized from individual dimensions to broader, universal ones. The findings suggest that Sabri Hamiti constructs a dramatic space that functions simultaneously as an existential prison and as a reflection of the alienation of modern man. The significance of these spaces lies in their ability to mirror social and political dynamics, where the interactions of dramatic characters embody moral questions—both individual and collective—present in the gaze of the reader/spectator.

Keywords: *Modern man, biblical archetype, dramatic discourses, dramatic space*

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.53/05*

The strategy of communism against the Catholic faith in Albania.

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This paper examines the strategy of Albanian communism against the Catholic faith, as part of a broader project of the regime to control society and build a new state identity. After 1945, Marxism-Leninism was established as the official ideology. According to it, religion was seen as an obstacle to social development and as an “opium” that kept the people subjugated. In this sense, materialism and Marxist dialectics were used to replace the authority of the church with the authority of the state. The communist strategy manifested itself in several clear directions. First, the proclamation of state atheism, which became the “only religion” of Albanians. Second, the suppression of religious institutions: the closure of churches, the prohibition of religious education and the nationalization of church property. Third, propaganda and indoctrination through the media, education and youth organizations, which aimed to discredit religion and spread the ideology of the party. Alongside them, the use of violence was open: arrests, internments and shootings of priests, nuns and believers who refused to submit. Another element was the attempt to create secular rites that replaced religious ceremonies, such as “socialist” weddings and funerals. In this way, the state aimed to fill the cultural and social void left by the absence of religion. In essence, the fight against Catholicism was not only ideological, but also political. For Enver Hoxha, the elimination of religious pluralism was a condition for the unity of the state and the strengthening of one-party power. State atheism was established as the foundation of the new collective Albanian identity.

Keywords: *communist state, communist Albania, Albanian Catholicism, anti-religious doctrine, Albania*

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Religious Symbolism and Cultural Identity in Stefan Çapaliku’s “Shën Gjon Kryepreri”

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The dramatic work “Shën Gjon Kryepreri” by Stefan Çapaliku, which the author himself defines as a historical comedy, intertwines religious, historical, and cultural elements

symbolically through the names of its dramatic characters. The naming of the characters is not accidental but carries semantic and cultural weight that reflects the intertwining of Albanian religious traditions—Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim—as well as secular and national elements. Names such as Gjoni, Pater Ferdinandi, Esterina, Mrija, and Miltiadhi directly reference important figures and concepts in Christianity, creating a clear connection to biblical symbolism and church tradition. On the other hand, names like Hilmiu and Sadetja reflect moral values of Islam, such as gentleness and prosperity, attesting to the presence of a multiple religious identity within the Albanian social environment. Meanwhile, names like Arbeni, Ardita, Agetina, Leci, and Ejlli represent a more secular or national cultural identity, where religious symbolism is diminished or implicit. This diversity of names serves as a reflection on religious coexistence in Albanian society, placing the drama in a context where faith is not only dogmatic belonging but also a cultural, identity, and historical code. Through the use of names with religious connotations, Çapaliku creates a symbolic narrative that challenges the boundaries between the sacred and the profane, between religious heritage and Albanian everyday life. Thus, “Shën Gjon Kryepri” becomes more than a comedy—it transforms into a theatrical meditation on the religious, moral, and historical identity of the Albanian individual in confrontation with time and society.

Keywords: *Stefan Çapaliku, religious symbolism, interfaith coexistence, Albanian identity*

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Materialism and the illusion of happiness: an empirical analysis of the relationship between material possessions and subjective

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This study analyzes the relationship between materialism and subjective well-being among Albanian youth, examining the phenomenon of the “illusion of happiness” fostered by social networks. In a reality where material wealth is often presented as synonymous with happiness, young people face social pressure, decreased self-esteem, and challenges

in psychological health. Unlike most studies focused on Western countries, this research addresses the Albanian cultural context and tests the mediating role of self-esteem and social network use. With a sample of approximately 400 university students (18–21 years old), data will be collected through standardized instruments and statistically analyzed. The results are expected to contribute to the cross-cultural understanding of the link between materialism and happiness, as well as to provide practical bases for policies and interventions that promote more sustainable well-being, beyond the materialistic model.

Keywords: *Materialism, self-esteem, well-being, social networks*

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From Concern to Conversation: Factors Influencing Youth Dialogue in Albania

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Climate change has become increasingly present in everyday discourse, especially during extreme weather events that are now more frequently affecting Albania such as prolonged droughts, severe flooding, and intense heatwaves. Addressing climate change requires action across multiple levels, from individual behavior to international policy but one of the simplest and most impactful steps individuals can take is to talk openly about it. When climate change is rarely mentioned, it reinforces a cycle of silence that hinders awareness. By contrast, frequent discussion promotes broader engagement, forming what researchers refer to as a “pro-climate social feedback loop”. Despite the importance of such conversations, data suggest that young people in Albania rarely discuss climate change with family or friends. This study aims to identify the factors that influence how often individuals engage in these discussions. The data were collected through a questionnaire administered in 2023 and 2024 with a total of 117 university students in Albania, assessing their beliefs and emotions regarding climate change. The survey included questions evaluating certainty about the reality of global warming, beliefs about human causation, different levels of concerns, perceptions of personal and community risk, moral evaluations of climate change, and media exposure. The findings indicate some initial and independent variables led to increased discussions about climate change and other variables that sparked little or no conversation, how convinced respondents were that climate change is happening and the

potential to take actions after environmental awareness. The study concludes with practical recommendations for fostering climate dialogue and activating social norms that support broader youth engagement with climate issues in the Albanian context.

Keywords: *Climate change discourse, youth engagement, concerns, environmental awareness*

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Liminal Bodies, Sacred Spaces: Identity and Positionality of Hijras in Interaction with the Hindu Majority in Varanasi

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This research, titled “Liminal Bodies, Sacred Spaces: Identity and Positionality of Hijras in Interaction with the Hindu Majority in Varanasi,” positions Kashi—the timeless city and spiritual core of Hinduism—as the focal point for examining the convergence of gender, religion, and sacred geography. In Kashi, where the lines between life and death, purity and impurity, sacred and secular are blurred, the city provides a rich context to explore the lived experiences of Hijras, whose identities inherently represent liminality. Through ethnographic methods, comprehensive interviews, and participant observation at ghats, temples, and festivals, this study explores how Hijras navigate and create meaning within the city’s ritual spaces. It looks into their involvement in religious ceremonies, blessings, and interactions with pilgrims as expressions of spiritual agency that challenge social exclusion while affirming divine legitimacy linked to mythological figures like Ardhanarishvara and Bahuchara Mata. The research also delves into how the Hindu majority in Kashi perceives and interacts with the Hijra community—fluctuating between reverence and marginalization—highlighting the deep-seated ambivalence within Hindu cosmology regarding gender diversity and ritual purity. By anchoring the investigation in Kashi’s sacred landscape, the study uncovers how Hijras turn marginality into sacred performance, reclaiming a sense of belonging in a city that itself symbolizes transition and transcendence. Ultimately, the research adds to discussions on religion, gender, and spatial identity, asserting that Kashi’s sacred environment not only reflects but also facilitates the intricate negotiations of liminal bodies seeking spiritual and social acknowledgment.

Keywords: *Hijras, Ardhanarishvara, Bahuchara Mata, Kashi*

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Parody religions as players in the religious market in the capitalist era

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In the twentieth century, R. Stark proposed the concept of the “religious market”. According to this perspective, various religious organizations and groups present their beliefs and practices as products that can be purchased and sold. In a capitalist society, traditional religions and independent religious movements compete with one another for followers through marketing techniques. P. Berger argued that religious traditions, which were previously imposed authoritatively, now need to be marketed and “sold” to the consumer. D. Redden, describing the situation of individual choice and competition among religions, introduced the concepts of a “spiritual supermarket” and “religious marketplace” to illustrate the commercialization of religion and religious practices, and their market-driven nature. Individuals have transferred consumer culture to spirituality, driven by the desire for comfort and personal tastes. They view religions as services that can be chosen in a symbolic “religious market”, each with its own “price” depending on the “brand” of that particular religion. The focus of the discussion is on parody religions, new players in this religious market, who compete with established world religions through satire and ridicule.

Keywords: *Sociology of religion, parody religions, religious market, spiritual supermarket, spiritual struggles*

THEMATIC SESSION 06:

MARRIAGE, FAMILY, WELFARE, SOCIAL POLICY & COMMUNITY

N° 2025 Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.35/06

The inclusion of persons with disabilities in Albania's social protection system

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This study examines the extent to which persons with disabilities are included in Albania's social protection system, assessing its alignment with international human rights standards, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Using a qualitative methodology, the research reviews relevant legislation, public policies, and the structure of social services at both central and local levels. The findings reveal persistent shortcomings in adopting a comprehensive approach to disability within social protection. Although Albania has introduced important reforms, such as transitioning from a purely medical model to a biopsychosocial model of disability assessment, restructuring disability benefits, and expanding social care services, several systemic gaps remain. These include insufficient inter-institutional coordination, limited accessibility, and inadequate capacities among social workers to address disability-related issues effectively. Moreover, benefit levels often fail to cover the additional costs of living associated with disability, while linkages between cash transfers, social services, and active labor market measures remain weak. Despite progress in deinstitutionalization and the establishment of community-based services,

geographic disparities and limited coverage continue to exclude many individuals. The study emphasizes that persons with disabilities remain disproportionately exposed to poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion across their life cycle, with additional vulnerabilities linked to gender, age, and rural residence. To address these challenges, the paper recommends systematic integration of disability perspectives into the design and implementation of social protection policies, strengthening monitoring mechanisms, improving accessibility, and enhancing institutional capacities. Building an inclusive social protection system is essential not only for ensuring dignity and equal opportunities but also for fostering active citizenship and social participation of persons with disabilities in Albania.

Keywords: *Disability, social protection, Albania, social inclusion, social policy, accessibility*

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Demographic structure and forms of citizen participation in decision-making on social policies

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Citizen participation in the decision-making process is an essential pillar of local democracy and the major driving force for making good social policies that represent real people's needs. In this research, the nature and intensity of citizens' interaction with local government institutions in the Municipalities (Elbasan, Patos and Mat) with a special focus on the level and the dimensions of engagement in decision-making processes will be explored. Based on information collected using a standard questionnaire, question 16—examining the level of citizen involvement in various local institutions—and respondents' demographic profile, a Citizen Participation Index was developed. The results finds that the local municipality of residence has a significant impact on the levels of participation, implying that local governance and community have an impact on the level of participation. Where individuals live, urban or rural, does not significantly have an impact on the levels of participation. Education turns out to be a strong determinant, where greater levels of education are strongly related

to greater participation. Work status is also a determinant of participation, with workers being more likely to participate than non-workers. The gender and age do not appear to play a significant role in determining participation.

Keywords: *social policy, participation index, local governance, decision making*

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Intergenerational trauma and adolescents: Breaking the cycle

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The intergenerational transmission of trauma remains one of the most complex and sensitive challenges in mental health. Children raised by parents with a history of trauma are more likely to experience emotional and behavioral difficulties, as well as impaired psychosocial functioning, reflecting an ongoing cycle of unresolved trauma passed from one generation to the next. Drawing on Murray Bowen's systemic theory, which emphasizes the influence of generational emotional patterns and self-differentiation within the family system, this study explores how parents' adverse childhood experiences impact the emotional and social functioning of their adolescent children. It also examines families' lived experiences and identifies strategies that can help break the cycle of trauma. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. Findings show that adolescents whose parents have experienced trauma exhibit higher levels of anxiety, emotional difficulties, and behavioral challenges. Family and community environments further shape these outcomes, highlighting the complex interplay of personal, relational, and social factors. Clinical strategies to support healing place a strong emphasis on family therapy. This involves building authentic, trusting relationships within the family, encouraging open communication, and creating safe spaces for every member to express emotions. Strength-based approaches help adolescents and their parents recognize their resilience and capabilities. Early prevention, timely interventions, and family-centered care are crucial to supporting adolescent mental health, and promoting social equity.

Keywords: *Unresolved trauma, family system, Murray Bowen, intergenerational transmission, adolescents, mental health*

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**Parental perceptions of bullying:
Experiences, impacts, and school collaboration
in primary education**

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This study explores parents' attitudes and experiences regarding their children's involvement in bullying situations, as well as the perceived impact of these experiences on children's well-being and academic progress. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 30 parents of primary school pupils (grades 1–5) in public schools in Shkodra through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative findings indicate that while a significant proportion of parents reported their children had not directly experienced bullying, many acknowledged that their children had witnessed such incidents. Parents expressed stronger awareness of the emotional consequences of bullying—such as withdrawal and insecurity—than of its academic impacts. Qualitative insights highlighted parents' concerns about verbal and social exclusion, changes in children's motivation and behavior, and varying levels of school responsiveness. Although most parents trusted that teachers take bullying cases seriously, participation in awareness-raising activities remained low, and there was a strong demand for more information and collaboration with schools. The study emphasizes the need for strengthening parent–school partnerships, enhancing awareness programs, and adopting comprehensive strategies that address both the psychological and educational dimensions of bullying in primary education.

Keywords: *Bullying, parental perceptions, school collaboration*

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**Degree of urbanization and risk of poverty
or social exclusion**

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The paper examines the relation between the risk of poverty or social exclusion and the degree of urbanization of population in CEE countries. The starting point of the analysis is the New Urban Agenda (set for the coming 20 years) which brings a new philosophy to shape a more sustainable and liveable future of the city. For the

analysis of a territory, the NUA proposed a methodology that harmonizes international statistical comparisons and to categorize a nation's whole territory along an urban-rural continuum. In this regard, the degree of urbanisation classification delineates cities, towns and semi-dense areas and rural regions. The analysis conducted employs the secondary analysis of quantitative data to highlight the risk of poverty or social exclusion at European level and degree of urbanization, as well as to assess the living conditions in Europe faced by people from cities, towns and rural areas. Drawing on Eurostat data, and focusing on urban and poverty and social exclusion, we argue that the risk of poverty is influenced by the degree of urbanization of the territory and shaped by the characteristics of the communities, such as the education systems (schools), NGOs, civil society, labour market, local elected authority, and local business.

Keywords: *Urbanization, poverty, social exclusion, DEGURBA*

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**From emergency to oblivion:
lack of coordination between public institutions
and the civil sector in dealing with crises**

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This study aims to analyze how the lack of efficient and rapid coordination between public state institutions and the civil sector affects the management and continuity of dealing with emergency crises in Albania. Drawing on the experiences of voluntary organizations and institutional emergency response in recent years (earthquakes, pandemics, floods), this research argues that Albania's recurring failure to sustain coordination between public institutions and civil society actors undermines effective and continuous crisis management. The lack of established continuity leads to repeated cycles where rapid mobilization is followed by structural neglect, evidenced by national emergencies such as the 2019 earthquake and the recent pandemic. This study integrates different sources and opinions of relevant actors in public and non-public institutions, using a combined research method. This method aims to find current coordination models, the role of local efforts, and how emergency experiences can help create more lasting ways to handle future crises. The research examines the possibility of sustainable sectoral cooperation by analyzing how existing efforts help build long-term community sustainability. It further explores the role of volunteerism in social security and solidarity. The study ultimately argues that sustainable, institutionalized collaboration between

the state and civil society is essential for effective emergency response and durable community resilience. Achieving this requires legal and cultural reforms that recognize volunteerism as integral to social security.

Keywords: *emergency, institutional coordination, civil sector, volunteerism, political crisis, community sustainability*

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The context of Social Work from a Socio-Economic perspective in Kosovo

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Social work in Kosovo faces complex challenges stemming from the country's transition, limited economic development, and pronounced social needs. This study focuses on the close relationship between socio-economic aspects and social work in the Kosovar context, analyzing how macroeconomic factors influence the provision of social services and community well-being in general. Kosovo, as one of the poorest economies in Europe with a high unemployment rate ranging around 25-30%, faces extraordinary pressure on its social welfare system. Limited budgetary resources restrict the capacity of state institutions to provide adequate support for vulnerable groups. Meanwhile, diaspora remittances cover a considerable portion of families' basic needs, creating an informal social support system. Social workers in Kosovo operate in an environment where social stigma, traditional family structures, and institutional deficiencies create specific barriers to implementing contemporary social work practices. The socio-economic aspect manifests in several critical dimensions: low family incomes that intensify social problems such as violence, neglect, and exploitation; insufficient funding of social service centers that limits capacity for quality interventions; and lack of investment in professional training of social workers. This paper seeks to argue that the transformation of social work in Kosovo requires not only institutional reforms, but also an integrated approach that considers socio-economic development as a prerequisite for sustainable social welfare. It is recommended to increase public investments in social services and legislative changes, develop public-private partnerships, and create new financing mechanisms that can support protective programs and early interventions, thereby reducing long-term social and economic costs for Kosovar society.

Keywords: *Social work, socio-economic development, social welfare, social services, Kosovo*

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Strengthening Family Roles in Mental Health Care: A Community and Home-Based Model for Albania

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Institutional care is still the main method of mental health support offered in Albania, but most support provided on a day-by-day basis is done by families for their relatives with a mental illness. However, despite their central place, the experiences and needs of these families are seldom researched or recognised in social policy. This paper discusses how families organise care as an emotional, social and practical experience in families and to what extent they could be assisted better in a community-based approach, emphasising the home front. The study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which serves to elucidate how various levels of influence — ranging from the familial and community level to broader policy frameworks — help to shape caregiving experiences. It also builds on the World Health Organization's community-based care framework that emphasizes proximity, social inclusion and gradual steps to get away from institutionalization. A mixed methods design is used, including qualitative interviews and focus groups with family carers, and quantitative data from professional and service user questionnaires. This makes it possible to understand the role of family capacity, availability of services and institutional responsibility. The anticipated impact will be: (1) the provision of evidence on the life world experiences of family carers; (2) identification of systemic and policy gaps that restrict withdrawal to community mental health care; and (3) a proposed pilot model of home/community support able to be implemented in an Albanian context. In addition to its empirical relevance, the study aims to intervene in the contemporary discussions on mental health reform in Albania and beyond, pushing for a transition away from institution-based care toward family- and community-based rehabilitation.

Keywords: *Mental health, family caregiving, community-based care*

THEMATIC SESSION 07:

CHILDHOOD, YOUTH, LEISURE, AGING AND GENDER

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Students and teachers' perceptions on the educational role of Civic Education in promoting Gender Equality in Lower Secondary Schools

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This study aims to shed light on the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the role of the Civic Education subject in improving gender equality in lower secondary education (SHFMU) in Kosovo. Civic Education is intended to develop a democratic culture and equality in rights and responsibilities, incorporating gender equality as an essential component of civic formation. Through this subject, schools help students grow as active citizens who think critically and engage with social issues. The contribution of Civic Education teachers is important, but to have a lasting impact, the involvement of all teachers and the integration of gender equality across all subject areas is necessary. The purpose of the research was to analyze the impact of Civic Education on improving gender equality, based on the perceptions of students and teachers. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used, including literature analysis, surveys, and data processing with SPSS. The study involved 202 respondents: 132 eighth-grade students, 70 ninth-grade students, and 19 teachers. The results show that 57.89% of teachers believe that Civic

Education has a strong impact on improving gender equality, while 56% of students think it has a partial impact. These differences highlight the need to strengthen interdisciplinary approaches and increase awareness of gender equality in schools.

Keywords: *gender equality, gender education, gender perspective, educational level, human rights*

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Social needs and services for the elderly in Albania

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The population of Albania is experiencing a rapid increase in the percentage of people over 65 years of age, as a result of increased life expectancy, declining fertility and massive emigration of young people. This demographic transition has intensified the need for an in-depth analysis of the social situation of the elderly and the existing services that address their well-being. This study aims to identify the main social needs of this age group, including financial support, healthcare, long-term care services, social participation and access to information. The analysis is based on a combination of national statistical data, existing literature and interviews with service providers. The results show that the social protection system remains largely residual, with fragmented support, insufficient services at the local level and high dependence on family networks, which are being weakened due to emigration and social changes. The study provides recommendations for the development of an integrated approach, based on human rights principles, that guarantees access, quality and sustainability of services for the elderly in Albania.

Keywords: *Elderly, social services, social protection*

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.59/07*

Mental Health in Early Adolescence: A Quantitative Study on Stress, Anxiety and Depression in Albanian Youth Aged 11 – 15

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Early adolescence is a critical developmental period marked by significant changes, which can influence mental health outcomes. Building on a study examining stress, anxiety, and

depression in Albanian children aged 6–10, this study extends the focus to adolescents aged 11–15, offering a continuous perspective on childhood and early adolescent mental well-being in Albania. This quantitative study employs a multi-informant design. For adolescents aged 11–15, data collection incorporates both self-report and parent-report measures. Participants complete the Perceived Stress Scale for Children (PSS-C), while emotional and behavioral functioning is assessed using the Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS-25) and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) in both parent and child versions. The design allows comparison between self-reported experiences and parent observations, highlighting potential discrepancies and patterns in symptom reporting. Research questions include: 1- What are the levels of perceived stress, anxiety and depression in Albanian adolescents 11 – 15?; 2- How do adolescents' self – reports compare to those of their parents?; 3- Are there differences in stress, anxiety or depression by age, or gender?; 4- What is the prevalence of clinically relevant anxiety and depressive symptoms?; 5- What are the correlations among stress, anxiety and depression within and between child – parent reports?; 6- How do these findings relate to earlier data from children aged 6 – 10? Preliminary descriptive analyses examined mean scores, standard deviations, and prevalence estimates for stress, anxiety, and depression, stratified by age and gender. Additionally, correlations between self- and parent-reports, as well as patterns of agreement, were explored to inform the reliability and interpretability of findings. Findings can inform early identification, intervention strategies, and policy discussions, while contributing to cross-cultural understanding of mental health trajectories from childhood into adolescence. Preliminary results show there is a moderate discrepancy between the way youths perceive these symptoms and the way their parents do.

Keywords: *Early adolescence, stress, anxiety, depression, Albanian youth, multi – informant*

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From lines to language: drawing as a tool for early childhood development

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Drawing is essential in the early development of children aged 3 to 6, serving both as a creative expression and as an important educational tool. During this period, drawing enhances fine motor skills, hand–eye coordination, and spatial awareness, while also fostering cognitive development in areas such as problem-solving, memory,

and symbolic thinking. Drawing also provides children with a nonverbal way of communicating emotions, experiences, and ideas, fostering early communication skills. The aim of the article is to highlight the importance of drawing in motor, emotional, and cognitive development, with particular emphasis on its complementary role in language development. There are illustrated different phases of drawing during early childhood and how drawing can be used with children to facilitate self-expression, both nonverbal and verbal, opening possibilities for interaction, narrative, and conversation. The article is based on review of recent research and contemporary findings regarding the developmental significance of drawing, as well as the value of engaging in dialogue about children's drawings. When adults or peers engage in dialogue about these drawings, the process fosters deeper reflection, strengthens communication skills, develops conversational abilities, and enhances emotional understanding. The article is relevant for educators, parents, and professionals' workers with children in early childhood, offering theoretical insights into the developmental and educational potential of drawing as a tool for holistic development.

Keywords: *Children, drawing, language, development*

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.95/07*

Children's rights in Albania's digital space: Parenting as a mediating mechanism

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The expansion of the digital space has created new opportunities for children and adolescents in Albania in the fields of education, communication, and social participation, while simultaneously exposing sensitive tensions regarding their rights and protection. National strategies and policy documents emphasize that every child is entitled to safety, privacy, and access to information in online environments, aiming to guarantee inclusive development and active participation. Nevertheless, phenomena such as cyberbullying, exposure to harmful content, and the misuse of personal data remain tangible risks that challenge the practical realization of these rights. This study integrates data from in-depth interviews and focus groups with adolescents and their parents, combined with an analysis of national documents on children's rights and online safety. The analysis reveals a persistent tension between restrictive parenting models, primarily focused on surveillance and control, and adolescents' aspirations for more autonomous, creative, and participatory digital spaces. For adolescents, technology is perceived as a vital tool for self-expression and social affirmation, while for parents it appears primarily as a source of risk. This duality produces a parental paradox, whereby efforts at protection often constrain the exercise of children's digital autonomy. In line

with the National Agenda for Children's Rights and national reports on online safety, the study underscores the necessity of a new parenting paradigm that moves beyond control, fostering dialogue, digital education, and the active inclusion of children's voices in rule-setting. Such an approach conceptualizes children and adolescents not merely as subjects of protection, but as capable actors with the right to safety, information, and autonomy in the digital environment.

Keywords: *Digital parenting, children's rights, online safety, parental mediation, children's digital autonomy*

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**Gender equality and sustainable cities:
Impact of FEMACT-Cities European network
on transforming urban environments for women**

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Gender equality has been enshrined in EU law for nearly 25 years, however, implementation on a local level remains uneven. The role of gender equality is vital to all policy areas remain poorly understood and work on gender equality implementation on a local level continues to be hampered by knowledge and data gaps, lack of committed staff, lack of awareness, lack of political support and both active and passive resistance. The FEMACT-Cities network is therefore focusing on the implementation gap in gender equality policy across a wide range of topics. The network has two objectives: to improve the implementation of gender equality on a local level and to promote innovation and knowledge sharing in gender equality in topics shared by the partners. The aim of this study was to analyse the way gender equality is framed in the annual reports of FEMACT-Cities European network, one of the most active European Urbact network. The study identifies the following relevant topics fall into four broad clusters: urban development (public space, accessibility, mobility and public transport, fear and security in public space, parks and playgrounds); labour market and training (entrepreneurship, labour market segregation & participation, care work, and education & training); wellbeing and safety (violence against women, mental health); internal and structural gender mainstreaming.

Keywords: *Urbact, city, gender, equality, women*

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Smartphone use and its impact on employees' sleep and performance in shkoder municipality

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This study investigates the relationship between smartphone use and dependency with sleep quality, daytime sleepiness, and work performance among Shkoder municipality. A sample of 150 participants completed a structured online questionnaire addressing smartphone use habits, sleep duration, and fatigue at work. Results showed that approximately 60–70% of respondents exhibited signs of smartphone dependency, including excessive use (>4 hours per day), frequent bedtime use, and difficulty in reducing usage. Excessive smartphone use was strongly associated with delayed sleep onset, poor sleep quality, and daytime drowsiness, Which negatively affected focus and productivity. These findings are consistent with international literature (e.g., Chaturvedi et al., 2019; Ellahi et al., 2021; Park et al., 2021), but highlight smartphone dependency as an additional modern factor exacerbating known challenges related to fatigue and sleep among call center employees. Practical implications emphasize the need for organizational and individual interventions to reduce excessive smartphone use, improve sleep hygiene, and enhance workplace performance.

Keywords: *smartphone dependency, sleep quality, daytime sleepiness, work performance*

THEMATIC SESSION 08:

WORK, PROFESSIONS AND ORGANIZATION

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.*81/08

Job Dissatisfaction and New Work Meanings in Turbulent Time: insights from Italy

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The centrality of work in contemporary society is increasingly under debate. In Italy, recent studies (Bertolini & Goglio, 2023) suggest that work has not entirely lost its importance, but its meaning has shifted: what matters today is the quality of work, understood as the ability to reconcile professional duties with family life, care responsibilities, and leisure. Other research, however, indicates a weakening of work's role in the hierarchy of values, pointing to a "marginal centrality" where work remains relevant but is increasingly placed alongside, or even subordinated to, other life domains (Asfor 2023; Community Research & Analysis for Federmeccanica, 2023). Building on this debate, the first part of the presentation discusses the results of a survey (January–February 2024) conducted by the author on 400 Italian employees of an international business consulting firm. Using a questionnaire designed with scientifically validated tests from organizational sociology and psychology, the study identifies key factors influencing job dissatisfaction and reshaping the perceived value of work. In the second part, the findings are used to outline ten families of meanings of work that crystallize into distinct typologies of workers. These insights shed light on how dissatisfaction interacts with emerging work cultures, offering a deeper understanding of the Italian case within broader international debates.

Keywords: *Marginal centrality of work, job dissatisfaction, quite quitting, job hopping, great refusal, meanings of work*

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**Precarious resilience:
Adaptation and organizational
mortality within Celaya, Guanajuato's Violent Milieu**

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This qualitative study examines the impact of urban violence on organizational mortality among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Celaya, Guanajuato—a Mexican city consistently ranked among the world's most violent urban centers. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 22 SME owners and two municipal officials, the research adopts an interpretivist lens to analyze how narco-cartel conflicts, systemic extortion (“piso” payments), and generalized insecurity reconfigure business survival strategies. Findings reveal that violence imposes multidimensional burdens: Economic precarity: Extortion consumes $\leq 30\%$ of profits, while security expenditures and asset theft cripple cash flow. Operational fragmentation: Forced closures, restricted operating hours, and supply-chain disruptions paralyze strategic development. Pathological adaptation: SME responses bifurcate into precarious resilience (relocation, payment to cartels) or organizational mortality (liquidation, illicit pivoting), with active resistance being rare. Critically, the study identifies a paradox: Survival mechanisms erode SMEs' developmental capacity, normalizing illegality and fragmenting the productive fabric. The concept of “resilience” is thus reconceptualized as a precarious state wherein short-term adaptation accelerates long-term institutional decay. This “destructive creation” cycle replaces licit enterprises with illicit ventures, corroding social trust and state legitimacy. The research contributes to conflict economics by demonstrating how violence transcends mere operational risk to become an embedded logic reshaping SME decision-making. It argues that traditional resilience frameworks inadequately capture the trauma-driven compromises SMEs make in hyperviolent environments, advocating for context-sensitive policies addressing extortion's structural roots.

Keywords: *Precarious resilience, organizational mortality, urban violence, systemic extortion, pathological adaptation*

The role of artificial intelligence (ai) in the development of the social work profession

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The rapid developments of artificial intelligence in recent years have dictated very significant changes both in the careers of social work students and in the practices of this profession, especially regarding marginalized target groups. Various studies in the field bring very interesting facts and data to analyze and to prepare us for what is expected to happen in the context of our reality. Through bibliographic analysis, it is intended that this paper will be able to provide answers to three research questions, which aim to: To become familiar with the impacts that AI has brought to the careers of social work students? To identify some of the positive and negative effects? As well as the impact that AI is bringing to the relationship between social workers and marginalized groups? For the realization of this work, a scaled method was used in the selection of scientific articles, where among the main criteria were to be scientific articles with many citations, to be from the last 5 years and to be specific in the issues addressed which are close to the purpose of our study. In the first phase, 53 scientific articles were analyzed, from which the 27 most relevant were identified, which were identified based on the three research questions that guide this study. At the end of the bibliographic analysis, we reach the conclusions that the effects of AI on the academic career of social work students are identified to be both positive and negative, this is also one of the reasons why studies in this direction should be as dynamic as possible, as the situation needs continuous monitoring. Procrastination, challenges in relation to mental health and digital skills of social workers remain some of the most acute aspects and that need to be kept under continuous control. Meanwhile, referring to the advantages that AI is bringing to target groups in need, it is evident that there are increased opportunities for access to services, especially innovative ones, which will also be accompanied by changes in the ethical approach. Of course, such developments are expected to bring an expansion of the mission of the social work profession in the field of social justice, reasons that influence the need for continuous implementation of studies, review and adaptation of university curricula and social policies.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Social Work, Positive and Negative Effects*

THEMATIC SESSION 09:

COMPARATIVE, HISTORICAL, REGIONAL, GLOBAL & FUTURE STUDIES

N° 2025 Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.24/09

Old and New Silk Roads: “Pathways” to Global Peace or Conflict?

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The paper starts with the observation that globalization, despite current Trump's customs policy, is increasingly mutating into regionalized globalization. Regionalization is however not meant geographically, but in the sense of a broad network that is based on criteria of geopolitical proximity, especially in terms of “friend-shoring”. Francis Fukuyama and Michel Benzon called the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (known as the New Silk Road) “China's Road to Ruin” for a number of reasons. At the G-20 meeting in New Delhi in September 2023, the United States, India, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, France, Germany, Italy and the European Union announced a declaration of intent to jointly establish the new economic corridor “India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor” (IMEC). In addition to the intended trade and economic benefits, the geostrategic intention of this new project should be emphasized. The obvious aim is to reduce the West's multiple economic dependencies on China and Russia. Instead, the emerging world power and “world's largest democracy” India is to be connected to Europe via the Middle East (including Israel), bypassing China, Russia and Turkey. In addition, the Group of Seven is promoting a trans-African “corridor” linking Zambia to Angola via the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as partnerships to help Indonesia, Vietnam, South Africa and Senegal make the transition from fossil fuels to renewable

energies. These projects have a common geopolitical logic: the advanced democratic countries, led by the US, want to improve their relations with developing countries to prevent them from falling into China's clutches. Against these new developments the presentation will focus on the economic implications of the IMEC compared to the BRI beyond the participating countries and on its geostrategic significance in relation especially to the Middle East and Europe.

Keywords: *Globalization, regionalization, silk roads, geostrategic trade competition*

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Towards the 'New Society': The working class in socialist Albania between ideology and reality

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This paper examines the formation of the working class in socialist Albania (1945–1990), placing it within the broader debates on development in turbulent times. Industrialization was the central pillar of Albania's socialist modernization project, conceived not only as an economic strategy but also as a means of restructuring society. The creation of a working class was framed as both a developmental objective and an ideological imperative, linked to the regime's vision of building a "new society." The study explores how policies of industrial expansion, labor mobilization, and rural-to-urban migration contributed to the emergence of new industrial centers and reshaped existing social dynamics. It also considers the ways in which state discourse portrayed the working class as the leading force of progress, while available evidence reveals a more complex reality marked by uneven development, recurrent shortages, and adjustments to shifting political and economic conditions. Drawing on party documents, statistical data, and recent scholarship, the paper situates Albania's experience within the wider Eastern European context, where socialist states sought to achieve rapid industrial transformation under conditions of limited resources and political uncertainty. By analyzing the interaction between ideological frameworks and socioeconomic practices, the paper contributes to a better understanding of how development was conceptualized and pursued in a turbulent environment. The case of Albania illustrates the opportunities and constraints of industrialization-driven social change in a small socialist state during the Cold War.

Keywords: *Industrialisation, working class, socialist Albania, rural-to-urban migration, state-controlled migration, ideology*

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A comparative study of males and females on career planning among adolescents

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One of the most crucial life stages is career planning, which is essential for everyone's future. Every adolescent can fulfil his aspirations for the future through this ongoing, quite complicated process. Career planning includes valuable steps about knowing yourself, knowing occupations, and combining them for a successful career. The main purpose of the given paper is to evaluate the variables that influence young teenagers in the upper secondary school of Durrës in the choice of profession and the importance they attach to their career planning during adolescence. This research aims to better understand who plans their career from youth and what factors influence the choice of professions by comparing the careers of men and women. The introduction and the literature review, which covers many authors' and theories' explanations of the significance of this process, comprise the first section of the study. The methodology section, which presents the approach utilized in the study, is covered in the second part. One hundred pupils from the upper secondary school "Leonik Tomeo," aged fifteen to eighteen, are involved in this study; fifty of them are male and fifty are female. The instrument of the study was the questionnaire, through which I was able to prove one of the hypotheses: Young teenagers make a pragmatic choice of profession, oriented towards professions that provide high income, influenced by parental influence, social pressure and not based on tendencies and their personal preferences. The presentation of data was carried out through graphs and tables. Surprisingly, this study disproved another hypothesis, which held that women would be more influenced by their parents' choices for careers. In reality, men were more influenced by their parents' choices for careers. The third phase includes discussion and some recommendations for social science teachers and school psychologists in career guidance and counselling for teenagers.

Keywords: *career, profession, school, student, teacher*

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The symbolism of birds in Illyrian-Albanian mythology and culture

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In Albanian mythology and cultural heritage, some birds occupy an important place. They have also been attributed many cults related to them. Of course, the symbolism of

these birds has its roots in the prehistoric period and the period of Illyrian antiquity. The symbolism of these birds, their meaning, their features and the cults associated with them have been transmitted, preserved and respected to this day among Albanians. Birds and their symbolism, from ancient times to the present day, have taken on different meanings, representing different qualities and phenomena such as wisdom, peace, love, war, beauty, spirituality, or embodying gods and their abilities. By exploring the symbolism of birds in Albanian mythology and culture, this paper engages in a detailed elaboration of the importance and values that the symbolism of certain birds has had and continues to have among Albanians. This paper will examine birds such as the pigeon, eagle, waterfowl, owl, swallow, etc. And what they represented in Illyrian antiquity, how their symbolism and meaning were passed down or transformed from generation to generation, how they have reached our time and how they continue to be preserved and respected in Albanian tradition. Of course, this work poses a challenge to the originality and identity of the symbolism of birds, considering that being part of nature and fauna, there is the possibility of using the images of these birds more widely and beyond Albanian culture. For the realization of this paper, descriptive and analytical methods were used. Using the technique of using bibliographies, studies and articles of Albanian and foreign researchers, qualitative data were reviewed, consulted and interpreted to identify issues related to the symbolism of birds in Albanian mythology and culture.

Keywords: *Birds, symbolism, mythology, Albanian tradition, heritage, meaning*

N° 2025 *Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.70/09*

Ghettoization in the era of smart cities: The case study of Gazi Baba

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In the field of urban sociology, a slum is defined as a densely populated urban area characterized by substandard housing, poverty, overcrowding, and social disorganization. This definition corresponds closely with the reality of Skopje's non-urbanized or shanty neighborhoods, particularly Gazi Baba (Chair municipality), one of the capital's living spaces where residents endure extremely poor living conditions. In this area, urban planning and quality of life remain largely rhetorical concepts. Substandard housing and unsanitary conditions constitute the differentia specifica of Gazi Baba, an urban zone predominantly inhabited by ethnic Albanians. This paper,

through the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods, aims to examine the current status and future prospects of genuine urbanization in this non-urbanized geography. The study will provide analysis and propose solutions to policymakers and the broader public in order to advance urban revitalization and enhance both the objective and subjective quality of life of Gazi Baba's residents and Skopje's population as a whole.

Keywords: *Slum, Gazi Baba, fake urban planning, discrimination, urban revitalization*

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Digital mental health interventions for employees: A systematic review of recent evidence using the PRISMA framework

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With the growing importance of workplace mental health and the rapid adoption of digital technologies, digital mental health interventions have emerged as promising tools to enhance employees' psychological well-being. This systematic review, conducted following the PRISMA guidelines, aims to evaluate the effectiveness of digital interventions in improving workers' mental health outcomes. A comprehensive search was performed across major databases (Scopus, PubMed, and Web of Science) to identify studies meeting predefined inclusion criteria. After screening and quality assessment, selected studies were analyzed to explore the impact of digital tools—such as mobile applications, online platforms, and digital cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) programs—on stress reduction, anxiety management, and overall well-being among employees. Findings indicate that digital interventions generally yield positive effects on mental health outcomes, though the magnitude of improvement varies across intervention types and occupational contexts. Limitations of the reviewed literature include methodological heterogeneity, small sample sizes, and short follow-up periods, which restrict the generalizability of results. Future research should employ more rigorous and longitudinal designs to establish the long-term efficacy and sustainability of digital workplace mental health initiatives.

Keywords: *Digital mental health, workplace well-being, employee interventions, PRISMA systematic review, online CBT, occupational psychology*

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Conceiving Socialism and Post-Socialism in World Society

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This paper explores how the concepts of socialism and post-socialism can be re-examined through the lens of world society theory, with a particular focus on the concept of functional differentiation. In classical socialist regimes, the economy was primarily organized through centralized planning and managed by state-owned enterprises under bureaucratic control. However, since the late 20th century, socialist states have undergone profound transformations, each responding differently to global pressures and internal demands. Examples include the Soviet Union's perestroika and subsequent dissolution, China's reform and opening-up, and Vietnam's Đổi Mới reforms. Rather than interpreting these changes solely as political or economic transitions, this study investigates how the global emergence of functionally differentiated systems—such as autonomous economic, political, and scientific subsystems—has shaped these trajectories. It argues that socialist and post-socialist states are not isolated or exceptional, but rather embedded in and influenced by the structural logic of a world society increasingly governed by global functional systems. Through comparative and theoretical analysis, the paper highlights how these states negotiate their place within global structures while adapting to or resisting the imperatives of differentiation. Ultimately, this systems-theoretical approach offers a new framework for understanding the evolution of socialism and post-socialism not as deviations from liberal modernity, but as contextually embedded responses to the same global conditions.

Keywords: *World society, system theory, socialism, post-socialism, functional differentiation*

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Memory, trauma, and cultural loss in post-colonial Nigeria – the legacy of the Benin Kingdom

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This essay examines the inter-relations of memory, trauma, and cultural loss in post-colonial Nigeria, with a focused case study on the Benin Kingdom. It consciously avoids any romanticization of pre-colonial socio-political structures within Benin or the broader African context. Instead, it focuses on the enduring psychological and cultural repercussions of colonial conquest and the imposition of Western ideologies on the

contemporary socio-political realities of Nigeria. Drawing from personal experience and observation, substantiated by interdisciplinary scholarly literature, the study argues that the pervasive anarchy, social disintegration, and political instability in Nigeria – and by extension, in many African states – are intrinsically linked to the colonial encounter and its capitalist imperatives. Employing Anibal Quijano’s concept of “colonialism and power”, Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity and the “third space”, in conjunction with Paul Ricoeur’s theories of memory, narrative, and forgetting, the essay explores the ways in which the Benin people strive to reclaim cultural meaning amidst historical rupture and collective amnesia. Methodologically, the research adopts an analytical approach, enriched by experiential insight and qualitative observation, to elucidate how cultural memory is contested, reconstructed, and politicised in post-colonial Nigeria.

Keyword: *Memory and trauma, cultural loss, Benin Kingdom, colonialism, restitution*

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Between memory and the shadow of dictatorship: The political psychology of democratic transition in Albania

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Thirty years after the fall of one of the most isolated and repressive communist regimes in Europe, Albania continues to grapple with a paradoxical relationship with its past. Although the transition to democracy began in the early 1990s, the collective confrontation with the crimes, traumas, and mechanisms of the totalitarian state remains incomplete. This study argues that the failure to fully address the communist legacy has produced a form of selective historical amnesia that continues to affect political culture, governance, and democratic consolidation. Drawing on secondary literature, archival sources, and comparative studies from Central and Eastern Europe, the article examines how the absence of a genuine internal democratization process after the 1990s allowed the reconstruction of post-communist elites and the preservation of informal networks of power and corruption. As a result, many institutional structures remain influenced by inherited authoritarian practices. The study contends that Albania’s integration into the European Union requires not only institutional reforms but also a moral and cultural confrontation with the communist past, as envisioned by Václav Havel in his idea of the “moral reconstruction of society.” Only through addressing historical injustices and collective traumas can the democratization process become sustainable and aligned with European values of accountability and human rights. This paper contributes to the debate on post-totalitarian transformation by emphasizing the interdependence between historical memory and democratic development.

Keywords: *Albania; communism, transitional justice, historical memory, democratic consolidation, European integration*

THEMATIC SESSION 10:

SECURITY, PUBLIC HEALTH, DEVIANCE & SOCIAL CONTROL

N° 2025 Uni.Shkodra-Int.Conf.54/10

Symptoms of eating disorders and addictive behaviors related to body dysmorphic disorder among students of Lodz University of Technology

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One of the growing challenges in today's world is the increase in addictions and dysfunctional behaviors related to body image and eating habits. This issue is particularly present among young people, who are constantly exposed, especially through social media, to unrealistic and often harmful beauty standards. While this topic is well-documented in American academic literature, there is a gap in comprehensive studies from other regions, including Poland. Polish researchers have mainly focused on conditions such as anorexia, bulimia, and orthorexia. However, there is a lack of attention to less commonly discussed but increasingly relevant disorders such as permarexia, pregorexia, tanorexia, bigorexia, and addiction to aesthetic medicine. The study I aim to present is a pilot project intended to test and validate the research tool. It was conducted among students of Lodz University of Technology using an anonymous survey. Its main objectives were to estimate the risk of development of body image-related disorders and addictive behaviors, and to identify the most frequently reported difficulties in this area among the surveyed population. In addition to sharing preliminary results, the presentation will explore the methodological challenges and limitations connected to constructing an appropriate research instrument. The pilot study will be followed by a larger-scale investigation among a broader group of young people in Poland. This next phase will use the refined questionnaire and, in a second stage, incorporate in-depth interviews to enrich the quantitative findings with qualitative perspectives.

Keywords: *body dysmorphic disorder; eating disorders; addictive behaviors; pilot study*

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**Cross-ethnic study in Kosovo:
young adults' quality of life, well-being,
self-esteem, anxiety and depression**

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Quality of life (QoL) and subjective well-being (SWB) are psychosocial constructs that have garnered considerable attention in contemporary research. Numerous studies have examined the determinants of these constructs, including gender, life events, employment status, migration, age, financial stability, and cultural context. The primary objective of the present study is to explore the associations between QoL and SWB with self-esteem, anxiety, and depression among youth in Kosovo. A secondary objective is to compare these relationships across ethnic groups—specifically between the Albanian majority and minority communities (Bosniaks, Turks, and Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians—RAE)—within the broader context of Kosovo's post-conflict environment and ongoing socio-political and economic transition. The study sample comprised 770 participants aged 15 to 25 years ($M = 18.84$, $SD = 2.01$). Findings indicate that 25.6% of respondents reported low SWB, 9.4% exhibited symptoms indicative of depression, and 80% reported experiencing anxiety. Youth from the Albanian majority community demonstrated significantly more favorable outcomes across indicators of QoL, SWB, self-esteem, community connectedness, and mental health (anxiety and depression), compared to their peers from minority backgrounds. These findings underscore the need for culturally sensitive, community-focused mental health interventions aimed at supporting minority youth. Future research would benefit from the use of longitudinal or experimental methodologies and more diverse, representative samples to better understand the dynamics of well-being in multi-ethnic, transitional societies.

Keywords: *Quality of life, subjective well-being, self-esteem, anxiety, depression, ethnicity*

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Between symptom and silence: “Hysteria” as a form of communication and its resonance in terms of Health Psychology

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In the 19th century, hysteria became a diagnosis that marked women’s bodies and minds, reflecting not only medical conceptions but also the cultural and social constraints of the time. This paper reconceptualizes hysteria as a form of silent and symbolic communication through which women articulated pain, protest, and exclusion in a society that denied them a public and emotional voice. The central research question is: Can hysteria in 19th-century women be understood as a form of silent communication within contexts of social and health exclusion? The answer is sought through the interplay of three approaches: psychoanalytic (Freud & Breuer), biopsychosocial (Engel, Taylor), and feminist (Showalter, Ussher), employing a thematic reading of the symptom as the body’s language. In the contemporary DSM-5 classification, the term “hysteria” is no longer used as a diagnosis; however, the symptoms once attributed to it are now addressed under somatic symptom, dissociative, and conversion disorders. Findings suggest that hysteria should not be reduced to a mere medical pathology but rather understood as a complex communicative act a bodily response to imposed silence and a medium to represent untranslatable suffering. In this way, the study contributes to Health Psychology by fostering deeper sensitivity to the gendered and social histories of the symptom, while also opening perspectives for interpreting somatization in contemporary contexts.

Keywords: *Hysteria, symbolic communication, symptom, health psychology, gender perspective, somatization*

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Mass media as criminogenic factors in the Republic of Kosovo

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This study aims to analyze and present the mass media as a criminogenic factor in the Republic of Kosovo. From the analysis of the current situation, it is clearly observed that the influence of the mass media on public opinion continues to be very high. Although the influence of mass media on public opinion is in principle a positive

influence, which is manifested in the comprehensive education of citizens, education on their rights, information about various social aspects, as well as education about the prevention of various illegal cases, in many situations, and rightly so, mass media continues to be considered as criminogenic factors. The findings of this study make it clear that, in recent times, mass media in Kosovo, in certain situations, are becoming criminogenic factors. Furthermore, disinformation, the dissemination of false and inaccurate information, the promotion of violent acts, and especially the transmission and distribution of content that violates family and social morality, is transforming this extraordinary means of information into a dangerous means of information. In addressing the chosen topic, the normative-legal method, analytical method and comparative method were applied.

Keywords: *Mass media, family, society, prevention, punitive policy, Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo*

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Behavioral approach and impact on the penitentiary system

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The Behavioral Approach represents a perspective in the study of leadership and institutional management, focusing on the behaviors of individuals and their impact on organizational performance. This approach, implemented in the penitentiary system, is important and special due to the closed, hierarchical and sensitive nature of the prison environment. The research aims to analyze how the behavioral patterns of leaders and staff help improve discipline, security and rehabilitation of prisoners. Through the application of the concepts of positive reinforcement, behavior modification, and social modeling, the behavioral approach contributes to the creation of a more ethical, cooperative, and productive organizational climate. Also, the use of cognitive behavioral therapies (CBT) has an impact on the reduction of deviant behaviors, the increase of emotional and social control, and is very effective in the process of resocialization of prisoners. The results show that leadership that applies the behavioral approach increases motivation, accountability and cohesion within penitentiary staff has a direct impact on reducing tensions and improving crisis management. The approach contributes to the creation of a more sustainable, ethical and productive institutional environment, where behavioral change is seen as the key to personal and organizational transformation.

Keywords: *behavioral approach, prison leadership & management, positive reinforcement, resocialization & organizational ethics*

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**Socio-cultural factors and use
of menstrual management products among women
in rural communities of Katsina state**

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Access to, and effective utilisation of menstrual products is surrounded by a lot of barriers particularly in rural areas. This study examined the factors affecting knowledge and awareness of women's use of menstrual products and general menstrual hygiene management practices during menstruation in rural communities of Katsina State. The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative research approaches to collect and analyzed data. The study population comprise both young and older women of menstruating age as well and men. Availability or accidental sampling technique was use to select Nine hundred and Eighty-Nine (989) respondents from 24 rural communities across Katsina state. Questionnaire was used to collect survey data. Qualitative data were generated from Nine (9) women of menstruating age and seven (7) Men through in-depth interview. The findings revealed that women in rural communities of Katsina State are aware of common Menstrual Hygiene Practices but only few of them maintain excellent menstrual hygiene practices like regular change of menstrual products in a day and proper washing of hands and Vaginal during menstruation in rural communities of Katsina State. The study also identified common types of menstrual products used by women in rural communities of Katsina State to include; cloths pads and rags as well as disposable menstrual pads. Sanitary pads were occasionally and rarely use by women during their menstrual cycle. Women also make use of some herbs to steam the vaginal after each menstrual cycle to maintain menstrual hygiene. Some women reported vaginal discharge and odour from use of non-sanitary products. Chi-square analysis showed a significant association ($p \leq 0.001$) between menstrual hygiene knowledge and the use of disposable pads. Multinomial regression analyses also revealed that Gender ($p = 0.001$) and age ($p = 0.037$) significantly affects beliefs in myths about tampons and menstrual cups, while occupation ($p = 0.001$) influenced preferences for homemade products. Restrictive practices against menstruating women were also discovered to be significantly influenced by gender ($p = 0.002$) and age ($p = 0.003$). The study recommends adoption of a policy in schools that ensures boys and girls are taught the art of making menstrual products from local materials, as well as provision of access to running water to facilitate effective MHM.

Keywords: *Education, knowledge, menstrual pads, menstrual health, reproductive health*

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Time and technology

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To refer the progress and growth towards the unknown means to walk in two directions, forward and backward, during periods of global instability where man raises doubts about being "fast" and "slow" in the face of all technological developments. It is precisely technology that is the greatest challenge that surpasses the human mind, created by man who seeks at all costs to challenge him and the naturalness of creation. This mega-development in technology and specifically in artificial intelligence promotes the creation of turbulence that leads man to uncertainty and fear in the existentialism of tomorrow. The presence of cold and emotionless thought and action of the robotics system, AI, separates man from nature, from the sacred from the soul, running towards a programmed world that walks, speaks, acts, adopts laws like the Sun but does not feel, simply oscillates between numbers, between algorithms zero and one. Perhaps the human being needs a clear compass to distinguish good from evil. So quit time create weak people, while turbulent times give birth to scientists, thinkers, poets and leaders who would not otherwise have emerged. Turbulence is both a threat and an opportunity for a new birth. But today the dilemma is "what happens if we lose control", over artificial intelligence, over this whole system of threads and holograms, what could happen to humanity? Nothing and everything! If we create systems that can make decisions autonomously, will we still be able to ensure that they are in line with human values? Turbulent times like a test for man, they reveal how fragile we are, but also how much strength we hide within us. Technology is a tool, not a God.

Keywords: *Technology, time, man, turbulent, algorithms*

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Prevalence and management of anxiety among youth in Tirana

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Introduction: Anxiety is one of the most common mental health concerns affecting young people worldwide, with increasing prevalence linked to academic pressures, social expectations, economic uncertainty, and digital influences. Studies indicate

that youth populations are particularly vulnerable to experiencing elevated levels of stress and anxiety symptoms, which can interfere with academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being. The purpose of the paper: The aim of this paper is to examine the prevalence of anxiety among youth and explore effective strategies for its management. Methodology: This study employs a quantitative research approach using a standardized questionnaire Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A). Data were collected through an online survey distributed to a randomly selected sample of young in Tirana, including a significant number of participants to ensure a broad representation. Findings: The study indicates that anxiety is a prevalent issue among youth, often triggered by academic pressure, social expectations, and financial concerns. To mitigate its impact, it is recommended to introduce early screening programs, strengthen counseling and psychological services, and develop targeted interventions that enhance coping skills and resilience in young people.

Keywords: *anxiety, youth, prevalence, management, mental health, well-being*

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Embodied Mechanisms of Vaccine Hesitancy: Insights from a TMS Study

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Introduction: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends updated COVID-19 vaccines for the 2024–2025 seasons, emphasizing their role in preventing severe illness and hospitalization. Nonetheless, vaccine hesitancy remains a critical barrier, undermining immunization efforts and contributing to ongoing viral circulation. **Methods:** To investigate the neurophysiological mechanisms underlying vaccine hesitancy, we examined sensorimotor responses to vaccination-related stimuli in individuals with varying levels of hesitancy. Using transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS), we measured motor-evoked potentials (MEPs) in the deltoid—a primary site of vaccine administration—and in a control muscle (extensor carpi radialis, ECR), while participants viewed images depicting COVID-19 or flu vaccinations and blood draws.

Results: Highly hesitant individuals (High-VH) exhibited a distinct sensorimotor response pattern compared to low-hesitant ones. Specifically, they showed increased deltoid motor cortex excitability during COVID-19 vaccination imagery, suggesting a somatotopically specific motor facilitation. Low-hesitant participants displayed the opposite trend, with a mild muscle-specific inhibition consistent with previous literature. Emotional ratings indicated that High-VH participants predominantly associated COVID-19 vaccination with fear, whereas Low-VH individuals reported more neutral or adaptive emotional responses. Discussion/Conclusion: These findings suggest that COVID-19 vaccination cues elicit differentiated motor and emotional patterns depending on individual levels of hesitancy. The increased excitability in highly hesitant individuals may reflect an anticipatory avoidance mechanism, highlighting the embodied and affective dimensions of vaccine-related decision-making.

Keywords: *COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy, transcranial magnetic stimulation, sensorimotor responses, emotional processing, avoidance behavior*

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Navigating moral taint: the politics of legitimacy among NGOs supporting sex workers in Poland

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This conference paper presents findings from a qualitative study on the effects of moral stigma on organizations supporting sex workers in Poland. The presentation draws on twelve in-depth interviews and analysis of online materials from five organizations representing three distinct models: Catholic, Harm Reduction, and Sex Worker Rights. Using grounded theory procedures, the study explores how moral taint—understood as the perception of moral dubiousness—shapes organizational functioning, including member engagement, funding opportunities, and collaboration with external partners. The results show a clear hierarchy of stigma: Catholic organizations operate within socially accepted moral frames; Harm Reduction groups face moderate ambivalence, while Sex Worker Rights initiatives encounter persistent moral discreditation that threatens their stability and legitimacy. The paper argues that moral taint acts as a structural constraint within the third sector, reinforcing inequalities among organizations assisting stigmatized groups. By situating moral stigma at the organizational rather than individual level, the presentation contributes to theoretical debates on “dirty work” and highlights the need for institutional strategies to normalize and sustain the activities of sex-worker-led and harm-reduction organizations.

Keywords: *Sex work, stigma, organizations supporting sex workers, qualitative research*

THEMATIC SESSION 11:

ETHNIC RELATIONS, NATIONALISM, HUMAN RIGHTS

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The Socio-Political context and post-Ohrid institutionalization of the Albanian language in North Macedonia

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This article interrogates the nexus between language policy, identity politics, and institutional transformation in post-conflict North Macedonia, with a particular focus on the evolving status of the Albanian language as a marker of collective rights and state legitimacy. Following the Ohrid Framework Agreement (2001)—a landmark political accord that concluded the armed conflict and redefined the principles of interethnic governance—the Albanian language progressively attained official recognition through a series of constitutional amendments and legislative enactments, culminating in the Law on the Use of Languages (2018). By tracing the trajectory from symbolic acknowledgment to juridical codification, the study conceptualizes this development as an evolutionary process of linguistic institutionalization. Unlike other provisions of the Ohrid Agreement, such as equitable representation within the security sector and public administration, the implementation of language rights unfolded with marked temporal delay and uneven intensity. This asymmetry, the paper argues, reveals the hierarchy of post-conflict priorities, wherein measures perceived as essential for immediate stabilization were privileged over those concerning identity and cultural parity. The 2018 Law on the Use of Languages represents the culmination of nearly two decades of incremental policy reform, extending the use of Albanian to the central and local levels of legislative, executive, and judicial authority. Yet its enforcement exposes

persistent gaps between legal formalism and administrative reality and the new political challenges too. Through an analytical reading of institutional capacity, bureaucratic practice, and political discourse, the article contends that the effective normalization of bilingual governance remains both an identity-affirming and developmental challenge.

Keywords: *Albanian language, linguistic institutionalization, post-conflict governance, Ohrid Framework Agreement, identity politics, language policy*

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Exploring Human Rights through Practice-Based Learning: A Qualitative Analysis of Educational Cards in Social Work Education

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Within the framework of the FRIDAS project, a qualitative inquiry was conducted to examine the pedagogical value and applied relevance of a newly developed tool: the “Educational Cards.” Designed to embed human rights perspectives into social work education, the cards present real-world scenarios that highlight ethical dilemmas, institutional gaps, and the complexities of frontline interventions. The study employed a focus group methodology, involving social work lectures, students, and practitioners in a structured session hosted at a university setting. After an introduction to the format, five selected case cards—addressing issues such as trafficking, child protection, homelessness, and discrimination—were reviewed in small groups, followed by a plenary discussion. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data captured participants’ reflections on the usability, clarity, and contextual relevance of the materials. Findings revealed a strong resonance between the content of the cases and the Albanian social context. Participants emphasized that despite originating from various European countries, the themes—violence, marginalization, and systemic neglect—reflect challenges increasingly present in

local practice. Moreover, the cards were praised for their structured clarity and realism, which not only facilitated learning but also prompted professional self-reflection and ethical positioning. Social workers found them relevant for navigating the ambiguity of daily interventions, while students highlighted their usefulness in understanding real-life consequences of institutional decisions. Discussions also uncovered deeper emotional and ethical aspects of social work, particularly in relation to burnout, professional boundaries, and institutional inertia—issues often underexplored in conventional training settings. This study concludes that the Educational Cards offer a contextually relevant and pedagogically robust method for embedding human rights into social work education and reflective practice. It is recommended that the cards be adapted further for local contexts and systematically integrated into both academic curricula and in-service training, to enhance ethical awareness, emotional preparedness, and critical thinking in human rights-based social work. Such tools represent an innovative contribution toward aligning social work education with real-world complexities and the broader goals of the 2030 Agenda.

Keywords: *Human Rights Education, Social Work Training, Educational Case Studies, Reflective Practice*

THEMATIC SESSION 12:

ENVIRONMENT, ECONOMY, TOURISM & DEVELOPMENT

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The impact of demographic processes on the sustainable development of tourism in the Malësia e Madhe region

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This paper explores the complex interdependence between demographic processes and the sustainable development of tourism in the Malësia e Madhe region, an area facing turbulent times and significant socio-economic changes. Utilizing an empirical research and theoretical analysis approach, this study reveals the impact of factors such as: population decline, emigration, population aging, and internal migration on the tourism sector. The main finding of the paper is that the unbalanced relationship between demography and economic development is harming the region's economic sustainability. Demographic trends, such as the abandonment of villages and the decrease in the young workforce, are seriously undermining the potential of tourism to serve as an engine for sustainable growth. This negative impact affects not only the provision of services but also the preservation of the area's cultural and natural heritage. This study provides a cause-and-effect analysis that highlights the need to raise awareness within the local community about the threats to their economic future. The paper serves as

a valuable reference point for local institutions, offering them the data and insights necessary to draft well-coordinated policies and development plans aimed at improving the opportunities for a more stable and prosperous future for Malësia e Madhe.

Keywords: *Malësia e Madhe, demographic processes, sustainable tourism development, turbulent times, impact*

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Climate change and the challenges of mountain tourism: The case of glacier tourism in the Albanian Alps

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Climate change, caused by global warming, has significantly affected alpine ecosystems. One of the most impacted sectors in these areas is glacier tourism, which has experienced considerable decline due to progressive melting and, consequently, the disappearance of permanent snow at high altitudes. This phenomenon is also evident in the Albanian Alps. Based on these climatic changes, our research identifies glacial landforms that can serve as potential tourist attractions, as well as analyzes the impact of climate change on the prospects of glacier tourism in this geographical region. Most of these features are not included in tourist itineraries, although the interest of both domestic and foreign tourists in such experiences is very high. This is mainly due to difficulties of access, lack of scientific information about them, and the rapid transformation of the glacial landscape. The study highlights the necessity of diversifying mountain tourism in Albania by integrating glacial landforms into itineraries through sustainable strategies. Such an approach will increase the attractiveness of these destinations, ensure the sustainability of tourism in the studied area, and provide long-term benefits for local communities in the face of climate change challenges.

Keywords: *Glacier tourism, climate change, sustainable development, glacial landforms*

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Smart specialization strategies in the Western Balkans: The case of the agro-technological industry in Kosovo

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Smart specialization strategies play a key role in promoting economic development and innovation in the Western Balkans, focusing on sectors with growth potential and competitiveness. This study examines the implementation of these strategies in the agro-technological industry, analyzing how digital technology impacts the economic performance of farmers. The selected case study is Digital Agriculture in Kosovo, where primary data were collected from farmers through a structured questionnaire. To measure the economic impact of technology adoption, a panel econometric model was used, including the variables: technology use (TechUse), usage intensity (TechIntensity), diversity of applications (UseCases_Count), and barriers encountered during adoption (BarriersIndex). The aim of the study is to analyze the effect of digital technology on farmers' economic performance and to identify the main barriers to adoption. Objectives include measuring technology use and intensity, assessing the diversity of applications, and examining the role of barriers and institutional support. The results show that the adoption of digital technology increases farmers' economic performance, the diversity of applications brings additional benefits, and barriers must be addressed to maximize positive effects. Based on these findings, recommendations are provided for public policies, improving institutional support, and expanding smart specialization strategies in the agro-technological sectors of the Western Balkans.

Keywords: *Specialization, technology, performance, agriculture, Balkans*

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Tourism and sustainable development under climate change in Albania

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Climate change is increasingly shaping the trajectory of economic and social development, with tourism among the most affected sectors. Albania, with its dual reliance on coastal and mountain tourism, faces mounting challenges from rising

temperatures, altered precipitation patterns, biodiversity loss, and extreme weather events. These environmental changes threaten not only natural attractions but also the livelihoods of local communities dependent on tourism. This paper examines the intersections between climate change, tourism, and development by exploring how vulnerable regions in Albania are experiencing and responding to climate pressures. Through a mixed-methods approach – combining secondary data on climate and tourism trends with case studies and stakeholder interviews – the research highlights both risks and opportunities for adaptation. The study argues that sustainable tourism strategies and effective policy interventions can transform climate challenges into drivers of resilience and innovation.

Keywords: *climate change, tourism, sustainable development, environment*

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Empowering citizens for a cleaner environment: A digital approach to household hazardous waste management

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Improper disposal of household waste poses serious environmental and health challenges, including soil and water contamination, air pollution, risks to sanitation workers, and the accumulation of toxic substances in landfills. Many everyday household products contain hazardous components that require careful handling and specialized disposal methods. Among these, Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) represents a critical category—materials generated in homes that are harmful to human health and the environment but not formally classified as hazardous under state regulations. Ensuring that citizens have access to effective HHW collection and management services is therefore essential for safeguarding both public health and the environment. This study introduces an innovative digital application developed to improve Household Hazardous Waste Management (HHWM) in Tirana. The platform empowers residents to identify, manage, and safely dispose of hazardous household materials through an intuitive, technology-driven interface. The application is designed with a modular architecture, offering flexibility and

scalability, and includes features such as: Categorization of various HHW types; Step-by-step disposal and transport guidelines aligned with national and local regulations; Emergency and contact information for relevant authorities; Interactive maps displaying nearby waste collection points; and educational tools to promote safe waste practices and community awareness. Although initially developed for Tirana, the application's adaptable structure allows for its implementation across other municipalities in Albania. By merging digital innovation with citizen engagement, this approach strengthens community participation in responsible waste management, empowering individuals to contribute actively to a cleaner, safer, and more sustainable urban environment.

Keywords: *Citizen engagement, digital innovation, environment, modular, waste*

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Sports tourism and the demand for tourist animator services

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Animation is a crucial element in the development of the tourist product (service) and warrants particular focus within the tourism sector. Furthermore, we assert that it exerts a substantial influence in this context, as the alterations in the wants, desires, and preferences of tourists are intricately connected to contemporary modifications in the quality of the tourist offering. Travel serves as a conduit for individuals to evade their quotidian routines and to pursue premium, versatile material that will engage them during their holiday. Animation is a crucial element of the tourism offering and significantly impacts the choice of destination amid the intense competition prevalent in the travel business today. The animator's role is crucial for developing and implementing material—specifically, diverse high-level program designed to engage visitors. Visitors perceive the animator in several roles throughout the program's execution, including organiser, creator, co-participant, and even buddy, due to their professional training and adaptability to participants' needs. Consequently, although the demographic of tourists is highly varied, all individuals possess a common desire for relaxation. Consequently, the animator is the optimal specialist to assist people in participating in sports and leisure activities that align with their specific requirements. During program implementation, the animator acts as a liaison for tourists, facilitating conversation and encouraging active involvement. The successful outcome of the communication process hinges on the animator's capacity to proficiently support interactions among tourists.

Keywords: *Animator, tourist offer, sports activities, tourist product*

Challenges of innovation in economic activities in Albania. Role in economic growth and sustainable development

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Innovation is a key factor for any economy that claims to successfully cope with fierce global competition. The era of the knowledge economy and rapid technological progress make innovation a necessity for both developing and developed economies. Innovation according to the National Innovation Initiative Report (2004) is a combination of invention and deepening of existing knowledge, thus leading to the creation of new social and economic values. What is the role of innovation in economic activities in economic growth for sustainable development? What are the challenges and opportunities? The aim of the paper is to examine the current state of innovation in the Albanian economic activities (enterprises) sector, by analyzing the factors that contribute to the creation and implementation of innovative ideas. The analysis method is based on national statistical data, as well as references from countries in the region, to provide a broader context. The data assessment is based on the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) over the years, as well as various international reports related to the field of Innovation. The challenges faced by Albanian enterprises include lack of financing, insufficient infrastructure and the need for more specialized human capacities. Innovation contributes to increasing productivity and creating jobs, highlighting the importance of an innovative culture for economic prosperity. Digital technology helps to implement innovation and improve the internal processes of enterprises. The results help to develop innovation in economic activities in Albania, and encourage finding solutions to barriers in the future.

Keyword: *innovation, innovation models, economic development, sustainable development, economic activities, challenge*

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Motivation and Employee Performance in Tourism: International Insights and implications for Albania

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The tourism and hospitality sector is a dynamic and powerful industry that contributes to economic growth and employment. However, its seasonal nature, intensive customer interaction and pressure to deliver high quality services create complex human resource management challenges, including high turnover, low motivation and employment instability. This paper reviews four international studies- Kotera et al. (2018), Camilleri et al. (2023), Tanković et al. (2023) and Fotiadis et al. (2025)- to examine how motivational factors and HRM approaches affect employee performance across different hospitality contexts. Drawing on classical and contemporary motivation theories, the review highlights the critical role of intrinsic motivation supported by autonomy, development opportunities and positive organizational practices in enhancing employee well-being, commitment and retention. Extrinsic motivators such as wages remain important but are insufficient to sustain motivation in the long term. Preliminary findings from the Albanian tourism sector indicate that low wages, seasonal contracts and limited professional development reduce motivation, while supportive managerial practices enhance engagement and performance. The paper offers recommendations to strengthen strategic HRM and employee motivation in Albania's tourism and hospitality industry.

Keywords: *Employee motivation, HRM, tourism, comparative review*

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Tourism and social transformations in the Balkans: The Albanian case as a laboratory for development and European integration

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In recent years, the Balkan region, and in particular Albania has been experiencing a phase of intense economic and cultural transformation linked to the development of incoming tourism. The gradual opening of markets, infrastructural investments, and the

prospect of joining the European Union are redefining hospitality models and the social dynamics of local communities. Tourism is not only an economic driver but also an agent of identity change: it promotes processes of modernization, but also raises questions about sustainability, cultural authenticity, and the distribution of benefits. The study proposes a sociological reading of the phenomenon, analyzing how tourism practices and hospitality policies are redefining the relationships between local and global, tradition and innovation. The Albanian case emerges as a paradigm of a transition still underway, where tourism becomes a field of negotiation between European aspirations and Balkan roots.

Keywords: *Tourism, inbound tourism, Balkans, development*

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The influence of the diaspora in promoting local tourism

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The Albanian diaspora of Kosovo, which is mainly located in countries such as Germany, Switzerland, Italy, etc., plays a very important role in the socio-economic development of our country, including the tourism and gastronomy sector. This paper examines the impact of the diaspora on the promotion of local tourism and the increase in their number, analyzing the ways in which migrants influence the increase in tourist visits, the promotion of natural and cultural attractions, as well as the development of tourist infrastructure. Through digital communication, social networks and personal recommendations. The diaspora often serves as a "silent ambassador" of Kosovo in the countries where they live. Also discussed here are the successful practices of involving the diaspora in promotional campaigns and various collaborations with local and central

state institutions. The results show that the engagement of the diaspora not only helps in increasing the number of tourists, but also in creating a positive image for Kosovo as an attractive tourist destination. Finally, recommendations are offered for intensifying cooperation between local institutions and the diaspora to further strengthen this impact.

Keywords: *tourism promotion, recommendations, development, cooperation*

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Environment ETD

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The developments of recent decades in Albania have been characterized by diverse dynamics of economic, social and environmental transformations, which have often been accompanied by periods of uncertainty and major changes. This paper aims to analyze the impact of "turbulent times" on the development of the environment, tourism and the Albanian economy, emphasizing the interdependence between these three components. In terms of the environment, the country has faced significant challenges such as air and water pollution, land degradation, uncontrolled use of natural resources and the consequences of climate change. These phenomena have affected the quality of ecosystems and the long-term potential for sustainable development. Tourism, as one of the most important sectors of the national economy, has had rapid development and adaptive capacity to various crises caused by internal or external factors. In recent years, gradual orientations towards sustainable models that promote the natural and cultural values of the country have been observed. On the other hand, the Albanian economy, influenced by internal and external factors, faces the need for a structural transformation that harmonizes economic growth with environmental protection and social development. The paper argues that only through integrated policies, effective governance and social awareness can a development model be achieved that resists crisis and guarantees sustainable national prosperity. The development of the economy, environment and tourism in Albania constitutes a complex process, which reflects the impact of economic crises, social changes and environmental challenges that our country has experienced in recent decades. While globalization and the transition to an open economy have brought new opportunities for investment and growth, they have also highlighted the problems of natural resource management and their long-term sustainability. Albania is trying to combine economic development with environmental protection, through green policies, the promotion of renewable energies and the improvement of tourism infrastructure.

Keywords: *Economy, environment, tourism, Albania, sustainable development*

THEMATIC SESSION 13:

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, DIGITALIZATION & INNOVATION

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Artificial Intelligence in finance: Impact on financial performance

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This article examines the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the financial performance of financial institutions, analyzing how these technologies improve financial analysis and risk management processes. Technologies such as machine learning, big data analytics, the implementation of support robots, data analysis, and algorithms for financial market prediction are used to analyze financial trends and offer data-driven recommendations based on big data and predictive models. The article uses an empirical methodology to investigate how the use of AI has influenced the financial performance of financial institutions in terms of profitability, efficiency, and financial stability. It also compares two large, profitable institutions: the Bank of America and the Deutsche Bank, by comparing their Return on Equity (ROE) and Return on Assets (ROA) before and after the implementation of AI. Additionally, it analyzes revenue and expenses to determine the effectiveness of AI's impact. The study's findings suggest that AI has contributed to improving operational efficiency and increasing decision-making accuracy, bringing significant benefits to financial institutions as well as the broader financial economy. These advancements also support the profitability objectives of these institutions. In conclusion, the article suggests that AI can be a powerful tool for enhancing financial performance, emphasizing the importance of investing in advanced technologies to support growth, competition, and stability in the financial sector, with the goal of maximizing their profits.

Keywords: *AI, finance, banking, technology*

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The role of Artificial Intelligence in transforming the contemporary teacher

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The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education presents both opportunities and challenges in redefining the teaching–learning dynamic. This paper examines how the integration of AI in classroom environments significantly enhances student learning outcomes compared to traditional teaching methods. Drawing on empirical studies and meta-analyses, the research highlights how AI-enabled tools—such as intelligent tutoring systems, adaptive learning platforms, and real-time analytics—contribute to improving academic performance, particularly in STEM disciplines. The adoption and impact of AI in classrooms can be analyzed through the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which emphasizes the importance of perceived usefulness. In parallel, the SAMR model (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition) provides a framework for evaluating how AI does not replace traditional teaching but redefines it. A survey conducted with teachers and students suggests that these technologies facilitate personalized teaching and increase student engagement, resulting in measurable gains in academic achievement. However, both the survey and the literature point to practical and ethical concerns, including inequalities in access, insufficient teacher training, and the risk of diminishing the human element in education. This paper argues that while AI holds transformative potential, its impact is maximized when carefully integrated within pedagogical frameworks and supported by institutions. The findings aim to inform teachers, policymakers, and engineers on best practices for leveraging AI to advance equitable and effective teaching practices.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, learning outcomes, personalized learning, educational technology, teaching innovation*

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Virtual and real threats: Social Media and AI in adolescent deviance awareness

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Social media and artificial intelligence (AI) are reshaping communication and information-sharing practices, particularly among adolescents. While these technologies offer educational benefits for adults, their influence on younger users remains ambiguous and potentially problematic. This study investigates how 12- to 13-year-old students perceive deviant behaviors within school environments and explores the role of AI-enhanced educational tools in raising awareness. Deviant behaviors—such as bullying, cyberbullying, aggression, substance misuse, and gambling—pose significant global challenges. To address these, we conducted psycho-educational workshops with 113 students (grades 8–9), utilizing AI-generated imagery and poster presentations to stimulate discussion and reflection. Findings reveal that 78.8% of participants responded positively to the intervention, with 62% reporting that the visual materials were engaging and thought-provoking. Students described the content as relatable and impactful, with only minor reservations expressed. These results highlight the potential of creative, AI-supported pedagogical strategies to foster awareness and promote behavioral insight among adolescents.

Keywords: *Deviant behaviors, bullying, cyberbullying, substance misuse, social media, AI*

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The hermeneutic and socio-cultural conception of science in Richard Rorty's thought

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The paper presents Richard Rorty's pragmatist perspective on the conception of science and scientific research from a postmodern philosophical approach. Rorty interprets scientific discourse as a particular narrative, with its own rules and intentionality, but far from traditional worldviews of method and metaphysical objectivity. He situates it within a hermeneutic framework, deeply influenced by social and cultural factors. For Rorty, the aim of science is not constituted by the attempt to discover an ultimate objective truth about reality, outside and beyond the human mind. Due to its to its hermeneutic character, science should contribute to the prosperity of an open and

free dialogue that enriches human experience and expands the horizons of human intercultural communication. In the hermeneutic sense, science and scientific research are interpretive discourse, where theories embody specific narratives that acquire meaning within a linguistic game of a particular cultural tradition. For this reason, it must serve and perform a pragmatic function, within a broad cultural horizon, engaging in dialogue with other forms of knowledge. Far from being based on dogmatic foundations, science comes as a human endeavor to prosper the life of the community, serving as an instrument through historicist and local interpretations that aim to fruitfully solve the current problems posed by reality and society.

Keywords: *Hermeneutics, pragmatism, language game, narration, objective reality*

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The role of technology in the development of children with special needs

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This research explores the perceptions and experiences of teachers in utilizing assistive and digital technology in the education of children with special needs, with a comparative focus on urban and rural schools. The main research questions address: how is technology used to support inclusive education for children with disabilities? What challenges do teachers face in integrating assistive technology, and how does geographic location influence its application? The theoretical framework is grounded in the principles of inclusive education and universal design for learning, supported by literature from UNESCO, who, and contemporary scholars in special education. a structured questionnaire was used as the primary research instrument, distributed via google forms to 40 teachers—20 from rural and 20 from urban areas in kosovo. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and comparative analysis. The findings reveal that while most teachers acknowledge the importance of assistive technology, significant disparities exist between urban and rural schools. Teachers in urban areas reported better access to technology, institutional support, and training, whereas rural teachers highlighted limited resources and a lack of professional development opportunities. Despite this, a strong willingness to improve and integrate technology was expressed by educators in both contexts. The study concludes that assistive and digital technology plays a vital role in enhancing learning, communication, and social inclusion for children with special needs. However, effective implementation requires increased investment in infrastructure, teacher training, and stronger collaboration between families and professionals. The research recommends the development of clear assistive technology policies, establishment of regional support centers, and targeted interventions to bridge the urban-rural divide.

Keywords: *Technology, inclusion, learning, needs, teacher, devices*

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Leadership in the Integration of Artificial Intelligence in primary education: Challenges and opportunities

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How can primary school classrooms be transformed into laboratories of critical thinking, creativity, and innovation? In 2025, Albania took a historic step by introducing artificial intelligence (AI) for the first time in the fourth-grade curriculum. Students learn fundamental concepts of computational thinking, coding, data processing, digital content, and online safety, while developing creativity, curiosity, and problem-solving skills that prepare them for an increasingly technology-driven world. This study examines how school leadership can make this transformation possible: leaders who create vision, support teachers, and ensure access to resources and training can foster an innovative and inclusive school culture. The analysis includes practical strategies and methodological approaches connecting theory with the concrete experiences of fourth-grade classrooms and addressing potential challenges in implementing technology in primary education. The expected outcome is a practical guide for Albanian school leaders and teachers, demonstrating how AI integration can be achieved ethically, creatively, and sustainably, transforming schools from places of passive learning into dynamic spaces where students actively experiment, create, and grow.

Keywords: *Artificial intelligence, primary education, school leadership, digital competencies, educational innovation*

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The risk of adolescents’ communication on social networks; rules and strategies that parents use to monitor them

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This paper explores parental attitudes to the use of social networks and their viewpoints on the risks that their children can encounter while they communicate on social networks. In this context, parents’ attitudes, perceptions and feelings to the use of social networks are reflected. Throughout the study, I have identified the rules and strategies that parents use to monitor their children’s activity on social networks, as well as their influence on the behaviour of adolescents. In this study, the qualitative method

is used to gather the data, through semi-structured interviews with adolescents who agreed to participate in the study and semi-structured interviews with their mothers. Findings in this study show that mothers' attitude to the use of social networks by their children is mainly negative as according to them; use of social networks makes them more isolated and negatively affects their academic results. Also, findings show that according to mothers in the study, the main risk that adolescents face during communication on social networks is communication with foreigners and invasion of personal information. Parents are worried about the fact that their children might communicate with foreign people and fall victim of deception and assault. Evidence from the study suggests that parents have put rules which define the way how their children must use social networks. These rules include the appropriate time during the day to access Internet, limitations on the time period spent on the Internet and privacy levels in social websites. In conclusion, adolescents do not respect the rules put by their parents, even though they consider these rules to be adequate.

Keywords: *Adolescent, communication, risks, strategy, parents, social networks*

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Impact of technology on social work practice: a comparative literature analysis of teletherapy platforms and ai-driven case

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The trend of using technology in social work interventions is rapidly increasing. This research paper delves into the transformative effects of technology, focusing specifically on teletherapy platforms and ai-driven case management systems within the realm of social work interventions. The study aims to evaluate the benefits and challenges associated with integrating these technologies and assess their effectiveness in improving client outcomes. The research methodology includes a comparative analysis of the literature regarding various teletherapy and ai-driven case management systems, including their functionalities, usability, and impact on social work practice, which can be summarized through a set of classified and scored features relevant to systems. The research articles were selected in search engines such as google scholar, pubmed,

and sciencedirect. The inclusion criteria required were the relevance of the paper in relation to teletherapy, social work practice, and artificial intelligence. Key areas of the investigation include, among others, the access to mental health services provided by teletherapy, the level of automation and the resultant administrative efficiency provided by ai-driven case management systems, and some ethical and privacy considerations. The research will expand the understanding of how the technology is functioning and can be utilized by social workers. The findings of the research will certainly pertain to the extent by which technology is significantly changing the social work practice landscape. By identifying the benefits and challenges of technological integration, this study aims to provide insights for practitioners, policymakers, and technology developers to optimize the use of technology in social work interventions.

Keywords: *Technology, social work, teletherapy platforms, ai-driven case, client outcomes*

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Understanding the human condition through technology and rhizomatic interaction in modernity

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In the turbulent times of modernity, the human condition undergoes a continuous process of reconfiguration. This paper undertakes a philosophical inquiry, both inductive and deductive in character, to explore the meaning of human existence within the socio-ontological context of technology. The rhizomatic interrelation between technology and modernity is examined through the lens of the philosophy of technology. Technology is approached not as an external instrument of progress, but as an intrinsic structure of human experience, where consciousness, the body, and thought are constantly reshaped. Through the concept of rhizomatic interaction, the study analyzes how humans and technology co-create a non-linear network of interrelations, in which the boundaries between subject and object, nature and artificiality, the human and artificial intelligence become increasingly transparent. This rhizomatic interplay, along with the reflexivity it generates, constitutes the essence of modernity as an ontological condition, a space in which the human being is no longer the absolute center of the world but a co-creator of reality through technological mediation. This new socio-ontological state situates humanity in a constant tension between control and dependence, creation and loss, thereby opening a new horizon for understanding human development in turbulent times.

Keywords: *Human condition, technology, modernity, rhizome, ontology, philosophy of technology*

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The ethics of innovation in times of uncertainty: Challenges in building a sustainable future

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In an era where technology is transforming everything at an unprecedented pace, the ethics of innovation have become more crucial than ever to ensure that development serves humanity rather than progress alone. Artificial intelligence, digitalization, and automation are reshaping the way we work, learn, and interact, creating new opportunities but also presenting challenges that demand careful consideration. In this context, there is a pressing need for an ethical framework to guide innovation toward humane and sustainable goals. This study examines the relationship between innovation, scientific responsibility, and sustainable development, highlighting that every technological advance should be accompanied by reflection on its social, environmental, and cultural impacts. Through an analytical and interdisciplinary approach, the study emphasizes the importance of ethics as a guiding compass, ensuring that technological creativity is aligned with justice, transparency, and equal opportunities for all. In conclusion, the core argument is that the ethics of innovation does not limit progress but rather gives it direction and legitimacy. Only through the conscious integration of ethical considerations into scientific and technological processes can we build a sustainable future where progress goes hand in hand with responsibility and humans remain at the center of every innovation.

Keywords: *Ethics, innovation, sustainable development, technology, responsibility*

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Digital competencies of teachers in Albania: An interdisciplinary perspective on technology, AI and sociological factors

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The development of teachers' digital competencies is essential for the successful transformation of education in Albania, particularly in the context of the integration and use of Technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI). This research aims to assess the current level of teachers' mastery of these competencies and to identify the main challenges

in their professional development in this regard. The study focuses on the interaction between two main dimensions: 1. The technological and AI-related aspect – the ability to understand, be aware of, and critically use AI tools; 2. The social factors – related to the impact of the digital divide, as well as geographical and socio-economic influences on the use of technology. Through a quantitative survey methodology involving pre-university teachers, and using an instrument based on ASCAP's competency assessment framework, the research seeks to explore how variables such as age, experience, educational level, and self-assessment of digital competencies affect teachers' perceptions and trust toward AI. The study analyzes the difference between general digital use and AI-specific use, as well as the impact of socio-geographical inequalities. The results are expected to help distinguish between general digital usage and AI-related practices, and to identify the inequalities that affect teachers' professional development. The study provides recommendations for training programs, aiming for a more inclusive and high-quality approach to the digitalization of education.

Keywords: *Digital competence, Albanian teachers, artificial intelligence, digital divide, social factors, professional development*

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Integrating 3D Modelling and Cybersecurity in Albanian Education: Building Innovation and Resilience in Turbulent Times

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As technology reshapes education, universities are challenged to innovate while staying secure and resilient. This paper looks at how 3D modelling can transform teaching and learning in Albanian higher education, making complex ideas more visual, interactive, and engaging. Drawing on surveys from students and instructors, the study highlights both the enthusiasm for using 3D tools and the growing awareness of cybersecurity risks such as data privacy and network safety. The findings suggest that while 3D modelling opens exciting possibilities for learning, these advances must go hand in hand with stronger digital literacy and institutional protection. The paper proposes practical ways universities can adopt new technologies responsibly, through training, infrastructure investment, and clear security policies. By linking innovation with cybersecurity, this research shows how Albanian higher education can turn digital transformation into a path for sustainable growth, even in uncertain times.

Keywords: *3D modelling, Albanian education, cybersecurity, digital transformation, innovation, resilience*

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Navigating Albania's Local Economic Development: Opportunities and Challenges

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A decade post-2015 Administrative Territorial Reform, Albania's local economic development (LED) exhibits progress in decentralization, with local budgets rising to 3.2% of GDP and own-source revenues tripling to 35 billion ALL in 2023. However, persistent challenges undermine inclusive growth amid EU accession efforts and projected 3.2-3.5% GDP expansion in 2025. This article analyzes key issues: stark regional disparities, where urban centers like Tirana generate 82% of revenues via high business density, contrasting rural stagnation with poverty rates at 31.8% and inadequate infrastructure like 23% irrigation maintenance. Fiscal constraints limit revenue generation, with underdeveloped cadastres and 14% liabilities-to-revenues ratio crowding investments, despite 46 million EUR in EU grants focused on tourism and agriculture. Service gaps in waste (68% cost recovery), water/sanitation (61% coverage), and digitization hinder business and agro-potential. Human capital deficits, including 10% staff turnover and low training (9%), exacerbate governance hurdles, with gender equality at 44%. Pathways forward include revising grant formulas, promoting inter-municipal cooperation, and investing in rural skills and broadband to sustain growth, reduce poverty by 5% annually, and transform local government potentials into an economic driver.

Keywords: *Local economic development; inter municipal cooperation, regional disparities*

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Rebirth of philosophy during the transition from the post-ideological era

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The aim of the research is to facilitate the overcoming of the crisis of education in post-totalitarian societies, especially in Albania, where the transition in the field of thought continues to be unclear and without a Western vision. The most acute is the crisis of thought in the field of pre-university and university education. Between the totalitarian utopian society and the modern Western capitalist society there is a long

distance and full of paradoxes. Totalitarian societies are hostile to philosophy, religion and speculative to science. During the Cold War (1947-1991), the education system of Albanian society was based only on Marxist-Leninist ideology. The Albanian post-communist transition was perceived only as a political, economic and legal transition. The pragmatic political elite used the slogan “fight against communism” and ignored the mental and spiritual transition through the reform of the education system. The theoretical basis of the research is philosophy, pedagogy and transitology, as a subfield of metaphilosophy. The research method is holistic and comparative. The focus is on the reform of the Albanian curriculum, the construction of critical thinking and guiding values based on competence and pluralism of truths in the fields of scientific, philosophical and religious knowledge.

Keywords: *Education, science, ideology and philosophy, critical thinking*

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An Analysis of Gender-Based Violence and Prevention Strategies in the Polog Region

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Gender-based violence represents a complex social phenomenon deeply rooted in cultural, economic, and structural inequalities. Despite the progress made in legislation and policymaking at both national and international levels, many women in the Republic of North Macedonia—particularly in rural areas and in the Polog region—continue to experience various forms of physical, psychological, sexual, and institutional violence. This paper aims to analyze the dimensions, forms, and socio-cultural contexts of gender-based violence in the Polog region, examining the key social, economic, and cultural factors that contribute to its persistence. The study also identifies the main challenges and shortcomings in institutional mechanisms for victim support and prevention. Based on statistical data, qualitative interviews, and relevant national reports, the paper provides a sociological perspective on the structural causes of gender-based violence and proposes recommendations for more effective prevention strategies.

Keywords: *Gender-based violence, women's rights, institutional response, social inequality*

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The Role of Technology in Contemporary Education and the Readiness of Albanian Schools for Digital Transformation

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The integration of technology in contemporary education is essential for developing students' digital competencies and improving the quality of teaching. However, Albanian schools face numerous challenges that hinder this process. The lack of sustainable technological infrastructure, limited access to digital devices, and the absence of laptops for every teacher restrict the effective use of electronic platforms and the development of innovative lessons. The age of part of the teaching staff and their limited experience with modern technology make adaptation difficult, while some students face economic hardships that prevent them from completing assignments through digital means. Another factor that burdens the process is excessive bureaucracy, as teachers and school administrators face numerous requirements for filling out documentation and administrative forms. This diverts their focus from teaching and reduces the effectiveness of technology integration. The study employs a mixed methodology: structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews with teachers and school leaders, and documentary analysis of institutional practices. The findings reveal that current training programs are ineffective, focusing mainly on paperwork rather than teaching practice, and failing to sustainably develop teachers' digital competencies. The study suggests the need for continuous investment in infrastructure and equipment, practice-oriented training programs, and a reduction of bureaucratic procedures, allowing teachers and administrators to focus primarily on teaching and improving the learning experience.

Keywords: *Digital education, educational infrastructure, digital competencies, teacher training, educational equity, technology in schools*

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Use of simple tools and practical experiments in teaching physics in the lack of a laboratory

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Physics helps us understand the world around us, yet it remains one of the most challenging subjects for students, especially in under-resourced schools. In many rural areas of Albania, the lack of laboratories and scientific tools poses a significant obstacle

to effective science teaching. Drawing from my experience as a physics teacher in a multi-grade classroom without a laboratory, this paper explores how creativity and simple materials can transform the learning experience. Through improvised experiments using everyday objects—plastic bottles, balloons, string, water, and mirrors—I have found ways to bring physics concepts to life. Key topics like force, pressure, heat transfer, and magnetism can be explored with minimal resources, making learning more concrete and memorable for students. These hands-on activities not only enhance conceptual understanding but also engage students of all levels, encouraging curiosity, critical thinking, and collaboration. The paper highlights the pedagogical value of practical experiments, even when conducted outside traditional laboratories. Supported by educational research and models like Dale’s Cone of Experience, the findings emphasize that active, experience-based learning is more effective than passive methods. In multi-grade or resource-limited settings, this approach fosters inclusion, participation, and sustainable knowledge acquisition. Ultimately, the lack of a laboratory should not be seen as a limitation, but as an invitation to innovate. With simple tools and an open mind, teachers can turn any classroom into a space for scientific discovery.

Keywords: *Practical experiments, simple tools, creative teaching, lack of laboratory, physics, active learning*

FULL PAPERS

**DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE
AND FORMS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION
IN DECISION-MAKING
ON SOCIAL POLICIES**

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ABSTRACT

Citizen participation in the decision-making process is an essential pillar of local democracy and the major driving force for making good social policies that represent real people's needs. In this research, the nature and intensity of citizens' interaction with local government institutions in the Municipalities (Elbasan, Patos and Mat) with a special focus on the level and the dimensions of engagement in decision-making processes will be explored. Based on information collected using a standard questionnaire, question 16—examining the level of citizen involvement in various local institutions—and respondents' demographic profile, a Citizen Participation Index was developed. The results finds that the local municipality of residence has a significant impact on the levels of participation, implying that local governance and community have an impact on the level of participation. Where individuals live, urban or rural, does not

significantly have an impact on the levels of participation. Education turns out to be a strong determinant, where greater levels of education are strongly related to greater participation. Work status is also a determinant of participation, with workers being more likely to participate than non-workers. The gender and age do not appear to play a significant role in determining participation.

Keywords: *social policy, participation index, local governance, decision-making.*

INTRODUCTION

Citizen engagement with local government is widely recognized as a core value of democratic regimes and an essential component in building responsible and representative public policy. Locally, where institutional closeness is most significant, meaningful engagement of citizens in decision-making is required to ensure that public authorities respond to the real needs and interests of communities.

In Albania, the legislation establishes various mechanisms to ensure citizens' entitlement to participate in decision-making processes, through the Law on Local Self-Government (Law No. 139/2015) and the Law on the Right to Information (Law No. 119/2014). However, these mechanisms are effectively run at a limited capacity. A range of barriers such as lack of information, low institutional trust, limited knowledge of civic rights, and socio-economic inequalities still limit active civic engagement.

The paper is about one specific aspect of participation: how intense and what kind of interaction between the citizens and institutions of local government there is in Elbasan, Patos and Mat municipalities, with regard to social policy. Drawing on data from a planned questionnaire, Question 16 of special interest, this paper explores to what extent citizens have engaged in different forms of participation (e.g., public hearings, formal meetings, online consultations). In addition, the analysis includes demographic factors to determine how participation rates vary across groups.

For comparison purposes and to facilitate systematic analysis, a Citizen Participation Index was developed. The index enables respondents to be categorized by low, medium, or high levels of participation, thus forming the basis for measuring participation gaps as well as proposing evidence-based solutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Citizen Participation in Local Government: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Citizen participation is an essential component in promoting good governance in public institutions (Fox & Meyer 1995). At the local level, it represents a direct mechanism through which citizens can influence or participate in the process of shaping public policies. Citizen participation in the modern era is associated with improved democracy, greater accountability for public officials, and a better decision-making process (Abel, 2007; Hong 2015).

Various studies show that when citizens are involved in decision-making processes, the policies resulting from this engagement are perceived as more fair, transparent, and legitimate (Boothe, 2021). Along the same lines, Michels and de Graaf (2010) point out that citizen participation has positive effects on democratic functioning: it increases the sense of civic responsibility, encourages citizens to listen to each other, and strengthens the legitimacy of public decisions.

However, the literature also highlights a number of limitations. According to Binh and Giai (2021), the dominance of local government is very evident in the process of citizen participation. Citizen participation at the local level is often characterized by low levels of engagement and limited interaction with public institutions. This type of involvement often remains more formal than real or substantial. Berner, et al., (2011) argues that many citizens feel hopeless about the effect of their opinions, perceiving participatory processes as formal and not influential. According to them, participation often only gives the illusion of involvement. Michels and de Graaf (2017), add that the influence of citizens in policy-making is often limited only to the level of providing ideas and suggestions.

Although this form of participation remains valuable, the real role and influence of citizens varies depending on how the participatory process itself is designed and implemented. International literature suggests that citizen participation can significantly contribute to improving the quality of democracy, through increased transparency, institutional accountability and the integration of citizen knowledge into decision-making. However, the effectiveness of these processes depends on the political, institutional and cultural context in which they take place. In this context, the case of Albania is of particular interest. As a country with a long history of democratic transition, Albania has built legal mechanisms that guarantee citizen participation. However, in practice, challenges remain numerous, including the lack of effective implementation of laws, the functioning of institutions and the low level of citizen trust in decision-making processes.

2.2 Forms of civic participation and interaction with local institutions

Successful mechanisms of civic participation are those that enable citizens to influence policy-making, engage in discussions and gradually increase their involvement, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of institutions (Serdült & Welp, 2015). In this context, the model known as the “Democracy Cube” of Archon Fung (2006) provides a useful theoretical framework for the analysis of participation. This model conceptualizes participation along three fundamental dimensions: who participates (openness or selection of participants), how the interaction occurs (form of communication and co-decision-making), and how discussions are linked to outcomes and public action. These dimensions help to classify and compare participation mechanisms according to the degree of involvement and the impact they have on public governance.

However, local governments are increasingly developing new methods and organizational models of citizen participation (Falanga, 2020; Bennett et al., 2022), including a range of participation activities and the allocation of resources for organizing citizen participation. According to Chirenje et al. (2013) and Leydet (2014) engagement in local governance includes passive participation, consultative participation, functional

participation and active participation. In practice, citizen participation can be understood as face-to-face participation such as citizens' forums, citizens' juries, and citizens' councils, or as online participation (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). Falanga (2020) adds that participation can be: traditional, client-oriented, consultative and innovative. According to the World Bank (2002), forms of participation can be ranked according to the level of engagement: information, consultation, cooperation and empowerment, representing a gradation that moves from more passive participation to more active and real influence on decision-making. While Ali, Waris and Azad (2021) classify forms of participation into two main categories: direct citizen participation and indirect participation.

These forms described by the international literature find connections with the mechanisms used by the local government system in Albania and provide an important basis for further analysis of citizen participation in the Albanian context. In this context, participatory mechanisms represent the legal and institutional means offered to citizens to influence the design and implementation of public policies at the local level. This is particularly important in social areas, where needs are most pronounced and interaction with institutions has a direct impact on the quality of community life.

In summary, the analysis of forms of participation in Albania highlights a significant discrepancy between the potential offered by existing mechanisms and their effectiveness in practice. Improving citizen-institutional interaction requires not only expanding formal spaces for involvement, but also building an institutional model based on responsiveness, transparency and accountability at the local level.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Instrument

The study is based on a standard questionnaire distributed among residents of Elbasan, Patos and Mat municipalities. The questionnaire includes a demographic section (gender, age, education, employment status, area of residence) and specified questions that assess citizens' awareness, perception, and actual engagement in local decision-making processes.

The focus of this paper is Question 16, which lists 13 specific forms of interaction with local government (e.g., meeting with the mayor, city council meetings, public hearings, meeting with social service officers, attending public budget hearings, etc.). However, only those respondents who answered "Yes" to Question 14 — i.e., during the last year they had participated in meetings with local representatives — were eligible to answer Question 16. Therefore, a total for 329 was eligible for the question 16: Elbasan: 94 respondents, Patos: 124 respondents and Mat: 111 respondents.

For each form, respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they had engaged:

- Never
- Once
- Twice
- More than twice

3.2 Construction of the Citizen Participation Index (CPI)

To allow for comparative analysis, all the responses were numerically coded:

- Never = 0 points
- Once = 1 point
- Twice = 2 points
- More than twice = 3 points

The overall score was calculated by summing values over all 13 domains of participation. The resulting index measured from 0 (no participation) to 39 (high participation).

For interpretative purposes, the Citizen Participation Index was split into three levels:

- Low participation (0–5 points)
- Moderate participation (6–15 points)
- High participation (16+ points)

This category allows for the meaningful comparison between groups of people. The author used the construction of the indexes suggested by Babbie (2020) in building the index.

3.3 Data Analysis

The following statistical methods were used for the purposes of this paper:

- Descriptive statistics to display each activity's rate of participation and provide an overview of the index distribution.
- Chi-square tests to examine association between levels of participation and categorical demographic variables such as municipality, gender, residence area, education level, and employment status.
- Correlation matrix, Heatmap, between all 13 forms of participation to see which activities occur together most often.

Statistical analysis was carried out by way of statistical software SPSS.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics for the Citizen Participation Index (CPI)

The Citizen Participation Index (CPI) calculated with 13 forms of participation (Question 16) was calculated for 329 individuals who reported active engagement with local government institutions over the previous 12 months. Descriptive results point to an asymmetric and highly dispersed model of civic involvement:

- Mean (M): 11.35
- Median (Md): 9.00
- Standard Deviation (SD): 9.92

- Range: 0 to 39
- Mode: 2 (with multiple modes)
- Variance: 98.47

The high standard deviation in relation to the mean indicates high heterogeneity in citizen engagement. The median of 9.00 falling short of the mean of 11.35 also supports a right-skewed distribution with a small segment of very active participants elevating the mean. Percentile analysis reveals 75% of the participants having a score of 16 or below and only 10% scoring above 26.

The results show that the majority of citizens participate in local decision-making at a medium or low level, while only a small portion are highly active. This highlights the need for measures to encourage more citizens to engage in a more consistent and effective manner in local decision-making processes.

4.2 Levels of Participation Across Municipalities

The figure below presents the percentage of the degree of citizen participation—ranked as low, moderate, and high—within the three municipalities that were surveyed: Elbasan, Patos, and Mat, and at the national level.

In Elbasan, the largest percentage of respondents (43.6%) exhibited low levels of participation in local decision-making. 30.9% of the respondents were seen to be moderate in their participation, whereas only 25.5% exhibited high levels of participation. On the contrary, Patos boasted the best distribution of civic engagement. A proportionately smaller percentage (29.0%) had low engagement, whereas 34.7% and 36.3% reported moderate and high engagement, respectively. This is a sign that the citizens of Patos are more actively engaged in consultative or decision-making roles at the local level, in contrast to the other municipalities.

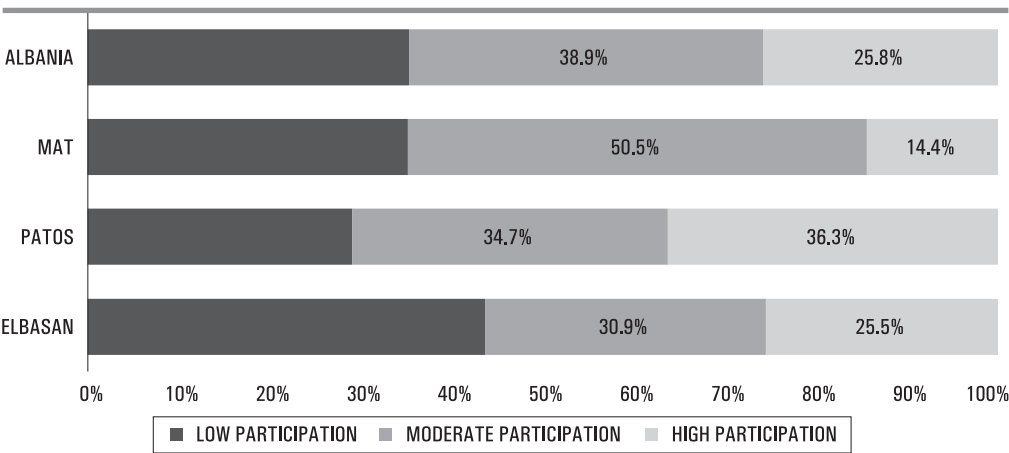


Figure 1: Levels of Participation Across Municipalities

Mat had a different pattern. Fifty percent (50.5%) of the participants expressed moderate participation, the highest percentage among this category in all three municipalities. However, only 14.4% reported high participation, the lowest among the three. This indicates that although most of the population is participating in some manner, fewer citizens are participating more intensively in participatory processes.

At the national level, which wight information from all three municipalities, moderate participation was the most common (38.9%), with low participation (35.3%) and high participation (25.8%) following. These figures represent an overall trend in which most citizens are involved to a moderate extent, with a relatively lower proportion indicating very high or very low participation in municipal decision-making on social policy issues.

The comparison of data across municipalities reveals that there are different challenges and opportunities in fostering a culture of citizen participation at various local levels. To advance inclusion and strengthen a more vibrant local democracy, it is essential to adopt targeted policies that address the specific needs of each municipality, while reinforcing mechanisms of communication and active citizen engagement.

4.3 Examine association between levels of participation and categorical demographic variables

The study examined the relationship between the level of participation of citizens (coded as low, moderate, and high) and several demographic factors through Chi-Square tests.

- Municipality was statistically significant to participation levels ($\chi^2(4) = 20.02$, $p < 0.001$). Patos populations yielded the highest rates of high participation (36.3%), with Mat generating the lowest (14.4%). This implies regional differences in local participation.
- Residential Area (urban or rural) did not significantly impact participation ($\chi^2(2) = 0.33$, $p = 0.850$), meaning that urban or rural is not different in relation to local participation for this population.
- Gender was not a significant predictor of participation ($\chi^2(2) = 2.41$, $p = 0.300$). Men and women equally distributed in terms of levels of participation.
- Age group also did not contain important differences ($\chi^2(10) = 12.36$, $p = 0.261$), indicating that participation levels are comparatively consistent across different age groups.
- Level of education was strongly associated with participation ($\chi^2(8) = 24.52$, $p = 0.002$), and a distinct pattern was found such that increasing education is associated with increased levels of participation. For instance, participants with a master's degree had the highest rate of high participation.
- Employment status was strongly correlated with participation ($\chi^2(6) = 17.75$, $p = 0.007$). Moderately and highly participating citizens were more likely to be employed citizens, whereas low participation had a larger proportion of unemployed citizens.

Table 1: *Association Between Participation Levels and Demographic Variables*

Demographic Variable	Chi-Square (df)	p-value	Significant	Conclusions
Municipality	20.02 (4)	<0.001	Yes	Significant differences; Patos highest high participation (36.3%), Mat lowest (14.4%)
Residential Area (Urban/Rural)	0.33 (2)	0.85	No	No significant difference in participation levels
Gender	2.41 (2)	0.3	No	No significant difference between males and females
Age Group	12.36 (10)	0.261	No	Participation stable across age groups
Education Level	24.52 (8)	0.002	Yes	Higher education linked to higher participation levels
Employment Status	17.75 (6)	0.007	Yes	Employed more likely to participate moderately/high; unemployed more low participation

The analysis shows that factors such as municipality, education level, and employment status significantly influence the level of citizen participation. In contrast, gender, age, and area of residence were not found to have a notable impact. This underlines the importance of focusing on socio-economic aspects to foster active citizen participation in decision-making, highlighting the need for tailored policies that support education and labor market inclusion.

4.4 Correlation matrix, Heatmap

To examine the internal correlation among various types of citizen participation activities, we used Pearson correlation analysis among 13 forms of participation in various decision-making processes at the local level. The results are given in the figure below based on a heat map of the correlation matrix. They're existed strong inter-correlations among almost all participation activities, indicating that individuals who participate in one activity also participate in others.

The strongest correlations were between:

- P16_10 (Public hearing for the 2024–2026 draft budget) and P16_11 (Public hearing for the 2025–2027 draft budget): $r = .901, p < .001$
- P16_9 (Public hearing for the 2024 budget) and P16_10: $r = .865, p < .001$
- P16_2 (Participation in municipal council meetings) and P16_11: $r = .750, p < .001$

These results show a compatible response pattern during budget consultations, indicating an engaged portion of the population being involved in fiscal openness procedures.

- Good to excellent correlations were also identified between:
- P16_6 (Meetings officer for communities) and P16_7 (NGO-arranged meetings): $r = .734, p < .001$

- P16_7 and P16_8 (Public/internet consultations): $r = .747, p < .001$
- P16_4 (Meeting with the coordinator for the right to information) and P16_3 (Meeting with social services representative): $r = .704, p < .001$

These findings highlight the intermediaries'—link officers' and NGOs'—major contribution to the facilitation of citizens' access to participation.

Weak but significantly positive correlations (.28 to .50) were found between more individualized forms of participation (e.g., submitting written proposals, completing online questionnaires) and more institutionalized/formalized ones. For example:

- P16_1 (Meeting the Mayor) and P16_12 (Written proposals): $r = .280, p < .001$
- P16_13 (Online survey/comments) and P16_1: $r = .430, p < .001$

These correlations suggest that civic engagement is complex but connected. Those who engage through formal means (e.g., council sessions, public hearings) will probably employ informal or facilitated forms (e.g., social workers, questionnaires, NGOs) as well. The high level of correspondence between budget-related consultations may be a sign of an efficient outreach program of local authorities or of a self-selected sample of highly engaged citizens.

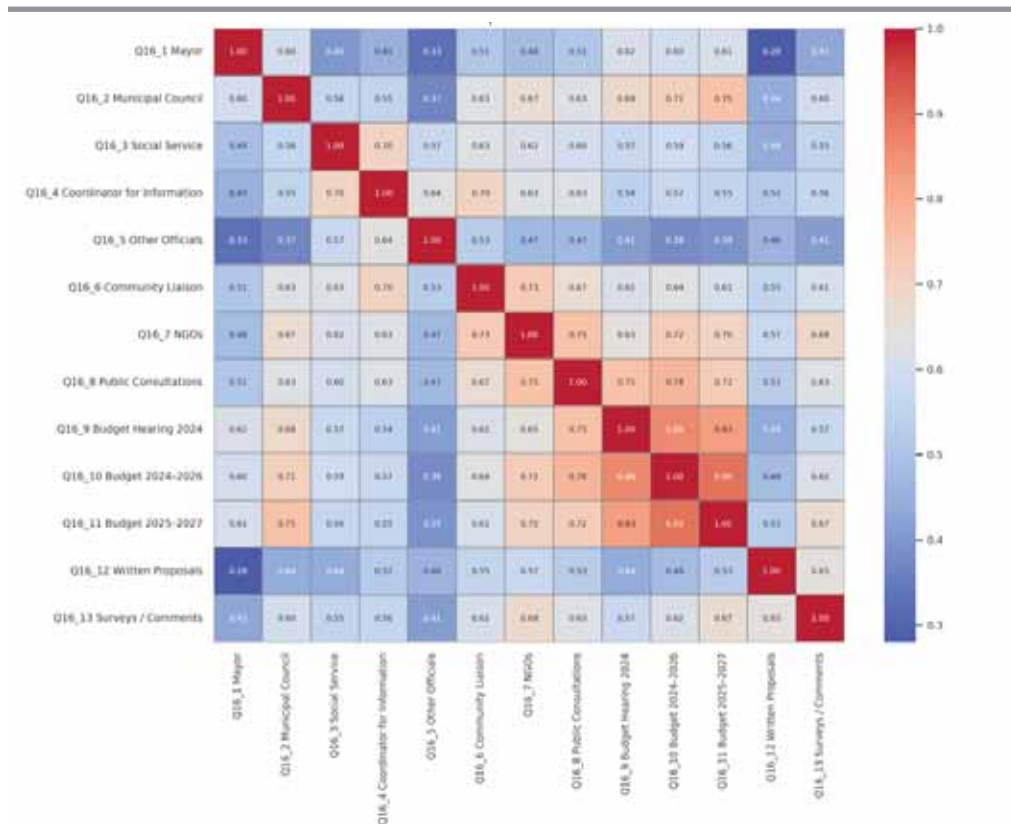


Figure 2: Correlation matrix of Citizen Participation Indicator

The data show that individuals who participate in one form of citizen engagement tend to be involved in other forms as well. This indicates that active citizens are broadly engaged across multiple decision-making activities. The role of intermediaries, such as community officers and non-governmental organizations, is particularly important in facilitating citizen participation. Moreover, the combined involvement in both formal and more individual forms of participation suggests the need for policies that support all modes of engagement.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Chi-Square tests identify statistically significant correlations between the degree of citizens' participation and their municipality, confirming that the provided environment of the local government significantly influences participation in decision-making. This means that local policy, communication, and transparency of the administration differ between municipalities and determine the degree of active participation. There was no difference identified between the city and countryside, therefore geographic classification itself does not determine the pattern of participation.

Correlation analysis also uncovers significant, positive relationships among the different channels of participation, for example, meeting with municipal officials, public consultations, and written proposals. These findings underscore that citizens who participate in one channel are likely to participate in others, indicating a tendency towards multi-channel civic engagement.

According to these findings, the following recommendation can be given to the municipalities:

- **Adjust Participation Approaches by Municipality:** Because municipal environment plays such a key role in influencing participation, local governments must adjust their participation approaches to the distinct needs and situations of their jurisdictions.
- **Promote Multiple Modes for Participation:** Because participation modes are interdependent, municipal governments must offer multiple participation channels, like in-person contact, public hearings, and web sites, to encourage more active citizen participation.
- **Encourage Combined Participation Events:** Structured and well-announced events that combine two or more modes of participation (for example, social service hearings with budget hearings) can maximize citizen participation.
- **Increase Awareness and Capacity Building:** Educating citizens about the available opportunities for participation and rights can improve both citizen contribution quality and participation rates.

Informing citizens about participation opportunities, their rights, and the effective use of different channels would improve the quality of public contributions and enhance long-term engagement in decision-making. Citizen participation in local governance processes is influenced by local policies, institutional practices, and the level of public awareness. To foster a more functional local democracy, it is essential to create inclusive and accessible environments for participation, while promoting collaboration between citizens and public institutions.

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PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING: EXPERIENCES, IMPACTS, AND SCHOOL COLLABORATION IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study explores parents' attitudes and experiences regarding their children's involvement in bullying situations, as well as the perceived impact of these experiences on children's well-being and academic progress. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 30 parents of primary school pupils (grades 1–5) in public schools in Shkodra through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative findings indicate that while a significant proportion of parents reported their children had not directly experienced bullying, many acknowledged that their children had witnessed such incidents. Parents expressed stronger awareness of the emotional consequences of bullying—such as withdrawal and insecurity—than of its academic impacts. Qualitative insights highlighted parents' concerns about verbal and social exclusion, changes in children's motivation and behavior, and varying levels of school responsiveness. Although most parents trusted that teachers take bullying cases seriously, participation in awareness-raising activities remained low, and there was a strong demand for more information and collaboration with schools. The study emphasizes the need for strengthening parent-school partnerships, enhancing awareness programs, and adopting comprehensive strategies that address both the psychological and educational dimensions of bullying in primary education.

Keywords: *Bullying, Parental perceptions, School collaboration*

INTRODUCTION

Bullying in primary education constitutes a significant concern within both educational research and practice, given its detrimental effects on children's psychological well-being, social adjustment, and academic engagement. While extensive scholarship has examined the perspectives of students and educators, comparatively less attention has been devoted to parental perceptions, despite their critical role in shaping responses to and prevention of bullying. This study contributes to filling this gap by examining parents' experiences, attitudes, and collaboration with schools, thereby highlighting the importance of strengthening parent-school partnerships as a central component of comprehensive anti-bullying strategies.

Bullying is generally defined as intentional, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance and is repeated or has the potential to be repeated over time (UNESCO, 2017, p. 15). It can take multiple forms—physical, verbal, relational, or digital—and is characterized by the deliberate intent to harm, repetition, and unequal power dynamics (Kowalski et al., 2012, p. 4). Scholars emphasize different dimensions: Olweus highlights the three classical pillars (intent, repetition, imbalance of power), Smith and Sharp describe it as “systematic abuse of power,” and Rigby adds the emotional component of aggressor satisfaction and victim oppression. While UNESCO's definition reflects a public policy perspective, Kowalski et al. stress the damaging impact of digital bullying, illustrating the evolving theoretical and contextual understandings of this complex phenomenon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual frameworks for understanding bullying

The phenomenon of bullying has been interpreted through various theoretical frameworks, each of which highlights different dimensions of its causes, mechanisms, and consequences. From the perspective of social learning theory, Bandura (1977) argued that behaviors are acquired through both direct experience and vicarious observation of others. Aggressive acts, including bullying, may be reinforced when individuals witness that such behaviors go unpunished or are even rewarded. Children who observe peers, family members, or media figures using aggression as a strategy may imitate these behaviors, especially if they perceive them as effective (Huston, 2018). In this sense, bullying is not a spontaneous act but part of a learned repertoire, shaped by reinforcement and modeling processes that extend beyond the immediate school environment. The ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979) provides a broader lens by situating bullying within nested social contexts. According to this model, bullying is influenced simultaneously by micro-level factors (e.g., family dynamics, peer relationships, classroom climate), meso-level interactions (e.g., the link between family and school), exo-level structures (e.g., community safety, media exposure), macro-level cultural norms (e.g., social inequalities, gender expectations), and

chrono-level influences (e.g., life events, historical shifts). For example, research shows that overcrowded schools, poor classroom management, or unsafe neighborhoods can contribute to bullying behaviors, whereas positive peer models, parental involvement, and community support function as protective factors (Analisah & Indartono, 2019; Bacchini, Esposito, & Affuso, 2009). By recognizing these interrelated systems, the ecological approach underscores the need for multi-level interventions that extend beyond the individual. A complementary perspective is provided by Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which suggests that the way children and adolescents reason about right and wrong evolves through a series of stages (Goldstein & Naglieri, 2011). At lower levels of moral reasoning, individuals may not perceive bullying as wrong unless it leads to punishment, which partly explains the tolerance of aggressive behaviors among some youth. As children progress to higher stages, they become more capable of internalizing social norms and principles of justice. However, in contexts where bullying is normalized or implicitly condoned, moral development may be hindered, perpetuating cycles of aggression. The psychoanalytic tradition, rooted in Freud's (1961) theory of personality, interprets bullying as the externalization of unconscious aggressive impulses or unresolved psychological conflicts. According to this view, when the ego and superego fail to regulate the aggressive drives of the id, individuals may express hostility toward others as a coping strategy. Subsequent psychoanalytic scholars emphasized the role of defense mechanisms—such as projection, displacement, and denial—in understanding bullying behaviors (Freud, 1936; Klein, 1946). From this perspective, bullying can be seen as a maladaptive attempt to manage anxiety, insecurity, or trauma. For instance, children from violent or emotionally deprived families may use bullying as a means of regaining control or asserting dominance (Fonagy & Target, 2003; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2008). In recent years, the psychoanalytic association (APsaA, 2015) has also stressed the group dynamics of bullying, conceptualizing it as a triadic process involving the bully, the victim, and bystanders. Bystanders' silence or passive complicity often reinforces the bully's power, making their role crucial in either perpetuating or challenging aggressive dynamics. As Mark Smaller of the APsaA noted: *"Bullies will only do what bystanders allow."* This highlights the social embeddedness of bullying and the necessity of engaging not only perpetrators and victims but also the wider peer group, teachers, and parents in preventive strategies.

Forms and consequences of bullying

Bullying manifests in multiple forms—physical, verbal, relational, and increasingly, digital (Kowalski et al., 2012). Cyberbullying has emerged as a particularly pervasive phenomenon, transcending physical environments and intensifying the reach and persistence of victimization. Children perceived as "different" are at higher risk, with physical appearance being one of the most frequent triggers (Armitage, 2021). Global data indicate that one in three children experiences bullying within a 30-day period, though prevalence and type vary significantly across regions. The consequences of bullying are profound, extending across educational, health, and social domains. Victimized children often report lower academic performance, reduced school satisfaction, and impaired peer relationships (Tsitsika et al., 2014). Health-related

outcomes include anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and even suicidal ideation, with bullied adolescents displaying rates of depressive symptoms significantly higher than their non-bullied peers (Coomber et al., 2011; Sourander et al., 2007). Longitudinal studies provide strong evidence of a causal relationship between bullying victimization and mental health problems, as well as increased risk of substance use (Moore et al., 2017). Moreover, the broader classroom climate is also affected: in environments with high levels of bullying, students generally feel less safe and less engaged in school (Tsitsika et al., 2014).

Risk and protective factors

Research identifies a wide range of risk and protective factors operating at different levels (Arseneault, Bowes, & Shakoor, 2010). At the individual level, poor self-concept, limited social skills, and early aggression increase vulnerability, whereas strong self-esteem and social competence act as protective mechanisms. At the family level, harsh discipline, lack of parental supervision, and domestic violence are risk factors, while supportive communication and parental involvement in school provide protection. School-related risks include overcrowded environments and conflictual climates, whereas effective classroom management and positive peer models offer resilience. Finally, at the community level, unsafe neighborhoods exacerbate risks, while recreational and sports opportunities mitigate them (Brendgen et al., 2008; Pepler et al., 2006).

Prevention and the role of parents and teachers

Effective anti-bullying interventions require a systemic and culturally adapted approach. Tsitsika et al. (2014) highlight several key components: inclusive and non-stigmatizing strategies, active parental involvement, teacher training, whole-school conferences, sustained program duration, and staff commitment. Programs that foster empathy, respect, and inclusiveness while explicitly rejecting bullying behaviors tend to be most effective. Importantly, the engagement of parents and teachers remains central, as their collaboration not only models prosocial behavior but also ensures continuity between home and school environments.

METHODOLOGY

The research was designed within a mixed-methods framework, combining survey techniques with in-depth interviewing to capture different layers of parental perspectives on bullying. The use of both quantitative and qualitative strands was intended to provide complementary forms of evidence: numerical indicators of general trends, and narrative accounts that offered greater contextual depth. The study population consisted of parents whose children were enrolled in the first five grades of public primary schools in Shkodra. A purposive strategy guided participant selection in order to reflect variation in background and involvement with the school community. Thirty parents completed a structured questionnaire, while six others—recruited independently from the survey

group—took part in interviews. The survey instrument contained ten attitudinal items rated on a five-point Likert scale, together with basic demographic questions. These items explored parents' assessments of bullying prevalence, the consequences they perceived for children's learning, and their views on cooperation between families and schools. For the qualitative phase, an interview guide was developed around five broad themes, covering children's experiences of bullying, observed emotional and academic effects, school responsiveness, communication with teachers, and proposals for more effective prevention. Interviews lasted approximately 25 minutes each and took place in settings that ensured privacy. Conversations were recorded with participants' permission and transcribed word-for-word for analysis. Voluntary participation and full respect of ethical standards—including anonymity and informed consent—were maintained throughout the study. Analytical procedures were tailored to each strand of data: questionnaire responses were summarized using descriptive statistical techniques, whereas interview transcripts were examined through a process of thematic coding. This dual approach made it possible to identify both measurable patterns and recurring narratives that illustrate how parents interpret and respond to the problem of bullying in the school environment.

RESULTS

The analysis of the parental questionnaires provides important insights into the ways families perceive and respond to bullying in primary schools. The majority of parents (73.3%) stated that they had discussed bullying with teachers, reflecting a relatively high level of awareness and engagement, though a notable 26.7% had never raised the issue with school staff. Regarding direct experiences, 23.6% of parents agreed that their child had been a victim of bullying, 39.3% disagreed, and one quarter expressed neutrality, suggesting that while some children are directly affected, a considerable number of parents are either uncertain or do not recognize bullying in their child's school life. Parents were somewhat more likely to acknowledge that their children had witnessed bullying: 40.0% agreed that their child had been a bystander, while 28.6% rejected this and the remainder were neutral.

The emotional consequences of bullying emerged strongly from the data. Almost seven out of ten parents (68.9%) believed that bullying makes children more withdrawn and insecure in the classroom, highlighting significant concerns about its psychological impact. However, views were more divided on academic consequences: only 16.7% agreed that bullying negatively influences children's grades and concentration, while nearly half disagreed, indicating that parents perceive its effects primarily in terms of emotional well-being rather than academic achievement. In terms of safety, a majority of parents (56.7%) felt that their children generally feel secure at school, although a smaller group (16.6%) expressed concern that their child may feel unsafe.

Findings also shed light on communication and cooperation with schools. Only about one-third of parents reported being informed about school anti-bullying policies, while nearly half remained neutral, pointing to limited awareness and dissemination

of such measures. Despite this, trust in teachers and schools appears relatively high: 64.5% of parents agreed that teachers take bullying cases seriously and 63.3% expressed confidence that schools protect their children. On the other hand, parental participation in awareness-raising activities was very limited, with more than half stating they had never taken part in such initiatives. At the same time, parents expressed a strong willingness to engage more actively in the future: almost all participants (96.5%) indicated that they would like more information and closer cooperation with schools regarding bullying.

Overall, these findings suggest that parents are most alert to the emotional and psychological consequences of bullying, while its academic effects are seen as less direct. Parents generally trust teachers to address bullying, but they are not well informed about school policies and are seldom involved in preventive activities. At the same time, their strong interest in greater communication and collaboration highlights both the current gap and the potential for schools to build more effective partnerships with families in order to create a safer and more supportive learning environment for children.

To complement the survey findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six parents of children in grades 1–5 attending public schools in Shkodra. The aim of these interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of families' personal experiences with bullying, the ways in which parents identified and interpreted this issue through their children, their perceptions of the school's response, the quality of communication with teachers, and their suggestions for improvement. All participants were selected purposively to capture diverse experiences and provided informed consent prior to the interviews. The conversations were carried out in a respectful and discreet manner, and data were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing the identification of recurring patterns and themes.

Parents frequently described their children's experiences of bullying as involving verbal harassment, ridicule, or social exclusion. These incidents were often signaled through changes in the child's emotional and social behavior, such as withdrawal, increased need for parental closeness, or reluctance to attend school. Several parents recalled how their once cheerful and active children became quieter, more insecure, and hesitant to engage in play, raising concern within the family about their overall well-being.

Academic consequences were also highlighted, as parents observed declining motivation, difficulties with concentration, and reduced engagement in schoolwork following bullying episodes. Some children, previously high-achieving, began to lose interest in lessons and homework, suggesting that bullying had disrupted not only their emotional balance but also their learning progress.

Parental views on the school's response were mixed. While some parents praised the involvement of teachers and school psychologists in offering emotional support and creating opportunities for dialogue, others felt that institutional reactions were delayed or insufficient at first. Nevertheless, most agreed that the eventual efforts of the school reflected genuine concern for student safety, though improvements in timeliness and consistency were still seen as necessary.

Communication with teachers emerged as a generally positive aspect, with parents noting that they felt heard and supported when addressing bullying concerns. Teachers were perceived as approachable and cooperative, providing reassurance to families and involving them in the management of cases. Still, a few parents suggested the need for more systematic updates and transparency regarding how incidents were being handled.

Finally, parents emphasized the central role of the family in both prevention and response. They stressed the importance of open conversations with children about bullying and of reinforcing emotional bonds to help them cope with challenges. Alongside this, parents recommended that schools implement more proactive educational sessions on bullying, beginning in the early grades, and increase the active role of school psychologists in prevention and intervention.

Taken together, the qualitative findings illustrate that parents not only recognize the harmful emotional and academic effects of bullying but also highlight the importance of stronger collaboration between families and schools. Their narratives point to the need for systematic preventive measures, earlier institutional responses, and educational initiatives that engage both students and parents in fostering a safer and more inclusive school environment.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important insights into parental awareness, perceptions, and involvement in addressing bullying in primary schools. The fact that 73.3% of parents reported having spoken with teachers about bullying reflects a relatively high level of engagement, supporting the argument of Thornberg and Knutsen (2011) that parental awareness and willingness to communicate with schools are crucial factors in prevention and intervention. Nevertheless, parental perspectives on whether their children had personally experienced bullying been divided, with an average score of 2.39, while they were more likely to acknowledge that their children had witnessed bullying ($M = 2.96$). This pattern is consistent with Espelage and Swearer (2003), who note that parents are often more aware of their children's role as bystanders than as victims, since children may remain silent or fearful to disclose personal experiences.

A strong consensus emerged regarding the emotional consequences of bullying. Parents agreed that bullying made their children more withdrawn and insecure in the classroom ($M = 4.07$), a finding that aligns with Rigby (2003), who highlights the emotional toll of bullying in terms of anxiety, social withdrawal, and decreased self-confidence. Interestingly, fewer parents perceived a direct academic impact, with a relatively low mean score of 2.55 concerning bullying's effect on grades and concentration. This diverges somewhat from existing literature, as Nakamoto and Schwartz (2010) emphasize that bullying victims frequently struggle academically due to stress and lack of safety. Such differences may indicate that parents are more attuned to the emotional rather than the academic consequences of bullying.

Encouragingly, most parents expressed confidence in their children's overall safety at school ($M = 3.67$), underscoring the significance of a secure learning environment for

well-being and achievement, as emphasized by Astor, Guerra, and Van Acker (2010). Similarly, parents demonstrated high trust in teachers' seriousness when addressing bullying cases and in the school's protective role ($M = 3.90$), echoing the findings of Cross et al. (2011), who argue that parental trust in school institutions enhances collaboration and intervention effectiveness.

However, levels of parental participation in anti-bullying activities were notably low ($M = 2.36$), even though parents expressed a strong desire for more information and cooperation with schools ($M = 4.69$). This mirrors Sawyer et al. (2011), who stress that informed and engaged parents strengthen the impact of anti-bullying programs. The qualitative interviews further revealed that while some schools provided responsive support through teachers and psychologists, preventive measures such as regular awareness sessions, socio-emotional education, and conflict resolution lessons were largely missing. This gap runs counter to best practices identified in the literature, which advocate embedding socio-emotional learning into curricula to foster empathy, respect, and self-regulation (Olweus, 1993; Bandura, 1991; Moore et al., 2017).

Taken together, these findings suggest that although parents recognize the emotional harm of bullying and trust schools to act responsibly, there remains a pressing need for more structured preventive interventions and stronger parental involvement. Strengthening school-family collaboration and integrating socio-emotional education into everyday practice may therefore be critical steps toward creating safer and more inclusive school environments.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlights the crucial role of parents in recognizing and addressing bullying in primary schools. Findings suggest that while parents demonstrate awareness of the emotional impact of bullying and maintain trust in the school's ability to intervene, there is still limited participation in preventive activities and a strong demand for more information and collaboration. Strengthening the partnership between families and schools, alongside embedding socio-emotional learning into the educational process, emerges as an essential strategy to create safer and more inclusive learning environments.

Recommendations for parents

Parents should become more aware of the importance of preventing bullying and actively engage in initiatives such as brochures, seminars, and meetings with school psychologists, which can help raise awareness of this phenomenon. Creating an open and communicative home environment is essential, where children feel free to share their daily experiences, including negative events at school. Parents are encouraged to monitor their children's behavior closely, paying particular attention to signs of social withdrawal, refusal to attend school, or sudden changes in emotional well-being, which may indicate bullying. Continuous collaboration with teachers and school psychologists is also vital in tracking children's social and emotional development. Above all, parents

should model positive behaviors within the family by promoting values such as respect, mutual support, and peaceful conflict resolution.

Suggestions for future research

To deepen the understanding of bullying and its impact, future studies should include larger and geographically diverse samples to enable generalization at the national level. Comparative analyses between primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education would also be valuable in identifying how the intensity and nature of bullying change across age groups. Furthermore, in-depth qualitative research involving students, parents, and teachers would provide richer insights into personal experiences and coping strategies in different social and cultural contexts, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of this complex phenomenon.

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THE HERMENEUTIC AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CONCEPTION OF SCIENCE IN THE THOUGHT OF RICHARD RORTY

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents Richard Rorty's pragmatist perspective on the conception of science and scientific research from a postmodern philosophical approach. Rorty interprets scientific discourse as a particular narrative, with its own rules and intentionality, but far from traditional worldviews of method and metaphysical objectivity. He situates it within a hermeneutic framework, deeply influenced by social and cultural factors. For Rorty, the aim of science is not constituted by the attempt to discover an ultimate objective truth about reality, outside and beyond the human mind. Due to its hermeneutic character, science should contribute to the prosperity of an open and free dialogue that enriches human experience and expands the horizons of human intercultural communication. In the hermeneutic sense, science and scientific research are interpretive discourse, where theories embody specific narratives that acquire meaning within a linguistic game of a particular cultural tradition. For this reason, it must serve and perform a pragmatic function, within a broad cultural horizon, engaging in dialogue with other forms of knowledge. Far from being based on dogmatic foundations, science comes as a human endeavor to prosper the life of the community, serving as an instrument through historicist and local interpretations that aim to fruitfully solve the current problems posed by reality and society.

Keywords: *hermeneutics, pragmatism, genealogy, narration, objective reality.*

THE GENESIS OF THE CLASSICAL CONCEPTION OF SCIENCE AND GENEALOGICAL CRITICISM

Regarding the dominant conception of the image of science as objectivity, Rorty traces its origins to Plato, culminating with Descartes and finally consolidated with Kant. In this evolutionary line of philosophical thought, science is presented as objectively founded and can rely on rationality as a method to produce ultimate truths. The proclaimed moment of the triumph of science along this line of philosophical thought is guided precisely by the question: Why is science so successful? In a certain perspective, the apparent success of science also comes from the path that philosophy has taken from Descartes to Kant. But if in antiquity philosophy constituted the pinnacle of knowledge, in modernity it took on the role of founding and legitimizing knowledge (epistemology). In this sense, philosophy was elevated to the rank of knowledge but for a new motive. It constituted a more fundamental knowledge insofar as it legitimized and served as a foundation for science. With Kant, the idea arises that science can offer synthetic a priori judgments, where it not only informs us empirically about the world but also performs it with an objective and absolute truth. It is here that Rorty's critique begins and unfolds. His axis of criticism relies on the well-known line of scientific historicism unfolded by Kuhn and Feyerabend and the postmodern one, in general. Initially under the influence of a new neopragmatism, Rorty sees all regimes of knowledge, including science, under a premise of utility. According to him, there are no universal objective criteria to decide what beliefs or principles enjoy epistemic priority. If we consider the history of civilization, depending on the socio-historical conditions, the different regimes of knowledge have given way to each other. In the epistemological sense, Rorty thinks that it is impossible to distinguish "what is 'given to the mind' and what is 'added by the mind'" (Rorty, 1979: 5). Consequently, science cannot be considered rational because it possesses an objective foundation on which it relies or is capable of self-grounding, but because it constitutes a regime of knowledge that is capable of self-correction based on "give-and-take participation in a cooperative social project" (Rorty, 1979: 6).

On the other hand, for Rorty, the question 'why is science so successful?' appears unfair and based on false premises. There are several answers to this question depending on the context and purpose. Thus, the success of science and its truths are not related to objectivity but to the function and role that scientific theories play in solving the problems posed by human society throughout history. "What explains the successes of science, to the extent they need explaining, are the relevant scientific theories themselves in their particulars. Why do the lights go on when we flip the switch? The answer is to be provided by electromagnetic theory, not by scientific realism. If we ask why we should believe electromagnetic theory, there is no better answer than the specific reasons that emerge from the detailed history of scientific practice and reasoning in this field" (Rouse, 2003: 9). Meanwhile, in relation to empirical prediction and control, science appears successful because this is the goal that we have recognized for it, but in relation to the question of 'what meaning should I give to life' it cannot give a successful and exhaustive answer. Rorty states that scientific discoveries are important because "... physical, chemical, and biological

discoveries can tell us interesting things about our bodies and how our brains work, but they cannot tell us “what kind of behavior to favor” (Rorty, 2004: 21).

Further, under the influence of Nietzsche, Rorty began to apply the genealogical method to science in order to deconstruct its rationalist-metaphysical conception. Therefore, for him, it is more valuable to describe and understand scientific narratives, structures, cultural and social aspects that influence and condition scientific discourse. Rorty himself acknowledges Nietzsche’s influence by affirming the legitimacy of scientific truths on genealogical premises. According to the latter, truth is what is held as such by society at a given time in order to preserve, protect and develop its life. As proof of this historicist and utilitarian character, scientific theories themselves and philosophical considerations about truth are different and changeable over time. In this sense, Rorty’s criticisms of rationalism and metaphysics in science are devalued as not current and useful in the current conditions and needs of society. Consequently, all philosophical perspectives that forget their function and the conditions under which they were created, becoming ahistorical, deserve to be criticized and deconstructed. In this context, even the idea of an objective truth and the belief in a unitary method of science is the fruit of a series of philosophical beliefs such as the existence of the natural essence, the essence, the reason created in a certain historical time: modernity. But recognizing the historicist and utilitarian character of science, Rorty essentially accepts a genealogical understanding and foundation of the regimes of knowledge and science as well. Every worldview of science is historically conditioned and arises from the conditions and needs of the time to serve society at a certain time. Consequently, the objectivist worldview of science in Modernity has also performed this function, but when this worldview loses its historical foundation and seeks to appear as ahistorical, then it becomes the object of deconstructivist criticism. By losing or forgetting the historical roots where it arose in response to the needs of the time, this worldview is proclaimed and legitimized as an objective belief beyond history, consequently turning into dogma. In this sense, the success of Galileo’s method over the Aristotelian one does not lie in the fact that it conveys and reveals the ultimate truth but that it appeared more convenient than Aristotle’s in that historical context and mentality. This usefulness is founded on Rorty’s very concept of linguistic pragmatism. According to him, “Truth is what you can defend against all comers” (Rorty, 1979: 308) which implies that truth enjoys the character of a local, relative, polemical stability. And to be more specific, this situation is produced within a dialogical narrative situation. According to him, “we produce new and better ways of speaking and acting — not better because they are more in accord with a previously known standard, but simply better in the sense that they seem clearly better than their predecessors” (Rorty, 1979: 54). This consideration also seems to proclaim the criterion of legitimization of scientific assertions that is based on a set of current social practices that accept some beliefs as truth. Therefore, scientific truth constitutes entirely a social conviction and a historical event based on a linguistic narrative of a certain community. This last conclusion is very important to emphasize, since the conception and reflection on science constitutes a philosophical discourse about science. And in this respect, before we determine ‘what is truth?’, we are always preceded by the fact that it constitutes descriptions through language. Therefore, truth takes on meaning within a linguistic regime and a descriptive discursive game where a social community determines what it will consider to be true, even in science.

Even the relationship or assessment of science vis-à-vis other knowledge as a higher episteme comes as a result of a historical or social consideration of a certain time. Historically, the role of science did not appear as dominant and valued in antiquity or the Middle Ages as it did in modernity. Therefore, observing the history of science or other regimes of knowledge, it is worth focusing on the ethical-political dimensions of science that do not forget its genealogical bed. The historicist character of science not only emphasizes the extrascientific elements that influence and shape scientific research but also the fact that it constitutes one of many historical forms of knowledge. Regarding the latter, Rorty prepares the ground through criticism that addresses the idea of the existence of an objective reality outside the human mind or a reality in itself. In the conclusion of his critique, since the existence of such an objective reality is not proven, then science cannot be philosophically legitimized as possessing priority over other regimes of knowledge. The danger of accepting the priority of empirical science over other forms of knowledge, Rorty likens to the situation of theology and priests in the Middle Ages. The glorification of scientists and natural science appears similar to that of theology and priests. He claims that “physics gets you closer to reality than morals as an updated version of the priests’ claim to be in closer touch with God than the laity” (Rorty, 2007: 134).

THE PRIMACY OF SOCIAL, POLITICAL, BELIEFS AND MORALITY IN EPISTEMIC LEGITIMACY

Within the framework of narrative and historicism, Rorty believes that the process of legitimizing scientific claims is more important and valuable than truth as an absolute objective concept. “There is no activity called ‘knowing’ which has a nature to be discovered, and at which natural scientists are particularly skilled. There is simply the process of justifying beliefs to audiences. None of these audiences is closer to nature, or a better representative of some ahistorical ideal of rationality, than any other” (Rorty, 1999: 36).

On the other hand, for Rorty, the fact that the political element appears to be an important influential factor in science is not simply related to the liberal political imprint of his thought but to the situation where today’s conditions of social development accept the primacy of liberal democracy. “From a scientific, technical-technological point of view we can solve almost any problems regarding basic human needs, and this will be increasingly so in the future because of the social tendency already mentioned. The main question no longer concerns the production but distribution and redistribution of social goods, and it is not a scientific, but first of all a political question” (Kremer, 2009: 71). The process of justification, where politics and morality gain priority in scientific discourse, appears in a more acute valence in relation to philosophy itself. Rorty thinks that philosophy can no longer serve as a foundation for science since “truth, viewed in the Platonic way, in terms of what Rawls calls ‘an order antecedent to and given to us,’ is simply not relevant to democratic politics. So philosophy, as the explanation of the relation between such an order and human nature, is not relevant either. When the two come into conflict, democracy takes precedence over philosophy” (Rorty, 1991: 190-192). In a concrete

axiological premise, Rorty advocates the concept of solidarity that constitutes both a final goal and a guiding principle of scientific discourse. Keeping scientific discourse within this moral value offers science a double potential: it enables its preservation and strengthening as a knowledge regime to help prosper life and society in the spirit of humanism and creates an epistemic usefulness for the scientific regime to not exclude any theory or perspective within its bosom. The principle of solidarity as an element of the functioning of science and its intentionality implies the idea that it does not have to be supported or justified on objective transcendental foundations but on the moral values of the human community. Therefore “scientific communities should be admired for their constitutive moral virtues (at least relative to other communities) rather for than their supposedly rational methods” (Rouse, 2003:2).

On the other hand, since the demarcation of science as objectively founded is rejected, Rorty proposes another horizon where science is supported and legitimized. The purpose of science should not be disconnected from the human purpose of preserving and protecting human communal life. “Pragmatists would like to replace the desire for objectivity—the desire to be in touch with a reality which is more than some community with which we identify ourselves—with the desire for solidarity with that community. They think that the habits of relying upon persuasion rather than force, of respect for the opinions of colleagues, of curiosity and eagerness for new data and ideas, are the only virtues scientists have. They do not think that there is an intellectual virtue called ‘rationality’ over and above these moral virtues” (Rorty, 1991: 39. For this reason, moral values are fundamental and foundational to science for its function in society. “Rorty asks that we focus upon the moral/practical/political terms of solidarity and responsibility to the community as the characteristic features that commend the sciences to us, in place of any distinctive cognitive methods or rational norms” (Rouse, 2003:12-13). And in this sense, the idea is decreed that all knowledge and its forms are at the service of man based on moral values such as tolerance, solidarity, conversation. These values are fundamental for us as human beings to understand ourselves and the world through forms of knowledge, since they appear not only as goals but also as premises that make these forms of knowledge possible and meaningful.

On the other hand, since Rorty thinks that it is precisely social beliefs as habits of action that guide actions, scientific objects are also dependent on and contextualized addressed to these beliefs. “They [beliefs] may lead to ‘reflex’ actions or they may initiate scientific breakthroughs” (Rorty, 1991: 94). So, according to Rorty, there is no particular logic of the scientific method but only practical procedures in historical and social conditions that influence our selection of theories throughout scientific research.

THE PRAGMATIC-SOCIAL HEURISTIC OF SCIENCE

Rorty, as a defender of the line of political liberalism, seeks to extend this mindset to the form of how science should be considered and thought about: “...science and philosophy, like politics, are problem-solving” (Rorty, 1999: 70). So the fact that science has a pragmatic function of solving relevant problems, that is, appearing as a

positive heuristic, cannot defend the idea of a single method and truth as an objective metaphysical foundation. From an epistemological perspective, Rorty's perspective shifts attention from the question 'Is it true?' to the question 'Is this truth useful and emancipatory for the community?'. This axis of shifting the research question presents science not as an isolated and privileged sphere of knowledge but as part of a broader cultural project where philosophical discourse, social development and communication practices are intertwined.

According to him, reality constitutes a communal social construction related to issues of discourse or language (Rorty, 1999). It is precisely the community, language and pragmatism that are the topical coordinates for shaping a new perspective on science, its intentionality and its role in society. So, the true question that should guide the regimes of knowledge and science is: how do things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term? In this regard, Rorty thinks it is important and reasonable to develop science on this premise. The path of science oriented by this question preserves all perspectives as valuable instruments to be used when a given situation requires them. Metaphorically, this resembles the situation where to solve a problem it is better to have a bag of many tools (perspectives) than with a single tool.

THE THERAPEUTIC ROLE OF HERMENEUTICS IN SCIENCE

By addressing a harsh critique of metaphysics and its mindset, Rorty seeks to offer a new principle of legitimacy to science based on a new philosophical worldview based on pragmatic premises. He appeals that philosophy should be practiced and conceived as "therapeutic rather than constructive, edifying rather than systematic" (Rorty, 1979: 5). By abandoning the mindset of rationalist epistemology, philosophy must be outlined as a hermeneutic. The latter also responds quite well to the influence of the postmodern situation where the different regimes of knowledge appear as plural narratives of discourses and interpretations. For Rorty, the invention of new ways of expression and creation, the invention of multiple vocabularies, is important, because "... the way things are said is more important than the possession of truths" (Rorty, 1979: 359). Based on the hermeneutic character that science acquires or should acquire, Rorty states that it is important "...to keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth" (Rorty, 1993: 377).

This consideration gives a strong hermeneutical nuance to science and scientific research. Similar to Gadamer's position, truth is what arises in dialogue between people, not as an objective prior given. Scientific truth is an open, ongoing process that is created only at the end of the conversational dialogue between people. In this respect, this argument reflects and justifies the belief that different philosophical worldviews are accepted and interpreted within a framework of beliefs at a given time and sociality. It is precisely these beliefs that are the foundation that creates the vocabulary that interprets scientific truths. The dictionary constitutes a special linguistic archive that is

selected to understand empirical reality in accordance with the goals and usefulness of society at a given time. Consequently, revolution and progress in science do not come from the discovery of objective truths that exist outside the human mind, but as the fruit of the reinterpretation of scientific problems through the discourses and dictionaries that are used. This aspect gives science a deep hermeneutic nuance where scientific truth emerges as a local and historical product of the reinterpretation of scientific issues and facts based on new beliefs and vocabularies that are constantly being created. Scientific research resembles the work of reconstructing the 'right' descriptions to solve and understand a concrete situation in science. In this regard, this gives science and scientific research the character of pragmatic-hermeneutic research in the regime of knowledge as a whole. So science becomes a community dialogue based on a hermeneutic, pluri-interpretive character that appears as pragmatism (anti-foundationalism). For Rorty, the notions of truth and method in science should be understood under this hermeneutic flow as "good epistemic ways" (Rorty, 1982: 195) or practical instruments of use, plural and constantly revisable. Scientific truth, according to him, is that "which are successful in helping us do what we want to do" (Rorty, 1979: 10). This pragmatism, supported by instances of practicality, communitarianism, and interpersonal dialogue, consequently conceives science and scientific research as a social practice where conversation and dialogue are fundamental. These two elements transform the nature of science from dogmatic knowledge into a narrative on hermeneutic premises. Hermeneutics, in this sense, names the process of human conversation that must build and characterize scientific research.

On the other hand, scientific truth does not fall into the nuances of extreme, fruitless relativity. Scientific conversation to find truth through dialogue means "... to finding a new way of expressing ourselves, and thus coping with the world" (Rorty, 1979:359). Later, Rorty even gives a more minimal definition of what can be called consensus as the purpose of conversation in science. According to him, the goal, even in science, is not the necessary achievement of consensus based on the premise and principles laid down by rationality. The idea is to continue and keep alive the conversation and mutual understanding between the interlocutors about their expressed positions. This strongly marks science as a special form of human solidarity, just like other forms of knowledge, such as philosophy. So for Rorty, "we are not conversing because we have a goal, but because Socratic conversation is an activity which is its own end... united by civility than by a common goal, much less by common ground" (Rorty, 1982:172/ 1979: 318). It is precisely in the spirit of this conclusion that he also accepts the nature of hermeneutics. Not as a method, not as a discipline, nor as a program that replaces epistemology, but as a horizon that accommodates and enables dialogue and coexistence between different perspectives of worldviews about science. However, preserving different perspectives of knowledge regimes and different worldviews does not come only as a moral invitation and appeal but also as an epistemic condition where the use of more instruments makes it easier to find solutions to the different problems that confront humanity on its path of progress. Therefore, truth in science must stem not from the assessment of a single perspective accepted as the only one above the others, but from the horizon of freedom of discussion and criticism between different perspectives in an unceasing dialogue.

CONCLUSIONS

Under the influence of postmodernism, Rorty seeks to constitute science beyond the traditional paradigms of method and absolute objectivity, placing it within a hermeneutical and socio-cultural framework. Rorty, distancing himself from logical positivism and metaphysical rationality and from claims to an objective epistemological foundation, sees science as a discursive practice embedded in historical, linguistic, and institutional contexts. For him, science does not aim to discover a final “truth” about reality, but to contribute to the development of an open dialogue that enriches human experience and expands the horizons of communication.

From a hermeneutical perspective, science is a permanent process of interpretation, where theories are understood as ‘narratives’ that take on meaning only within language and cultural tradition. At the same time, the socio-cultural dimension places science in a dynamic relationship with democracy, pluralism, and liberal society, seeing it as an instrument for collective emancipation, rather than as a neutral apparatus for the production of facts. In this sense, his approach opens up a new horizon for the interpretation of science as an intersubjective dialogue and cultural practice with an emancipatory impact. Most likely, Rorty seeks to offer a communitarian vision in the vision of science and scientific research with his gesture that bears the traces of a liberal political perspective.

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CHALLENGES OF LEADERSHIP WHEN ETHICS IS COVERED BY COMPROMISE

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a critical analysis of cases of consequences when the code of ethics is violated in the functioning of an educational institution and brings an argumentative experience for the management and structuring of human relations through ethics and discipline committees in public schools. The theoretical framework is based on the theories of institutional ethics, procedural justice and mechanisms of organizational silence (the silent organization), which help in the decomposition of forms of bias and distortion of the role of the whistleblower. The methodology is qualitative and exploratory, using as a source of data the author's own testimony, official institutional documents, minutes, testimonies of the parties and discursive analysis of meetings. The paper concludes that the failure to respect the code of ethics, the practice and mentality of excessive tolerance, indifference, silence in the face of cases of inappropriate behavior often creates an institutional culture that treats justice as a risk, not as a necessity of the democratic functioning of the school. In conclusion, this situation brings important reflections on the relationship between written ethics and ethics lived in practice, raising the need for a deep review of the way institutional committees function in the field.

Keywords: *ethics, transgression, manipulation, discipline, compromise*

INTRODUCTION

Leadership in education is not merely about administration—it is about shaping the moral compass of the institution. The ability to uphold and support ethical standards, especially during times of crisis or conflict, defines the credibility and legitimacy of educational leadership. However, when ethics are compromised for the sake of peace, comfort, or institutional image, leadership loses its moral authority, and justice is

replaced by silence. This paper is based on both a personal and institutional experience, where the unethical behavior of a teacher challenged the leadership structure of a public school. In this context, the deputy principal faced challenges that extended beyond administrative responsibilities, involving emotional and professional difficulties as well.

Managing this situation required calmness, professionalism, and dedication to preserve institutional integrity. Efforts to restore ethics and respect focused on promoting open communication, professional reflection, and awareness of each individual's role in maintaining a healthy work climate. This experience highlights the importance of ethics as the foundation of all professional relationships and the need for leadership grounded in responsibility, understanding, and mutual respect.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of this study rests on three interconnected concepts: institutional ethics, procedural justice, and organizational silence. These principles help explain how individual behaviors and institutional reactions influence the ethical culture of an educational organization.

Institutional Ethics

Institutional ethics refers to the moral system upon which public institutions operate. According to Cooper (2006), every institution has an obligation to act with integrity, fairness, and transparency—not only in formal policies but also in everyday decision-making. In the context of this study, while the institution claimed to uphold ethical values, its failure to respond to inappropriate behaviors undermined its moral credibility. This experience raises a crucial question: if an institution tolerates ethical violations, can it still be considered ethical in practice?

Procedural Justice

Procedural justice emphasizes the importance of fairness in decision-making processes (Tyler & Lind, 1992). When procedures are unclear, delayed, or biased, trust in the ethical system is eroded. In this case, the formal processes for conflict resolution were characterized by bureaucratic delays and administrative ambiguity, which weakened perceptions of fairness and increased feelings of professional insecurity.

Organizational Silence

Organizational silence (Morrison & Milliken, 2000) describes the tendency of individuals to refrain from reporting misconduct or inappropriate behavior due to fear, apathy, or cultural norms. In the analyzed case, silence was evident not only among staff members but also within the leadership levels, turning into a self-protective mechanism. Several teachers privately acknowledged the problematic behavior but hesitated to take formal action due to fear of retaliation or loss of professional standing.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and reflective approach, based on the case study method. The primary sources of data include the institutional narrative of the experience, internal documentation, meeting minutes, and a discursive analysis of institutional responses.

Due to the sensitivity of the case, the confidentiality of all individuals involved has been maintained. The main focus remains on institutional mechanisms, the handling of ethical violations, and the impact of inaction on organizational climate. The reflective approach positions the researcher as both participant and observer, offering an authentic perspective on the experience of institutional injustice.

LEADERSHIP UNDER ETHICAL PRESSURE: A CASE NARRATIVE

The case involves a prolonged conflict between a member of the academic staff and a representative of the institution's leadership. Repeated displays of unprofessionalism, demeaning communication, and attempts to undermine institutional authority became a source of ongoing tension. These acts, often occurring publicly in front of other staff, created an unsafe working environment and disrupted collaboration within the school.

Attempts at mediation and promoting professional reflection yielded no results, while institutional responses remained limited. The absence of corrective action fostered the perception that unethical behaviors could be tolerated in the name of administrative stability, thereby undermining trust in the institution's ethical framework.

ANALYSIS: WHEN ETHICS IS COVERED BY COMPROMISE

The Fragility of Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership is often tested in contexts where institutional structures provide little support. In this case, the leader faced a dual pressure: managing the conflict and maintaining institutional balance. The system failed not because of a lack of regulations but because of the lack of courage to implement them fairly and consistently.

Compromise as an Institutional Strategy

Instead of resolving the issue based on ethical principles, the institution adopted a conciliatory and avoidance-oriented approach. While such a strategy might reduce short-term tension, it undermines trust and weakens the culture of accountability. The tendency to "not escalate the issue" reflects the substitution of justice with silence and responsibility with convenience.

The Cost of Silence

Institutional silence carries deep consequences. It normalizes inappropriate behaviors and creates a precedent that discourages the reporting of similar cases. The psychological isolation of individuals who raise ethical concerns becomes a new form of institutional passivity, weakening professional morale and reducing leadership effectiveness.

DISCUSSION: ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS

Educational leadership requires making difficult decisions where moral principles often clash with institutional pressures. The analyzed case reveals how the lack of institutional response to ethical violations can become a new form of organizational failure. Particularly for women in leadership roles, the pressure to maintain calm often conflicts with the duty to uphold professional ethics.

Gender and Power Dynamics in Educational Leadership

The conflict examined includes a clear gender dimension, where a woman in a leadership position faces challenges rooted in traditional perceptions of female authority. Repeated dismissive behaviors and the use of gendered language constitute microaggressions aimed at undermining women's professional legitimacy in leadership.

This dynamic reflects a broader phenomenon within educational institutions, where women are often judged by double standards and face skepticism about their leadership competence. Institutional silence toward such cases reinforces structural inequalities and discourages women's participation in leadership roles. Addressing this reality requires gender awareness in conflict management and clear institutional support for female leaders.

Ethics, Law, and Institutional Responsibility in the Albanian Educational System

This case illustrates evident gaps between the legal framework and its practical implementation within Albanian educational institutions. According to Law No. 69/2012 "On the Pre-University Education System" and Ministerial Instruction No. 20 (2018), the Ethics and Discipline Committees are mandated to uphold the principles of dignity, respect, and mutual responsibility.

In this case, these structures failed to ensure an immediate and impartial handling of the issue, violating the principle of procedural accountability. Institutional inaction not only damages professional morale but also undermines public trust in the legal order of the education system.

The lack of effective monitoring mechanisms and enforcement of ethical standards fosters the perception that ethics remains a declarative, rather than practical, concept. Improving this situation requires strengthening oversight structures, providing ethical training for leaders, and establishing clear procedures for intervention in cases of misconduct. Only through consistent application of law and ethics can the educational system uphold integrity, respect, and justice as the fundamental values of educational leadership.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To move from symbolic ethics to real accountability, the following actions are recommended:

Empowering Ethics Committees

Ethics committees should be independent, trained, and timely in decision-making. They must be protected from political pressure and empowered to issue enforceable consequences.

Institutional Protection for Leaders and Whistleblowers

School systems must develop clear protections for leaders who report violations and ensure they are not isolated or retaliated against. Reporting must not mean sacrificing one's well-being.

Zero Tolerance for Ethical Compromise

Schools must avoid treating ethics as negotiable. Values must be defended even when uncomfortable. Compromise should not come at the cost of dignity or justice.

Reflective Leadership Programs

Training programs should help leaders develop moral courage and resilience in the face of internal conflict. Peer-support networks could help reduce the isolation of ethical leaders.

Routine Ethical Climate Assessments

Regular surveys and reviews should be conducted to detect patterns of silence, fear, or bias in schools. Ethical climates must be measured, not just assumed.

CONCLUSION

Ethical leadership requires more than policies—it requires courage, institutional support, and a culture that does not treat justice as inconvenient. When ethics is buried under compromise, leadership becomes performative and schools lose their moral compass.

This paper has attempted to reflect the lived experience of being in such a position, not as an act of complaint, but as a call for systemic awareness and reform. Schools must learn that the cost of compromise is higher than the cost of truth—and that real leadership begins when silence ends. Until institutions can act with the same urgency as the pain they cause, justice will remain theoretical, and leadership, painfully alone.

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BETWEEN SYMPTOM AND SILENCE: “HYSTERIA” AS A FORM OF COMMUNICATION IN 19TH CENTURY WOMEN AND ITS RESONANCE TODAY IN THE CONTEXT OF HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

In the 19th century, hysteria became a diagnosis that marked women’s bodies and minds, reflecting not only medical conceptions but also the cultural and social constraints of the time. This paper reconceptualizes hysteria as a form of silent and symbolic communication through which women articulated pain, protest, and exclusion in a society that denied them a public and emotional voice. The central research question is: Can hysteria in 19th-century women be understood as a form of silent communication within contexts of social and health exclusion? The answer is sought through the interplay of three approaches: psychoanalytic (Freud & Breuer), biopsychosocial (Engel, Taylor), and feminist (Showalter, Ussher), employing a thematic reading of the symptom as the body’s language. In the contemporary DSM-5 classification, the term “hysteria” is no longer used as a diagnosis; however, the symptoms once attributed to it are now addressed under somatic symptom, dissociative, and conversion disorders. Findings suggest that hysteria should not be reduced to a mere medical pathology but rather understood as a complex communicative act a bodily response to imposed silence and a medium to represent untranslatable suffering. In this way, the study contributes to Health Psychology by fostering deeper sensitivity to the gendered and social histories of the symptom, while also opening perspectives for interpreting somatization in contemporary contexts.

Keywords: *Hysteria, women in the 19th century, symbolic communication, symptom, health psychology, gender perspective, somatization, history of psychopathology.*

INTRODUCTION

Hysteria occupies a distinctive place in the history of psychiatry and psychology, emerging in the nineteenth century as one of the most debated diagnoses explaining physical and emotional manifestations without organic cause. It was primarily associated with women, reflecting both the limitations of medical knowledge and the patriarchal assumptions that portrayed the female body as fragile and prone to “nervous” instability (Showalter, 1997). Thus, hysteria became not only a clinical label but also a cultural discourse through which women’s bodies were inscribed with meanings of fragility, silence, and deviance.

The phenomenon’s theoretical relevance lies in its foundational role in shaping modern psychology. The work of Charcot, Janet, and Freud transformed hysteria from an obscure condition into an interpretive framework for understanding unconscious conflict and repressed trauma (Freud & Breuer, 1895). Yet hysteria was more than a medical entity: it functioned as a bodily language a nonverbal form of expression through which women conveyed distress and protest in contexts where verbal articulation was denied (Ussher, 2011).

Although the term “hysteria” has disappeared from contemporary diagnostic systems such as the DSM-5, replaced by categories like somatic symptom and dissociative disorders (APA, 2013), its communicative and symbolic dimensions remain underexplored. The present study addresses this gap by reconceptualizing hysteria as a multidimensional phenomenon where clinical, cultural, and gendered meanings converge. Integrating psychoanalytic, biopsychosocial, and feminist frameworks, it interprets nineteenth-century hysteria as a complex act of communication and as an interpretive key for understanding modern forms of somatization.

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF HYSTERIA AND ITS COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION

In nineteenth-century medicine, hysteria encompassed a wide range of symptoms from nervous fits and paralysis to aphonia and trance states largely attributed to women’s bodies and reproductive systems. This association reinforced the cultural construction of femininity as inherently unstable (Showalter, 1997). Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière Hospital institutionalized hysteria as a neurological disorder, demonstrating through hypnosis that its manifestations followed consistent patterns rather than simulation (Goetz, Bonduelle, & Gelfand, 1995).

Pierre Janet later reframed hysteria as a dissociation of consciousness an internal fragmentation rather than an organic disease while Freud and Breuer (1895/2000) interpreted it as the conversion of repressed emotions into bodily symptoms. Their case of Anna O. revealed that recalling repressed experiences through “the talking cure” could relieve symptoms, laying the foundation of psychoanalysis. This shift redefined the body as a vehicle of meaning, translating psychological conflict into physical form.

From a communicative standpoint, hysterical symptoms operated as a “language of the body.” In a society that restricted women’s voices, the body became a stage where suffering and resistance could be symbolically expressed. Feminist authors such as Showalter (1997) and Ussher (2011) thus view hysteria as a silent protest a form of embodied speech revealing the intersection of medical discourse, gender politics, and cultural repression. Hence, hysteria served a dual role: scientifically, it catalyzed the birth of modern psychology; socially, it gave women a paradoxical form of expression within the boundaries of oppression.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO HYSTERIA

The Psychoanalytic Perspective

Freud and Breuer (1895/2000) conceptualized hysteria as the expression of unconscious conflict, where repressed emotions found bodily representation. Symptoms were symbolic acts “compromise formations” through which the psyche translated forbidden affect into somatic language. Freud’s notion of conversion (1917/2001) established the idea that the body can speak what the mind cannot, a principle that continues to inform contemporary psychotherapy.

The Biopsychosocial Perspective

With the rise of Health Psychology, George Engel (1977) proposed the biopsychosocial model, emphasizing that illness results from the dynamic interplay of biological, psychological, and social determinants. Applied to hysteria, this model interprets symptoms as manifestations of stress, trauma, and cultural constraint rather than mere neurological dysfunction. Taylor (2020) extends this reasoning to modern somatization, situating hysteria as an early illustration of biopsychosocial interaction in clinical practice.

The Feminist Perspective

Feminist theorists reframed hysteria as a cultural narrative of gendered oppression. Showalter (1997) described it as a “cultural epidemic” reflecting women’s collective suffering, while Ussher (2011) viewed it as symbolic protest against patriarchal medicalization of the female body. In this reading, hysteria becomes a language of resistance, transforming silence into embodied expression.

Integrative Synthesis

Although differing in focus, these perspectives complement one another: psychoanalysis exposes the unconscious dimension; the biopsychosocial model highlights contextual interdependence; and feminism situates the symptom within structures of power. Together, they frame hysteria as both a psychological and communicative phenomenon a body’s discourse shaped by emotion, culture, and gender.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conceived as a theoretical and historical-critical analysis of hysteria, aiming to reconceptualize it as a form of symbolic communication rather than merely a clinical diagnosis of the past. To achieve this goal, a qualitative approach was adopted, based on thematic analysis and a critical review of the literature. This methodology was chosen because the phenomenon of hysteria cannot be understood solely through empirical data; rather, it requires a deep theoretical explanation and a multi-layered interpretation combining psychoanalysis, the biopsychosocial model, and the feminist perspective.

Type of Study

The study is a theoretical and conceptual review, combining historical and sociocultural analyses. Since hysteria has been removed as a diagnostic category from modern manuals (APA, 2013), the chosen methodology is neither experimental nor quantitative but seeks to reconstruct its meaning through scientific literature and discourse analysis from medical, psychological, and cultural sources. This type of research corresponds to what the methodological literature defines as *theoretical research* or *critical literature review* (Grant & Booth, 2009).

DATA SOURCES

The study relies primarily on secondary sources, including:

- Classical texts such as *Studies on Hysteria* by Freud & Breuer (1895/2000), and the writings of Charcot and Janet on dissociation.
- Contemporary diagnostic manuals such as the *DSM-5* (APA, 2013).
- Modern Health Psychology literature, including authors such as Taylor (2020).
- Feminist analyses of hysteria and gender, represented by Showalter (1997) and Ussher (2011).
- Historical and academic studies on the evolution of the concept of hysteria in the nineteenth century (Goetz, Bonduelle & Gelfand, 1995).

The main criterion for selecting the literature was theoretical and historical relevance: authors were chosen who represent foundational approaches (psychoanalytic, biopsychosocial, and feminist) and who have made significant contributions to the development or critique of the concept of hysteria.

Analytical Procedures

The study employs thematic analysis, applied to the existing literature. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a process for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns (themes) within data. In this case, the main themes identified were:

- Hysteria as a neurological and psychoanalytic diagnosis (Charcot, Freud, Janet).
- Hysteria as an expression of the biopsychosocial interaction (Engel, Taylor).
- Hysteria as a gendered construct and symbolic protest (Showalter, Ussher).

These themes were examined through a process of critical comparison, in which each theoretical approach was analyzed as part of a broader network of interpretations, with the goal of building a theoretical synthesis that explains the communicative function of hysteria.

Epistemological Framework

This study adopts an interpretivist/constructivist epistemological stance, viewing hysteria as a historical and social construct rather than an immutable medical entity. According to Hesse-Biber (2014), interpretivist research seeks to understand the meanings that actors (in this case, hysterical women, physicians, and society) attribute to their experiences. This framework enables an exploration of how symptoms function as a “language” and how they interact with the cultural and social contexts of their time.

Methodological Limitations

An important limitation is that the study relies on secondary literature and does not include empirical analyses with contemporary patients. Furthermore, the historical interpretation of hysteria is influenced by the nature of the remaining sources, which are often filtered through the patriarchal lens of nineteenth-century medicine. Another limitation is the absence of direct data on women’s subjective experiences, as these were rarely documented in full. Nevertheless, by combining historical, theoretical, and feminist sources, the study aims to provide a rich and balanced overview.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Hysteria as the Language of the Body

The analysis of the literature reveals that nineteenth-century hysteria should not be reduced merely to a clinical diagnosis but can be understood as an alternative bodily language. Symptoms such as temporary paralysis, nervous attacks, and loss of voice functioned as “encoded messages” through which women articulated pain and protest in a society that denied them a public voice. In this sense, the body became the medium of communication, transforming the symptom into a silent narrative (Freud & Breuer, 2000; Showalter, 1997). The communicative function of the symptom reflects the fact that social silence and gender restrictions could not extinguish the need for expression but merely displaced it into another, bodily form.

The Psychoanalytic Dimension: The Unconscious as the Source of the Symptom

From the psychoanalytic perspective, hysterical symptoms appear as expressions of unconscious traumas and repressed emotions. The case of Anna O., described by Breuer, is illustrative: her bodily symptoms were interpreted as “translations” of emotional conflicts that could not otherwise be articulated (Freud & Breuer, 2000). This interpretation supports the idea that hysteria was an unconscious form of communication in which the body served as a channel for expressing an unacknowledged psychic reality.

In this sense, psychoanalysis explains hysteria as a *language of the unconscious* a symbolic manifestation that demands clinical interpretation to be deciphered.

The Biopsychosocial Dimension: The Interaction of Factors

From a biopsychosocial perspective, hysteria cannot be understood solely as an internal psychological conflict but as a phenomenon occurring through the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors (Engel, 1977). Bodily symptoms, often unexplainable by the medicine of the time, may be linked to physiological reactions to stress and trauma, to individual coping mechanisms, and to the social norms that constrained women's voices. In this regard, the findings suggest that hysteria represented a form of *somatization*, where experiences of stress and social exclusion were manifested physically (Taylor, 2020). Thus, hysteria can be considered an early example of what is now known as a *psychosomatic disorder*.

The Feminist Dimension: Symptoms as Symbolic Protest

From the feminist standpoint, hysteria acquires another meaning: it is interpreted as a symbolic act of resistance. Feminist scholars argue that hysteria was not merely an individual illness but a collective form of protest by women against patriarchal structures and the restrictive roles imposed upon them (Showalter, 1997; Ussher, 2011). Hysterical symptoms, in this interpretation, functioned as a way of making visible what could not be expressed in words. Thus, hysteria can be seen as a *silent discourse* through which women's bodies communicated exclusion, frustration, and collective pain.

Synthesis of Findings

By integrating these perspectives, the findings suggest that hysteria should be understood as a multidimensional communicative phenomenon:

- From psychoanalysis, it represents the *language of the unconscious*.
- From the biopsychosocial perspective, it expresses the *interaction between psychological, biological, and social factors*.
- From feminism, it embodies a *form of symbolic protest* and a *language of resistance*.

These dimensions do not contradict but rather complement one another, creating an integrated framework for understanding hysteria not merely as a pathology of the past but as a complex communicative act that continues to hold interpretive value for contemporary Health Psychology.

DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis suggest that nineteenth-century hysteria cannot be understood merely as an obsolete diagnostic category but rather as a complex phenomenon in which individual experiences, social norms, and cultural processes intertwine. This

interpretation places hysterical symptoms within a broader framework as forms of silent communication that not only belong to the clinical dimension but also reveal power relations, as well as gendered and social dynamics.

Hysteria as a Multidimensional Phenomenon

The discussion of theoretical approaches indicates that hysteria represents a phenomenon with multiple layers of interpretation. On one hand, psychoanalysis teaches that symptoms are not random; they carry unconscious meanings and are connected to repressed emotional experiences. On the other hand, the biopsychosocial approach demonstrates that the experience of hysteria results from the interaction between individual and social factors a perspective that aligns it with modern concepts of somatization. Meanwhile, feminist analysis highlights the political dimension of the symptom, viewing it as a symbolic protest by women in a patriarchal society. This theoretical intersection renders hysteria a paradigmatic case for understanding the relationship between mind, body, and society.

Connection to Health Psychology

In the context of Health Psychology, hysteria holds particular value as an early example of what is now defined as a *psychosomatic disorder*. Engel’s (1977) biopsychosocial model supports this interpretation, demonstrating that symptoms cannot be understood without considering the interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors. From this perspective, hysteria serves as a historical example showing that health and illness are not purely biological phenomena but are also constructed through cultural discourses and social relations. This makes hysteria a meaningful topic for Health Psychology, which seeks to understand not only the individual causes of symptoms but also their broader contextual significance.

The Importance of the Gender Perspective

The discussion of feminist literature particularly the works of Showalter (1997) and Ussher (2011) emphasizes the importance of treating hysteria as a phenomenon that reflects the gender relations of its time. This dimension remains relevant today, as contemporary studies reveal that women are still more frequently diagnosed with disorders associated with somatization and chronic pain (Barsky, Orav & Bates, 2005). This suggests that the pathologization of women’s bodily experiences is not merely a historical phenomenon but one that continues to resonate in modern clinical practice. In this sense, hysteria serves as a case study for reflecting on how society and medicine interpret gendered experiences of pain and suffering.

Contemporary Implications

The findings of this study extend beyond their historical significance. They have implications for how we understand phenomena such as somatization, stress-related disorders, and medically unexplained symptoms today. If nineteenth-century hysteria

is viewed as an alternative form of expression for women, then modern psychosomatic symptoms can also be interpreted as communicative forms that reflect underlying social and psychological tensions. For this reason, Health Psychology must develop tools that are sensitive to the gendered and cultural dimensions of symptoms, avoiding their reduction to purely medical phenomena.

Limitations of Interpretation

Although this discussion highlights key aspects of hysteria as a communicative phenomenon, it must be acknowledged that the interpretations rely on historical sources shaped primarily by male physicians of the time. Women's subjective experiences were rarely documented directly, often filtered through clinical descriptions. This limits the ability to construct a complete picture of their lived experiences. Nevertheless, by integrating psychoanalytic, biopsychosocial, and feminist approaches, it is possible to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Implications for Health Psychology

The study of hysteria as a historical and communicative phenomenon holds substantial value for Health Psychology. It reminds us that symptoms should not be seen merely as biological signs but as part of a dialogue between mind, body, and society. Today, many patients present with functional disorders without an organic basis (e.g., somatic symptom disorders, chronic pain, dissociative symptoms). Understanding the history of hysteria helps professionals avoid past mistakes such as disbelief, stigmatization, and minimization of symptoms by acknowledging them as real experiences requiring validation and multidisciplinary treatment (Taylor, 2020).

Lessons for Clinical Practice

-From a clinical perspective, one of the key lessons is that communication with patients must be grounded in empathy and active listening. Whereas Victorian physicians often dismissed women labeled as "hysterical," today's professionals must foster therapeutic relationships that empower patients and encourage them to articulate emotions and concerns. This is a crucial element in Health Psychology interventions, where the focus is not only on treating the symptom but also on identifying stress sources and psychosocial factors that sustain it (Engel, 1977).

Furthermore, modern medicine requires a multidisciplinary approach. Patients with psychosomatic symptoms benefit from an integrated treatment model involving the family doctor, psychologist, neurologist, physiotherapist, and sometimes the social worker. Such collaboration prevents fragmented care and helps address symptoms as part of a broader biopsychosocial framework.

Gender and Social Sensitivity

Another significant implication concerns the gender perspective. The history of hysteria shows that women’s experiences have often been misinterpreted or pathologized. Even today, recent studies indicate that women frequently report feeling undervalued or ignored when discussing their pain (Samulowitz et al., 2018). For this reason, Health Psychology and clinical practice must develop tools sensitive to the gendered and cultural dimensions of symptoms. Such an approach would help reduce implicit discrimination and promote more equitable and inclusive healthcare.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several recommendations emerge from this study:

- Comparative historical and modern analysis: Conduct studies comparing historical cases of hysteria with present-day somatic and dissociative disorders to trace the evolution of understanding and treatment.
- Research on the gender dimension: Undertake deeper investigations into how gender, culture, and social status influence the experience and interpretation of symptoms.
- Interdisciplinary approaches: Future research should involve collaboration among psychology, medicine, sociology, and gender studies to develop a comprehensive understanding of somatization and psychosomatic manifestations.
- Use of qualitative methods: In addition to quantitative studies, more qualitative research is needed to give voice to patients’ subjective experiences and avoid filtering them solely through the clinical perspective.

Recommendations for Healthcare Practice

- Strengthen the role of health psychologists within the healthcare system by integrating them into clinical teams that treat patients with medically unexplained symptoms.
- Train healthcare personnel on gender and cultural biases to prevent the stigmatization of women and other marginalized groups.
- Develop psychoeducational programs for patients to help them understand the mind-body relationship and use effective strategies for managing stress and emotions.
- Promote open communication in clinical settings so that patients feel heard and respected thereby reducing the need to “communicate” through symptoms.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of hysteria in the nineteenth century, viewed not merely as a medical diagnosis but as a form of symbolic communication, offers a rich insight into the interconnection of psychological, social, and cultural factors in defining health and illness. The historical analysis reveals that hysteria was not simply a clinical construct of its time but a language of the body through which women articulated pain, constraint, and protest within a patriarchal society where their voices were often absent.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, hysterical symptoms were interpreted as expressions of unconscious conflicts and repressed traumas (Freud & Breuer, 1895). From the biopsychosocial viewpoint, hysteria emerges as the result of an interaction among biological, psychological, and social factors (Engel, 1977; Taylor, 2020). Meanwhile, the feminist approach interprets it as a form of silent protest and a reflection of the gender relations of its era (Showalter, 1997; Ussher, 2011). This theoretical pluralism renders hysteria a multidimensional phenomenon that demands interpretation on several levels.

One of the most significant findings is that, although the term “hysteria” has disappeared from modern diagnostic manuals (APA, 2013), its dimensions persist in clinical practice through disorders of conversion, somatization, and dissociation. This continuity indicates that the experience of suffering without organic explanation has not vanished but has merely changed the language through which it is named and understood. Therefore, understanding the history of hysteria carries direct implications for Health Psychology today: it reminds us of the importance of validating symptoms, the need for interdisciplinary approaches, and the essential role of gender sensitivity in clinical practice.

This study contributes to the literature by offering a reconceptualization of hysteria as a complex communicative act rather than a mere pathology. It promotes a renewed understanding of the symptom as a message of the body, opening new perspectives for interpreting modern psychosomatic manifestations. Furthermore, it suggests that Health Psychology must continue to develop theoretical and practical tools capable of capturing the invisible dimensions of the symptom the silent histories, gendered experiences, and social tensions that often remain absent from traditional medical discourse.

In conclusion, the legacy of hysteria teaches that health cannot be understood outside the interaction between mind, body, and society. Beyond being a diagnosis of the past, hysteria remains a critical reminder for contemporary medicine and psychology: to ignore no symptom, to listen to every voice even when articulated through the body and to provide care that is integrated, empathic, and gender-responsive. Only in this way can Health Psychology fulfill its essential purpose: to understand and promote well-being in all its dimensions.

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MENTAL HEALTH-AN ESSENTIAL PART OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Mental health represents an essential dimension of overall well-being and a fundamental pillar of sustainable development. This paper aims to provide an overview of the role of mental health within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with reference to SDG3 on good health and well-being. Based on a qualitative research approach, it reviews relevant scientific literature and policy documents to explore the interconnections between mental health, well-being, and sustainable development. The findings highlight that mental health is an integral component of health and well-being and is a basic human right. Mental health is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development, contributes to the functions of society, and influences overall productivity. There is an important connection between mental health and physical health. Mental disorders have a substantial impact on a nation's wealth, productivity and well-being. The relationship between well-being and mental health problems is interrelated. Mental health was incorporated in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015. Nowadays it is accepted that global mental health achieved a major victory by being included in the SDGs. And it is also accepted that progress in development will not be made without improvements in mental health. The study concluded that are needed integrated efforts at various levels, comprising social, environmental and economic aspects, to achieve the goals of sustainable development.

Keywords: *mental health, sustainable development, well-being, SDGs, global health.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, mental disorders and psychosocial disabilities have been increasingly recognised as global development issues (Eaton et al., 2014; cit. Votruba et al., 2014).

Improving people's mental health and well-being has been identified as one of the key public health issues of our time, and the global coronavirus pandemic has created even greater need for mental health support (Pieh et al., 2021; Rajkumar, 2020; Vindegaard & Benros, 2020 – cit. Moore et al., 2022: 369).

More than 1 billion people are living with mental health disorders, according to new data released by the World Health Organization (WHO), with conditions such as anxiety and depression inflicting immense human and economic tolls. While many countries have bolstered their mental health policies and programmes, greater investment and action are needed globally to scale up services to protect and promote people's mental health (World Health Organisation, 2025).

Mental health and well-being are increasingly recognized as essential components of overall health in the modern era (Magomedova & Fatima., 2025).

Mental health is a major aspect of a population's overall quality of life, and mental disorders have a substantial impact on a nation's wealth, productivity and well-being. Mental disorders constitute one of the most significant public health challenges in the WHO European Region, being the leading cause of disability and the third leading cause of overall disease burden (as measured by disability-adjusted life-years), following cardiovascular disease and cancers (WHO, 2015 – cit. Ministry for Health of Malta, 2019: 11).

As cited by Walker et al. (2021: 7-8) “Data from a recent report by the Happiness Research Institute showed the correlation between 16 different health conditions and life satisfaction in a panel of Europeans over 45 years old (Happiness Research Institute, 2020). Depression and anxiety were, on average, associated with the largest per-person reductions in self-reported life satisfaction— greater than stroke, arthritis or lung disease. Life satisfaction data from other high-income countries (HICs) such as the US and Australia, show mental health disorders to be associated with similarly large reductions in life satisfaction.

Supporting mental health and wellbeing is essential for fostering societies in which all people can meaningfully participate in social and economic activities, in turn promoting social cohesion, sustainable growth and economic prosperity (APEC Digital Hub for Mental Health, 2021: 4).

There is no disagreement that improving human well-being is a worthy objective (Rogers et al, 2012, p.12).

In September 2015, mental health was included in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this historic step, the United Nations (UN) acknowledged the burden of disease of mental illness, and defined mental health as a priority for global development for the next 15 years (Votruba & Thornicroft, 2016).

According to Weinberger K., et al. (2015: 7) “The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development underlines a global commitment to “achieving sustainable development

in its three dimensions—economic, social and environmental—in a balanced and integrated manner”.

As Maria Neira (2012, p.2) (Director, Public Health and Environment, World Health Organization) asserts “Health is an important input to sustainable development. Without health, there is no sustainable development; healthy people are better able to learn, work and contribute positively to their economies and societies. Sustainable development will produce more health. Smarter development in sectors like transportation, housing, energy, and agriculture, can generate more health co-benefits and fewer risks, particularly for Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs).

METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on a qualitative research paradigm. The main aim of the paper is to provide an overview of mental health and its place in sustainable development, as an essential part of it.

The objectives of the paper are:

- To provide an overview of mental health and well-being.
- To explore the interconnections between mental health, well-being, and sustainable development.

The research question is: “What is the role of mental health within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?”

There are reviewed relevant materials such as: articles, theses, policy documents, etc., available on the internet, including scientific databases, such as: Scopus, PubMed, etc. For the selections of the materials available there are used keywords about mental health, well-being and sustainable development. The inclusion criteria were related to the written language, the relevance to the topic of the paper and the quality of the materials. Regarding the written language, care was taken to ensure that the selected materials were in English language. Regarding the relevance to the topic of the paper, care was taken to ensure that the selection of materials was done according to the defined keywords, depending on the purpose of the paper. Regarding the quality of the materials, care was taken to consider materials from scientific sources, reviewed and published.

THEORETICAL TREATMENT

Understanding mental health

Mental health affects us all (Ryan et al., 2019: 6). According to the World Health Organization, “Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape

the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development. Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders. It exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to the next, with varying degrees of difficulty and distress and potentially very different social and clinical outcomes” (WHO, 2025).

In Albania, mental health is defined as “the ability to think and learn, as well as an individual’s ability to understand and live with their own emotions and the reactions of others” (Law No. 44/2012).

Mental health and illness exist along a continuum moving away from well-being to mild, time-limited distress through to more chronic, progressive, and severely disabling mental disorders. Conditions related to substance misuse often coexist with mental disorders. Mental disorders are also more common in persons with chronic physical conditions (Ministry for Health of Malta, 2019: 17).

Mental illness is a leading cause of the global burden of disease. Mental illness causes more years lived with disability (32.4%) than any other health condition and nearly as many disability-adjusted life-years (13.0%) as cardiovascular disease (13.5%). People living with mental illness are also more likely to develop physical health problems and have poorer physical health outcomes, including higher rates of premature mortality (Ryan G., et al., 2018).

Mental health problems may arise when a person is faced with a much larger stressor than usual. These occur as part of normal life and are not mental illnesses. For example: death of a loved one, moving to a new country, having a serious physical illness, etc. When faced with these large stressors, everyone experiences strong negative emotions (such as sadness, grief, anger, demoralization, etc.). These emotions are also accompanied by substantial difficulties in other domains such as: cognitive/thinking (for example: “nothing will ever be the same”, “I don’t know if I can go on in my life”, etc.) physical, for example: sleep problems, loss of energy, numerous aches and pains), and behavioural (for example: social withdrawal, avoidance of usual activities, angry outbursts, etc. (Kutcher & Wei, 2017: 74).

At the simplest level, mental illnesses can be defined as severe disturbances of behaviour, mood, thought processes and/or social and interpersonal relationships. In psychiatric diagnosis these experiences are grouped under a range of common headings that enable the use of similar responses and treatments to be offered to people with the same diagnoses. The most common groupings are anxiety, affective disorders, psychotic disorders, including schizophrenia, and personality disorders (Ryan & Pritchard, 2004: 20-21).

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2025) “Mental illnesses are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behavior (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses can be associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities.

According to DSM-5 TM (2013: 20) & DSM-5-TR (2022: 14),

“a mental disorder is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual’s cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the

psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress or disability in social, occupational, or other important activities. An expectable or culturally approved response to a common stressor or loss, such as the death of a loved one, is not a mental disorder. Socially deviant behavior (e.g., political, religious, or sexual) and conflicts that are primarily between the individual and society are not mental disorders unless the deviance or conflict results from a dysfunction in the individual, as described above”.

At any one time, a diverse set of individual, family, community, and structural factors may combine to protect or undermine mental health. Although most people are resilient, people who are exposed to adverse circumstances – including poverty, violence, disability, and inequality – are at higher risk. Protective and risk factors include individual psychological and biological factors, such as emotional skills as well as genetics. Many of the risk and protective factors are influenced through changes in brain structure and/or function (WHO, 2025).

Mental health promotion

Mental health is fundamental to good health and quality of life. Positive mental health is a resource for everyday life which allows us to manage our lives successfully and contributes to the functioning of individuals, families, communities and society. Mental health promotion targets the whole population and focuses on enabling and achieving positive mental health (Sheridan & Elhinney, 2016: 4).

Mental health contributes to all aspects of human life. It has both material and immaterial, or intrinsic, values: for the individual, society, and culture. Mental health has a reciprocal relationship with the well-being and productivity of a society and its members. Its value can be considered in several related ways:

- Mental health is essential for the well-being and functioning of individuals.
- Good mental health is an important resource for individuals, families, communities, and nations.
- Mental health, as an indivisible part of general health, contributes to the functions of society, and has an effect on overall productivity.
- Mental health concerns everyone as it is generated in our everyday lives in homes, schools, workplaces, and in leisure activities.
- Positive mental health contributes to the social, human, and economic capital of every society. -Spirituality can make a significant contribution to mental health promotion and mental health influences spiritual life (WHO, 2004).

The concept of positive mental health includes well-being, salutogenic factors (like optimism), resilience (the capacity to cope with adversity) and quality of life, defined by World Health Organization (WHO) as “an individual’s perception of his/her position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which he/she lives and in relation to the goals, expectations, standards and concerns” (Kalra et al., 2012: 81).

The goal of mental health promotion for people with mental illness is to ensure

that individuals are enabled to gain control over their lives and their mental health and that the environment in which they live supports their recovery. Like all health promotion, mental health promotion actions are intended to enhance positive mental health and well-being throughout the lifespan and in a range of settings, including the home, school, workplace and community. Mental health promoting strategies are oriented to empowerment and participation. They strengthen protective factors, lessen risk factors, build on the social determinants of health and often involve partnerships across sectors (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2025).

There is no health without mental health. WHO advocates for a whole-of-government and whole-of-society response anchored on a shared vision for the future of mental health in the Region. Mental health promotion involves actions to strengthen the policy environment and the use of strategic communication for network building, stakeholder engagement, enhanced mental health literacy, and behavior change. Mental health promotion interventions improve overall wellbeing and are delivered in the settings where people live, work, learn, and thrive (WHO, 2025).

The results show that people with MH (mental health) issues still struggle greatly to be included – from ongoing stigma and discrimination to systematic inequalities in education, employment and health services. MH systems have to include inclusion into their structures, promote cross-sector cooperation, and fight for more society transformation if they are to be really effective (Dote-Pardo, 2025).

Understanding wellbeing

Wellbeing is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘the state of being comfortable, happy, or healthy’ (cit. Marshall, 2024: 8).

Psychological well-being refers to inter- and intraindividual levels of positive functioning that can include one’s relatedness with others and self-referent attitudes that include one’s sense of mastery and personal growth. Subjective well-being reflects dimensions of affect judgments of life satisfaction (Burns, 2016: 1).

Mental wellness can be “defined as an asset or resource that enables positive states of wellbeing and provides the capability for people to achieve their full potential” (Patel et al., 2018: 1562; cit. Bodeker et al., 2020: 6).

Longitudinal evidence indicates that higher levels of mental wellbeing reduce the risk of incident mental health issues and mental disorders (e.g., Keyes et al., 2010; Wood & Joseph, 2010; Grant et al., 2013; Lamers et al., 2015; Schotanus-Dijkstra et al., 2017 – cit. Bohlmeijer & Westerhof, 2021).

There are many models of well-being. We will list some of them.

-*Self-determination theory* (Richard Ryan, PhD, and Edward Deci). According to self-determination theory, human motivation relies on three basic psychological needs:

- Autonomy: the feeling you’re choosing your behavior versus feeling controlled or compelled by others
- Competence: the feeling that you can be effective in the activity
- Relatedness: a feeling of connectedness and belonging with others

When those needs are met, the research showed, people tend to be more self-motivated, feel more satisfied, and experience greater well-being. By contrast, when people are motivated to act because of external pressures—or internal pressure to live up to external expectations—they have more trouble staying engaged and feel less fulfilled (Weir K., 2025).

-*PERMA Model* (Seligman, 2011). Well-being is predicted by five elements: (a) Positive Emotion, (b) Engagement, (c) Relationships, (d) Meaning, and (e) Accomplishment. These five elements are represented by the acronym PERMA. Each element contributes to well-being, can be pursued for its own sake, and is independently defined and measured. The combination of PERMA elements promotes flourishing, which is optimal functioning of individuals, groups, communities, nations, and society at large (Seligman, 2011). Well-being may be increased by increasing PERMA elements. Positive Emotion includes subjective reports of happiness, hope, joy, and satisfaction. Engagement is an element that represents flow; Engagement refers to focus, interest, or absorption in an activity. Relationships include closeness and connection with family, friends, or colleagues. These relationships are important throughout a person's lifespan and contribute to well-being in many ways. Meaning is belief or membership in something larger than oneself and may be derived from religion, spirituality, or advocacy. The final element, Accomplishment, refers to pursuits that occur throughout life for the sake of 'winning.' Accomplishment often requires perseverance and resilience, and may include academics, athletics, or career achievements (Seligman, 2011; cit. Kovich, et al., 2023).

-*The model of well-being* (Carol & Burton Singer, 1996). According to the model of Carol D. Ryff & Burton Singer (1996) the dimensions of well-being are six: Self-Acceptance; Positive Relations with Others; Autonomy; Environmental Mastery; Purpose in Life and Personal Growth.

Regarding the first dimension, *Self-Acceptance*, they consider it as a central feature of mental health as well as characteristic of self-actualization, optimal functioning, and maturity, concluding that, holding positive attitudes toward oneself emerges as a central characteristic of positive psychological functioning.

Regarding the second dimension, *Positive Relations with Others*, they emphasize that the ability to love is viewed as a central component of mental health and warm relating to others is posed as a criterion of maturity.

Regarding the third dimension, *Autonomy*, they emphasize that the fully functioning person is described as having an internal locus of evaluation, whereby one does not look to others for approval, but evaluates oneself by personal standards.

Regarding the fourth dimension, *Environmental mastery*, among other things, they point out the individual's ability to choose or create environments suitable to his or her psychic conditions, the participation in a significant sphere of activity outside of oneself and the ability to manipulate and control complex environments.

Regarding the fifth dimension, *Purpose in Life*, they claim that one who functions positively has goals, intentions, and a sense of direction, all of which contribute to the feeling that life is meaningful.

Regarding the sixth dimension, *Personal Growth*, they focus on the need to actualize oneself and realize one's potential, on the openness to experience, which they consider as a key characteristic of the fully functioning person, asserting that such an individual is continually developing, rather than achieving a fixed state wherein all problems are solved.

The relationship between well-being and mental health problems is interrelated. When well-being is high, the likelihood of experiencing mental illness decreases, whereas poor mental health diminishes overall well-being. Studies indicate that individuals with mental health problems constitute the largest proportion of those with low levels of well-being. Consequently, prioritizing the promotion of well-being is crucial both for preventing mental illness and facilitating recovery from mental health issues (Gautam et al., 2024).

Mental health and Sustainable Development

Mental health problems are widespread across every society and age group and remain the second leading cause of long-term disability. They drive up healthcare costs for families and governments while costing the global economy an estimated \$1 trillion each year in lost productivity, UN health experts said (United Nations, 2025).

In political contexts, sustainable development is considered as a task that should be integrated into all areas. The goal is a common endeavor to create a sustainable society in which good health for all is stimulated (Swedish Government publication, 2005; cited by the Swedish Association of Occupational Therapists, 2018; 4).

The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development represents a unique opportunity for improving mental health and achieving human rights worldwide. With its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) it seeks to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The SDGs address key global challenges we face, such as poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, corruption, prosperity, peace, justice, and health, including mental health (Mental Health Europe, 2019: 2).

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice (Hammond & Owens, 2020: 16).

The mental health-related SDGs

Mental health was incorporated in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015. In this remarkable phase, the United Nations (UN) recognized the burden of disease of mental illness, and defined mental health as a priority for global development for the next 15 years (Ahmed, 2019: 174).

Adopted by 193 countries, the SDGs came into effect in January 2016, and aim to foster economic growth, ensure social inclusion and protect the environment (Mensah, 2019).

Health figured prominently in the MDGs. Three of the eight goals focused directly on health-related issues—reducing child mortality (MDG 4), improving maternal health (MDG 5) and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (MDG 6)—while three others were indirectly related to health—eradicating extreme poverty and hunger

(MDG 1), ensuring environmental sustainability (MDG 7), and developing a global partnership for development - MDG 8 (Nunes et al., 2016).

There have been repeated and increasingly frequent calls to include mental health in the sustainable development goals (SDGs). This is for the simple reason that progress in development will not be made without improvements in mental health (De Silva et al., 2014; cit. De Silva, 2015).

The inclusion of mental health in the Sustainable Development Goals means the world needs to recognise mental health as a holistic issue relevant to every sector of development—and respond accordingly (Mental health Innovation Network, 2018).

United Nations consider the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development as a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity and confirm that all countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan.

The SDGs consist of 17 goals with 169 targets. Specific reference is made to mental health and substance abuse under goal 3 (Dybdahl & Lien, 2017).

Mental health is central to SDG3, which is focused on good health and wellbeing, but it is also connected to other SDGs, owing to the relationship between mental health and poverty (SDG 1) and the reduction of inequalities (SDG 10), in addition to other SDGs. Therefore, addressing UN Sustainable Development Goals is hardly achievable without giving sufficient attention to mental health (WHO, 2002; UN General Assembly, 2015).

Mental health is a cross-cutting issue, having interdependencies with many of the UN development goals (Votruba et al., 2015).

It is a breakthrough in global development to acknowledge that addressing mental health can improve a broad range of health and development outcomes, including better growth outcomes for infants of mothers with depression, improved rates of HIV/AIDS prevention and reduced effects of alcoholism on families and communities. This milestone reflects remarkable progress in terms of overcoming structural, political and social barriers (Scorza et al. 2018).

The SDGs provide, for the first time, an operational framework that tacitly calls for considering urbanization globally, while providing local mechanisms for action and careful attention to closing gaps in the distribution of health gains (Ramirez-Rubio, & Fanjul et al., 2019).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a clear framework of the connection between the different Goals for achieving the right to health while leaving no one behind (United Nations, 2024, p.4).

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) aims to ensure ‘healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages’.

SDG 3 is closely linked to and interdependent with other SDGs. For instance, reducing poverty (SDG 1) is highly relevant to improving SDG 3 outcomes, as poverty is a major determinant of health. Equally, preventing hunger and malnutrition (SDG 2) is essential to prevent malnutrition-related diseases and promote overall health and development. Similarly, quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), clean water

and sanitation (SDG 6), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), climate action (SDG 13), peaceful societies with strong institutions (SDG 16) and international partnerships (SDG 17) are important in enabling sustainable progress towards SDG 3. Achieving SDG 3 targets thus requires a comprehensive, integrated approach, and often necessitates social, economic, educational and environmental measures to be taken on top of addressing health in a narrow sense (European Parliament, 2024: 2).

SDG 3.4 requires states to adopt the following aim: ‘By 2030, (to) reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable disease (NCDs) through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being’. SDG 3.5 requires states to ‘strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol’. Thus, SDG 3.5 and the first part of SDG 3.4 demand policy attention for the prevention and treatment of mental, neurological and substance use disorders, while the second half of SDG 3.4 requires policy attention to be given to mental health promotion.

Other SDGs (especially 1,5, 8 and 10, relating to poverty reduction, gender, economic development and reducing inequalities, respectively) also require attention be paid to mental health, as mental disorders are highly associated with poverty, financial hardship and debt, and low productivity. They are generally more common in women, among ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups (Foresight 2008; Beddington et al, 2008; cited Jenkins, 2019).

SDG 3 is much more than the promotion, development and protection of health. This goal on health and well-being is very much intertwined with all other goals, meaning the achievement of SDG 3 will have a huge influence on the fulfilling of other targets and vice-versa. The protection of health was already at the heart of the development agenda under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with several goals concerned with health, including MDG 4: reduce child mortality; MDG 5: improve maternal health; and MDG 6: combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (Advocates for International Development, 2019: 3).

SD cannot be achieved through isolated initiatives, but rather integrated efforts at various levels, comprising social, environmental and economic aspects (Mensah, 2019).

Given the great impact and the wide implications that mental health has on people and their wellbeing and functioning, investment in mental health is of great importance (Robila, 2016: 9).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Mental health is a major aspect of a population’s overall quality of life, and mental disorders have a substantial impact on a nation’s wealth, productivity and well-being.

Supporting mental health and wellbeing is essential for fostering societies in which all people can meaningfully participate in social and economic activities, in turn promoting social cohesion, sustainable growth and economic prosperity

Mental health is an integral component of health and well-being, is a basic human right. Mental health is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development, contributes to the functions of society, and has an effect on overall productivity.

Mental health and illness exist along a continuum moving away from well-being to mild, time-limited distress through to more chronic, progressive, and severely disabling mental disorders.

There is an important connection between mental health and physical health. Mental illness causes more years lived with disability than any other health condition and nearly as many disability-adjusted life-years as cardiovascular disease. People living with mental illness are also more likely to develop physical health problems and have poorer physical health outcomes, including higher rates of premature mortality.

Positive mental health is a resource for everyday life which allows us to manage our lives successfully and contributes to the functioning of individuals, families, communities and society. So, it is very important mental health promotion. Mental health promotion actions are intended to enhance positive mental health and well-being throughout the lifespan and in a range of settings, including the home, school, workplace and community.

Mental health promotion involves actions to strengthen the policy environment and the use of strategic communication for network building, stakeholder engagement, enhanced mental health literacy, and behavior change.

The results show that people with mental health issues still struggle greatly to be included – from ongoing stigma and discrimination to systematic inequalities in education, employment and health services.

There are many models of well-being.

According to self-determination theory (Richard Ryan, and Edward Deci), human motivation relies on three basic psychological needs: Autonomy; Competence; Relatedness.

According to PERMA Model (Seligman, 2011), well-being is predicted by five elements: (a) Positive Emotion, (b) Engagement, (c) Relationships, (d) Meaning, and (e) Accomplishment.

According to the model of well-being (Carol & Burton Singer, 1996), the dimensions of well-being are six: Self-Acceptance; Positive Relations with Others; Autonomy; Environmental Mastery; Purpose in Life and Personal Growth.

The relationship between well-being and mental health problems is interrelated. When well-being is high, the likelihood of experiencing mental illness decreases, whereas poor mental health diminishes overall well-being.

Mental health was incorporated in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015. Nowadays it is accepted that global mental health achieved a major victory by being included in the SDGs. And it is accepted that progress in development will not be made without improvements in mental health.

United Nations consider the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development as a

plan of action for people, planet and prosperity and confirm that all countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan.

Mental health is central to SDG3, which is focused on good health and wellbeing, but it is also connected to other SDGs, owing to the relationship between mental health and poverty (SDG 1) and the reduction of inequalities (SDG 10), in addition to other SDGs. Therefore, addressing UN Sustainable Development Goals is hardly achievable without giving sufficient attention to mental health.

Three of the eight goals focused directly on health-related issues—reducing child mortality (MDG 4), improving maternal health (MDG 5) and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (MDG 6)—while three others were indirectly related to health—eradicating extreme poverty and hunger (MDG 1), ensuring environmental sustainability (MDG 7), and developing a global partnership for development (MDG 8).

Mental health is a cross-cutting issue, having interdependencies with many of the UN development goals.

It is of great importance investment in mental health.

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FROM INDUSTRIALIZATION TO PROLETARIANIZATION: THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF THE WORKING CLASS IN SOCIALIST ALBANIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the formation of the working class in socialist Albania (1945–1990), placing it within the broader debates on development in turbulent times. Industrialization was the central pillar of Albania’s socialist modernization project, conceived not only as an economic strategy but also as a means of restructuring society. The creation of a working class was framed as both a developmental objective and an ideological imperative, linked to the regime’s vision of building a “new society.” The study explores how policies of industrial expansion, labor mobilization, and rural-to-urban migration contributed to the emergence of new industrial centers and reshaped existing social dynamics. It also considers the ways in which state discourse portrayed the working class as the leading force of progress, while available evidence reveals a more complex reality marked by uneven development, recurrent shortages, and adjustments to shifting political and economic conditions. Drawing on party documents, statistical data, and recent scholarship, the paper situates Albania’s experience within the wider Eastern European context, where socialist states sought to achieve rapid industrial transformation under conditions of limited resources and political uncertainty. By analyzing the interaction between ideological frameworks and socioeconomic practices, the paper contributes to a better understanding of how development was conceptualized and pursued in a turbulent environment. The case of Albania illustrates the opportunities and constraints of industrialization-driven social change in a small socialist state during the Cold War.

Keywords: *Industrialisation, working class, socialist Albania, rural-to-urban migration, state-controlled migration, ideology*

THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION

The formation of the working class in the countries of Eastern Europe and in certain regions of Central and East Asia exhibits notable similarities. These relate, first, to the relatively late emergence of the working class in comparison with that of the more developed countries, and second, to its formation under the conditions of state socialism, as a social phenomenon intrinsically connected to the process of socialist industrialization¹.

While Marx and the European Marxists had elaborated a philosophical system grounded in scientific principles that analyzed and critiqued the contradictions of capitalism, they had expressed only in general terms how the “new society” would look—its concrete construction being left to “the experience of the working class” (Eley, 2022: 40-41). This question, however, came to the forefront following the triumph of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in October 1917. After the horrors of the First World War, the Soviet Union appeared to embody the realization of the ideal of this new society. It was precisely the model created in the Soviet Union, beginning in the late 1920s, that became the paradigm for other socialist countries that emerged after the Second World War, whether as satellites or allies of the Soviet Union. The Soviet model of “building the material-technical, and scientific base” for the construction of socialism—undertaken after Stalin’s victory over his political opponents—was founded on the use of a bureaucratic state machinery controlled by the Party to modernize and industrialize the country at a rapid pace, with a strong emphasis on heavy industry, until the completion of social transformations leading toward socialism (Kenez, 2006: 89-96). At the center of this project stands the “working class,” in whose name the “dictatorship of the proletariat” is established—ideologically conceived as an intermediate stage in the transition toward socialism. The worker becomes the symbol of the new society. However, a common characteristic of these societies in their pre-industrial phase is that the working class represents a minority within society and is almost non-existent within the communist parties of Eastern Europe. Consequently, the formation, expansion, and political education of the working class—as the foundation of the new socialist order and of the communist party’s power—became one of the principal objectives of the regime.

Precisely such a model was followed in Albania after the end of the Second World War, one based on the rapid industrialization of the country and the subordination of all sectors of the economy to the development of heavy industry, thus resulting in the formation of the Albanian working class and the broader proletarianization of society. In Albania, these processes assumed distinctive characteristics, shaped by the interaction with the Chinese model of state socialism and by the determination

¹ The rigid social structure, the persistence of traditional modes of production, and the resistance of the existing political order to the penetration of modernization and industrialization caused the social transformations associated with modernity to emerge with considerable delay in these countries. At the same time, the intertwining of the initial stages of industrialization with elements of the old social structure hindered social emancipation and the advancement of democratic elements, contributing instead to the radicalization of the middle class and the growth of popular discontent, both of which became increasingly inclined to express criticism toward the interplay of the contradictions between capitalism and authoritarian regimes.

of the leadership of the Party of Labour of Albania to pursue the chosen path despite internal difficulties and the country's growing isolation.

THE POLITICAL LINE OF SOCIALIST INDUSTRIALIZATION IN ALBANIA

The Albanian Communist Party, founded in 1941, included only a small number of workers among its ranks (Frashëri, 2006: 142-143). Until the 1960s, its cadres were drawn primarily from the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie. This reflected the broader social structure of Albania, where the working class constituted an insignificant portion of the population—a consequence of the country's limited industrial development. The working class was present only in a few construction sites and extractive industries established through Italian investments (ASHSH III, 2007: 316-317). One of the Party's principal objectives after coming to power was the creation of a working class in Albania, conceived as the core of the new socialist society and, at the same time, as the social base of the regime.

The model of socialist industrialization—an accelerated form of industrial development implemented through the use of the state-bureaucratic apparatus in the name of building the new socialist society—began to be applied in Albania after 1948, following the break in relations with Yugoslavia and the establishment of close ties with the Soviet Union. The delayed onset of this process was influenced by several factors: the economic hardships of the postwar period, Yugoslav influence and control over the country's economy, as well as measures aimed at consolidating the regime and suppressing anti-government movements. The measures for the implementation of this process were initiated immediately after the First Congress of the Party of Labour of Albania (November 1948). In this congress, in order to respond to the country's social reality—characterized by the absence of a class-conscious proletariat and a labor force largely composed of peasants, craftsmen, and artisans—the name of the Party was changed to the Party of Labour of Albania (ISML, 1981: 245-246). After the First Congress, state economic planning began with the drafting of the Two-Year Plan (1949–1950), followed by the Five-Year Plans of 1951–1955 and 1956–1960 (Pashako, 2015: 3). These plans, approved by the highest organs of the Party and the state, were binding down to the lowest production units. They determined the investments to be made, costs, production norms, labor power, and the machinery to be mobilized for their completion. As a result of these measures, major industrial projects began to rise throughout the country, made possible thanks to Soviet financial aid and technical assistance (instructors, engineers, architects, etc.). A decisive step in accelerating the industrialization process was taken at the Fourth Congress (February 1961), the very congress that paved the way for the rupture of Albanian-Soviet relations. One of the main causes of this break had been the issue of industrialization itself: during his visit in May 1959, Nikita Khrushchev had urged the Albanian leadership to slow down the pace of industrialization, criticized excessive investments in extractive industries, and called for a greater focus on agriculture and light industry (Lala, 2021: 117). At the Fourth

Congress, having secured Chinese support, the leadership of the Party of Labour of Albania presented its projects for “building the material and technical base of socialism” and for continuing the industrialization process with a focus on heavy industry and the construction of major industrial works, even under a strict austerity regime following the suspension of Soviet credits—a line that continued in the subsequent five-year plans. (Boriçi, 2021: 291-293)

THE SOCIAL BASIS OF PROLETARIANIZATION

It can be said that the recruitment of the working class had a dual social basis: the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie. In the early stages, as in the case of the Kombinat, workers were seasonal, employed only during the summer months. With the increasing difficulties faced by the peasantry and the implementation of the collectivization process, as well as through state measures encouraging internal migration, full-time employment for all workers was made possible. Thus, three factors contributed to the recruitment of a segment of the peasantry into the working class:

- The difficulties experienced by the peasantry in meeting state obligations within the framework of the new system of collection.
- The promotion of internal migration by the state itself, in order to meet the labor demands of the new industries.
- The process of collectivization, carried out vigorously during the years 1956–1960, which further accelerated the proletarianization of the peasantry.

The other social basis for recruitment into the working class was the urban petty bourgeoisie and the self-employed population of the cities. Two main factors contributed to this process:

- The continuous decline in profits for craftsmen and artisans, accompanied by an increase in taxation.
- The voluntarist state policy of organizing them into artisanal cooperatives, which led partly to their proletarianization and partly to their recruitment into the industrial working class (ASHSH IV,2009: 207-213).

In addition to these two forms, there was another mode of recruitment into the working class. This included declassed elements (large landowners, kulaks, former traders, or workshop owners) as well as individuals convicted of expressing opposition to the regime. These individuals were punished collectively along with their families and relatives and were incorporated into the labor force engaged in the construction of major industrial works, heavy industry, cooperatives, and similar sectors. For civil servants and members of the middle and upper bureaucracy who had demonstrated disagreement with the Party line, the measure of being sent “to be re-educated within the ranks of the working class” was applied (Lelaj, 2015: 175), meaning that the individual had to leave office work and take up manual labor in industry or agriculture, under the close surveillance of the State Security organs.

As a fourth form—this time a temporary and partial mode of recruitment—there existed what can be described as “controlled labor,” which manifested itself in several ways. Voluntary labor focused on the participation of young people and others capable of work, who were called upon during certain periods to take part in opening new lands, building railways, draining marshes, and similar projects. Moreover, prisoners, both political and ordinary, constituted an important source of labor, being forced to work without pay or for minimal wages in mines and construction (Vullnetari, 2014, 3).

INDUSTRIAL CENTERS. INDUSTRIAL CITIES

The political line of industrialization pursued by the Party of Labour of Albania was accompanied by the formation and expansion of the working class. The construction of factories, plants, and industrial complexes was associated with two interrelated processes: the increase in internal migration and the establishment of industrial centers. Internal migration became a process directed by the party-state and by the institutions responsible for drafting the State Plan. The population of certain villages and the outskirts of cities—including mechanics, professionals, engineers, as well as, in many cases, declassed elements or individuals punished for opposition to the regime, along with teachers and bureaucrats—was relocated around major industrial works to supply labor for the industries and to provide the necessary administrative, educational, healthcare, and cultural-ideological services in the newly established industrial centers.

A typical example of the creation of an industrial zone located on the outskirts of traditional cities is the establishment of the industrial area of Tirana following the construction of the “Stalin” Textile Combine. The Combine began construction in July 1949 and was completed in November 1951. It was built with financial assistance provided by the Soviet Union, as well as under the direction of Soviet instructors and engineers. The Combine was constructed precisely in the area of Yzberisht, on the outskirts of Tirana—a typically rural periphery with scattered houses and small plots of land, about five kilometers from the capital. These were surrounded by swamps over an area of 350 hectares, which were regularly flooded from autumn until early spring. Within a few months, drainage canals were opened, leading to the disappearance of the marshes. Hundreds and later thousands of workers were brought from various parts of the country to work on the construction of the Combine. At the same time, two-story buildings were erected to house Soviet engineers, followed by barracks for the workers. Some of them were initially employed seasonally from nearby villages, whereas after the consolidation of the Combine’s operations in 1952, and especially following the completion of collectivization in the plains and hilly areas, work was carried out by permanently stationed workers. As the labor force increased, the residential area expanded. Around the Combine arose the workers’ district of Kombinat, which by the late 1950s included about 14,000 inhabitants. During this period, the construction of prefabricated apartment buildings began, resembling the Soviet Khrushchevian style, to house the workers’ families (Islami, Veizaj & Verdiani, 2019: 56–57). The Combine, beyond its economic function, was also seen as a symbol

of socialist transformation—a place where the working class, the foundation of the new society, would be produced, and as a base for social emancipation brought about by modernization and industrialization, thereby becoming one of the main pillars of regime propaganda. The Combine, distinguished by the grandeur of its Soviet-style façade and the central square featuring the statue of Stalin with his raised hand pointing to “the line,” was surrounded by the workers’ club, the house of culture, the library, schools, kindergartens, and the industrial center (Bushati, 2023: 214–215). Workers’ districts and industrial zones similar in character to that of Kombinat were built in Tirana around the Tractor Factory and the Glass Factory (the Lapraka area and further toward Shkozë), in Durrës around the Wood Combine and the Chemical Fertilizer Plant in the northern part of the city, in Shkodër where the workers’ district included the industrial zone surrounding the Wire Factory, in Korçë around the Textile Combine, in Fier with the workers’ districts linked to the oil extraction industry and mechanical plants, in Elbasan around the Metallurgical Combine (2.5 million m³, 530 buildings), and elsewhere (Pashako, 2015: 6).

In addition to the creation of industrial zones within or around traditional urban areas, entirely new industrial towns were also established. These were built around major industrial enterprises, often in territories that had previously been small villages or uninhabited areas. Unlike the larger cities, where a variety of activities developed—such as light industry, administrative services, educational and cultural institutions—and which included social strata associated with the “people’s intelligentsia” and “urban pedagogy,” these new towns were characterized exclusively by a specific industrial activity directly linked to a factory or combine. Their population consisted mainly of the industrial working class, along with a small number of local administrators and personnel employed in educational and cultural services. Within a small urban space, the regime ensured the presence of official institutions, including the headquarters of the District Committee, as well as facilities of cultural, artistic, and educational character. The latter served to promote the cultural formation of the working class, always in accordance with the principles and norms of official Marxist-Leninist ideology, intertwined with a sense of patriotism rooted in the defense of the “socialist fatherland” and loyalty to the leadership of the Party of Labour of Albania.

In total, approximately thirty-four new industrial towns were established. The city of Laç was developed near the Nitrogen Fertilizer Combine, beginning in the early 1960s. The city of Rubik arose in connection with the Copper Processing Plant. The new city of Kukës was built from the ground up as a result of the flooding of the old town, following the construction of the Fierza Hydroelectric Power Plant. Several other industrial towns were established in association with extractive industries developed to exploit the country’s natural resources. The industrial towns of Patos, Ballsh, and Kuçovë (the latter of which had begun to develop in the 1930s) were built and expanded around the oil extraction and refining facilities. Bulqizë and Memaliaj emerged as mining towns, located respectively near the chromium and coal mines. All of these, along with several smaller settlements, were equipped with the necessary urban infrastructure, as previously mentioned, characterized by both functionalist and cultural-ideological features (Vullnetari, 2014: 3).

A typical example of this model is the establishment of the town of Bulqizë. Chromium extraction, along with the work for the construction and expansion of the mine, began in Bulqizë in 1948, with the participation of volunteers and a workforce recruited from the population of nearby villages. Under the supervision of Soviet engineers, a geological service was established to study the long-term possibilities for the mine's exploitation. Around the mine, prefabricated wooden barracks were built to house the qualified staff (engineers, members of the geological service, and military personnel). The miners would arrive on foot or in carts pulled by animals from surrounding areas such as Zerqan, Shupenza, Fushë-Bulqiza, and Gjorica. There was also a canteen for the workers. In later years, within the framework of increasing production and expanding the extractive industry to fulfill the objectives of the Five-Year Plan, the state undertook the enlargement of the workforce through the mass mobilization of internal mechanical migration. This policy was articulated by Enver Hoxha during his visit to Peshkopia in 1952: "Comrade peasants, you should be proud to send your best sons to work there and to fulfill and surpass the established objectives. Never again will the Bulqizë mine suffer from a lack of labor power" (Hoxha, 1977: 54). Beginning in 1955, when Bulqizë emerged as an industrial center with 1,971 inhabitants, the construction of urban infrastructure began. Initially, brick buildings were erected for the workers and three-story apartment blocks for the qualified staff. Within a period of fifteen years, with the growing importance of the mine and the expansion of the labor force, around 300 apartments were built for the workers and the mine administration. The town also included a primary school, a secondary school offering training courses for miners, a hospital, a pharmacy, clinics, a post office (PTT), a military unit, and a police station. In 1974, the town's cinema club was inaugurated, serving as a venue for cultural activities organized by amateur and professional groups, for film screenings, recreation, and various social events (Lelaj, 2015: 171–173).

In addition to the encouragement provided by state policy or the imposition "from above," it should be noted that, particularly between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s, the peasantry often viewed industrial development as a new means of improving income and living conditions following collectivization and the establishment of agricultural cooperatives. Work in the mines was perceived as an escape from the oppressive conditions created by the system of production quotas imposed in the cooperatives. Moreover, wages were higher, paid in cash, and fixed. Frequently, peasants sought to exploit family or regional connections to obtain from Party and state structures the necessary authorization for transfer from agricultural cooperatives to work in mines and factories.

FORMS OF ORGANIZATION AND PROPAGANDA. THE REALITIES OF THE WORKING CLASS IN ALBANIA

The workforce employed in factories and plants, in accordance with the spirit of collectivism that lay at the foundation of the system, was organized into two basic units: the Brigade and the Professional Unions. The Brigade was the fundamental unit of workers' organization, responsible for coordinating and supervising work, fulfilling production objectives, meeting production norms, and conducting "criticism" and

“self-criticism” sessions for those who violated work standards or expressed dissent. The brigadier, who stood at the head of the brigade, was formally proposed as a candidate by the “workers’ collective,” but the nomination had to be approved by the factory administration and the basic Party organization—thus making the process a mere formality, always determined from above. The Brigade also had an ideological function, organizing cultural and sports activities, as well as voluntary labor campaigns. These activities influenced the worker in several ways:

- They strengthened the spirit of “partisanship,” affirming the Party’s role as the “vanguard” of the working class, with the aim of fostering loyalty to the regime.
- The spirit of collectivism was encouraged. The sense of collectivity formed in the workplace extended beyond it, evolving into a broader social collectivity grounded in two key concepts: “class solidarity” and “socialist national consciousness.”
- Cultural and sports activities also contributed to the cultural emancipation of the working class, fostering a general culture defined, of course, in accordance with the ideological lines of the regime.
- Finally, the various activities that took place also represented a form of exploitation of the working class by the Party and State bureaucracy. Workers, who often labored long hours in inadequate hygienic conditions, were required after work to attend collective meetings, sessions of the basic Party organizations, brigade activities, or the organization of voluntary actions, thereby further limiting the individual and collective free time available to them.

The theme of the working class as the foundation of the new socialist society occupied a central place in official ideology and propaganda. Its roots lay in the Marxist-Leninist doctrine of the primary role of labor in society, but also in the direct political interest of the party-state in using the working class to legitimize the regime’s absolute power. The new social order established by the Party was presented as being in the service of the working class, as “the power of the working class,” with the Party governing and ruling in its name, as the advanced vanguard of the proletariat. By portraying the socialist state in educational texts, books, newspapers, and art as the power of “the sons of peasants and workers,” the system constructed a conceptual axis of identification through which workers and peasants not only identified with one another but also came to view themselves as members of the ruling class and the primary beneficiaries of the transformations that had taken place (Lelaj, 2015: 193). However, with the progress of industrialization and the persistent difficulties in the drafting of the Five-Year Plans, in the challenges of increasing production output and distribution, arose the issue of stimulating production growth and achieving production norms. Among the major campaigns for the mobilization of the labor force were those centered on “socialist emulation,” designed to enhance competition among workers and socialist enterprises to meet and surpass production targets. Those who exceeded norms were awarded prizes and featured on “emulation boards,” while workers who showed deficiencies in their work were subjected to public criticism during workers’ council meetings. Beginning in the 1950s, the Stakhanovite movement also spread in Albania—a campaign highlighting workers who exceeded norms and increased productivity. Albanian Stakhanovites

received the title of “assailants” for surpassing norms, while those who introduced innovations to accelerate production rhythms or successfully applied Soviet and Chinese labor practices in Albanian factories were recognized as “innovators.” (Mëhilli, 2021: 126-130). In official rhetoric and propaganda, the concept of “proletarian discipline” gained increasing importance, defined in 1970 in the book *Let Us Broaden Our Knowledge of the Socialist Organization of Labor* through several key elements: “...to perform one’s duty toward the homeland with the highest consciousness, to produce as much as possible, better and at lower cost, to meet and surpass the established norms and objectives of productivity...” (Lelaj(2015): 198.

Thus, the regime gradually shifted its rhetoric concerning the working class as the leading class of society, redirecting the discourse from the rights to the duties and sacrifices of the working class, functioning as an ideological superstructure for the exploitation of labor by the Party and State bureaucracy.

In fact, immediately after the end of the War, Albanian workers were incorporated into trade union organizations known as the Professional Unions, established in October 1945 (Kasmi & Koçi, 2022: 72). However, these organizations were not created by the workers themselves. They were not independent and were transformed into instruments of the Party of Labour of Albania (PPSH) to control the labor force. The statute approved after the First Congress included provisions concerning the unions’ duties to guarantee workers’ rights, working conditions, and wage regulation. With the consolidation of the PPSH’s power and the further centralization of the economy, the Professional Unions assumed the role of shaping the ideological formation of workers and promoting “socialist emulation”—that is, stimulating the workforce to increase production, surpass norms, and participate in voluntary labor campaigns—without these efforts necessarily translating into higher wages or improved working conditions. In the statute of the Professional Unions of Albania (BPSH), it was stated that:

The BPSH, as schools of communism, carry out comprehensive work for the ideological, class-based, and revolutionary education of their members, to arm workers with firm convictions about the vitality and superiority of our socialist order, to educate them in the spirit of socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism, to make them ever more capable professionally, endowed with broad culture and high communist virtues. The BPSH work to further elevate the consciousness of the working class regarding its role and mission in socialist society as the ruling class. The BPSH devote special attention to the broad mobilization and active participation of workers and other employees in the development of the economy, in the drafting and implementation of the state’s economic and social plans, and in addressing production-related issues (Kasmi & Koçi, 2022: 110)

Beginning in the mid-1970s, with the deterioration of economic conditions linked to two main factors—the breakdown of relations with the People’s Republic of China and the general economic crisis caused by the centralized state economy—the economic and social situation of the working class in Albania also worsened. Continued investment in heavy industry to sustain and construct factories and combines that operated at a deficit, combined with severe shortages in agricultural production and consumer goods, further deepened the crisis. At the same time, the complete absence of political representation

for workers (and the lack of a tradition of labor movements) made it impossible to oppose these measures, unlike in Poland, where the trade union organization *Solidarność* emerged as an opponent of the regime. For Albanian workers, the only available options were either adaptation to the system or escape from the country.

The Albanian working class, formed during the years of bureaucratic state socialism, played an important role in the early democratic transformations in Albania. Following the student protests of December 1990, it was the workers' strikes of the spring of 1991—led by the Independent Trade Unions—that brought about the final crisis of the Party of Labour's rule (Halili, 2016: 245).

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DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS IN ALBANIA: DECENTRALIZATION OR RE-CENTRALIZATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the article is to explore the decentralization process, the degree of local autonomy, and the territorial administrative reform, TAR, by underlining the achieved level of political and fiscal decentralization of the local self-governing units, LSGUs in Albania. The decentralization reforms were undertaken to improve the local governing structures and their relation with the communities where they operate, given that they know better the peoples' traditions, needs and requests. The actual state of the local government autonomy and decentralization is the result of the interaction of different economic, political, social, and cultural factors towards a consolidated democracy. The methodology to exploring the topic of decentralization policy and TAR in Albania, is that of qualitative methods, by using primary and secondary sources of information from different relevant national and international organizations and institutions, reports and evaluations of different other important actors, and that includes the review and analysis of the related legislation, especially of the 2014-2025 period, including laws, strategies, Decisions of the Council of Ministers, DCM, MoF documents and budgetary information, INSTAT data and information and other important sources. The article explores political and fiscal decentralization reforms and the related TAR policy, by analyzing different available data and information, to arrive at conclusions about the LSGUs decentralization or re-centralization of powers, functions and competences, also by analyzing the relations with the central level of government and the local public services offered to citizens in their respective communities, to achieve sustainable development.

Keywords: *Decentralization, re-centralization, local public policies and services, fiscal decentralization*

A SHORT HISTORY OF DECENTRALIZATION AND TAR IN ALBANIA

Albania transition to democracy began in the 1990s, from the collapse of the communist regime. The former regime had monopolized all the political power, with a planned and centralized economy, followed by isolation, poverty, and other important social problems, that inhibited the country development. For the first time in the 1992, the institutional reform created a local autonomous government, where limited functions and competencies of the central government were transferred to the local one, and that was considered an accomplishment and a step to autonomy. This reform was too weak from the fiscal point of view and in relation with the sharing of resources. Later on, with the adoption of the 1998 Albanian Constitution, some progress was marked in relation with the approval of the legislation for the decentralization reform and policy, and further with the approval and signature of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1999. In 2000, follows the adoption of the Law no. 8652, "On the Organization and Functioning of the Local Government" (KSH. 2000),

"The necessity of the adoption of a new law for the organization and the functioning of the local government was natural, in order to improve the offered services and the citizens life, from the decentralization of the functions and the empowering of local authorities".

This was followed by the approval of the "Strategy of Decentralization" in 1999 and aimed at 'supporting the constitution provisions for the local government, combined with the Albanian tradition and, with the vision and objectives of the central and local political actors, with the best international experience and the models of Euro-Atlantic societies (KM, 1999: 5). Based on this law (KSH, 2000) Albania was organized in 308 communes and 65 municipalities, that both represented the first-tier of the local government and 12 regions, as the second-tier.

TAR in Albania started in 2013-2014 when the Government and the Parliament of Albania initiated the TAR reform with the Special Parliamentary Commission in close coordination and cooperation with LGUs. Thus, on 31 July 2015, the Albanian parliament approved the Law no. 115/2015 "On the administrative-territorial division units of local government in the Republic of Albania", by re-establishing 12 regions, and reducing the number of LSGUs, in 61 municipalities, and different functional zones by merging 5-6 prior communes (KSH, 2014).

One year later was approved the Law no. 139/2015, date 17.12.2015 "On local self-government" (Law 139/2015, 2015). Previously LGUs had the right to administer their own resources and to gain funds by the state budget. The territorial-administrative reform, TAR aimed at consolidating smaller units of local government, in larger and more efficient units, which would be able to provide better local services and give citizens and communities more access to these services. Thus, the policy goal was to increase the efficiency in using the available resources of the local governmental units, in the context of the decentralization reform, and to help LGUs to improve their capacities

towards good governance (qualitative public services, closer to the citizen's needs) and sustainable development. The goal could be achieved by consolidating smaller units of local government in larger and more efficient and effective units, with the mergers or amalgamation of some LGUs and the re-drawing of the borders of LGUs or re-scaling. Until this moment, the country fragmentation in small administrative-territorial units demonstrated that prior LGUs were not capable economically and did not perform well to offer an adequate level of local public services, in terms of quality, in part because they did not generate funds, and also because of the major part of their budgets used for current expenditures, especially salaries, for a high number of administrative-territorial units' employees. **Ten years have passed from the initial implementation of the reform and the effects of the TAR have been mixed.**

In this context,

"local autonomy", in the article no. 2.2, is defined as: 'the right and capacity of local self-governing units, in accordance with the Constitution and the law, and its respective limits, to regulate and manage a fundamental part of public issues of their responsibility and in the interest of the municipality" (KSH, 2015).

Law. No.139, 2015). In this law are also specified the functions and competences of the LSGUs, together with the delegated functions from the central government (The chapter VII, with the articles 21-30 of the law state the functions and competences of the LSGUs, like: municipalities functions in the infrastructure and public services area; social services; culture, sports and recreation; environmental protection; agriculture, rural development, forestry and pastures, nature and biodiversity; local economic development; public order). Another important issue is that of the finances of the LSGUs, that are specified in the Law no. 139/2015, chapter VIII, articles 34-44, specifying that LSGUs sources of revenues are from own local resources, with the application of local taxes and fees; revenues from other municipalities sources, with revenues from rents of the municipalities assets, investments, from PPPs, donations, and other sources; and from national resources related with shared taxes, unconditional transfers, and conditional transfers.

Another important step in relation with LSGUs' fiscal decentralization was the approval and the adoption of the Law no. 68/2017 "On the Local Self-Government Finance" (KSH, 2017). This law was adopted to ensure fiscal decentralization or fiscal autonomy of the LGUs, and to give municipalities the possibility to generate revenues, with the setting and managing of their local taxes, for funding their functions and competences.

The Law no.68/2017, in the article no.4 states the principles of fiscal autonomy, or the full autonomy in using their revenues from different sources, including the right of LSGUs to independently generate revenues, the right to benefit from state budget unconditional transfers, from shared taxes. In the article 23 it is defined that the total annual sum of the unconditional transfer, in a budgetary year is not less than 1% of the GDP, whereas in relation with revenues generated from the shared taxes, in the article 25 states that LSGUs benefit from: 97% of the revenues generated from the

tax on property transfer on real estate (immovables); 25% of the revenues from the annual tax of the used vehicles; 5% of the revenues from mining royalties; and 2% of revenues from personal income tax.

Thus, LSGUs were guaranteed political, administrative and financial resources for an increased level of autonomy, in order to fulfil their functions and to offer qualitative local public services.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review reveals that the decentralization and TAR reforms were guided by a political and an economic rationale, but until now the desired level of autonomy of the LSGUs from the central government is not yet achieved, and local government did not manage to generate more funds, due to different contextual and international factors.

Stafa and Xhumari (2018) in their article argue about the major improvements of the policy and legal framework for decentralization (LLSG, TAR, LLSGF), but in the same time stress 'the need to stop the frequent legal amendments of local tax and fiscal powers, which has been accompanied by conflicting policy priorities, inconsistencies and confusion regarding the implementation - like central government exemptions to specific categories of payers of the property tax and the tax on the infrastructure impact of new investments (Stafa & Xhumari, 2018)

Moreover the performance audit of the Supreme State Audit (KLSH) on the functioning of the municipalities (Tirana, Durrës, Vlora, Korca, Fier, Shkodra, Dropull, and Gjirokastra) stated that: even if the TAR was necessary, it has not fully reflected the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and as a result, there are several contradictions between the reform objectives and budgetary and fiscal policies of the central government, that have contributed to the lack of local autonomy and to issues regarding the strengthening of the decentralization and municipal autonomy (SSA, 2018).

The study of Dulic, Kmezic and Bartlett (2018) comprised eight countries: Slovenia and Croatia (I group); Bosnia and Hercegovina, Montenegro, Serbia (II group); Macedonia, Kosovo (III group); Albania (IV group). Except for the first group (already EU member states) the others aspire to join EU, so the decentralization was linked with Europeanization. Albania has achieved substantial progress in all aspects of decentralization and local government reform...However, like the other countries in the region, Albanian municipalities were not spared certain post-crisis policy reversals and centralistic measures, related with the frequent, ad hoc legal amendments that lead to inconsistencies and conflicting policy priorities (Dulic, Kmezic & Bartlett, 2018).

According to the authors Lippi and Tsekos (2019) countries like Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Croatia, and Albania, after the global economic crises of 2008, were obliged to undertake several reforms to cope with the fiscal tightening of the period and the respective fiscal consolidation measures, that severely affected local policies across Europe and particularly degraded public services (LPS are health, social services and public utilities (water management, and waste collection and disposal). Lippi and

Tsekos (2019) continue that in Albania happened ‘austerity by recommendation’, and was a case of a mimetic isomorphism, where policymakers were pressured from outside into imitating other examples, with a voluntary policy transfer or emulation, backed up by the expected EU admission. They argue that Albania priorly was a country that experienced economic growth, and fragmentation, and that policymakers in Albania adopted a ‘do more with less’ approach, with a strategy of ‘incremental compromise’ with the undertaken territorial-administrative reform, and the outcome was recentralization. For Lippi and Tsekos (2019) the country case fits in the cluster of the countries with ‘evocative austerity policy (bottom up)’. In the same line, Dizdari, Troshani and Drishti (2019) argue that TAR was the most radical (de jure) programme in terms of local unit’s self-government and decentralization.

According to government reports, related with the performance indicators of municipalities, in a decade of transformation from TAR, and the accompanying viewpoints based on the 2023 Census and future challenges, municipalities are divided by size, in: 15 municipalities with less than 10000 residents, 33 municipalities with 10000-50000, 12 have 50000-150000, and Tirana with more than 150000 residents. The report underlines the decentralization of the functions and increased financial sources (MSHPV, AMVV, 2024).

To better understand the level of autonomy of local government in different countries, the local autonomy index, LAI 2.0 developed by Ladner et al., was developed for a period from the 1990-2022, and covers 57 countries, including Albania. This index shows that Albania has not achieved a notable level of local autonomy. In the LAI 2.0 are included seven dimensions of local autonomy, measured through 11 variables: legal autonomy, access, policy scope, political discretion, financial autonomy, organizational autonomy and non-interference (Ladner et al., 2023). To measure local autonomy the authors used the method of assessment by experts and they note that in between the countries in top and those in the bottom in relation with autonomy, there are three categories of countries, with their respective values of local autonomy: countries where local authorities have a medium-high degree of autonomy (index values between 60 and 70), countries with a medium degree of local autonomy (values between 50 and 60) and, countries with a medium-low degree of autonomy (values are between 40 and 50). Thus, according to LAI 2.0 (Ladner et al, 2023) Albania is positioned in the second group with a medium degree of local autonomy, together with two other countries of the Western Balkans: North Macedonia and Hercegovina.

RESULTS

The level of autonomy of the local government in Albania is still not sufficient, even if there is substantial progress in this regard. Also, the latest developments in the country, demonstrate for a re-centralization of the local level of government.

From 2015, the local government in Albania is responsible for 41 public services, with the transferred competences for deeper decentralization in 5 areas: forestry and pastures’ management, drainage and irrigation canals, the management of preschool

education, rural roads management, and fire protection and rescue. In relation with waste management the LSGUs are responsible to cover their territories, using their own structures, or contracts for waste management and treatment in landfills or incineration. Despite a general belief that the decentralization process has progressed, the LSGUs still suffer from inequalities of resources and generation of funds, to fulfilling the added functions in the territories they cover.

Decentralization policies and the following TAR (2013-2014) implementation was undertaken by using amalgamation and re-scaling strategy as a mean to counter territorial fragmentation. The main objective of TAR was to consolidate local government units, for offering citizens effective and efficient local services, with a higher quality. TAR was a policy initiated and implemented by the central government, with a “top-down” approach.

Even if amalgamation and re-scaling strategies were used as means to counter fragmentation, actually there are 21 LSGUs with less than 25000 residents, that do not show evidences of financial performance, do not generate funds and as a result do not exert fully their respective functions and competences. Initially, the reduction of the number of local government units, from 373 LGUs to 61 municipalities, has contributed to the revenue increase of bigger municipalities, when there are no evident changes to the total revenues collected and generated from the smaller municipalities. Thus, the consolidation of these LSGUs was not achieved, and they continue to operate in the same way as before the TAR reform.

In this context, the issue of fiscal decentralization is related with the exertion of functions and competences of the LSGUs, accompanied with the necessary finances or funds. It means that LSGUs should have necessary funds to operate, and the collection of revenues, generated by issuing or determining different taxes or tariffs, by borrowing, from the division of shared taxes, without being too dependent on central government transfers (conditional or unconditional ones). Thus, the level of fiscal decentralization achieved in these years is not what was expected initially, because of the respective levels of the total revenues collected and generated from the LSGUs, the total expenditures level, oriented mostly towards the operative or current expenditures compared to investments, and the level of debts incurred before the reform and financial difficulties after, due to several factors that condition the local government fiscal performance. There are financial inequalities between the municipalities, and the achieved level of fiscal decentralization is not sufficient to guarantee the local government level autonomy and in the same time, does not lead to qualitative public services. One positive aspect to underline is the introduction for the year 2025 of the Local Government Performance Grant (200 million ALL from national sources and 260 million ALL of foreign financing from SDC and SIDA) that funds municipalities on demonstrated performance.

Another area of concern is that of LSGUs relations with the central government that evidence the complexity of policymaking and the major issues and challenges resulting from the division of functions, competences and the sharing of responsibilities. As a result, there are policy coordination difficulties across institutional levels, intrusions in the local government level functioning, frequent changes of the legislation, limitations of the local government, and interaction with a multitude of actors outside the government.

There are frequent interferences from the central government to LSGUs which affect negatively the local government level autonomy and decentralization (such as the latest interferences from the central level about the biggest municipalities directors' layoffs required from the Prime Minister E. Rama, as a result of citizens' complaints about their work in LSGUs or the introduction of a national provider for waste management because of the dissatisfaction with the priorly managed process by most of the LSGUs).

The massive layouts of directors in the municipalities, beginning with Vlora municipality, were followed with layoffs in other bigger municipalities, for issues such as the occupation of public spaces or permits for different subjects in their territories, and culminated with the resignation of the major of Vlora municipality.

Another controversial issue is the initiative of the Prime Minister to remove from office, the major of Tirana municipality, Erion Veliaj (after accusations and his detention for abuses of office and power), after almost one year, with the required action from the Municipality Council for interrupting his remaining mandate, and to organizing the local elections for a new major. In the situation where the Mr. Veliaj was not charged guilty with a definitive decision, the Constitutional Court cancelled the elections of 9 November 2025 for the major of Tirana, and thus overturned the President's decree (CNA, 2025).

The decentralization process and TAR policy contribution to long-term sustainable development is debatable, due to the lack of appropriate local public services for all citizens and investments, including the remote areas (hilly and mountainous regions).

Nevertheless, in the beginning of the fourth mandate of the government led by the Socialist Party, Prime Minister Rama, expressed in the meeting of the SP' Assembly, the need for reviewing and changing TAR, by an ad-hoc, specific parliamentary commission (that will function and organize extensive public consultations) driven by the major changes of these years, related with demographic changes to technological changes, with a special focus on the improvement of local government quality, for the EU integration process of Albania 2030 (TCh, 2025; Dosku, 2025). Once again, the new Territorial-Administrative Reform is initiated by the central government, top-down, even if the aim is to develop extensive public consultations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Country's efforts to democratization and further development have initiated and sustained decentralization reforms and territorial-administrative policies, TAR in 2014. Albania as a country with a long transition to democracy and now as a fragile democracy, is trying to overcome several political, social, economic and other problems or factors that impede further country development. Decentralization process and TAR have not achieved their goals and objectives, and several factors and events have contributed to the issue of re-centralization of the functions and competences in the central level of government.

The most problematic aspect is the division of responsibilities and competences between the central government and the local government, that often is not clear, and is evidenced in complex relations and policymaking, as in the cases where the central

level intervenes with initiatives that limit the local level. It is necessary a deeper level of decentralization, accompanied by fiscal decentralization, for improving the quality of the provided services from the local level of government for the citizens and the communities, and for taking in consideration their needs and demands. The legislation should be improved for addressing the problem of overlapping functions and competences. In several cases it is evidenced the need for policy coordination across institutional levels and amongst the multitude of actors inside and outside the government, for delivering different local public services, and to supporting long-term sustainable development. There is an added need for the improvement of the local government capacities, by recruiting and training their human resources. It is also needed a major engagement of citizens in the local decision-making process as they are the beneficiaries of the local public services, and the increased cooperation of the LGUs with CSOs and other actors for generating funds, engaging in projects, and for technical assistance.

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN FINANCE: IMPACT ON FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the financial performance of finance institutions, analyzing how these technologies improve financial analysis and risk management processes. Technologies such as machine learning, big data analytics, the implementation of support robots, data analysis and algorithms for financial market prediction are used to analyze financial trends and offer data-driven recommendations based on big data and predictive models. The article uses an empiric methodology to investigate how the use of AI has influenced the financial performance of financial institutions in terms of profitability, efficiency and financial stability. It also compares two large, profitable institutions: the Bank of America and the Deutsch Bank, by comparing their Return on Equity (ROE) and Return of Assets (ROA) before and after the implementation of AI. Additionally, it analyzes revenue and expenses to determine the effectiveness of AI's impact. The study's findings suggest that AI has contributed to improving operational efficiency and increasing decision-making accuracy, bringing significant benefits to financial institutions as well as the broader financial economy. These advancements also support the profitability objectives of these institutions. In conclusion, the article suggest that AI can be a powerful tool for enhancing financial performance, emphasizing the importance of investing in advanced technologies to support growth, competition and stability in the financial sector with the goal of maximizing their profits.

Keywords: *AI, finance, banking, technology.*

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has brought a revolution in the financial sector, offering powerful tools that can improve efficiency and create competitive advantages for financial institutions. Banks and major financial institutions have started to embrace advanced AI algorithms for portfolio optimization, transaction processing and improving customer service. With the rapid developments in technology, AI has not only helped in improving daily operations but has the potential to transform the traditional banking business model.

In this context, many large banks worldwide are assessing the effects of AI on their financial performance by observing the impact it has on improving key financial indicators. One of the most used metrics to measure this effect is the return on invested capital (ROA). Furthermore, the analysis of revenues and expenses before and after the implementation of the AI helps to evaluate how AI impacts the reduction of operational expenses and the increase of revenues.

This study aims to analyze the impact of AI implementation on financial performance by taking as examples two banking institutions from two superpower countries, which were among the first to implement artificial intelligence, examining comparisons of AI, valuable conclusions are drawn about the role of AI in improving financial efficiency and achieving strategic objectives for these banks, but not only and the impact of Artificial Intelligence in finance how does it effect it?

LITERATURE

Let's mention some authors of the AI in Finance:

1. Jourbert & Louw (2019) in the article "Artificial Intelligence in Finance: Opportunities and challenges." This study explores the opportunities and challenges AI offers to the financial sector including machine learning and big data analytics. It discusses how these technologies help financial institutions create more accurate models and optimize risk management.
2. Choudhury & Hossain (2018) in the article "Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in Financial Services" analyze the use of AI and machine learning to develop algorithms that assist in analyzing financial data and optimizing decision-making in financial institutions.
3. Ng & Teo, 2017, in the article "AI in Financial Analytics: Enhancing Forecasting Accuracy." examine AI applications to improve the accuracy of financial forecasts, using deep machine learning algorithms and big analysis to predict market movement and revenues.
4. Britt, K., & Meyers, J. (2020) "The role of Artificial Intelligence in Risk Management in Financial Institutions". This study highlights the use of AI to improve risk management, particularly through predictive analytics and real time monitoring of financial markets. It discusses how AI can help reduce human errors and enhance the efficacy of financial processes.

5. Brynjolfsson & McAfee (2017). "The second machine Age: Work, Progress and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies." This book analyzes the impact of advanced technologies, including AI, on increasing efficiency and financial performance in companies. The authors provide an overview of how AI can change economies sectors, including finance.
6. Kshetri (2021): "The role of Artificial Intelligence in Financial Performance." This study focuses on specific applications of AI in the financial sector, evaluating how AI has improves financial performance by contributing to the growth of profitability and efficiency.
7. Li & Zhang (2019). "The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Financial Performance: A case study." This study uses an empirical approach to assess the impact of AI on the financial performance of several financial instructions, analyzing changes in the profitability and operational efficiency after AI implementation.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to analyze the impact of implanting Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the financial performance and risk management of financial institution, using two financial instructions from two superpower countries as examples. The performance and risk management practices of Deutsche Bank and Bank of America have been compared before and after the implementations of AI to identify changes in ROE (Return on Equity), ROA (Return on Assets), and the effects on risk strategies, as well as changes in revenues and expenses, to assess AI's efficiency.

The study focuses on the USA's Bank ang Germany's Bank, two financial instructions from the world's economic superpower, covering the period before 2016 and after 2016 when both banks implemented AI at the same time, analyzing the change the change in ROE, ROA, as well as the revenues and expenses over the years. The study also explores how AI has impacted finance and risk management.

In a increasingly interconnected and dynamic world, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has begun to play a key role in transforming how industries and economies function. The financial sector, with its rapid advancements in technology and innovation is one of the most prominent beneficiaries of this transformative shift. The use of AI in finance has become a powerful tool for enhancing financial analysis optimizing risk management and improving the financial performance of instructions.

COMPARISON

Bank of America, (BoFA), is one the largest and oldest banks in the United States, with a history dating back to 1904. Bank of America has been a pioneer in the use of technologies to improve customer experience and operational Effendy. In recent years, the bank has significantly invested in artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance its services, risk management and optimize processes. A well-known example is its digitals assistant, Erica, which uses to help customers manage account and make financial decisions.

Bank of America has intensively implemented artificial intelligence (AI) in its banking services, with one of the most prominent innovations being the virtual assistant, Erica. Since its launch in 2018, Erica has become a key part of Bank of America's digital customer experience, helping millions of users manage their accounts and providing financial advice. Erica has passed over 2 billion interactions, highlighting its significant role in customer service with 42 million clients. Additionally, the bank has made substantial investments in AI to improve operational efficacy and offer a more personalized experience for customers.

Besides "Erica," Bank of America has used other artificial intelligence technologies to enhance its operations and services. One example is PRIAM (Predictive Intelligence Analytics Machine), a system that helps analysts identify potential investors for IPOs using historical data and market analysts. Another implementation is Robotic Process Automation (RPA), which uses AI algorithms to automate operational tasks, including credit processing, international payment operations and anti-money laundering monitoring. AI is used to analyze financial data, assists in credit risk assessment and predict customer behavior. Machine learning algorithms analyze customer behavior patterns, aiding in the provision of credit over the last three years. AI troubleshooting issues and managing finances. AI algorithms detect potential fraud patterns and predict financial trends to support strategies decision-making. AI has been used to automate routine processes such as data collection, data processing and security checks, helps to reduce costs and increase efficiency. The investments in this technology show Bank of America's commitment to using AI to enhance effectiveness and provide personalized and secure services for its clients

Founded on August 1, 1957, Bundesbank was establishing after World War 2 when Germany sought to build a stable monetary system to avoid the inflation and destabilization the country had experienced in the past. As part of the evolution of the financial sector, Deutsch Bank has begun using advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence, to improve operational efficacy and risk management.

Deutsch Bank has applied several artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to optimize its operations and improve customer services. One of the key innovations in the "Black Forest" model, which is used to combat financial crimes. By examining factors such as transaction amount, currency types and geographical location, "Black Forest" helps identify and investigate suspicious transactions in real-time.

Another significant project is the "Next Best Offer" tool in wealth management. This AI-powered recommendation engine analyzes customers portfolios to suggest investment products that align with their preferences and risk profiles. Considering market trends and regulatory compliance, this tool ensures that financial advice is personalized and compliant with industry standards.

Customers service chatbot: Deutsch Bank has developed a chatbot named "Debbie," which uses AI to provide automated services to clients. This chatbots assists customers in completing simple transitions, obtaining information about their accounts and offering help with common inquiries. It has been used at Deutsch Bank to automate and improve internal processes, including credit evaluation, risk management and data

analysis. Deutsch Bank has used AI to create advanced of data and identify suspicious activities that may indicate potential fraud. Deutsch Bank has used AI to analyze and predict market movements and assist in investment decision-making. This allows the bank to offer more personalized services to its clients by optimizing investments strategies and minimizing risk. (Bank of Deutsch)

(ROE AND ROA)

ROE- (Return on Equity), a measure of a company profitability that calculates the net income as a percentage of shareholders equity. It shows how effectively the management is using the company's assets to generate profits.

ROA- (Return on Assets), a financial ratio thar shows the percentage of profit a company generates relatives to its total assists. It indicates how efficient the company is in using its assets to create revenue.

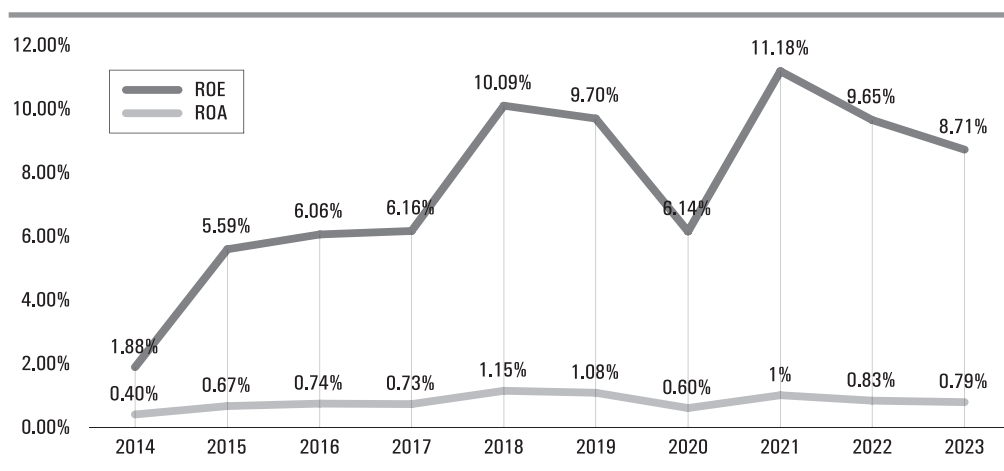


Figure 1: Bank of America, ROE and ROA. Source: Bank of America

On graphics: after implementing AI in 2016, the bank showed a clear upward trend in financial performance, with increases in ROE and ROA. This suggests that AI has contributed to improved operational efficiency and risk management helping the bank achieve a sustainable level of profitability in the long term.

Before the implementation of AI (2014-2015): ROE increased significantly from 1.88% in 2014 to 5.59% in 2015, showing an improvement in return on equity, while ROE also rose from 0.4% to 0.67%. This period indicates a stabilization of the bank's financial performance, possibly due to internal reforms and overall economic growth.

Year of AI implementation (2016): In 2016, after the introduction of AI, ROE and ROA continued to improve, reaching 6.06% and 0.74%, respectively. This suggests a potential positive initial impact of AI, which could have contributed to the optimization of operations and increased efficiency.

After implementing AI (2017-2023): In 2017, ROE remained relatively high at 6.16% while ROA experienced a slight decline to 0.73%. This signals a stabilization in performance after a period of growth. In 2022, there was a significant improvement with ROE at 9.65% and ROA at 0.83%, indicating that the bank had reached a high level of return on equity and assets. This improvement is linked to the increased use of AI for risk management and real-time data analysis, as it was a factor controlled by their bank's internal policies overseen by the administrators and executive board. It is the risk that needed to be taken to achieve maximum profit.

Return on equity (ROE) for Bank of America (BAC) shares is 8.63% as of Friday, February 21, 2025. This is an increase of 7.11% compared to its 12-month average of 8.06%. The average ROE for the last 5 years is 8.91%. (Bank of America)

While the Deutsche Bank,

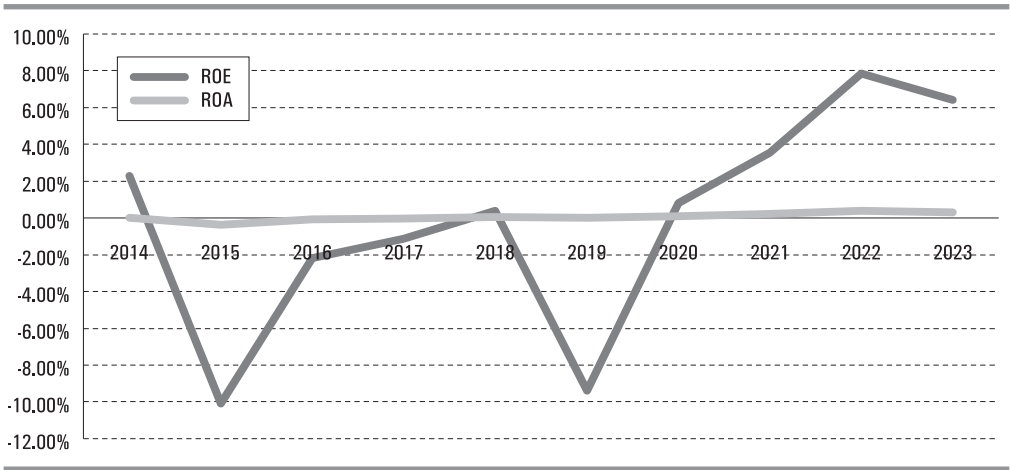


Figure 2: Bank of Germany ROA and ROE. Source: Deutsch Bank

The implementation of AI has had a slow and dual impact during the 2016-2020 period. After the challenging financial period (2015-2016), AI technologies began to show noticeable results in 2020 and 2022, when the bank achieved better financial performance.

The significant increase in ROE and ROA in 2022 can be before and after the implementation of Artificial Intelligence, their increase in values indicates that new element implemented in these banks positively impacted their finance. It is clear from the data the figures show growth, which demonstrates that AI has effectively and better risk management, both of which have been greatly supported by the use of AI.

As we observe from the comparison of ROE and ROA before and after the implementation of Artificial Intelligence impacted their finances. It is clear from the data that the figures show growth, which demonstrates that AI has effectively influenced both banks, which are very large institutions.

Although the return an asset and return on equity leave room for further analysis of the impact of Artificial Intelligence of AI on revenues and expanses has also examined, especially since 2015-2024, including the COVID-2019 pandemic, AI has been main new factor implemented in their structure.

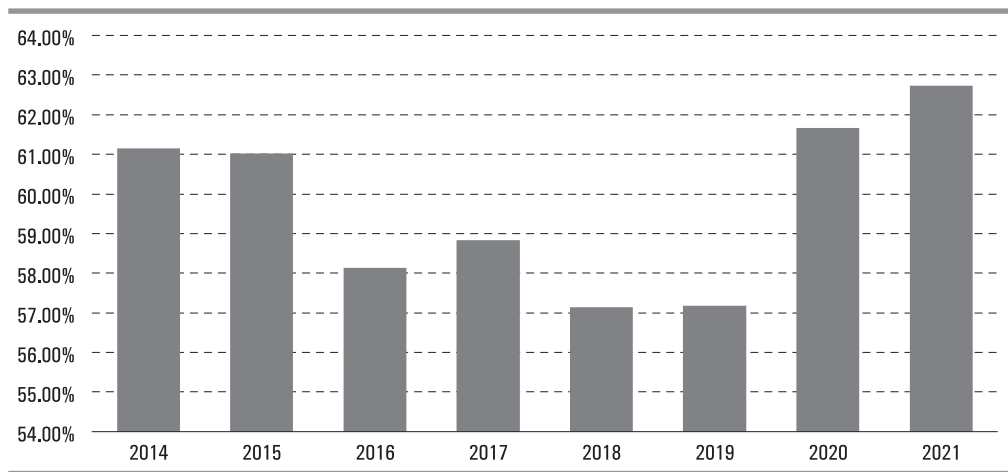


Figure 3: *Bank of America- expense/revenue ratio* Source: *Bank of America*

2014-2017: The expense-to-revenue ratio decreased from 61.03% to 57.14% during the period from 2014 to 2017. This reduction can be linked to Bank of America's efforts to optimize operational costs and increase efficacy.

2018-2020: The ratio increased to 58.75% in 2018 and 61.67% in 2020. This increase may be attributed to impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced banks, to make significant investments in digital infrastructure and health protection systems, thereby erasing operational expenses.

2021: The rise in the ratio to 62.73% in 2021 indicates that the bank faced significant challenges in controlling operational casts, possibly due to ongoing investments in AI and digital transformation. This may have required high spending on new digital infrastructure, staff training and the development of new AI systems for advanced data analysis and risk management.

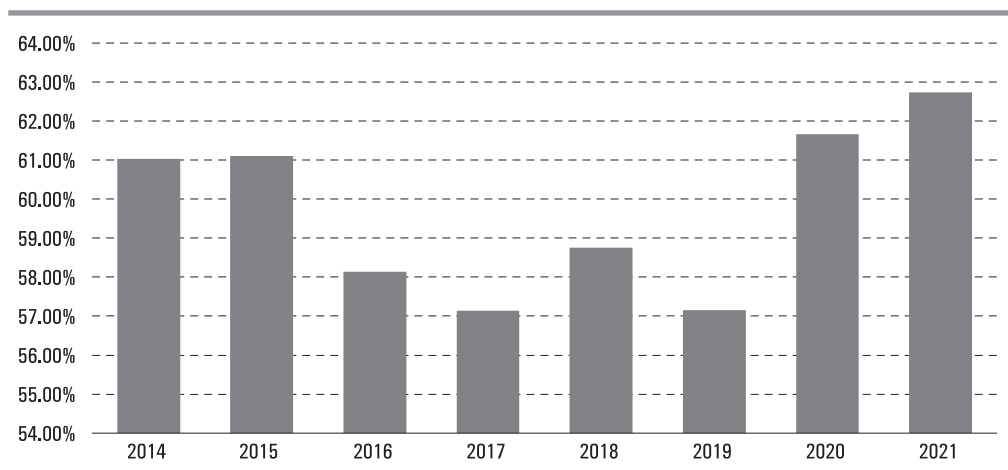


Figure 4: *The costs-to-income Ratio for Deutsch Bank.* Source: *Bank of Germany*

In 2014 and 2015, the cost-to-income ratio for Deutsch Bank was around 61%. This period reflected the bank's ongoing challenges in cost management and transformation following the aftermath of the global financial crisis. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) was still in its early stages. In the years 2016-2019m the cost-to-income ratio for Deutsch Bank continued to improve, dropping from 58.14% to 57.15%. This period market an effort to improve operational efficiency and reduce costs, as part of a new strategy that included the use of innovative technologies. In 2020 and 2021, the costs-to-income ratio increased to 61.67% and 62.73%, respectively, mainly due to the impact of Ccoviid-19 pandemic, which increased expenses for securing operations and supporting digital services. The use of AI intensified to improve online services offering faster and more secure services to customers, as well as automating many of the bank's internal operations. Nevertheless, the increase in operational expenses due to the global crisis and significant investments in technology and infrastructure caused the bank to have a higher cost-to-income ratio during this period.

ADVANTAGES

- Improvedment of operational efficiency: AI automates routine processes and repetitive tasks, reducing the need for manual intervention and saving time and resources.
- Accuracy and better forecasting: AI models can analyze large amounts of data in real-time and provide accurate predictions for market trends.
- Risk management: AI can identify and predict risks better than traditional methods by detecting potential patterns that indicate risks, such as fraud. This helps institutors avoid losses and maintain financial stability.
- Customer adaption and improvement of their experience: AI can analyze customer behavior and provide personalized services in real-time.
- Optimization of investment portfolios: AI can assist in analyze and optimizing investment portfolios to achieve better returns with reduced risk.
- Speed in transaction processing: AI acerates transaction processing and reduces errors, contributing to a more stable and secure financial system.

DISADVANTAGES

- High implementation costs: Implementing AI requires significant initial investments in infrastructure, technology and staff training. These upfront costs can negatively impact financial performance, especially for smaller institutions.
- Risk of errors and losses: AI can make mistakes when there is a lack of accurate data or due to incorrect parameters in the algorithms. These errors can lead to significant financial losses and affect overall performance.
- Inability to understand complex situations: In some cases, AI algorithms may struggle to interpret financial situations that require deep analysis and human judgment. This inability can lead to ineffective decisions or losses.

- Ethical issues and privacy: AI often process sensitive personal data of customers. This raises concerns about privacy and can lead to legal problems or a loss of trust from customers, which impacts the financial performance of institutions.
- Job losses and social consequences: The implementation of AI can lead to job reductions, creating social concerns and sometimes resistance from employees. This can affect organizational culture and the stability of operations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From this study, by comparing two very large banks in terms of ROE and ROA before and after the implementation of AI, as well as the income and expenses of each bank, it was noted that after covering the costs and the adaption period, the data show an increase and AI has effectively impacted the finances of these banks. Large banks with a very high number of transactions, which require a larger workforce, have implemented AI to reduce labor costs. It is evident that the income and expenses in the first few years for both banks are low, which is due to the high cost of implementing AI, but in the later years, AI starts to yield its fruits.

The improvements that Artificial intelligence brings to the banking sector can be significant, but their long-term sustainability remains debatable. While AI helps reduce costs and increase operational efficiency, continuous reliance on complex algorithms may bring risks, especially when facing unexpected market changes or lack of quality data. Other limitations include the need for substantial initial investments and the challenges of organizational adaption, as the use of AI requires new skills and adjustments in the work culture. Furthermore, if not properly managed, AI models can lead in inaccurate decision-making due to the deterioration of algorithms if misinterpretation of their results. These factors suggest that, although AI offers significant benefits, its long-term impacts require careful oversight and ongoing adaption.

In the analysis of the differences between the German and American banks, significant differences were observed in the impact of AI. For Deutsch Bank, the implementation of AI in 2016 initially led to continuous decline in revenues and expenses until 2017. However, in 2019, the bank experienced a significant increase in these indicators, which suggests that the impact of AI may have brought short-term effects on efficiency, but also faced unforeseen risks or new market demands. This change model may also reflect the impact of German regulations and the characteristics of European market, suggesting a complex impact of AI that differs from one bank to another.

It is emphasized that in this study, there are also other elements that influence that influence the income and expense picture, but these are stable, essential and nonsystematic factors. Additionally, elements such as capital and the investment of the owner's capital also affect ROE and ROA. Furthermore, the writing does not encompass banks in general but focuses on the two banks that implemented AI from the beginning and how it has impacted their finances.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Large Initial Investments and Organizational Adaptation: Banks must plan and divest carefully in the implementation of Artificial Intelligence, considering the need for substantial initial investments and addressing organizational adaptation challenges. This will help ensure the process is more sustainable and create opportunities for long-term development.

Oversight and Regulation of algorithms: Banks must continuously monitor the performance of Artificial Intelligence algorithms and ensure that they adapt to market changes and new demands. Monitoring algorithms will help prevent misinterpretation of results and ensure that decision-making is accurate and reliable.

Building Transparency and Increasing Customer Trust: Banks should inform customers about the use of Artificial Intelligence, the benefits it brings, and how it helps improve financial services. Transparency in the use of customer data and the explanation of how algorithms work will help build trust and customer loyalty.

Preparing for unexpected market changes: Banks should be ready to face unforeseen risks or rapid market changes that may impact the performance of AI algorithms. This requires a flexible approach and an adaptable process for technology adaptation to potential changes.

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THE ROLE OF THE 1946 CONSTITUTION IN THE FORMALIZATION OF THE ALBANIAN COMMUNIST STATE

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ABSTRACT

The Law on Elections for the Constituent Assembly of 1945 in September, promulgated by the Antifascist National Liberation Council, decided that these elections would be free and democratic. They would ensure equality among citizens who had the right to vote and, above all, they would be secret. Not everyone would have this right; this group included the ministers of the Quisling government, war criminals and all those individuals who no longer enjoyed civil rights. Any other individual, an Albanian citizen over 18 years of age, could have the right to delegate sovereignty. The importance of these elections was very definitive for the Party, as it was considered a big step towards political maturity, to have the opportunity to show all the organizational skills and the platform that they would follow in the service of government, regardless of how it was later implemented. The elections for the Constituent Assembly were held on December 2, 1945. Over 90% of voters participated in them and 93% of them voted for the candidates of the Front. In these elections, no other party participated, because the communist regime led by Enver Hoxha had provided only one list of candidates, all of whom were affiliated with his party. Other political parties, which had had influence in the pre-war period, were suppressed or were out of the game. Since the Communist

Party had extended its influence to every corner of the political and legal aspect of the functioning of Albania at that time, no other political competition was allowed.

Keywords: *Elections, legal, communism, regime*

LEGAL MEASURES ON THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE STATE

The consolidation of the communist state in post-war Albania should not be seen simply as an administrative or legal process, but as a radical transformation of the social order and the way of conceiving power. Even before taking power, the Communist Party began revolutionary reforms aimed at liquidating the wealthy classes and creating the economic basis of socialism, in accordance with the character of political power (Sadiku, 2013: 29-30).

Thus, the transformations of that time were not reforms in the traditional sense of the word, but a means of building a new social order, where law and justice lost their autonomy. The principle of equality before the law was replaced by the principle of class affiliation, and this brought about a reversal of the very nature of law: from a system of impartial norms to a mechanism of political control. In this sense, the establishment of the communist state in Albania represents a radical deviation from the legal tradition based on freedom and human dignity.

In parallel with the efforts to recover the country destroyed by the war, the state began implementing reforms aimed at stripping the bourgeoisie and the gentry of the main means of production and creating a centralized economy (ASH. 2009).

This strategy constitutes a fundamental change in the legal nature of property, because the means of production, which in modern legal systems are elements guaranteed by private law, were considered political assets that should belong to the state. Thus, a new logic was created, where the state was placed above the law and not within it. Essentially, this means that the law did not serve to protect the right to property, but to annul it, considering private property as an obstacle to the “construction of socialism”.

In the years following the devastating war, the new regime inherited a treasury emptied by the occupying governments and by the collaborators. But in the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels had laid out a solution to the dilemma facing Hoxha and Shehu, a solution that yielded results in Albania (Jacques, 1995: 486).

The proletariat would eliminate capital from the bourgeoisie by putting it completely in the hands of the state. The state used its powerful political power to achieve this great cause. This shows that all those citizens, such as bankers, etc., had a lot of wealth, while the ordinary workers had always lived in poverty. In this case, a slave-owner relationship is observed. Where the upper class of the bourgeoisie used the lower class to carry out various jobs and the remuneration to them was not enough for any vital need. This injustice was eliminated through the confiscation of property.

Among the first steps that were taken were the control of the economy by the state (Saraci, 2021: 20).

The first acts of the democratic government, issued during 1944-1945, were directed against the property of the Italian and German states, as well as war criminals and enemies of the people, confiscating these and putting the property of the Italian and German states under control (Bocari, 1973: 127).

Law No. 38: "On the confiscation of the assets of the Italian and German states located in Albania and on the taking control of the assets of their nationals"¹

Law No. 38 was enacted to ensure state control over foreign assets and assets associated with the occupying powers, preventing the economic and political influence of Italy and Germany in Albania after World War II. The consequences of the occupation and previous collaboration with the fascist powers had left a legacy of foreign assets in the hands of Albanian individuals and companies, which could threaten the economic sovereignty of the new state.

Article 1: All state and quasi-state, state-owned or patrimonial property of Italy and Germany located in Albania shall be confiscated. Such property shall be confiscated not only by right of ownership of the above-mentioned States, but also any property owned by them through companies or persons involved.²

At the ideological level, this measure serves as an instrument of justification of economic centralization and the elimination of foreign influence in the national economy. The law is not interpreted as a means of protecting the property rights of individuals within an equal legal framework, but as a mechanism to legitimize the seizure and concentration of wealth in the hands of the state, turning private property into an object of political control.

The Agrarian Reform and the Extraordinary Tax were not only legal instruments to distribute wealth or to provide income for the state, but symbolic means to destroy the old structures of economic domination and to create a new relationship between the individual and political authority. The expropriation of large landowners and the distribution of land to the peasants represented not only an act of social justice at first glance, but also a way to connect the broader stratum of the population with the new power, making them feel part of a new social order. On the other hand, the crackdown on merchants and the bourgeoisie through extraordinary taxes did not only have a fiscal function, but also aimed to destroy any alternative source of influence and economic independence vis-à-vis the state. In essence, these measures created a political philosophy where the state was built on the basis of the denial of economic and social pluralism, becoming the sole source of legitimacy, control and distribution of goods.

If we look at the process of state consolidation through a philosophical lens, the Agrarian Reform and the Extraordinary Tax were not only measures of a practical nature,

¹ Official Gazette, *Presidency of the National Liberation Council*, Law No. 36 (Tirana, Tuesday, 23, 1945), 3.

² Official Gazette, *Presidency of the National Liberation Council*, Article 1: *Confiscation of Italian and German State Properties Located in Albania* (Tirana, Tuesday, 23, 1945)

but manifestations of an ideology that aimed to embody the Hegelian notion of the state as an expression of universal reason. Through the expropriation of the old elites and the distribution of wealth, the individual was no longer seen as an economically independent subject, but as a being that finds meaning only through his integration into the collective and submission to state sovereignty. This political philosophy, absorbed by communist ideology, saw in the elimination of economic pluralism a way to eliminate the possibility of political pluralism, making the state not only the arbiter, but also the creator and guarantor of social reality itself. In this sense, the consolidation of power was not simply a legal transformation of 1945–1946, but an ontological upheaval, where private property and power collapsed to make way for a total sovereignty, which saw the individual not as an end in itself, but as an instrument in the service of a new collective history.

In this process, it is noted that Marxist principles existed and were considered fundamental. First of all, these principles must be identified and each of them justified.

Firstly, the means of production had to be nationalized, thus destroying the power of the bourgeoisie (Jacques, 1995: 486). This was based on the belief that the means of production – land, capital and other resources – represented the basis of the economic power of the bourgeoisie. As long as they remained in private hands, there was a risk that the wealthy class would maintain its influence and prevent the establishment of social equality. Nationalization was therefore seen as an instrument to destroy the economic power of the bourgeoisie and eliminate any material basis for opposition to the regime.

Secondly, the State had to have absolute control. Absolute state control emerged in the economic sphere, through laws on the nationalization of private property and the collectivization of agriculture, where every means of production and valuable asset passed into state hands. This process was justified by the idea that only the state, as the representative of the “general interest,” could manage resources fairly and equitably. From a legal point of view, the establishment of this control was supported by a series of normative acts that limited the constitutional rights of property, organization, and individual freedom.

Thirdly, the centralized economy had to adapt to the Soviet model.

Confiscations based on the law during 44-45 came in large numbers. From the assets of Italians and Germans to every other resource of citizens in Albania. By the end of 1945, everything was under state control (Jacques, 1995: 486).

AGRARIAN REFORM AND THE CONFISCATION OF PROPERTY

A document explains that confiscation “is the act by which the state becomes the owner of a thing belonging to someone else, without paying compensation.” In 1945, as a result of the decisions to confiscate private property and expropriate without compensation those who owned real estate, large areas of land were included in the Agrarian Reform law.

The confiscation law affected both Italian and German assets in Albania, but also the Axis countries in general. Initially, it aimed to confiscate mainly Italian state assets, as well as those of persons or companies with state capital, or representing these countries (Fischer, 1999: 254).

In August 1943, the Presidency of the General National Liberation Council, by special “law”, decided that state lands in the liberated areas and lands confiscated from traitors and enemies of the people would be given to landless or landless farmers to work for themselves without any compensation.³

Through the powers of a government, delegated by the Congress of Përmet, the Antifascist National Liberation Committee began to apply the agrarian reform, where the class struggle was immediately intensified. This meant fighting the rich class, by confiscating their wealth. Not only property, but also the tools of labor and livestock of the large landowners were confiscated. The question that arises from this applied practice is the fact of why this agrarian reform took place and what was its purpose? We can say that as a main essence, this reform sought to suppress the upper class, because as is understood this class of the population could be the owner of a property, at a time when the poor class existed only as a labor force.

With the Agrarian Reform Law, the lands that were left to the owners could not be sold or rented. They had obligations to work the land themselves. The land distribution benefited the villagers who were on expropriated lands and those who wanted to move from war-damaged or poor mountainous areas. In both cases, preference was given to the families of martyrs and those who had taken part in the National Liberation Army, as well as other villagers with no or very little land. Families were given 5 ha of land that could be normally worked with a pen of oxen. Other families of the same sex who worked and lived together were given 3 ha each. The reform began in Fier on July 15, 1945 and ended on November 17, 1946 (Sadiku, 2013: 32).

The Agrarian Reform of 1945 was not just a land distribution, but a sophisticated instrument of political and ideological control over the peasantry, aiming to build a society in line with the totalitarian vision of the Communist Party. Through privileges for the families of martyrs and fighters of the National Liberation Army, the regime created a sense of loyalty based on “historical merit” and guaranteed a social group that could be used as an ideological shield against possible resistance. The restriction of the possibility of selling or renting land and the obligation to work it yourself were not simply economic measures, but tools to shape a peasantry dependent on the state and to gradually institutionalize the collectivization model, where every act of the individual was linked to the interest of the state and to ideological orientation. The reform also affected the social structure and psychology of the peasants, creating feelings of belonging, privilege and exclusion, and reinforcing the narrative of “friends and enemies of the people” as a means of legitimizing power. The territorial dimension of the reform, the inclusion of families displaced from damaged or mountainous areas, shows that the transformation was not only economic, but also a strategic reorganization of society and space, reflecting the Party’s total vision of a controlled, homogeneous and ideologically

³ National Archives of Albania (AQSH), Fund 14, Year 1952, “Study on the Issue of Agrarian Reform in Albania.”

committed Albania. In this sense, the Agrarian Reform was not only a practical step towards socialism, but also a philosophical means of affirming unquestioned power and building a new social order under the sign of Hoxheist doctrine.

LAW ON EXTRAORDINARY TAXATION

The political and economic program of the Communist Party and the reforms undertaken by it gave the Albanian state a pronounced class character. Such a state was needed by the Communist Party to suppress the resistance of its political opponents, the expropriation of the wealthy classes and "... to protect the victories of the revolution" (Omari, 1977: 119).

The economic situation of the country was quite difficult, after the establishment of the communist regime. The extraordinary tax was declared in 1945 by the communist government and was one of the main tools to hit the wealthy classes and "class enemies". It aimed to provide immediate income for the reconstruction of the country, which had emerged from the war with a destroyed economy, but in reality it also had a political and repressive character. The tax was imposed on the wealth of citizens, especially landowners, merchants and large craftsmen, and often the amounts were so high that they led to their bankruptcy. In addition to its economic function, it served as a means to financially weaken the classes independent of the government and to prepare the ground for the agrarian reform and subsequent nationalizations. The process of alienation of private property, as far as the class of merchants and entrepreneurs was concerned, began with the law of the extraordinary tax on war profits. This tax falls on the period 1939-1944 with the idea that the profits during this period were considerable in value. As has always happened with regard to the communist period, here too we have a deviation. This deviation lies in the fact that, one motive is another appears at first glance. It is understandable that the main goal was not to tax these high values earned during that period, but the state sought total ownership of every commodity, product, or source coming from the Albanian people.

The extraordinary tax aimed at deepening and intensifying the war against the wealthy classes and on the other hand the government sought to provide the necessary financial means, without waiting for them to accumulate by ordinary methods. It constituted the most important revolutionary measure in the field of finance and at the same time it can be called the first step in the process of widespread expropriation of the wealthy classes.

In fact, the purpose of the extraordinary tax was for the state to collect the large quantities of foreign goods and gold reserves that merchants and businessmen had. For this purpose, the War Profits Tax Commission and special commissions were created to levy the extraordinary tax throughout Albania (Omari, 1977: 49).

The extraordinary tax changed the logic of the relationship between the state and citizens. Until then, taxes had a fiscal character and served to collect income according to the economic possibilities of individuals. While this extraordinary tax was imposed on a political basis, with the aim of dissolving a social stratum undesirable to the regime. So, it was no longer just an economic obligation, but a punitive and ideological tool, which

treated private property as an obstacle to the construction of the new socialist order. In this sense, the tax not only provided immediate financial resources, but marked the beginning of the transformation of private property into state property, foreshadowing the agrarian reform and the massive nationalizations that would follow. This tax did not have as its goal simply finances, but created a political and legal precedent, where private property was placed under the full control of the state and was no longer seen as an inviolable right. The imposition of the extraordinary tax on war profits has had a great, two-sided importance.

First, it provided 50% of the budget revenues of the 1945/46 fiscal year.

The fact that this measure provided 50% of the budget revenues of 1945/46 shows that the main source of state financing was not productive economic activity, but the sequestration and taxation of existing private property. Thus, the law no longer functioned as a tool for fiscal justice, but as a mechanism for transferring wealth from the individual to the state, which constitutes a clear deviation from the nature of law as a system of protection of property and equality before the law.

Secondly, the size of the quotas, combined with the subsequent reduction in the prices of commercial goods, dealt a very serious blow to the comprador bourgeoisie which, by collaborating with the monopoly capital of fascist Italy without caring about the development of the country's economy, had filled its pockets with gold (Omari, 1977: 136).

The reduction of trade prices and the imposition of high tax quotas constituted a combined economic-political strategy aimed at the systematic weakening of the commercial bourgeoisie. These measures could be interpreted as attempts to stabilize the market after the war, but in essence they were oriented towards the destruction of private capital as a source of economic independence. The "comprador bourgeoisie", which in the text is described as a stratum linked to Italian monopoly capital, represented precisely that segment of society that did not fit the ideology of state socialism. Therefore, its economic blow, through fiscal and trade policies, was an act of a political nature disguised as economic regulation. From a legal point of view, this shows that economic law did not function on the basis of neutrality, but served as a means of class punishment. Through the reduction of prices and the increase of quotas, the state intervened directly in market relations, eliminating the logic of free competition and gradually nationalizing the function of trade. This intervention led to the weakening of the role of private law and the narrowing of the space for individual initiative, which are fundamental elements of natural law and the market economy. At a deeper level, this process reflects the conflict between law as a system guaranteeing economic freedom and the ideology that considers private property as a source of exploitation. Through these reforms, the communist government shaped a legal order dependent on political goals, ultimately deviating the law from its nature of impartial justice.

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MOTIVATION AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN TOURISM: INTERNATIONAL INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ALBANIA

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ABSTRACT

The tourism and hospitality sector is a dynamic and powerful industry that contributes to economic growth and employment. However, its seasonal nature, intensive customer interaction and pressure to deliver high quality services create complex human resource management challenges, including high turnover, low motivation and employment instability. This paper reviews four international studies- Kotera et al. (2018), Camilleri et al. (2023), Tanković et al. (2023) and Fotiadis et al. (2025)- to examine how motivational factors and HRM approaches affect employee performance across different hospitality contexts. Drawing on classical and contemporary motivation theories, the review highlights the critical role of intrinsic motivation supported by autonomy, development opportunities and positive organizational practices in enhancing employee well-being, commitment and retention. Extrinsic motivators such as wages remain important but are insufficient to sustain motivation in the long term. Preliminary findings from the Albanian tourism sector indicate that low wages, seasonal contracts and limited professional development reduce motivation, while supportive managerial practices enhance engagement and performance. The paper offers recommendations to strengthen strategic HRM and employee motivation in Albania's tourism and hospitality industry.

Keywords: *Employee motivation, HRM, Tourism, comparative review.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism and hospitality are industries that depend strongly on people. Employees are not just service workers; they create experiences that shape how visitors feel and what they think about a destination. However, jobs in tourism are often seasonal, low paid and emotionally tiring, which creates many challenges for managing and motivating staff.

In Albania, tourism has become one of the country's main priorities and fastest growing sectors. The National Tourism Strategy 2024-2030 sees tourism as an important part of sustainable development. Still, there are problems such as informal jobs, low and unequal wages, lack of skills that match market needs and few chances for professional growth. Because of these issues, motivating employees has become essential for improving service quality and keeping the industry competitive.

This paper aims to show how motivation theories and human resource management (HRM) practices used in other countries can help improve Albania's tourism sector. By comparing international research with the Albanian situation, the study suggests ways to increase employee motivation, satisfaction and performance in tourism.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) proposes that human needs follow a hierarchy, from physiological and safety needs to self-actualization. In tourism, employees often remain at lower levels of this hierarchy due to financial insecurity and job instability. Ensuring acceptable working conditions and reliable contracts allows workers to pursue higher-order needs such as belonging and self-development, which are essential for intrinsic motivation and loyalty.

Herzberg's Two Factor Theory (1959) differentiates between hygiene factors (salary, supervision, work environment) that prevent dissatisfaction and motivators (achievement, recognition, growth) that create satisfaction. In tourism, improving wages or conditions alone may reduce complaints but not necessarily enhance engagement. True motivation arises from opportunities for personal development and acknowledgement of effort.

Adams' Equity Theory (1963) emphasizes perceived fairness. Employees compare their contributions and rewards with others; inequity leads to demotivation and turnover. In Albania's tourism industry, where wage and workload disparities are common, transparent HR policies and equitable promotion criteria are crucial for sustaining morale and trust.

Deci and Ryan, through their Self Determination Theory (1985), argue that intrinsic motivation flourishes when three psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence and relatedness. Tourism employees who are empowered to make decisions, receive meaningful feedback and feel socially connected are more likely to exhibit proactive behavior and emotional commitment. This framework aligns closely with modern HRM concepts of empowerment and participatory leadership.

COMPARATIVE REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Kotera, Adhikari and Van Gordon (2018), in their research on hospitality employees in the UK, explored the difference between autonomous and controlled motivation. They found that when employees are intrinsically motivated- driven by inner purpose, autonomy and personal values- they experience better mental wellbeing and stronger job performance. In contrast, when motivation comes from external pressures such as fear of job loss or the need for financial security, workers are more likely to experience stress, burnout and disengagement. The authors suggest that hospitality organizations should introduce self-development programs such as mindfulness and neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) to help employees build resilience and sustain intrinsic motivation.

Camilleri, Troise and Morrison (2023) present the concept the concept of Responsible Human Resource Management (HRM), which combines ethical leadership, employee empowerment and sustainable motivation. Their study shows that organizations that practice fairness, provide autonomy and create learning opportunities tend to have lower employee turnover and higher levels of commitment. Recognition and transparency are identified as important factors that connect HRM practices with stronger motivation. The research highlights that responsible management is not only ethical but also strategic, as it fosters trust, engagement and long-term organizational stability.

The study by Čuić Tanković, Vitezić, and Kraljić (2023) investigates how soft skills, especially communication, empathy and teamwork affect motivation and customer satisfaction in Croatia's hospitality industry. The findings emphasize that employees who are trained in interpersonal and emotional skills perform better, feel more confident and integrate more easily into their teams. This sense of belonging increases job satisfaction and motivation. In this context, motivation is seen as a natural outcome of skill mastery and positive workplace relationships, underlining the human side of service quality in tourism.

Fotiadis, Vassiliadis, Xanthopoulou and Kladou (2025) examined HR strategies in Greek hotels using a mixed method approach. They found that many businesses rely on short-term hiring and invest little in staff training or development. The study calls for more strategic and long-term HR planning, emphasizing digital recruitment system, continuous professional development and performance-based rewards. By aligning HR policies with employee needs and market competition, the research demonstrates how structured HRM strategies can lead to sustainable motivation and improved service outcomes in tourism.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Across all four studies, consistent themes become evident, offering valuable insights into motivation and HRM in the tourism and hospitality sector.

First, intrinsic motivation-driven by autonomy, personal growth and purpose, consistently leads to higher performance, job satisfaction and well-being. Employees

who feel a sense of control over their work and alignment with their values are more resilient and engaged.

Second, fairness and recognition play a central role. When employees perceive equitable treatment, transparent reward system and appreciation for their efforts, they develop stronger commitment and trust toward their organization.

Third, skill development and communication are shown to strengthen motivation. Continuous training in interpersonal and soft skills, such as empathy, teamwork and effective communication, not only improves service quality but also promotes confidence and belonging.

The studies collectively emphasize the need for strategic and responsible HRM. Sustainable motivation depends on ethical leadership, empowerment and long-term investment in people, rather than on short term incentives like wage increases. Together, these findings highlight that human centered management is key to achieving competitiveness and service excellence in tourism. Motivation is multidimensional, psychological, social and structural. Effective HRM must therefore address both the “heart” (intrinsic) and the “wallet” (extrinsic) dimension of work.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ALBANIAN TOURISM SECTOR

Albania’s tourism workforce faces several key challenges, including low wages, high seasonality and limited career advancement opportunities. Based on international research and best practices the following strategic priorities are proposed to develop a more motivated and professional workforce:

- Integrate motivation into HRM policy. HR strategies should combine financial rewards with intrinsic motivators such as recognition, autonomy and opportunities for learning. This balanced approach can boost both job satisfaction and performance.
- Invest in skills and training. Ongoing professional development, especially in soft skills, digital literacy and sustainable tourism practices can strengthen employee’s competence, confidence and pride in their work, leading to higher quality service.
- Promote equity and transparency. Creating fair, merit-based system for performance evaluation, promotions and rewards helps build trust, reduce turnover and enhance employee commitment.
- Foster ethical and transformational Leadership. Leaders should promote respect, open communication and participatory management. Such leadership builds a sense of belonging and shared purpose, essential for intrinsic motivation and teamwork.

By focusing on these priorities, Albania can build a more stable, skilled and motivated tourism workforce, capable of delivering authentic, high quality visitor experience while contributing to the country’s long-term goals for sustainable economic development.

CONCLUSIONS

Motivation is not a static concept but an evolving process shaped by workplace culture, managerial behavior and socio-economic context. The reviewed studies collectively affirm that intrinsic motivation, reinforced by fair and responsible HRM, is the foundation of sustainable employee performance.

For Albania, improving wages and contracts is necessary but not sufficient. Building an environment where employees feel valued, competent and connected will determine the future competitiveness of the tourism sector. Integrating psychological well-being, professional development and ethical governance into HRM design offers a pathway toward a more resilient and human centered hospitality industry.

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BALANCING TRADITION AND MODERNIZATION: INSIGHTS FROM TEACHERS ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF ALBANIAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceptions of teachers and student teachers regarding the changes needed in Albania, focusing both on the teaching profession and on broader social domains such as family, economy, politics, culture, and legislation. The research is guided by three questions: How do participants perceive the necessary changes in these key domains of Albanian society? What priorities do they articulate for the transformation of the teaching profession and its status? And how do their perceptions reflect the tension between preserving traditional values and embracing modernization in the Albanian context? The sample included 380 participants (78.2% female and 21.8% male) with diverse demographic characteristics in terms of age, educational level, and area of residence (73% urban and 26.1% rural). Data were collected through an open-ended survey instrument administered online and analyzed using thematic coding. The findings highlight that participants link the improvement of the teaching profession with better working conditions, appropriate salaries, greater respect, and reduced bureaucracy; in the family domain, they emphasize moral values, respect, and solidarity; in the economy and politics, they stress the importance of stable incomes, employment opportunities, and a more accountable, corruption-free political culture; while in culture and legislation they point to the tension between tradition and emancipation, as well as concerns about law enforcement and the protection of vulnerable groups. Overall, the study suggests that teachers' perceptions express a comprehensive vision for societal transformation, where the advancement of education is closely connected with economic, political, and institutional reforms, requiring a balanced approach between tradition and modernization.

Keywords: *Teachers, education, economy, politics, culture, legislation.*

INTRODUCTION

Transformations in Albanian society over recent decades have deeply shaped its economic, political, and educational landscape. As the country seeks a sustainable model of democracy and progress, education remains central to preserving national identity while embracing modernity. It serves not only as a driver of economic development but also as a catalyst for cultural renewal and social cohesion, fostering citizenship and democratic engagement (Binder, 2024; UNESCO, 2024). Within this process, the teacher plays a pivotal role in shaping new generations and mediating between traditional and modern values, embodying the tension between cultural continuity and the demands of rapid social and technological change (Eurofound, 2024).

Educational challenges in Albania and the Western Balkans are closely tied to teaching quality, teacher motivation, and the development of modern competencies. International assessments such as PISA 2022 and PIRLS 2021 reveal declines equivalent to about 2.5 years of learning, reflecting limited use of effective instructional practices and a lack of supportive environments for educators (Shmis et al., 2025). In Albania, instruction remains largely teacher-centered, focused on content delivery rather than critical and collaborative learning (IIEP-UNESCO, 2024), emphasizing the need for pedagogical modernization and sustained investment in continuous professional development (UNICEF & OECD, 2024). CPD and structured career systems are key to educational quality and teacher retention (Eurydice, 2021), yet they often remain formalistic and weakly linked to career progression or motivation (UNESCO, 2024). As Binder (2024) notes, improving teachers' status and working conditions is essential for an education system responsive to the demands of a digital and inclusive society, while studies confirm that intrinsic motivation, recognition, and supportive leadership foster teacher sustainability and reduce turnover (Agaj, 2023; Farahmandpour & Voelkel, 2025). Beyond structural factors, the cultural dimension of teaching remains crucial. Partnerships between universities and schools foster reflective practice and professional leadership, positioning teachers as active agents of change. This perspective is particularly relevant in contexts where education functions not merely as a vehicle for knowledge transmission but as a means of building social capital and restoring citizens' trust in public institutions (UNESCO, 2024).

In the field of education policy, Albania has implemented several reforms to enhance quality and strengthen accountability. The European Commission (2024) report notes progress in curriculum updates and teacher development initiatives but warns that the management of human and financial resources remains fragmented. UNESCO (2024) similarly identifies the absence of institutional mechanisms for evidence-based policymaking, leading to reforms that are often inconsistent or only partially implemented. Eurydice (2021) and UNESCO (2024) highlight the need for policies that support teachers' professional autonomy and promote horizontal cooperation among institutions. Meaningful teacher involvement in policy design is essential for building a responsible and sustainable culture of quality. In Albania, however, bureaucratic divisions and weak coordination across educational levels continue to hinder implementation. Strengthening the link between research and policy remains

crucial to ensure that education reforms are genuinely evidence-informed rather than formal or symbolic (UNESCO, 2017).

Social transformation in Albania is closely tied to economic development and employment. Eurofound (2024) notes that, despite expanded access to education, young people continue to face economic insecurity, limited job opportunities, and weak social inclusion. Similarly, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2024) finds that many view migration as a route to economic and professional stability. In this context, improving education without sustainable economic growth creates a paradox that fuels disillusionment and erodes trust in public institutions (King & Gëdeshi, 2020). Although salaries in education have increased (INSTAT, 2024), they remain below the national average, reducing the profession's appeal for younger generations. IIEP-UNESCO (2024) links this to insufficient financial incentives that weaken motivation and performance. Strengthening the relationship between education and the economy thus requires policies that enhance employability, stimulate innovation, and secure fair working conditions for educational staff (UN Albania, 2024).

In contemporary educational research, culture and values are viewed as the moral infrastructure sustaining social cohesion and ethical growth. They shape how schools construct meaning, belonging, and legitimacy within communities (Aspin, 2005; Peterson & Deal, 2009). School culture represents the shared moral framework linking teachers' personal ethics with institutional purposes (Schein, 2004). When coherent, it fosters trust, collaboration, and professional identity; when fragmented, it breeds alienation and resistance to change (Peterson & Deal, 2009). Reflective and dialogical cultures grounded in openness and critical inquiry enable educators to act as learning communities responsive to ethical and social complexity (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). These theoretical perspectives are particularly relevant to the Albanian context, where social transformation coincides with what European studies describe as a crisis of trust and value erosion among youth (Eurofound, 2024; UNESCO, 2024). Teachers, as moral and cultural agents, play a crucial role in rebuilding confidence in education and institutions by modeling democratic, inclusive, and ethical practices. Schools thus function as spaces of moral and civic renewal, where the tension between tradition and modernity is actively negotiated. Education, in this sense, transcends its technical function to become a cultural and ethical enterprise central to restoring social cohesion and promoting coexistence in a pluralistic democracy (Binder, 2024; Plaku & Leka, 2025).

Within this complex context, the perceptions of teachers and pre-service teachers offer a distinctive lens through which to understand how Albanian society envisions its own transformation. They are not only educational practitioners but also citizens who express expectations, tensions, and aspirations for social change (UNESCO, 2024; Eurydice, 2021). Examining their voices reveals how traditional values are negotiated alongside modern ideals, how education is perceived as a means of improving quality of life, and how its development relates to trust in public institutions. Grounded in this theoretical and empirical framework, the study addresses three research questions: (1) How do participants perceive the necessary changes across the key domains of Albanian society education, politics, economy, culture, and legislation? (2) What priorities do they articulate for transforming the teaching profession and enhancing its social and professional status? and (3) How do their perceptions reflect the tension between preserving traditional values and embracing modernization?

METHODOLOGY

Study design: This study employed a qualitative design aimed at analysing how teachers and student teachers perceive and interpret social change in Albania. The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables the exploration of meanings, values, and lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participants and sampling: A total of 380 participants (78.2% female, 21.8% male) took part, including both in-service and pre-service teachers. Most lived in urban areas, with many holding postgraduate degrees, and about seven in ten were already employed in teaching. The sample was obtained through random voluntary participation via Google Forms shared across professional networks and teacher education institutions in Albania. Participation was fully voluntary and anonymous.

Instrument: Data were collected through an online form containing six open-ended questions, created and distributed via Google Forms. The instrument invited participants to reflect freely on six areas of social and professional life in Albania: the teaching profession, the Albanian family, the economy, politics, culture, and legislation. Open-ended questions asked participants to describe what kinds of reforms or changes they considered necessary in teaching and in society, allowing them to articulate their perceptions, values, and expectations in their own words.

Data collection and analysis: Data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). Responses were repeatedly read for familiarisation, then inductively coded without predefined categories. The codes were organised into themes corresponding to the six areas of inquiry and synthesised into broader analytical dimensions. This interpretive process revealed cross-cutting themes, such as justice, equality, meritocracy, inclusion, and institutional modernization, illustrating how participants conceptualised social change in Albania.

Ethical considerations: Before participation, respondents were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. No personal identifiers were collected, and all responses were coded and analysed exclusively at the group level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the qualitative analysis are presented thematically to reflect the main areas of social perception articulated by teachers and student teachers. The responses were organized into two major dimensions: the social and cultural dimension, encompassing education, family, and culture and the institutional and structural dimension, covering economy, politics, and legislation. Together, these themes capture how participants envision moral renewal, civic responsibility, and institutional integrity as interconnected forces shaping Albania's social transformation.

**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS
(EDUCATION, FAMILY, AND CULTURE)**

Table 1 presents the categories and subcategories related to the social and cultural dimension, illustrating how teachers and student teachers conceptualize moral responsibility, professional identity, and the values that sustain social cohesion and cultural continuity.

Table 1: *Main Categories, Subcategories, and Illustrative Reports (education, family, culture)*

Main Category	Subcategories	Illustrative Reports (edited responses)
Education Teaching Profession	Status and social recognition of teachers	“Teachers should regain authority and professional respect.” “Society must value teachers as it once did, they shape future generations.” “Respect for teachers has declined, even though their responsibilities have grown.”
	Salaries and working conditions	“Teachers’ salaries are far too low for their workload.” “Schools need better equipment and facilities.” “Financial and moral support for teachers should be strengthened.”
	Bureaucracy and administrative load	“We are overwhelmed by paperwork rather than teaching.” “Too much time is spent on documents instead of meaningful professional work.”
	Professionalism and motivation	“There should be more commitment to students and less formalism.” “Motivation for professional growth and creativity in teaching needs to increase.”
Albanian Family	Moral education and respect	“Respect for the elderly is fading.” “Children are not raised with sufficient responsibility.” “We need to rebuild belonging and mutual respect within families.”
	Gender roles and traditional mindsets	“Patriarchal patterns still persist in many households.” “There must be greater equality between men and women.”
	Communication and family relationships	“There is a lack of communication between parents and children.” “Parents should spend more time with their children.”
	Economic factors	“Economic hardship is the main source of family conflict.” “Low incomes undermine harmony and stability.”
Albanian Culture	Preservation of traditional values	“We must not forget our roots and cultural traditions.” “Albanian culture is rich but insufficiently promoted.”
	Mindset and social emancipation	“We need more openness toward new ideas.” “People should stop judging others.” “We must move beyond prejudice and foster tolerance.”
	Cultural participation and the arts	“There should be more cultural activities for young people.” “Art and literature deserve stronger institutional support.”
	Civic values and ethics	“Civic behavior and respect for the law should be cultivated.” “Society needs greater education in coexistence and civic ethics.”

The findings show how teachers and student teachers articulate a broad reform agenda that links education, family, and culture as mutually reinforcing pillars of Albania's social transformation. Their views highlight the intersection between professional, moral, and civic dimensions of change. In the educational field, respondents stress the deterioration of teachers' social status, the inadequacy of salaries relative to the cost of living, and excessive bureaucracy that hinders pedagogical creativity. This mirrors international analyses showing that teacher professionalism depends on recognition, autonomy, and meaningful professional development (Eurydice, 2021; UNESCO, 2024). Participants view the teacher not only as an instructor but as a moral leader responsible for cultivating civic values and democratic attitudes, consistent with Aspin's (2005) concept of learning communities as spaces of ethical engagement. In the Albanian family context, participants perceive an erosion of moral values and respect. They express concern about communication gaps, the persistence of patriarchal attitudes, and the impact of economic stress on family cohesion. These insights echo wider European debates about the reconfiguration of family roles in times of social turbulence, where equality and shared responsibility replace traditional hierarchies (Beteille and Evans, 2019). Respondents implicitly connect the stability of the family with the moral resilience of society, underscoring that ethical education begins within the home. Regarding culture, teachers interpret it as both a heritage to be preserved and a dynamic field for renewal. The emphasis on tolerance, civic ethics, and openness toward diversity aligns with UNESCO's (2024) call for inclusive societies built on cultural dialogue. Cultural vitality, in this sense, is perceived as inseparable from education: schools are seen as agents for cultivating social imagination, creativity, and critical thinking (Binder, 2024). Respondents advocate for stronger institutional support for art, literature, and civic education as instruments for rebuilding collective identity and public trust. Across these three spheres, a coherent narrative emerges, one that links professional dignity, ethical culture, and civic responsibility as conditions for sustainable development. Teachers and student teachers envision reform not as a technical adjustment but as a moral and cultural renewal that bridges tradition with modernity. Their perspectives confirm that education, when anchored in values and inclusion, remains the primary driver of Albania's democratic and social transformation.

THE STRUCTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSIONS (ECONOMY, POLITICS, AND LEGISLATION)

Table 2 presents the categories and subcategories related to the structural and institutional dimensions, reflecting how teachers and student teachers perceive economic fairness, political accountability, and legal integrity as pillars of social trust.

Table 2: *Main categories, subcategories, and Illustrative reports (economy, politics, legislation)*

Main Category	Subcategories	Illustrative Reports (edited responses)
Albanian Economy	Employment and income	“Salaries should match the cost of living.” “Young people are discouraged because effort is not rewarded.” “Employment policies should create merit-based opportunities.”
	Economic inequality and poverty	“The gap between rich and poor is growing.” “Low wages and high prices make survival difficult.” “Economic justice should be ensured for all citizens.”
	Migration and labor mobility	“Many educated people leave because they see no future here.” “Better salaries and stability would reduce migration.”
	Investment and innovation	“There should be more investment in production, not just consumption.” “Innovation and technology should drive the economy.”
Albanian Politics	Corruption and accountability	“Corruption is destroying trust in institutions.” “We need transparent and responsible governance.”
	Meritocracy and justice	“Jobs and promotions should depend on merit, not connections.” “The same laws should apply to everyone.”
	Political culture and civic participation	“Citizens should be more active in decision-making.” “Politics should be about service, not personal gain.”
	Institutional stability	“We need stable policies, not constant changes with every government.” “Public institutions should be independent of political influence.”
Albanian Legislation	Fairness and equality before the law	“Justice must be applied equally to all.” “There are too many privileges for people in power.”
	Law enforcement and integrity	“Laws exist but are not implemented.” “We need honest judges and prosecutors.”
	Protection of citizens’ rights	“Human rights should be guaranteed in practice, not only on paper.”; “People must feel protected by the law.”

Respondents link economic, political, and legal change to the broader vision of social justice, equality, and institutional trust. In the economic sphere, the dominant concerns relate to low wages, inequality, and limited opportunities, consistent with findings from Eurofound (2024) and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2024), which identify economic insecurity as a major factor shaping youth expectations and migration. Teachers and students alike emphasize the moral dimension of the economy, fairness, effort, and reward, as key to restoring hope and civic engagement. In politics, responses converge on the need for meritocracy, accountability, and depoliticized institutions, echoing UNESCO (2024) and European Commission (2024) reports on governance challenges and fragmented policymaking. The perceived distance between citizens and political elites reinforces the idea that trust in institutions can only be rebuilt through transparency and evidence-based decision-making. In legislation, participants stress justice, equality

before the law, and effective enforcement. Albania's legal framework is often viewed as well drafted but weakly enforced, reflecting persistent implementation gaps noted by the European Commission (2025) and UNESCO (2024). Both highlight that institutional weaknesses and limited accountability hinder effective law enforcement. Efforts to align with European standards reveal aspirations for modernization and democratic integrity, linking educational and civic values with ethics, merit, and social responsibility.

Implications and Limitations: The findings point to several areas for structural improvement: (1) Reducing bureaucracy and administrative load: Simplifying school-level procedures and shifting CPD from formal compliance to collaborative, practice-oriented professional learning. (2) Career and motivation systems: Introducing transparent career structures, and performance- or area-based incentives to enhance professional motivation and retention. (3) Civic and ethical education: Strengthening moral and civic education through school-community partnerships and inclusive curricula that promote social cohesion. (4) Evidence-based policymaking: Creating institutional mechanisms that link educational research with governance to support evidence-informed decision-making.

Using an online open-ended interview format expanded the diversity of perspectives but limited the depth of interaction. Future research could combine semi-structured interviews and focus groups with teachers and teacher education students, complemented by school-level data and internal CPD evaluations, to strengthen triangulation and contextual interpretation.

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FROM CONCERN TO CONVERSATION: FACTORS INFLUENCING YOUTH DIALOGUE IN ALBANIA

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ABSTRACT

Climate change has become increasingly present in everyday discourse, especially during extreme weather events that are now more frequently affecting Albania such as prolonged droughts, severe flooding, and intense heatwaves. Addressing climate change requires action across multiple levels, from individual behavior to international policy but one of the simplest and most impactful steps individuals can take is to talk openly about it. When climate change is rarely mentioned, it reinforces a cycle of silence that hinders awareness. By contrast, frequent discussion promotes broader engagement, forming what researchers refer to as a “pro-climate social feedback loop”. Despite the importance of such conversations, data suggest that young people in Albania rarely discuss climate change with family or friends. This study aims to identify the factors that influence how often individuals engage in these discussions. The data were collected through a questionnaire administered in 2023 and 2024 with a total of 117 university students

in Albania, assessing their beliefs and emotions regarding climate change. The survey included questions evaluating certainty about the reality of global warming, beliefs about human causation, different levels of concerns, perceptions of personal and community risk, moral evaluations of climate change, and media exposure. The findings indicate some initial and independent variables led to increased discussions about climate change and other variables that sparked little or no conversation, how convinced respondents were that climate change is happening and the potential to take actions after environmental awareness. The study concludes with practical recommendations for fostering climate dialogue and activating social norms that support broader youth engagement with climate issues in the Albanian context.

Keywords: *Climate change discourse, youth engagement, concerns, environmental awareness.*

INTRODUCTION

Climate change represents one of the most pressing challenges of this century due to its impacts on ecosystems, economics, and societies. The success of climate mitigation and adaptation efforts depends not only on policy frameworks and technological solutions but also on how individuals perceive, discuss, and act upon the issue. Public engagement, facilitated through targeted education and interpersonal communication, plays a crucial role in shaping awareness, attitudes, and behavioral intentions toward climate action.

While these dynamics have been extensively studied in high-income contexts, less attention has been paid to how they operate in countries like Albania. In recent years, Albania has experienced increasing climate variability, including prolonged droughts, severe flooding, and increasingly intense heatwaves. Despite these visible effects, climate change remains a relatively marginal topic in everyday communication. Conversations about climate issues are sporadic and often limited to times of crisis. This lack of dialogue contributes to what researchers describe as a “climate silence,” a social phenomenon that weakens public engagement and reduces readiness for collective action (Moser, 2016).

Existing research has shown that people’s perceptions of climate change are closely linked to their personal experiences and cognitive interpretations of local weather patterns. While global warming occurs on spatial and temporal scales beyond individual perception, local weather conditions can provide tangible cues through which individuals climate topics (Howe et al., 2013; Thomas et al., 2019). Especially, the way young people interpret these experiences is often shaped by motivated reasoning, the tendency to process information in ways that confirm pre-existing beliefs (Kunda, 1990). Studies in the United States and Western Europe demonstrate that those with weaker prior beliefs about climate change are more influenced by perceived personal experience (Myers et al., 2012; Akerlof et al., 2013).

According to communication theory, any public discussion or communication of a social issue can be subject to what is known as a “spiral of silence”. When a topic is rarely discussed, individuals become less likely to mention it, reinforcing a cycle of silence and disengagement. Conversely, open and frequent conversations promote

social legitimacy, encouraging that others will join the conversation, fostering broader awareness and participation.

The study aims to contribute to understanding the social and psychological dimensions of climate communication among Albanian youth. By examining the frequency and determinants of climate-related conversations, the research seeks to contribute to understanding how communication and emotional engagement can help break the cycle of silence and foster a culture of active climate awareness among youth in Albania.

UNIVERSITIES AS AGENTS OF CHANGE IN THE ERA OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Universities occupy a central position in addressing the global climate crisis, serving as both producers of scientific knowledge and as social institutions capable of fostering transformative change. They are, at best, struggling to respond adequately to the challenges of the climate and ecological crises and, at worst, may inadvertently perpetuate them by reinforcing dominant epistemologies and modes of behavior. Although calls for universities to transform their practices in response to these crises are widespread, limited attention has been paid to how such transformation might occur. One overlooked factor is the emotional and communicative environment within academic settings. A lack of space for expressing and sharing emotions about the climate crisis may lie at the core of higher education's climate silence, mirroring a wider societal pattern in which restricted dialogue reinforces apathy and passivity.

Over the last several decades, universities have taken a leading role in generating knowledge about the climate crisis, producing a vast body of research and policy guidance. Almost every government in the world now acknowledges and pledges action to address climate change; yet, global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise (Stoddard et al., 2021). Given the scale of societal transformation required, higher education institutions could be pivotal change agents in shaping sustainable futures (Giesenbauer & Müller-Christ, 2020). However, despite thousands of universities worldwide declaring climate emergencies, many remain poorly equipped to fulfill their responsibilities as part of society's critical learning infrastructure and as contributors to the public good (Facer, 2021; Gardner et al., 2021; Green, 2021). To fulfill their potential as catalysts for transformation, universities must not only educate future generations about climate change but also model climate-resilient practices, foster emotional and ethical engagement, and create spaces for open dialogue that link scientific understanding with civic responsibility.

Suggestions for what a climate-serious university might look like include developing curricula that equip students with skills in community engagement, advocacy, and media communication; empowering academic staff with the security and agency to participate in civic and environmental action; and transforming campuses into hubs for local resilience and community organizing. Facer (2021) conceptualizes these necessary shifts through four overarching dimensions: (i) redesigning the daily operations of

universities to reduce emissions, nurture biodiversity, and adapt to a changing climate; (ii) reinvigorating their civic role to build ecologically and socially resilient communities; (iii) reshaping knowledge structures to reflect the interdisciplinary complexity of climate change; and (iv) refocusing their educational mission to support both students and staff in developing the emotional, intellectual, and practical capacities needed to live well with one another and with the planet. Achieving such transformation would enable universities, not only Agricultural University of Tirana but also other private and public universities in Albania, to model climate-resilient practices and cultivate cultures of dialogue, empathy, and collective responsibility essential for addressing the climate emergency.

METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the factors influencing the frequency of climate change discussions among young people in Albania. While global research has shown that climate dialogue can strengthen awareness and collective action, limited evidence exists regarding how these dynamics unfold in the Albanian context. Data for this study were collected through a structured questionnaire administered between 2023 and 2024 to a total of 117 university students across several Albanian institutions. The questionnaire was designed to capture respondents' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral orientations toward climate change. Specifically, it included items measuring certainty about the reality of global warming; beliefs regarding human causation of climate change; levels of concern and perceived risks to self, family, and community; moral evaluations of climate change (e.g., whether it is perceived as a good or bad phenomenon); media exposure and perceptions of the efforts made by family and friends to address the issue; and frequency of interpersonal discussion about climate change with family and peers.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- To what extent do Albanian university students discuss climate change with family and friends?
- Which cognitive, emotional, and social factors influence the frequency of these discussions?
- How do perceptions of risk, moral responsibility, and media exposure relate to climate change communication among youth?
- What implications do these communicative patterns have for strengthening youth engagement and pro-climate social norms in Albania?

Descriptive and correlational analyses were conducted to examine relationships between these variables and the likelihood of engaging in interpersonal discussions about climate change. Preliminary findings suggest that higher levels of certainty, concern, and moral engagement are associated with more frequent discussions. In contrast, low perceived risk and limited media exposure appear to reinforce communicative silence.

FINDINGS

The results of the study reveal distinct patterns in how Albanian university students engage in interpersonal discussions about climate change. Overall, climate change appears to remain a relatively infrequent topic of everyday conversation: only a minority of respondents reported discussing it often with family or friends, while the majority indicated that such discussions occur rarely or only occasionally. This limited level of engagement reflects a broader social pattern of “climate silence,” where environmental concerns are acknowledged but seldom verbalized.

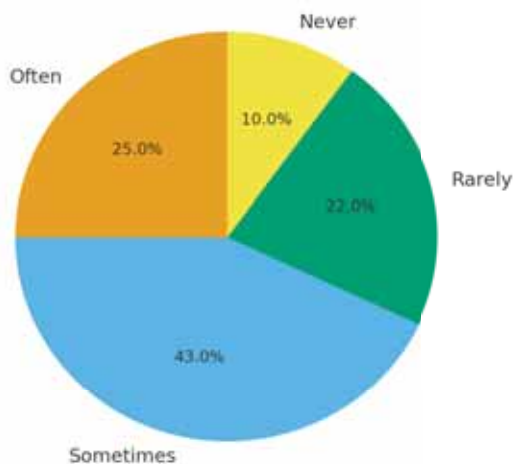


Figure 1: Frequency of climate change discussions

The results reveal that 68% of Albanian university students reported discussing climate change with family or friends at least occasionally, while 32% indicated rarely or never engaging in such conversations. Among those who discussed the topic frequently, 74% expressed a high level of concern about climate change, and 69% reported feeling a personal moral responsibility to act. Conversely, students with low perceived risk or limited media exposure were significantly less likely to participate in discussions. Moreover, 58% of respondents noted that their peers or family members were environmentally conscious, and this perception strongly correlated with higher communication frequency, revealing a cyclical relationship between awareness and engagement on climate issues.

Descriptive and correlational analyses show that cognitive, emotional, and social factors all play a role in shaping the likelihood of climate communication. Students who expressed higher certainty that climate change is occurring, greater concern about its consequences, and stronger feelings of moral responsibility were significantly more likely to engage in conversations about the issue. These findings suggest that both cognitive conviction and emotional engagement function as important motivators for interpersonal dialogue. In contrast, low perceived personal or community risk, as well

as limited exposure to climate information in the media, were associated with lower discussion frequency, reinforcing patterns of disengagement and silence.

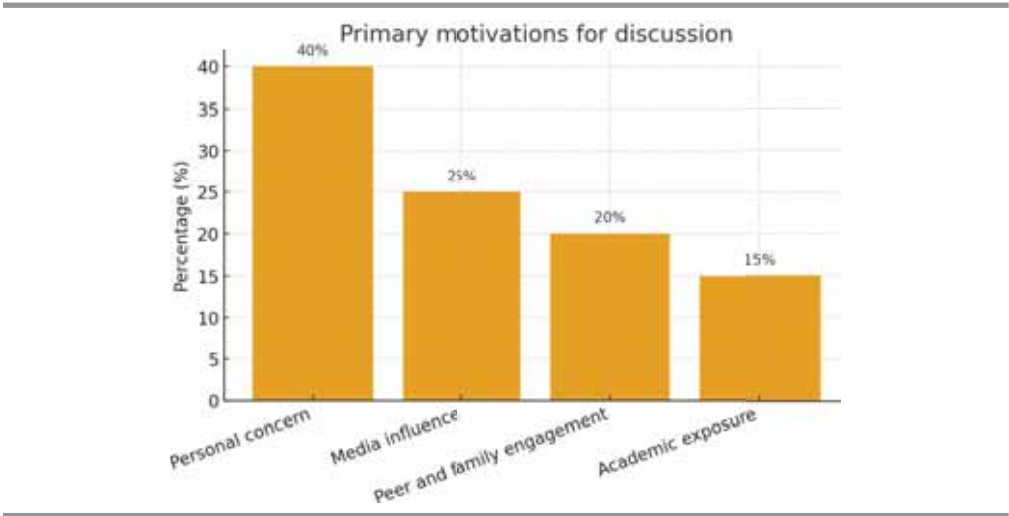


Figure 2: *Primary motivation for discussion on climate change*

The largest group of respondents (40%) reported that their main motivation to talk about climate change stems from personal concern, meaning they feel directly affected or morally responsible for the issue. About one-quarter (25%) said that media coverage, such as social media posts or news stories, prompted them to discuss climate change. This shows that media remains an important trigger for environmental dialogue. One in five participants (20%) mentioned that conversations with friends or family members motivated them to discuss the topic more often, highlighting the influence of social circles and interpersonal communication. A smaller portion (15%) were motivated through educational settings, such as university courses, lectures, or sustainability projects. The data indicate that personal concern is the most powerful driver of climate dialogue among Albanian university students, while academic exposure has the least influence. The results highlight that emotional and experiential engagement (personal concern, peer interactions) currently outweigh institutional or educational stimuli, suggesting that universities could enhance their role by fostering structured opportunities for climate discussions within curricula and campus life.

The findings also point to the broader role of social influence in shaping communicative behavior. Rather than being purely individual, students' willingness to discuss climate change appears embedded in relational contexts where environmental awareness is socially reinforced. This suggests that peer and family networks can act as informal channels for climate learning and norm formation. Strengthening these networks through participatory education and youth-centered initiatives could therefore enhance sustained engagement with climate issues beyond formal institutional settings.

Despite the importance of such conversations, data suggest that young people in Albania rarely discuss climate change with family or friends. The findings reveal

the interplay between certainty, moral concern, risk perception, and communicative behavior, offering insights into how higher education can foster a culture of climate dialogue and engagement among youth

CONCLUSIONS

This study underscores that climate change communication among Albanian university students remains limited but influenced by cognitive certainty, emotional engagement, and social context. Students who express stronger belief in the reality of global warming, greater concern, and moral responsibility are more likely to engage in conversations about it. However, low perceived risk and limited media exposure continue to sustain patterns of silence. Encouraging open dialogue, both within educational settings and in everyday social interactions, can help normalize climate discussions, break cycles of disengagement, and strengthen collective awareness.

Addressing climate change necessitates coordinated action across multiple levels of society, from individual behavioral change to global policy frameworks. The effectiveness of such efforts depends not only on institutional and policy support but also on education and engagement at appropriate social and educational scales. Understanding public perceptions is therefore fundamental to the development of effective and context-sensitive climate policies. The findings of this study underscore the significance of localized attitudes in shaping academic and social environments for climate engagement, while highlighting the importance of fine-grained, context-specific data in informing targeted interventions and enhancing policy relevance.

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: A STUDY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate teachers' perceptions of the presence and impact of bullying on students' concentration, engagement, and academic achievement, as well as their role in preventing and managing this phenomenon. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative data collected through a survey with 30 primary school teachers (grades 1–5) and qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews with 6 teachers. The results indicate that, although some teachers remain neutral regarding the presence of bullying, the majority perceive it as a prevalent issue that negatively affects students' motivation, classroom participation, and learning outcomes. Teachers report that aggressors often face behavioral and academic difficulties, while victims tend to show lower levels of self-confidence, engagement, and performance. Most teachers feel relatively prepared to intervene, yet they highlight the absence of clear institutional protocols and insufficient professional support. Moreover, collaboration with parents is considered essential for effectively addressing bullying cases. The study suggests the need for strengthening school protocols, providing continuous teacher training, and ensuring greater involvement of school psychologists and parents to foster a safer and more supportive learning environment.

Keywords: *bullying in schools; teachers' perceptions; academic achievement.*

INTRODUCTION

Bullying in schools is widely recognized as a complex social phenomenon that not only undermines students' emotional well-being but also significantly affects their academic engagement and performance. While a considerable body of research has explored the perspectives of students and parents, teachers' perceptions remain particularly important, given their central role in shaping classroom climate and addressing behavioral issues. Understanding how teachers identify, interpret, and respond to bullying is essential for developing effective strategies of prevention and intervention. This study investigates primary school teachers' perceptions of the prevalence and impact of bullying on students' concentration, participation, and academic outcomes, while also examining the challenges and institutional limitations they face in managing such cases.

Bullying is generally defined as the repeated psychological or physical oppression of a less powerful individual by a stronger person or group (Sullivan & Cleary, 2004). According to Olweus (1993), it involves negative and intentional behavior that is repeated over time within a power imbalance, making it difficult for the victim to defend themselves. Similarly, Smith and Sharp (1994) describe bullying as a systematic abuse of power whereby a stronger individual or group deliberately and repeatedly harms a weaker one, either physically or psychologically. Rigby (2002) further emphasizes the emotional dimension, noting that bullying typically includes the aggressor's satisfaction and the victim's sense of oppression.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON BULLYING

Several theoretical frameworks help explain the mechanisms underlying bullying behavior and its persistence in school settings.

Social Dominance Theory (SDT) emphasizes that human societies are structured by group-based hierarchies, maintained through cultural ideologies, institutional policies, and interpersonal relations (Pratto et al., 2006). Within this framework, bullying can be interpreted as a strategy for establishing and maintaining social power hierarchies, where aggressors assert dominance, prestige, or control over weaker peers. The theory outlines three main assumptions: (1) age- and gender-based hierarchies are universal, while arbitrary-set hierarchies emerge in societies with surplus economic resources; (2) many forms of group oppression, such as racism, sexism, nationalism, and classism, are manifestations of the same predisposition to form group-based hierarchies; and (3) social systems are shaped by opposing forces that either enhance or attenuate inequality (Pratto et al., 2006). At the core of SDT are three proximal processes—aggregated individual discrimination, institutional discrimination, and behavioral asymmetry—regulated by legitimizing myths. The degree to which individuals endorse these myths determines their orientation toward maintaining social hierarchies, known as social dominance orientation (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that the need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy is essential for human development. When these psychological needs are

thwarted, individuals may engage in deviant behaviors, such as bullying, to compensate for feelings of lack of control or power (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The frustration of these needs can lead to negative mental health outcomes and reduced persistence and performance, underscoring how unmet needs link social environments with maladaptive behaviors.

Moral Disengagement Theory explains bullying through the lens of cognitive mechanisms that allow individuals to justify harmful actions. Bandura (1991) argued that people adopt moral standards that guide behavior, but through mechanisms of moral disengagement—such as victim-blaming, minimizing harm, or shifting responsibility—bullies neutralize self-sanctions and act without guilt. Later, Bandura (1999) emphasized that such mechanisms operate both at the individual and social-system level, enabling aggressors to maintain a positive self-image while engaging in harmful practices. Social learning theory also highlights the role of modeling, where aggressive behaviors are learned through observing and imitating others.

Together, these perspectives suggest that bullying is not only an individual act of aggression but also a socially embedded process shaped by power hierarchies, unmet psychological needs, and moral justifications.

The Link Between Bullying and Academic Success (Grades, Concentration, Self-Esteem)

A growing body of research has demonstrated that bullying and victimization are strongly associated with negative academic outcomes, reduced motivation, and impaired self-esteem. Samara, Da Silva Nascimento, El-Asam, Hammuda, and Khattab (2021) found that children involved in bullying behaviors were less academically engaged, less motivated, reported lower self-esteem, and achieved poorer academic results. Cognitive-motivational factors significantly mediated the relationship between victimization and academic achievement, with bullying victims showing weaker academic outcomes through reduced motivational and cognitive resources.

Similarly, Solas-Martínez, Rusillo-Magdaleno, Garrote-Jurado, and Ruiz-Ariza (2025) reported that girls who were victims of bullying and cyberbullying demonstrated lower performance in study time management and self-regulation efforts. Victimized girls were up to 4.2 times more likely to face difficulties in self-regulation, while female aggressors exhibited up to 10.2% lower self-regulation effort. Male cyberbullies showed 9.6% poorer time management compared to peers and had a 4.4 times greater risk of low self-regulation ($p < 0.001$).

Beyond academic performance, Copeland et al. (2013) highlighted the long-term psychiatric consequences of bullying involvement. Victims and bully-victims were found to be at heightened risk for anxiety disorders, depression, panic disorder, agoraphobia, and suicidality, even after controlling for childhood psychiatric issues and family difficulties. Bullies, on the other hand, were primarily at risk of developing antisocial personality disorder.

In a related study, Solas-Martínez, De la Torre-Cruz, Rusillo-Magdaleno, and Martínez-López (2025) analyzed bullying, cyberbullying, and the use of cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies among adolescents aged 10–16. Both victims and aggressors reported significantly lower use of learning strategies, particularly in

repetition, elaboration, and metacognitive self-regulation. Girls were more affected in cases of cyberbullying, while boys who bullied scored higher in critical thinking. The risk of underusing learning strategies increased by 1.3 times for bullying victims and 2 times for cyberbullying victims; for aggressors, the risk was 1.4 times for boys and 1.8 times for girls in traditional bullying, and 2.5 times for both genders in cyberbullying. The authors stress the need for collaborative interventions involving students, teachers, and families to strengthen effective learning strategies, particularly for girls involved in cyberbullying.

Ozyildirim and Karadağ (2024) similarly demonstrated that peer bullying had a significant negative impact on academic achievement, moderated by students' grades and course types, though cultural context was not a moderator. These findings emphasize that peer relationships influence not only students' social development but also their academic performance. Finally, Syahrudin, Pongpalilu, Aisyah, Maing, and Purnamasari (2025) found a significant negative correlation between bullying and student achievement, along with a positive correlation between bullying and student stress levels, further underlining the academic and psychological toll of bullying.

Taken together, these studies suggest that bullying undermines academic success not only directly through reduced motivation and self-regulation, but also indirectly by heightening stress, lowering self-esteem, and increasing the risk of long-term psychological difficulties.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to capture both the breadth and depth of teachers' perceptions of bullying and its impact on students' academic success. Structured questionnaires provided a general overview, while semi-structured interviews offered deeper insights into teachers' experiences, attitudes, and reflections. The research was carried out in five public primary schools in Shkodër, Albania, with a purposive sampling strategy targeting teachers of grades 1–5. A total of 30 teachers completed the questionnaire, and six additional teachers participated in semi-structured interviews. Most participants were female, in the age range of 31–50 years, with professional experience spanning from early-career to over 30 years in teaching. The teacher questionnaire included 10 Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and five demographic questions. It assessed perceptions of bullying prevalence, its effects on academic success, and the roles of teachers and schools in addressing bullying. The semi-structured interview guide contained five core questions focusing on teachers' direct experiences with bullying, its perceived impact on learning, institutional responses, parental involvement, and suggestions for improvement. Data collection took place in June 2025. Questionnaires were distributed with the support of school administrators and completed anonymously. Interviews, lasting approximately 25 minutes each, were conducted individually in quiet school settings, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. All participation was voluntary, and ethical standards of confidentiality and informed consent were

maintained. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize participants' demographic profiles and perceptions. Qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis, allowing the identification of recurring patterns and deeper interpretative insights into the relationship between bullying and academic outcomes.

RESULTS

The results of this study provide a comprehensive picture of teachers' perceptions and experiences of bullying in primary schools in Shkodër, combining quantitative survey data with insights from qualitative interviews. Together, these findings highlight both an awareness of the negative consequences of bullying and the persistent challenges teachers face in addressing it effectively.

Prevalence and Forms of Bullying

Survey results revealed a mixed perception of the presence of bullying in schools, with nearly half of the teachers (46.7%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that bullying was a problem in their classrooms, 30% remaining neutral, and only one-fifth acknowledging its presence. This ambivalence may reflect underreporting or a lack of recognition of subtle forms of bullying. Interviews reinforced this interpretation: teachers most frequently described cases of verbal bullying and social exclusion, often disguised as "jokes" or difficult to detect. Several emphasized that while such behaviors were common, they were not always perceived as bullying in the strict sense.

Impact on Student Engagement and Academic Performance

Teachers widely recognized that bullying has detrimental consequences for students' academic motivation and participation. Survey data showed that about half of teachers (50%) agreed that victimized students are less engaged in class, with 33% neutral. Similarly, nearly half (47%) affirmed that bullying negatively affects academic performance, a finding echoed in interviews where teachers described victims as less motivated, more distracted, and sometimes reluctant to attend school. Some also recounted cases of sudden drops in grades following bullying incidents, underscoring the link between victimization, loss of self-confidence, and reduced classroom participation.

When asked whether low-achieving students were more likely to be bullied, survey responses were more divided: only 27% agreed, while nearly half disagreed or remained neutral. Interviews suggested that while weaker academic performance may sometimes coincide with victimization, teachers also recognized the importance of other factors such as social skills, peer relationships, and self-esteem.

Behavioral and Academic Difficulties of Aggressors

There was stronger consensus regarding aggressors. Two-thirds of teachers (67%) reported that students who bully others tend to show more behavioral problems and academic difficulties.

Interview accounts reinforced this view, with teachers noting patterns of oppositional behavior, poor emotion regulation, and disciplinary challenges among aggressors.

Teachers' Preparedness and Institutional Protocols

Most teachers (73.3%) reported feeling prepared to handle bullying cases, reflecting a degree of professional confidence. However, both survey and interview findings revealed gaps in institutional support. While 60% of teachers had participated in training on bullying, more than one-third had not, suggesting uneven access to professional development. Moreover, many teachers reported a lack of clear school protocols, noting that responses were often ad-hoc, dependent on the initiative of individual teachers rather than guided by consistent procedures. This lack of standardized reporting and intervention frameworks was described as a major barrier to effective management of bullying cases.

Collaboration with Parents and Challenges in Identification

Both survey and interview data highlighted the critical role of parents. Two-thirds of teachers (66.6%) agreed that parental cooperation is essential, and many described positive experiences when parents responded promptly. However, teachers also reported challenges in sustaining constructive collaboration, as some parents reacted emotionally or defensively, while in other cases students did not disclose bullying incidents to their families, delaying intervention.

Another recurring challenge concerned the identification of bullying incidents. About one-third of teachers admitted difficulties in recognizing such cases, particularly when bullying took indirect or relational forms. This problem was compounded by what many perceived as insufficient professional support from colleagues, school psychologists, or administrators. Teachers frequently expressed the need for more consistent psychological services and multidisciplinary collaboration.

Recommendations Emerging from Teacher Perspectives

Teachers emphasized several avenues for improvement. They strongly supported regular and specialized training on bullying prevention and intervention, along with the integration of anti-bullying themes into the curriculum. They also highlighted the importance of embedding school psychologists within the school system to provide direct support for both students and teachers. Interviewees suggested that structured awareness-raising campaigns, stronger parent-school partnerships, and clearer institutional protocols would greatly enhance the effectiveness of current efforts.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into teachers' perceptions of bullying, its consequences for students, and the role of schools in addressing this phenomenon. Overall, the results align with international literature while also revealing specific challenges within the Albanian educational context.

Teachers reported mixed perceptions regarding the presence of bullying in their schools, with an average score of 2.55 for the statement “Bullying is present in my class/school.” This finding reflects broader international evidence that bullying is often underestimated or underreported, particularly when institutional mechanisms for detection and intervention are weak. As Olweus (1993) noted, many teachers remain unaware of the true extent of bullying since a large proportion of incidents occur outside their direct supervision.

In terms of its impact on students, teachers recognized that bullying negatively influences classroom engagement ($M = 3.10$). This aligns with research showing that victims often experience heightened anxiety, withdrawal, and reduced motivation to participate in school activities (Boulton et al., 2008). The consequences extend beyond engagement to academic achievement. Teachers strongly perceived that bullying undermines students’ academic performance ($M = 3.76$), echoing the findings of Nakamoto and Schwartz (2010), who demonstrated through meta-analysis that bullying is associated with chronic stress, difficulties in concentration and memory, and long-term academic underachievement.

Teachers also expressed nuanced views regarding the profiling of students as victims or aggressors. The idea that academically weaker students are more often victimized ($M = 2.66$) was met with skepticism, consistent with studies indicating that although academic or social skill difficulties may increase vulnerability, other factors such as self-esteem, physical appearance, and social support networks play a more decisive role (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002). By contrast, there was stronger agreement that aggressive students tend to face greater behavioral and academic challenges ($M = 3.59$). This perception is consistent with empirical evidence showing that aggressors frequently display oppositional behavior, poor emotional regulation, and an elevated risk of long-term academic failure (Swearer et al., 2010).

While teachers acknowledged the importance of parental collaboration ($M = 3.87$), the literature confirms that strong school–family partnerships are critical for creating a safe and supportive environment (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009). Teachers in this study showed a heightened awareness of its academic repercussions, underlining their central role in detecting and addressing both the emotional and cognitive dimensions of victimization.

At the institutional level, several gaps emerged that require attention. While 60% of teachers had received training on bullying, 40% had not. This disparity is significant, as international research consistently demonstrates the importance of teacher training in identifying and addressing bullying effectively (Tsitsika et al., 2014; Olweus, 1993). Yet, only part of the teaching body felt fully confident to intervene, signaling the need for structured and ongoing professional development. This aligns with Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory, which emphasizes that teachers, as role models, play a critical role in shaping prosocial behavior and reducing aggression in the classroom.

Institutional shortcomings were further evident in the lack of clear school protocols. Both teachers and parents reported that responses to bullying were often ad hoc rather than guided by structured policies, contradicting international recommendations for

unified child protection strategies (UNESCO, 2017). Moreover, many teachers described feeling isolated in their efforts, receiving limited support from school leadership or mental health professionals. This gap underscores the need for interdisciplinary teams within schools, as highlighted by the American Psychoanalytic Association (2015), which emphasizes the importance of collaborative approaches involving teachers, psychologists, counselors, and the wider community.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the importance of a systemic and multi-level response to bullying. While teachers recognize the damaging academic, behavioral, and emotional consequences of bullying, their ability to address it effectively is constrained by insufficient institutional support, inconsistent protocols, and limited collaboration with families and professionals. Consistent with Olweus (1993), the data also show that minimizing or neglecting bullying incidents risks normalizing such behaviors, thereby perpetuating harm. To move forward, schools need to strengthen their policies, provide clearer reporting and intervention protocols, and invest in comprehensive teacher training. At the same time, closer partnerships with families and greater involvement of mental health professionals are essential to ensure both prevention and effective intervention.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlights that while teachers in Albanian primary schools are aware of the negative academic, social, and emotional consequences of bullying, their ability to address the phenomenon effectively remains constrained by the absence of clear institutional protocols, inconsistent support, and limited systematic training. The findings confirm that bullying is perceived as present, though often underestimated, and that both victims and aggressors experience significant challenges in engagement, behavior, and academic performance. At the same time, teachers show willingness to intervene and collaborate with parents, signaling a strong foundation for building more comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies.

Based on the results, the following recommendations are proposed:

Recommendations for Teachers

- Teachers should engage in regular, structured training on the identification and management of bullying, including practical techniques for effective intervention and peer mediation in conflict situations.
- They should develop continuous classroom monitoring practices, paying particular attention to group work, break times, and less supervised activities where bullying behaviors are more likely to emerge.
- Interactive pedagogical methods that promote collaboration, empathy, and mutual respect should be encouraged, creating a culture of inclusivity within the classroom.
- Building trust-based relationships with students is essential, as it creates a safe environment where children feel comfortable reporting problematic incidents.

- Teachers are encouraged to use real-life cases as educational tools in civic education and moral education subjects, helping students reflect on values such as respect, fairness, and responsibility.

Recommendations for Schools

- Schools should develop and implement clear anti-bullying protocols, outlining the responsibilities of teachers, school leadership, parents, and students in identifying and managing cases.
- Ensuring psychological support structures is crucial, through the presence of school psychologists and partnerships with external institutions, to provide assistance not only to victims but also to aggressors.
- Schools should establish multidisciplinary intervention teams, including administrators, teachers, psychologists, and parent representatives, to ensure coordinated and immediate responses to bullying incidents.
- Awareness-raising campaigns within schools, such as educational slogans, sensitization days, and activities promoting social inclusion and non-violence, can foster a culture of respect and solidarity.
- Finally, schools should conduct regular assessments of school climate through surveys with students, staff, and parents, in order to monitor changes, evaluate progress, and identify areas requiring further improvement.

By implementing these recommendations, schools and teachers can create a safer and more supportive learning environment, one in which students are empowered to engage fully in their education and protected from the harmful effects of bullying.

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MATERIALISM AND THE ILLUSION OF HAPPINESS: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY ON MATERIAL POSSESSIONS AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, where social media shape interaction and self-presentation, perceptions of happiness are increasingly illusory, driven by materialism and social comparison. This illusion, detached from genuine well-being, is amplified among young people, who are particularly sensitive to social and cultural pressures. For them, happiness is often portrayed as a reflection of wealth, appearance, and a curated public image, shifting the focus from authentic well-being to outward appearances.

The research question that arises is: *How does materialism affect the subjective well-being of young people and what role does self-esteem and the use of social networks play in this relationship?* To address this, the study employs a quantitative approach, testing

hypotheses related on the relationship between materialism, self-esteem and subjective well-being, emphasizing the role of social media use as a mediating factor. This approach ensures measurable, objective, and generalizable findings. Constant exposure to social media content fosters a powerful culture of comparing their lives to what they see online, creating a gap between what they possess and what they see in others. New technology is changing the way advertising and algorithms work, which in turn affects how companies should communicate these messages to customers.

This study aims to address a significant research gap by examining materialism, social media, and well-being in a socio-cultural context distinct from Western countries. While previous research has extensively explored these relationships, highlighting various psychological and social consequences, this study also holds practical relevance. It can inform parents and educators about the impact of social media on youth, offering guidance to strengthen self-esteem and mitigate the influence of materialism on perceptions of happiness.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To examine the impact of materialism on subjective well-being in young people, exploring the mediating role of self-esteem and the impact of social media use on this relationship.

Objectives

- Assess the direct relationship between materialism and subjective well-being.
- Investigate the role of self-esteem in the materialism-well-being relationship.
- Analyze the connection between social media use and materialism/subjective well-being.
- Test the mediating role of social media use in the materialism-well-being relationship.
- Examine how specific dimensions of materialism relate to subjective perceptions of happiness.

Research questions

- Does materialism negatively impact on subjective well-being in young people?
- How does self-esteem influence the relationship between materialism and subjective well-being?
- Is materialism related to specific dimensions of thoughts about wealth and life satisfaction?
- How does the intensity of social media use affect materialism and subjective well-being?
- Does social media mediate the relationship between materialism and subjective well-being?

Hypotheses

- H1. Materialism is negatively related to subjective well-being
- H2. The relationship between materialism and subjective well-being is stronger among individuals with low self-esteem.
- H3. Individuals with low self-esteem have lower well-being than those with high self-esteem.
- H4. People with high levels of materialism more often show high scores on the questions “I often think about the things I don’t have” and “I think I would be happier with more money.”
- H5. The more satisfied an individual is with life, the less likely they are to rely on material values.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of materialism is broadly defined in sociology, economics, and consumer psychology (Ahuvia & Wong, 1995). Richins & Dawson (1992: 308) defined materialism as “a set of beliefs centered around the importance of possessions”. Materialistic individuals pursue fame, status, and wealth as desired outcomes (Górník-Durose, 2005; Kasser, 2002; Zawadzka, 2006). Subjective well-being refers to cognitive evaluations of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2002: 63). Subjective well-being has three components: life satisfaction (LS), positive affect (PA), and negative affect, NA (Andrews & Withey, 1976).

The 2025 Digital Landscape reports that approximately 5.24 billion people use social media, increasingly displaying wealth and status. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat portray success through luxury goods, vacations, and branded products, fostering a sense of emptiness. Research indicates that adolescents who spend more time on screens report lower well-being, reduced life satisfaction and happiness, and higher levels of loneliness and depression (Twenge & Campbell, 2019; Twenge et al., 2018, 2021; Booker et al., 2015; Kelly et al., 2018).

Philosophical and religious perspectives have long argued that prioritizing money, wealth, and status undermines well-being and spiritual fulfilment (Belk, 1983; Elgin, 1993). Psychoanalytic (Freud, 1908/1959; Horney, 1937) and humanist/existentialist (Fromm, 1976; Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1961) theorists similarly critique materialism. Empirical research emerged in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, with consumer researchers (Belk, 1984; Richins & Dawson, 1992) and psychologists (Kasser & Ryan, 1993) examining its impact on well-being. These studies found that individuals who prioritize wealth and material success report lower happiness and life satisfaction, reduced vitality and self-actualization, and higher levels of depression, anxiety or psychological distress.

Similarly, Cohen & Cohen reported that adolescents who value material possessions, such as expensive clothing or goods, are more prone to mental health issues, including paranoia and depression. Research also indicates a link between social media use and materialism: individuals who spend more time on social media exhibit higher

materialistic tendencies than those who engage with traditional media (Bush & Gilbert, 2002; Kamal et al., 2013).

Literature gaps

Most research on materialism and happiness centres on Western contexts, overlooking the cultural and economic realities of countries like Albania. Few studies address gender or social differences in the pressure to “appear happy” or the influence of platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. There remains a clear gap in cross-cultural and interdisciplinary research needed to understand this complex, multifaceted phenomenon.

METHODOLOGY

This study will apply a quantitative methodological approach, aiming to measure the relationship between materialism, self-esteem and subjective well-being in young people.

Participants and Sampling

The study population consists of young university students in Albania, aged 18–21 years. The sample will be selected using the convenience sampling method, which is a practical and common method for online studies with students.

Measurement instruments

Standardized and reliable instruments were used for data collection. The Material Values Scale (MVS) measured individuals’ orientation toward wealth and material values. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) assessed overall self-esteem and is recognized for its high reliability. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) evaluated subjective well-being, focusing on personal perceptions of life satisfaction and quality.

Data collection procedure

The questionnaire will be distributed online via platforms like Google Forms and social media/student groups. Participants will be informed about the study’s purpose, data use, and confidentiality before participating. Participation is voluntary, and individuals can withdraw at any time.

Ethics And Limitations

The study followed ethical standards, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. However, the use of convenience sampling limits the representativeness of the findings, and self-reported data may introduce bias. These limitations reduce generalizability but underscore the need for future research with larger, more diverse samples and improved data collection methods.

Table 1: H1: Materialism has a negative relationship with subjective well-being.

Correlations				
			SWLStotal	MaterializemT otali
Spearman's rho	SWLStotal	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.482**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	<.001
		N	443	443
	MaterializemTotali	Correlation Coefficient	-.482**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.
		N	443	443

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Spearman correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between materialism and subjective well-being. The results revealed a statistically significant negative correlation, $r(443) = -0.482, p < 0.001$, indicating that individuals with higher levels of materialism report lower life satisfaction. This finding supports the first hypothesis, aligning with previous research that links materialistic orientation to reduced well-being (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Kasser, 2002). (Table 1)

Based on the correlation analysis, the centrality dimension of materialism is negatively and statistically significantly related to subjective well-being, with a coefficient of $p < 0.01$. The relationship is slightly stronger in the group with

Table 2: H2: The link between materialism and subjective well-being is stronger in individuals with low self-esteem.

<u>Correlations^a</u>				
			ShumaD1	<u>SWLStotal</u>
Spearman's rho	ShumaD1	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.404**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	185	185
	<u>SWLStotal</u>	Correlation Coefficient	-.404**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	185	185

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

a. grupRSES = 1.00

Table 3: *H3: Individuals with low self-esteem have lower well-being than those with high self-esteem.*

Ranks					Test Statistics ^a	
	GRUPi vetvleresimi	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks		SWL Stotal
SWL Stotal	1.00	185	224.71	41571.00	Mann-Whitney U	23364.000
	2.00	258	220.06	56775.00	Wilcoxon W	58775.000
	Total	443			Z	-.378
					Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.706
					a. Grouping Variable:	
					GRUPi vetvleresimi	

low self-esteem ($r = -0.40$) than in those with high self-esteem ($r = -0.39$). However, this does not support our hypothesis since the differences are negligible. This may reflect the developmental stage of the sample (ages 18–21), when identity and self-esteem are still forming (Erikson, 1968). (Table 2)

A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted but no statistically significant difference in subjective well-being was found between the two groups ($U = 23364.00$, $Z = -0.378$, $p = 0.706$). Studies have consistently shown that individuals with high self-esteem report more happiness and life satisfaction, while those with low self-esteem are more likely to experience depressive symptoms and dissatisfaction. In the case of Albanian students, subjective well-being may depend more on external factors such as finances, family expectations, and job prospects. From a theoretical perspective, this result can also be linked to the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasizes the importance of fulfilling basic psychological needs to achieve sustainable well-being. If these needs are not met, then high self-esteem is not sufficient to generate long-term happiness. These findings suggest that in the Albanian context, self-esteem is not a strong or isolated predictor of subjective well-being, warranting further study of its

Table 4: *H4: People with high levels of materialism more often show high scores on the questions “I often think about the things I don’t have” and “I think I would be happier with more money.”*

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
17. Mendoj shpesh për gjërat që nuk i kam, por dua t'i kem.	Between Groups	257.127	1	257.127	199.972	<.001
	Within Groups	567.044	441	1.286		
	Total	824.172	442			
15. Mendoj se do të isha më i/e lumtur nëse do të kisha më shumë para për të blerë gjëra.	Between Groups	276.240	1	276.240	196.596	<.001
	Within Groups	619.656	441	1.405		
	Total	895.896	442			

social and cultural interactions. (Table 3)

A one-way ANOVA assessed the impact of materialism on beliefs regarding wealth and happiness, revealing highly significant differences for both statements ($p < 0.01$). Individuals with high materialism were more likely to view wealth and possessions as sources of happiness and life satisfaction, supporting existing literature (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Kasser, 2002). This reflects the “happiness illusion,” the notion that well-being depends on material acquisition. (Table 4)

To understand whether this hypothesis holds or not, a linear regression analysis was performed and the results showed that the model is statistically significant $F(1,441) = 63.48$, $p < 0.01$ and explains about 12.6% of the variance in materialism, $R^2 = 0.126$. This shows that individuals with lower life satisfaction tend to have high levels of materialism. Also, for every unit increase in life satisfaction, materialism decreases by 0.464 according to the coefficient $B = -0.464$. (Table 5)

Table 5: *H5: The more satisfied an individual is with life, the less inclined they are to rely on material values.*

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.355 ^a	.126	.124	9.90673	
a. Predictors: (Constant), SWLStotal					

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6230.096	1	6230.096	63.480	<.001 ^b
	Residual	43281.209	441	98.143		
	Total	49511.305	442			
a. Dependent Variable: MaterializemTotali						
b. Predictors: (Constant), SWLStotal						

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	62.805	1.295		48.502	<.001
	SWLStotal	-.464	.058	-.355	-7.967	<.001
a. Dependent Variable: MaterializemTotali						

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This study confirms that materialism negatively affects subjective well-being among Albanian youth. A significant inverse relationship was found between materialism and life satisfaction ($r = -0.482$, $p < 0.001$), supporting international research linking materialistic values to lower happiness and increased psychological distress (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Kasser, 2002).

Contrary to expectations, self-esteem did not mediate this relationship, and social media use showed no significant effect, suggesting that cultural and social factors such as economic pressure, family expectations, and social norms may play a larger role. Nonetheless, social media fosters constant comparison, creating an “illusion of happiness” where appearance outweighs genuine emotional well-being.

The findings highlight the need for interventions addressing materialism and social comparison in education and families. Families should prioritize personal achievements, relationships, and experiences over possessions, and model growth-oriented behaviours. Policy initiatives and public campaigns can promote responsible social media use and values like creativity, solidarity, and personal development, fostering the well-being of Albanian youth.

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NAVIGATING ALBANIA'S LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Albania's local economic development (LED) is pivotal in its journey toward European Union (EU) accession and sustainable growth, with projected GDP expansion at 3.7% for 2025 driven by tourism, construction, and domestic consumption. The 2015 territorial reform, merging 373 administrative units into 61 municipalities, has advanced decentralization but revealed that it is an unfinished business in terms of governance, fiscal autonomy, and multi-level coordination. Opportunities emerge in renewable energy and agrotourism to be boosted with EU-funded initiatives under Reform and Growth Facility (RGF). The challenges include municipal capacity to design, implement, and absorb EU-funded interventions and spatial inequalities. This article applies a place-based, multi-level governance framework for LED, which conceptualises it as the outcome of interactions between territorial assets, municipal fiscal and administrative capacity, and multi-level governance arrangements aligned with EU cohesion policy principles. Within this framework, municipal performance indicators serve as proxies for local development readiness and absorption capacity in the EU accession context. This article, reviews current strategic frame on LED and analyse the pillars that informs Chapter 22. By analysing the data from the Municipalities Performance Measurement 2024 with LED lenses, this article dissects institutional frameworks, capacities, finances, infrastructure, human capital, territorial

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dynamics, participation, and governance hurdles. It proposes measures to address LED through improving municipal capabilities, stakeholder engagement, and performance-based financing for inclusive LED.

Keywords: *Local economic development, decentralization, EU accession, multi-level governance*

INTRODUCTION

Albania, with a population of 2.4 million (Census 2023) and GDP per capita at approximately €7,887 in purchasing power standards (PPS), representing 37% of the EU-27 average in 2025, has sustained robust economic performance amid global uncertainties. The economy grew by 4% in 2024, propelled by domestic demand, a tourism surge with 82% more arrivals than in 2019, and construction activities, though industry and agriculture contracted slightly due to currency appreciation and rising wages. Projections for 2025 indicate a moderation to 3.7% growth, with poverty reductions anticipated from rising employment (68.3% rate) and remittances, yet vulnerabilities persist from informal economy (estimated at 30% of GDP), high youth unemployment (over 20%), and emigration netting a loss of 50,000 individuals annually. Albania has demonstrated solid economic performance over the past decade, but the pace of income convergence with the European Union (EU) has not been rapid enough to support the fulfilment of the country's aspirations, according to the World Bank Albanian Public Finance Review 2025¹.

The 2015 administrative-territorial reform (Law No. 115/2014) aimed to enhance efficiency by consolidating municipalities, granting them mandates in Local Economic Development through business support, infrastructure, and land use planning. By November 2025, Albania achieved a milestone by opening all six EU negotiating clusters, including competitiveness, cohesion, and resources, unlocking RGF for structural reforms². This progress aligns with the 2023-2030 Decentralization Strategy, emphasizing fiscal empowerment and local governance, though full implementation lags due to unresolved competency overlaps and capacity gaps in smaller units. Local disparities are pronounced: urban centers like Tirana capture 60% of foreign direct investment (FDI) at €1,585 million in 2024, while rural areas, comprising 50% of the population, lag with GDP per capita at €4,000 versus €8,000 in cities. This analysis expands on these dynamics, integrating 2025 data from international reports and from The Municipalities Performance Measurement System to evaluate opportunities in key sectors and persistent challenges, concluding with policy recommendations for equitable development.

² World Bank, ALBANIA PUBLIC FINANCE REVIEW: Enhancing Fiscal Sustainability for Resilience and Human Development. 2025

³ See EC 7th Accession Conference with Albania, 17 November 2025 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-ministerial-meetings/2025/11/17/>

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A PLACE-BASED, MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE APPROACH TO LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN EU ACCESSION CONTEXTS

Local Economic Development as a Place-Based Development Paradigm

This article is grounded in place-based development theory, which argues that economic development outcomes are shaped by territorially specific assets, institutional arrangements, and socio-economic dynamics rather than by uniform, spatially blind policies. Barca (2009) conceptualises place-based development as a long-term strategy aimed at reducing inefficiencies and inequalities by tailoring interventions to the unique characteristics of each territory. This approach has been adopted as a foundational principle of EU Cohesion Policy and reinforced by OECD analyses of regional and local development (OECD, 2016).

Within this paradigm, Local Economic Development (LED) is understood not as a sectoral policy or a collection of projects, but as an endogenous process that mobilises local resources, knowledge, and actors to enhance territorial competitiveness and social well-being (Swinburn et al., 2006; Meyer-Stamer, 2008). LED shifts the focus from top-down redistribution and national growth poles toward locally driven strategies that recognise spatial diversity and institutional capacity as critical determinants of development outcomes.

In the Albanian context, the place-based perspective is particularly relevant given the pronounced disparities between urban and rural municipalities, and between economically dynamic centres such as Tirana and structurally weaker peripheral areas. The framework therefore explains why similar national policies produce divergent local outcomes following the 2015 territorial reform.

Decentralisation: Fiscal and Local State Capacity

The second pillar of the framework draws on fiscal decentralisation and local state capacity theory, which posits that decentralisation can improve allocative efficiency, accountability, and economic performance—provided that local governments possess adequate fiscal autonomy and administrative capacity (Oates, 1972; World Bank, 2019).

According to decentralisation theory, municipalities are better positioned to identify local needs and tailor development interventions. However, empirical evidence consistently shows that decentralisation without sufficient own-source revenues, professional administration, and investment discretion may exacerbate territorial inequalities rather than reduce them (Rodríguez-Pose & Gill, 2004). This theoretical strand informs the article's emphasis on: The growth of municipal own-source revenues as a proxy for development agency, The composition of local expenditures (investment vs. recurrent costs), capacity gaps between large and small municipalities. Within this framework, municipal capacity is treated as a mediating variable between decentralisation reforms and LED outcomes. Stronger municipalities can translate autonomy into investment, service quality, and economic facilitation, while weaker ones remain dependent on transfers and constrained in their LED role.

Multi-Level Governance and the EU Partnership Principle

The third theoretical component is multi-level governance (MLG), which conceptualises policy-making as the result of interactions among multiple levels of government and non-state actors rather than hierarchical command (Marks & Hooghe, 2004). MLG theory is central to EU Cohesion Policy, where development outcomes depend on vertical coordination between EU, national, and local levels, as well as horizontal partnerships involving economic and social actors. The EU's partnership principle, embedded in the cohesion acquis and Chapter 22, operationalises MLG by requiring the participation of subnational authorities, civil society, and the private sector in planning, implementation, and monitoring (European Commission, 2014). LED represents a concrete mechanism through which this principle is implemented at the local level. In Albania, the relevance of this framework lies in the interaction between a centralised policy design and decentralised implementation which is counterbalanced by the national strategies and municipal planning instruments. Ultimately, the benefits the local absorption capacity for EU funds. The theoretical lens of multi-level governance helps explain coordination failures, overlaps of competencies, and the uneven integration of spatial planning, economic strategies, and municipal budgeting observed in the article.

Institutional and Performance-Oriented Perspectives on Development

The fourth pillar draws on institutional economics and performance-oriented governance, which emphasise that institutions, incentives, and accountability mechanisms shape development outcomes (North, 1990; OECD, 2015). From this perspective, local economic development is not only a function of resources but also of how effectively institutions plan, manage, and deliver policies. Performance measurement systems are understood as instruments that enhances transparency and accountability, provide incentives for efficiency and results and signals the investment and EU funds readiness. The Municipal Performance Measurement System 2024 is therefore theoretically positioned as a proxy for local development readiness, linking governance quality, fiscal performance, and service delivery to LED potential. This aligns with EU requirements for results-based management and performance orientation under IPA III and future cohesion instruments.

Integrated Analytical Framework

Bringing these strands together, the article applies an integrated theoretical framework in which:

- Place-based conditions define development opportunities and constraints;
- Decentralisation and fiscal capacity determine municipal agency;
- Multi-level governance arrangements shape coordination and partnership effectiveness;
- Institutional performance influences the translation of policies into economic outcomes.

Within this framework, LED is conceptualised as the outcome of interactions between territorial assets, institutional capacity, and governance quality, operating within the constraints and opportunities of the EU accession process.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Local Economic Development (LED) has become a cornerstone of contemporary territorial policy, particularly amid decentralization and efforts to foster territorial cohesion. This subchapter outlines the core conceptual elements of LED, including its definitions, place-based nature, and foundational pillars.

LED is widely conceptualized across international institutions as a participatory, multi-stakeholder process designed to enhance the economic capacity and competitiveness of a defined local or subnational territory. It involves collaboration between public authorities, the private sector, and civil society to jointly develop and implement strategies promoting sustainable growth, employment generation, and improved quality of life.

Prominent definitions emphasize common themes:

- The World Bank views LED as a collaborative effort among public, business, and nongovernmental actors to improve conditions for economic growth and job creation.
- GIZ highlights the regional focus, describing it as an ongoing process to address market failures, eliminate bureaucratic barriers, and bolster local firm competitiveness.
- UN-Habitat underscores the creation of resilient economies through local commercial stimulation, with a strong emphasis on decent jobs and inclusion of marginalized populations.
- The International Labour Organization (ILO) stresses partnerships among territorial stakeholders to stimulate economic activity.

Collectively, these portray LED as an enduring, collaborative mechanism—rather than a discrete project—that leverages local resources and advantages.

LED marks a shift from centralized, top-down policies reliant on national “trickle-down” effects to locally driven transformation. This place-based perspective recognizes that economic outcomes are influenced by the distinctive assets, institutions, and social dynamics of each territory. LED is underpinned by three interconnected pillars:

- **Partnership and Participation:** Involves forging alliances among municipalities, businesses, educational institutions, civil society, and communities to diagnose challenges, prioritize actions, and co-produce solutions, thereby promoting ownership and sustainability.
- **Competitiveness and Local Advantage:** Focuses on enhancing the business environment, resolving market failures, and capitalizing on territorial assets (e.g., human capital, natural resources, location, or cultural heritage) to support value chains, entrepreneurship, skills, and innovation.
- **Inclusive and Sustainable Outcomes:** Positions economic growth as a vehicle for decent employment, poverty reduction, inequality mitigation, social cohesion, and resilience against shocks.

LED constitutes a locally driven, partnership-oriented process that mobilizes territorial capacities for competitive, inclusive, and sustainable development. This framework underpins its relevance in decentralization reforms and territorial policies, repositioning local governments as enablers of economic change

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF ALBANIA'S EU ACCESSION

In the context of Albania's European Union accession process, LED must assume a strategic role in aligning territorial development with EU principles of economic, social, and territorial cohesion. LED is not only a development approach, but also a governance mechanism through which local governments operationalise decentralisation reforms and contribute to meeting EU accession requirements, particularly under Chapter 22 – Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments (. For Albania, LED must be understood as a place-based, participatory process whereby municipalities, in partnership with the private sector, civil society, and other local stakeholders, jointly design and implement development strategies that mobilise local resources, strengthen economic competitiveness, and generate decent employment. This approach is especially relevant given Albania's territorial disparities, urban–rural divide, and uneven economic performance across municipalities following the 2015 Territorial Administrative Reform.

As an Instrument for EU Alignment LED for Albania needs to build on the following considerations:

- Territorial Cohesion and Balanced Development: The EU *acquis* places strong emphasis on reducing regional and local disparities and promoting balanced territorial development. LED provides municipalities with a practical framework to identify local development needs and growth potentials and develop tailored interventions to specific territorial contexts encouraging the support for lagging areas while enhancing growth poles.
- Multi-level Governance and Partnership Principle: EU cohesion policy is founded on the partnership principle, requiring the involvement of local and regional authorities, economic and social partners, and civil society in development planning and implementation. LED operationalises this principle at the local level by strengthening collaboration between municipalities, businesses, chambers of commerce, and community organisations. A multi-level governance approach addresses the interaction between central and local government coordination which is key factor in relation to competences and financing responsibility between the two layers.
- Competitiveness, SMEs, and the Local Business Environment: Within the EU accession framework, improving competitiveness and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are key priorities. LED has the potential to enable Albanian municipalities address local bottlenecks affecting businesses, such as administrative burdens, infrastructure gaps, and skills mismatches and support local value chains in sectors such as agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, and services. The generator of development is the promotion of the entrepreneurship, innovation, and workforce development in line with EU standards. This in turns is a prerequisite for integration into the EU single market.

- **Inclusive Growth, Employment, and Social Cohesion:** Consistent with EU objectives of inclusive growth and decent work, LED in Albania must address links between economic development with social outcomes. Municipal LED initiatives aim to create quality jobs, particularly for youth, women, and vulnerable groups while addressing the inequalities and fostering social cohesion and community resilience. This focus aligns LED with EU priorities under the European Pillar of Social Rights and reinforces the social dimension of Albania's accession process.
- **Institutional Capacity and EU Funds Readiness:** As Albania prepares for increased access to EU funding instruments (e.g., IPA III and future cohesion funds), LED strengthens municipal capacities in strategic planning and programming and project preparation and implementation. Increasing capacities for monitoring, evaluation, and performance-based management is not only a requirement for the EU membership but remains a key instrument for accountable governance of the development. In this sense, LED functions as a building block for absorption capacity, enabling municipalities to move from fragmented projects toward integrated territorial development strategies, as required by EU cohesion policy. The establishment of Training Academy for Local Government (in December 2025) will address these aspects.

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – CURRENT STRATEGIC, LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Albania's national policy framework provides an enabling, though incomplete, foundation for local economic development (LED). Key strategic documents, including the 2023–2030 Decentralization Strategy and the 2025–2027 Economic Reform Programme, identify LED-related priorities such as digitalisation, green transition, and anti-corruption. Fiscal decentralisation reforms have increased municipal own-source revenues by approximately 15% since 2020, now accounting for around 30% of local budgets. Nevertheless, municipalities remain highly dependent on central transfers, which constitute about 70% of total revenues, with rural municipalities particularly constrained by low revenue bases and borrowing limits. While the Medium-Term Revenue Strategy (2024–2027) aims to strengthen fiscal capacity through tax administration reforms, delayed implementation continues to limit municipalities' development-oriented spending. These reforms, linked to Reform and Growth Facility milestones, create opportunities for LED but require stronger legal clarity and alignment with the EU acquis.

The legal framework for LED is primarily anchored in Law No. 139/2015 on Local Self-Government and Law No. 107/2014 on Territorial Planning and Development. Law No. 139/2015 establishes municipalities as key development actors, granting competencies in areas such as land use management, tourism promotion, and support to small and medium-sized enterprises, in line with the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the principle of subsidiarity. LED is explicitly recognised as a municipal function, reflecting conceptual alignment with EU Cohesion Policy and Chapter 22. However, ambiguities in the division of responsibilities—particularly in environmental permitting and shared sectors—have led to coordination gaps and recentralisation tendencies, weakening implementation effectiveness.

The law further enhances local autonomy by allowing municipalities to engage in economic activities, including public enterprises, asset management, and public–private partnerships. While these instruments support place-based development, the absence of explicit alignment with EU rules on competition, state aid, and public procurement poses risks of *acquis* misalignment under Chapters 5 and 8. Moreover, although infrastructure and public services are not formally defined as economic functions, they remain critical preconditions for LED. Weak integration between spatial planning, economic strategies, and budgeting continues to generate institutional fragmentation and limits territorial competitiveness, particularly in agriculture and rural development, where municipal capacity constraints hinder value-chain development.

Law No. 107/2014 provides the spatial foundation for LED by embedding a place-based logic and principles of sustainable development. However, its potential remains underutilised. General Local Plans function largely as regulatory instruments and are weakly connected to local economic strategies and investment programming. Development and construction procedures prioritise compliance over facilitation, increasing transaction costs for investors and limiting the strategic use of territory as a development asset. These challenges are exacerbated by the absence of a functional regional tier and an operational territorial classification for development programming, constraining Albania’s capacity to implement integrated territorial investments under EU cohesion policy.

By 2025, most municipalities had adopted LED strategies aligned with national frameworks, yet implementation remains uneven. Limited administrative capacity, staff turnover, weak data use, and political instability have resulted in low execution rates, particularly in smaller municipalities. While regulatory predictability and digital service delivery have improved, inconsistencies in local taxation and inspections continue to affect the business environment.

Overall, Albania’s challenge lies not in the absence of legal or strategic frameworks for LED, but in their limited integration and operationalisation. Aligning local governance, spatial planning, and municipal finance with EU Chapter 22 requirements—through clearer standards, stronger coordination, and performance-oriented financing—remains essential for transforming local territories into effective platforms for development and cohesion.

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE LENS OF MUNICIPAL PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT SYSTEM (2024)

The *Municipal Performance Measurement System 2024* is developed by the Agency for support to Local Self-government in Albania, after first baseline report in 2023. It highlights substantial progress in the enabling conditions for local economic development (LED) in Albania since the 2015 territorial reform, while also revealing persistent territorial disparities. Although LED is not treated as a standalone policy area in the report, performance data on municipal finance, services, and governance provide strong empirical evidence of how local growth dynamics are evolving.

A key driver of LED has been the strengthening of municipal fiscal autonomy. Between 2015 and 2024, municipal own-source revenues increased by 241%, from ALL 13 billion to ALL 44 billion, while per-capita revenues tripled from ALL 4,634 to ALL 18,497. The share of own revenues relative to unconditional transfers rose from 36% to 54%, signalling a gradual shift toward self-financed local development. This trend has been particularly pronounced in large and business-dense municipalities, where fiscal autonomy reaches 75–83%, and in Tirana up to 83%, enabling higher levels of investment in infrastructure and economic services.

Improved fiscal performance has translated into increased local spending capacity. Total municipal expenditures rose by 122% since 2015, reaching ALL 74.4 billion in 2024, equivalent to 3.1% of GDP. However, only 20% of municipal budgets are allocated to investments, while 80% are absorbed by personnel and operational costs. Per-capita investments reached ALL 6,376 in 2024—74% higher than in 2015, but 5.2% lower than in 2023—indicating both progress and emerging constraints in sustaining development-oriented spending.

Service delivery improvements further illustrate the economic relevance of municipal functions. In agriculture, irrigation and drainage systems now cover 54% of agricultural land, contributing to a 19% increase in agricultural exports. Yet, functionality remains uneven, with irrigation operational on only 45% of covered land, limiting productivity gains in many rural municipalities. In waste management, national coverage increased to 85.6%, while cost efficiency improved, with the average cost per ton declining by 2.5% to ALL 8,610. These efficiency gains free fiscal space for reinvestment, particularly in tourism-oriented municipalities.

Governance indicators reinforce the link between institutional capacity and LED outcomes. Municipal staff turnover stabilized at around 10%, while training participation increased to 12.9%, supporting continuity in service delivery and investment planning. Transparency has improved markedly, with 90% of municipal council decisions published and 77% of public consultations conducted, reducing uncertainty for businesses and investors. EU integration capacity, however, remains uneven: only 36% of EU project applications were successful in 2023–2024, with medium and large municipalities dominating absorption due to stronger administrative structures.

Despite these gains, disparities between municipalities remain stark. Small municipalities generate on average only ALL 10,367 per capita in own revenues—often less than 18% of their total budgets—making them heavily dependent on transfers and limiting their LED potential. In contrast, Tirana records ALL 43,069 per capita, reinforcing its role as a dominant growth pole. Rural service gaps persist, with waste collection covering only 65% of rural areas and forest management plans in place for just 24% of national forest areas, constraining land-based economic activities.

Overall, the data show that Albania has made measurable progress in creating the financial, service, and governance foundations for local economic development. The 75% reduction in arrears, the expansion of own revenues, and improved service efficiency demonstrate increasing municipal maturity. However, the uneven distribution of these gains risks entrenching territorial inequalities. Without targeted support to smaller

and rural municipalities—through capacity-building, investment prioritization, and inter-municipal cooperation—the contribution of municipalities to national growth is likely to remain concentrated in a limited number of urban and business-dense areas. Strengthening LED-focused performance indicators in future assessments would help better link municipal performance to economic outcomes and EU cohesion objectives.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the evolution of local economic development (LED) in Albania within the context of decentralisation reforms and the European Union (EU) accession process. The findings indicate that, a decade after the 2015 territorial reform, Albania has established important institutional and fiscal foundations for LED, yet the reform remains incomplete in terms of territorial cohesion, policy integration, and local implementation capacity.

Municipal performance data show measurable improvements in fiscal autonomy, service delivery, and governance, particularly in larger and economically dynamic municipalities. The expansion of own-source revenues and increased administrative maturity have enhanced local governments' potential to support economic activity. However, these gains are unevenly distributed, with small and rural municipalities remaining highly dependent on central transfers and constrained in their ability to invest in development-oriented interventions. As a result, local economic growth remains spatially concentrated, reinforcing existing territorial disparities.

The analysis further demonstrates that Albania's legal and strategic framework is broadly aligned with the principles of EU cohesion policy under Chapter 22, particularly in recognising municipalities as development actors and promoting a place-based approach. Nevertheless, local economic development is weakly institutionalised as an integrated policy process. Limited coordination between spatial planning, economic strategies, and municipal budgeting, combined with unclear multi-level governance arrangements, reduces the effectiveness of LED interventions and their contribution to national development objectives.

From an EU accession perspective, LED functions as a critical operational mechanism linking decentralisation with cohesion policy requirements. While transparency and consultation practices have improved, the partnership principle remains underdeveloped, and municipal capacity to design, implement, and absorb EU-funded interventions varies significantly across territories. These capacity gaps pose challenges for the effective utilisation of IPA III and future cohesion instruments.

The evidence suggests that Albania's LED challenge is less one of formal policy absence and more one of implementation, coordination, and performance orientation. Strengthening the integration of planning, finance, and governance at the local level, alongside targeted capacity-building for lagging municipalities, is essential for enabling LED to contribute meaningfully to territorial cohesion, inclusive growth, and EU convergence.

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SOCIAL NEEDS AND SERVICES FOR THE ELDERLY IN ALBANIA

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ABSTRACT

The population of Albania is experiencing a rapid increase in the percentage of people over 65 years of age, as a result of increased life expectancy, declining fertility and massive emigration of young people. This demographic transition has intensified the need for an in-depth analysis of the social situation of the elderly and the existing services that address their well-being. This study aims to identify the main social needs of this age group, including financial support, healthcare, long-term care services, social participation and access to information. The analysis is based on a combination of national statistical data, existing literature and interviews with service providers. The results show that the social protection system remains largely residual, with fragmented support, insufficient services at the local level and high dependence on family networks, which are being weakened due to emigration and social changes. The study provides recommendations for the development of an integrated approach, based on human rights principles, that guarantees access, quality and sustainability of services for the elderly in Albania.

Keywords: *Elderly, social services, social protection.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest demographics and socioeconomic shifts of the twenty-first century is the aging of the world's population. As a result, the population of those 60 and older is increasing quickly. Over 2.1 billion individuals are predicted to be 60 years of age or older by 2050, accounting for more than 21% of the world's population (UN, 2023). In the case of Albania, the high rate of youth out-migration is a significant contributing factor to population aging in addition to the drop in fertility and mortality. Albania's demographic structure was significantly impacted by the large number of emigrations. A significant decline in the number of young adults is one effect of international migration.

The reduction of household size is also visible in the living situation of the elderly. The share of elderly living in multi-family households has decreased from 30 percent in 2001 to 19 percent in 2011. On the other hand, the share that lives as a couple without children has increased from 24 to 32 percent in the same inter-census decade (INSTAT, 2015).

Low fertility rates and a declining trend, combined with the emigration of the population of reproductive age, have led to a narrowing of the base of the population pyramid. The birth rate below replacement level since 2001, increased life expectancy, and migration remain the main factors in the aging of the population. The 2023 Census data show that one in five individuals (19.7 percent) are 65 years of age or older, compared to one in nine individuals (11.3 percent) in the 2011 Census and 7.5 percent in the 2001 Census. The transition towards an older population is also reflected in dependency ratios. The youth dependency ratio decreased to 24.0 percent from 30.4 percent estimated in the 2011 Census, and the elderly dependency ratio increased to 30.4 percent from 16.7 percent in 2011. The median age of the population is 42.5 years, up from 35.3 years in the 2011 Census (INSTAT, 2024).

In this context, assessing social needs and existing services for older people is essential to understand current gaps and to design sustainable, comprehensive and human rights-based policies. This study aims to provide an analysis of the current situation, combining statistical data, existing literature and field experiences to build a comprehensive picture of the challenges and opportunities in this area.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Active and Healthy Ageing

“The process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age” is how the World Health Organization (WHO) defines active ageing (WHO, 2002). The emergence of this concept in the 1990s, facilitated by initiatives from the WHO and various governmental and nongovernmental organizations, provides a policy framework that highlights the relationship between activity, health, independence, and successful aging. This approach emphasizes not only

the health dimension, but also the social and economic one, encouraging the active participation of older people in community life.

The WHO document on active ageing identifies key aspects including autonomy, defined as the perceived ability to control, cope with, and make personal decisions about daily living according to individual rules and preferences; independence, which refers to the capacity to perform daily living functions with minimal assistance; and quality of life, described as an individual's perception of their position in life within the cultural and value context, relative to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns. The concept encompasses various dimensions, including an individual's physical health, psychological condition, degree of independence, social connections, personal beliefs, and interaction with significant environmental factors (Paúl, Ribeiro, & Teixeira, 2012)

Rights of the elderly

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), adopted at the Second World Assembly on Ageing in April 2002, set a comprehensive and bold agenda for ageing-related policies in the 21st century. Over the past 20 years, significant social, economic, environmental, and technical change has accompanied the execution of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. The region's economy, employment, health and care systems, social solidarity, and cohesiveness have all been profoundly impacted by the financial crisis of 2007–2008, security threats and violent conflicts, rising international migrant flows, and the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020. Additionally, different nations continue to experience these crises' effects and recover from them differently. Over the past 20 years, digitalization has changed social and economic life in the area, posing both new opportunities and difficulties for society's ability to adjust to an aging population.

The perception of and attitude towards older people has shifted over past decades, away from a narrative of 'pathological ageing', towards an objective of 'active ageing', based on the recognition of the human rights of older persons and the fact that the ageing population of today has an overall much better state of health than previous generations. Whilst there is currently no international treaty that focuses exclusively on the rights of older persons, certain instruments contain specific references to the rights of older people, such as the European Social Charter (revised) (Papadopoulos, 2024). At the international level, the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030) and the WHO Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities are expressions of a rights-based narrative around ageing populations, but likewise of the fact that such visions need to be implemented at the level closest to the citizens (Council of Europe, 2024).

In 2017, the European Union adopted the European Pillar of Social Rights, which stipulates older people's rights to community-based long-term care: "Everyone has the right to affordable long-term care services of good quality, in particular homecare and community-based services" (EU, 2017). The UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG) under Agenda 2030 foster older people's rights and wellbeing, amongst others through SDG 3 promoting healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages, and SDG11 calling for inclusive and sustainable cities and communities. The current UN

Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030) encourages all UN member States to improve the lives of current and future generations of older people by combatting ageism, promoting age-friendly environments, and providing access to integrated and long-term care (UN, 2021).

Long-term care models

Examining how well family responsibilities and public or private service delivery are balanced is one method of categorizing long-term care systems. Esping-Andersen's (1989) research on welfare states is the source of this kind of categorization depending on who provides care. Leitner (2003) expanded on this work by classifying nations according to whether long-term care services are formally provided by paid carers or informally by unpaid carers, usually family members, and whether family carers are supported by policies. According to Leitner (2003), welfare systems can either strongly or weakly emphasize familialism or not, which are categorized into four models. The first is the explicit familialism approach, which encourages the family to provide care but frequently does not offer official care. The second is the optional familialism model, which offers both supportive policies for family caregivers and official care services. As a result, the state offers the choice of partly formal care while simultaneously strengthening the family. The implicit familialism model is the third model. This one does not actively promote the family's role in providing care, nor does it provide official care services. The de-familialism model, which emphasizes market or public delivery of care services with little assistance for family caring, is the final one (OECD, 2025).

Verbeek-Oudijk et al. (2014) group European nations according to who is responsible for delivering care as well as how much is spent on non-residential long-term care. Three nation clusters are identified in the paper: one for the North, one for Central Europe, and one for Southern and Eastern Europe. The Central European cluster is characterized by average expenditure and average family responsibility, the Southern and Eastern European cluster by low public expenditure and high family responsibility, and the Northern cluster by high public spending and low family responsibility for care. However, there is a trend of convergence whereby nations with high levels of publicly supported care are supporting informal care and reorienting the emphasis toward societal or familial responsibilities. At the same time, attempts are being undertaken to enhance the standard and accessibility of publicly supported care in nations where informal care is already prevalent. According to Bihan, Roit, and Sopadzhian (2019), nations have modified their cash-for-care plans. While the Netherlands provided greater family support, Southern and Continental countries, as well as England, reduced the role of families through the market (OECD, 2025).

METHODOLOGY

The analysis was conducted using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, integrating statistical, documentary, and empirical sources. On the quantitative side, data from the 2023 INSTAT census were used, complemented by international databases

to gain a deeper understanding of Albania's demographic structure and aging trends. The analysis was further enriched with reports and publications from international organizations, which provide a comparative framework on long-term care and emerging needs for specialized services for the elderly. An important component of the methodology also involved reviewing policy documents and secondary sources, including the National Action Plan on Ageing (2020–2024), national standards for social services, and regional analyses from European and international institutions. To bring in practical perspectives, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders working directly in the field of elderly services, which helped identify gaps and existing practices at the local level. This triangulation of data ensured a comprehensive approach, allowing for a balanced and reliable interpretation of the findings.

SOCIAL PROTECTION SCHEMES

The long-term viability of the pension system has been enhanced by recent revisions. Albania unveiled a comprehensive pension reform plan in January 2015 with the goals of enhancing coverage, fortifying the connection between contributions and benefits, and enhancing the system's economic sustainability. Three primary reforms were implemented: (i) parametric changes to the current Defined Benefit (DB) plan; (ii) modifications to special regimes; and (iii) the implementation of a non-contributing social pension for all those who were not eligible for a contributory pension. In Albania, pension coverage has remained quite high. In 2020, there were 605,000 persons aged 60 and over, and there were 651,000 pensioners, of which 529,000 were old-age pensioners (those aged 65 and above). Contribution coverage, on the other hand, is now low, suggesting that seniors' coverage will eventually drop to low levels. It is anticipated that the non-contributory social pension would improve future pension coverage for vulnerable and impoverished workers who are not now covered by the system. It is necessary to comprehend the extent to which the social pension would close the coverage gap among retirees, as well as the potential financial ramifications (World Bank, 2022). Gender gap in pensions is currently 16,384 Albanian Lek (ALL) for men and 13,072 ALL for women, in average women receive a 20% less income than men in their retirement years. Unfortunately, for most women the transition into retirement equates to a transition into poverty. Introduction of the social pension, as a means-tested social assistance for those above age 70, is especially directed towards women, who have higher unemployment rates, lower contribution periods and greater life expectancy compared to men (Musabelliu, 2021).

The majority of elderly people in Albania depend solely on their pensions for income, with the exception of remittances from family who live or work outside. Among Albania's current social transfer programs, family and old-age pensions have the biggest impact on reducing poverty. The at-risk-of-poverty rate was lowered by 12.7 percentage points in 2018 thanks to pension payments, and by an additional 2.9 percentage points thanks to other social transfers. The percentage of those 65 and older who are at danger of poverty is far lower than the national average for both sexes (ILO, 2022).

The pension levels in rural and urban plans are very different. The rural scheme's average old-age pension in 2019 was 56.4% of the urban scheme's average old-age pension (ILO, 2022).

The two primary programs that make up Albania's social assistance system have both recently seen substantial revisions aimed at increasing their efficacy and equality. Economic Assistance [Ndihma Ekonomike, NE] and Disability Assistance (DA) are the two primary programs that make up Albania's social assistance system (World Bank, 2022).

SOCIAL NEEDS AND SERVICES PROVIDED TO THE ELDERLY

Discussions about population aging and the need for long-term care in Albania have only recently emerged. This is as a result of various factors such as declining birth rates, increasing life expectancy and high emigration among younger groups over the past three decades, which have had a huge impact on the demographic structure of the population. However, as one of the youngest countries in Europe, Albania has not yet developed a proper system for long-term care for the elderly. Projections that Albania's population will shrink and age faster have been taken seriously by the government, which in 2019 adopted the first national policy document on aging 2020-2024 and the related action plan, and activities for long-term care of the elderly are also foreseen in the National Strategy for Social Protection 2024-2030.

Social care is provided at the regional level by the Social Security System or at the local level by municipalities. Social, residential or day care centers provide services for several groups, including people aged 65+. Based on the regulatory framework in force, one of the forms of long-term social care is residential care. The map of residential institutions for the elderly occupies an important place in the structure of the state social service. Currently, the social care system for the elderly consists of public and non-public residential institutions. Public nursing homes are in Tirana, Shkodër, Kavajë, Fier, Gjirokastrë, Poliçan. This social service benefits only the elderly who have reached retirement age according to the legislation in force and meet all the conditions set out in the Council of Ministers No. 518 dated 04.09.2018. According to the audit report on care for the elderly, it results that there is a shortage of staff and overload in providing services to the elderly, inadequate infrastructural conditions and lack of activities, lack of specialist doctors (according to the problems and needs of the elderly) in residential institutions (KLSH, 2023).

As professionals report, the lack of sufficient funds and professionally trained staff significantly reduces the quality of care. Furthermore, the care system relies mainly on the family, creating a high dependence on informal care, which is often insufficient or absent. Added to this, stigma towards old age and lack of awareness of existing rights and services mean that many elderly people do not seek or receive the support they are entitled to. As a result, a significant part of the elderly remains without sufficient care and without full inclusion in social life.

There is a large geographical disparity in access to social services between regions in Albania. The current capacity of residential care covers only 0.78 percent of the estimated number of older people in need of long-term care and community-based care covers only 1.8 percent of the estimated number of older people in need of long-term care. There are very few support mechanisms for home-based care services. There is an urgent need to increase investment in the development of community-based and home-based residential care services and for wider geographical coverage. Although family support is essential in the provision of care and strongly linked to traditional Albanian culture, relying mainly on traditional long-term care provision within the family, which relies heavily on unpaid female caregivers, is no longer considered a sustainable solution. For this reason, there is a greater need for formal long-term care provision (ILO, 2023). The weakening of traditional family ties as a result of migration or the inability to provide care services for older family members is increasingly highlighting the need to provide more sustainable solutions.

Family care, while important, is not always sufficient and is often disorganized, dependent on the economic and emotional resources of the family. On the other hand, older people living alone are at higher risk of neglect and lack of basic services. This reality shows that the care system cannot rely solely on the family, but requires more comprehensive public policies, integrated community-based services and broader social awareness to ensure dignified aging. “Some older people continue to receive care from their family members, but there are also many others who live alone and do not receive adequate support for their daily needs.” In addition to the physical issues associated with aging, older people experience a number of mental challenges as they age. These include social disengagement, which includes both loneliness and social isolation. Both are prevalent among older people, with up to three-quarters of older people reporting that they often feel lonely (Keck, 2020). Loneliness and social isolation are major risk factors for age-related diseases and are detrimental to healthy aging.

Values, family support, and the importance of family members’ care for the elderly have traditionally been prominent in Albanian culture; but in the absence of family caregivers, an increasing number of older people still find themselves facing physical and social isolation (Porrazzo et al., 2015). UNFPA conducted a survey on loneliness (2021) using a model to determine which risk factors from the survey were predictive of loneliness outcomes. Several variables contributed significantly to loneliness scores: network size, living alone, available tangible support, general happiness, available positive social support, social self-esteem, etc. Lower social self-esteem scores were associated with higher loneliness scores, suggesting that people with anxiety about social interactions are more likely to have higher loneliness scores. Lack of tangible support or having support to perform necessary daily tasks was also associated with increased loneliness. The tangible support score was calculated by summing a number of measures, including support if one is sick and needs help with housework, preparing meals, or going to the doctor.

Albania had significant risk factors of social self-esteem (20% relative contribution) and tangible support (36% relative contribution). These results suggest that interventions aimed at providing daily support to older people, as well as those that

help develop social skills, can be very effective in addressing loneliness. Albania also had a risk factor of belonging with family and friends (44% relative contribution). Increasing social skills and relationships, which would address social self-confidence, can also be effective in addressing feelings of belonging, as negative social mentalities can support feelings of doubt about social belonging (UNFPA, 2021). Social isolation of older people is a worrying problem in Albania. It has been noted that both internal and international migration have contributed to the weakening of traditionally strong societies and families in Albania. “Every day I encounter older people who live isolated, without regular contact with their family or community. Their loneliness is not only emotional, but often translates into a lack of support for the most basic needs.” Social isolation of older people has multiple consequences, affecting not only their emotional well-being, but also their physical health and ability to cope with everyday life. The lack of family and community contacts often leads to deep feelings of loneliness, depression and increases the risk of chronic diseases. In addition, isolation weakens opportunities to receive basic services, practical support and social inclusion, making this problem one of the most urgent challenges for social policies and care programs in Albania.

The last research shows that family caregiving remains the primary form of Long-term Care (LTC) in Albania, with 95% of older persons relying on family members and only 5% receiving care from non-family caregivers, including 2% supported by paid caregivers (primarily state-funded). Despite this reliance, 13% of older persons in need, lack any form of caregiving, revealing critical gaps in care provision. Cultural norms reinforce caregiving as a family duty, placing an emotional, physical, and financial burden on families, particularly women, who make up 67% of family caregivers. Women are also more vulnerable to unmet care needs, being twice as likely as men to report having no caregiver themselves. Access to formal caregiving services is further restricted by financial and geographical barriers. Among older persons without a caregiver, 61% cite the absence of nearby relatives, a challenge most acute in non-Tirana areas due to migration and shrinking family networks. Additionally, 80% of older persons state that they cannot afford a paid caregiver, limiting access to professional caregiving support (UNDP, 2025).

Research has shown that older people have improved mental and physical health outcomes when they can continue to live somewhat independently (Beller & Wagner, 2018). Targeted assistance can often be effective in postponing the need for full-time assisted living (i.e., home care services, full-time direct assistance from a family member or a health professional). Ensuring that older people have access to assistance when needed for basic tasks such as shopping, meal preparation, medical care, and household chores, through a combination of formal local services, informal community networks, or helplines, can serve to extend the period of safe and happy independent living and well-being of older people (UNFPA, 2021).

The most critical problem of old age is economic poverty, caused by the lack or insufficiency of income. Despite the reform of the pension scheme, the system faces challenges related to demography and economics. The old-age dependency ratio almost doubled from 8.6 percent in 1989 to 16.7 percent in 2011. By 2030, this ratio is expected to double again to reach 32.9 percent (MSHMS, 2019). Most elderly people in Albania rely on their pensions and remittances from relatives living abroad to cover

living and medical expenses. However, families with greater financial stability rely on informal care services, which in most cases are not provided by a trained workforce, but by unemployed women looking for work.

Older people in Albania face a number of challenges that make it difficult for them to access quality and continuous services, as reported by interviews with professionals. Existing services are often fragmented and non-standardized, failing to provide integrated health, social and psychological care. This situation is further aggravated by the uneven geographical distribution, with rural areas left with little or no support, while services are mainly concentrated in large cities.

Older people living alone in rural and remote areas are particularly vulnerable. An estimated 46.0 percent of the population aged 65 and over live in rural areas. They do not live with family members to care for them, nor do they have access to any form of formal long-term care service, whether residential care, home care or community-based services. Older people in rural areas also face disadvantages in pensions, access to health care and other social protection programs (ILO, 2023). Albania's social care and protection systems insufficiently protect people against the shocks of poverty. Older people face multidimensional exclusion, especially those who rely on economic assistance. Most evidence to date shows an increased need for health care for older people. This will require investments in tertiary care, as well as in prevention. The situation of older people is even more precarious in rural areas, where older people face difficulties in accessing health care facilities, due to distance and the high cost of treatments for chronic diseases. The monthly pension is not enough to cover daily expenses and other health and social needs of this age (Musabelliu, 2022). Promoting professionals who perform efficient and effective care management will be crucial to achieving the integration of health and long-term care in Albania. The current service delivery structure fails to differentiate between the types of services provided to people with different health and social problems – despite the fact that it is important to distinguish between physical and mental health status and assess progress accordingly (UNICEF, 2016).

The shrinking working-age population and the high number of migrants for employment reasons, especially in the working-age group between 25 and 54, are expected to lead to a shortage of labor and skills for providing care in Albania ("care drain"). The increasing trend of female participation in the labor force will also create constraints on the potential supply of caregivers within families. Therefore, securing an adequate labor force is another urgent task for Albania to cope with the growing demand for services (ILO, 2023). As a measure to fill the limited capacity of the public sector, Albania could use the provision of social care services by NGOs through procurement contracts. Furthermore, Albania could also explore the possibility of developing a market for long-term care services by private providers. For this, efforts should be made to create a favorable environment to enable more businesses to enter the long-term care market, while developing capacity for market regulation and quality assurance with the aim of effective cooperation between the public and private sectors. In order to attract and retain the long-term care workforce, there is a need to improve wages and working conditions in this sector (ILO, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Albania stands at a demographic crossroads, where rapid population aging intersects with long-standing socioeconomic transformations such as migration, urbanization, and shifting family structures. The growing share of older persons nearly one in five citizens underscores the urgency of developing a coherent, inclusive, and sustainable system of care that respects the rights and dignity of older people. This demographic shift brings both challenges and opportunities for the country's social protection and long-term care systems.

The analysis reveals that Albania's policy landscape has begun to recognize aging as a national priority, with the adoption of the National Action Plan on Ageing (2020–2024) and the integration of elderly care measures in the National Strategy for Social Protection (2024–2030). Yet, despite these policy advances, the care infrastructure remains underdeveloped, fragmented, and unevenly distributed. Existing services cover only a small fraction of those in need, leaving the majority of older adults dependent on family support, which is increasingly strained by migration and economic hardship. This reliance on unpaid, predominantly female caregivers not only reinforces gender inequalities but also limits the sustainability of informal care arrangements.

The findings emphasize multiple dimensions of vulnerability among the elderly economic, social, psychological, and geographical. Poverty remains a persistent risk, particularly in rural areas where pensions are lower and access to services is limited. Social isolation and loneliness have emerged as pressing issues, fueled by the erosion of traditional family networks and the lack of community-based alternatives. In addition, Albania's long-term care system faces a critical shortage of trained professionals, weak coordination between health and social services, and insufficient investment in home- and community-based care models.

Preparing for an aging society requires a whole-of-society commitment that goes beyond welfare reform. It demands reimagining social solidarity across generations and viewing older people not as passive beneficiaries, but as integral members of families, communities, and the nation's social fabric. By embedding dignity, equality, and participation at the heart of aging policies, Albania can transform demographic change into an opportunity for a more cohesive, resilient, and humane society.

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INNOVATIONS AND CHALLENGES IN ELT IN THE ALBANIAN CONTEXT: THE CASE STUDY OF ELBASAN HIGH SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

English Language Teaching (ELT) in Albanian schools has undergone significant transformation in the recent years, driven by curriculum reforms, digital integration, and alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). English, which is introduced from the first grade, provide students with longer exposure and a stronger foundation in communicative competence. Innovative practices such as project-based learning, cross-curricular approaches and the use of digital tools in Smart Labs and online platforms have enriched classroom experiences. Furthermore, national and international initiatives, including professional development programs and Erasmus+ projects, have contributed to teacher growth and the modernization of pedagogical practices. Despite these achievements, ELT in Albania continues to face challenges. Urban and rural schools face unequal access to resources. This creates disparities in learning opportunities. The exam-oriented culture often prioritizes grammar and memorization over authentic communication and learner autonomy. Additionally, while some teachers embrace new methodologies, others struggle with limited training in ICT use, inclusive education, and innovative assessment strategies. Student motivation and opportunities for authentic language practice outside the classroom also remain limited. This paper discusses both the innovations and the challenges shaping the ELT in Albanian schools, by emphasizing the case study of the High Schools of Elbasan, highlighting best practices while addressing systemic constraints. The analysis emphasizes the need for sustained teacher support, digital literacy, and inclusive approaches to ensure that ELT continues to meet global standards while responding to local realities.

Key Words: *EFL, innovations, challenges, curriculum reform, high school.*

INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is a key school subject in the Albanian high schools. English has now become necessary for an educational career advancement and career in a globalized society. Elbasan, being typical of a typical educational institution in this type of educational context: Albania, provides an effective context for exploring the situation in which innovation and issues of sustainability coexist within the high schools. In recent years Albania has made substantial educational reforms during which focus is added to a shift in digital integration and digital curriculum modernization. However, most schools still are hampered about infrastructure, development and access to resources. This paper explores to what extent pedagogical and technological innovations are implemented in the Elbasan high school context, and how they relate to the remaining barriers: mixed abilities classes, exam-based practice and teacher training gaps. The research answers three main questions: What creative pedagogies, practices (pedagogical, technological and curricular) are emerging in EFL teaching at Albanian high schools? What are the biggest challenges to effective EFL instruction and learning? What is best for policy, school leadership and teacher practice to connect innovation to equity and sustainability? This paper stands out for having been structured as follows: a Literature Review (i) summarising the present research, a Methodology demonstrating the study's conceptual framework, a Findings Section (ii) presenting key patterns, a Discussion: describing the study findings in relation to Elbasan's schools, and a Conclusion/Recommendations (iii) discussing implications for future EFL practice in Albania.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Innovations in EFL Teaching in Albania

Recent literature shows the growing importance of technology and innovative pedagogy in EFL classrooms in Albania. Balla (2023) notes that despite the difficulties that accompany sustainability and training strategies, technology has become popular among students, who find their digital tools as engaging yet accessible. Likewise, research from Durrës (Osmani & Tartari, 2024) indicates that learners engage much more with digital tools, highlighting the need for suitable infrastructure and teacher practice. Collaborative teaching and digital creative methods, such as those described in this study, have also attracted focus. Dervishaj and Presi (2024) describe higher education's digital creative methods and co-teaching arrangements, which can be adapted to secondary contexts to ensure enhanced in-class interaction. Zela and Jata also reinforce this claim (2024), stating the role of the digital resources in motivating students and connecting language learning to professional contexts. UNESCO's encouragement on Media and Information Literacy (MIL) at the curriculum level has helped to build digital competence and information awareness in Albanian learners. At a pedagogical level, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has been discovered as a major agent in facilitating speaking and listening skills (Sefa &

Xhaferi, 2023). Their study points to increase in learner autonomy via CLT, yet still with existing resource and methodological limitations on the part of many teachers. Likewise, Jani and Celaj (2024) assert that there is potential for new methodologies and technologies integrated successfully in the Albanian curriculum to revolutionize language learning. In general, innovation in Albanian EFL teaching is about digital and digital ICT integration and collaboration, curriculum redesign, each of which present possibilities for more motivating, learner-centered and approach-oriented instruction.

Difficulties in EFL teaching in Albania

Despite these developments, there are still structural and pedagogical difficulties for the Albanian EFL teachers. Mehilli & Kolaj (2022) found that the challenges came by mixed-ability classes mainly centered on a variety of learning styles, lack of confidence in communication, limited access to up-to-date materials and low student motivation. Just as Sefa and Xhaferi (2023) report, traditional teachers-centered approach remains strong. As a result, this can limit the successful implementation of CLT. The limitations in infrastructure have not gotten better. In the SCAR review (2025), 80% of teachers in Albanian pre-university schools blame inadequate equipment and unstable internet for the barriers to digital education. Osmani and Tartari (2024) point out, moreover, that while the students are enthusiastic about technology, teachers receive less instruction about what to do with these tools. Apart from infrastructure, systemic injustices are also there that erode the quality of the EFL service. Albanian National Strategy for Development (2022–2030) emphasizes digital literacy and widespread access, but the digital divide continues to marginalize rural schools and at-risk communities. Moreover, the immense burden of testing and inspection procedures discourages new or inventive ways to produce things. Finally, even though Albania's EFL sector is innovative, it is in practice characterized by: an uneven distribution of resources, low teacher support and structural pressure to teach traditionally (and exam-oriented).

METHODOLOGY

This text adopts a qualitative-descriptive method, synthesizing contemporary literature, policy publications and context-rich sources on EFL teaching in Albania; more specifically in the context of Elbasan. The study does not utilize primary data, but uses Elbasan's high schools as a micro-case to discuss the national direction of the relationship. This study is based on recent literature on the EFL innovations and challenges in Albania (2022–2025), the evaluation of educational policy documents (namely UNESCO MIL and national digital strategies) and practical application to the context of Elbasan education, with the local EFL high schools practice as a backdrop. It reviews the salient contribution of the research to the EFL teaching implications for innovation, equity and professional development in teaching and learning.

FINDINGS

Innovation, Digital and ICT Tool Integration

Studies often reveal that the Albanian students respond positively to digital learning. “Students love it,” as Balla (2023) observes, realizing technology’s motivational potential. Similarly, Osmani and Tartari (2024) found the same situation in Durrës, where the use of digital tools for learning created a lively atmosphere among students but still needed sufficient teacher preparedness and infrastructure. A more recent study by Zela & Jata (2024) extends this line to ESP settings and validates the conclusion that digital literacy corresponds with communication at work. At a broader systemic level, the MIL (Media Information Technology) initiative from UNESCO (2025) also enhances the digital and media literacy in curriculum implementation. As such, for Elbasan high schools, this evidentiary basis reveals substantial potential for digital-based tools - namely, integrated applications, integration of blended learning platforms and multimedia exercises to support communicative competence development.

ADVANCES IN PEDAGOGY: CLT, COLLABORATION AND CREATIVE METHODS

Sefa and Xhaferi (2023) demonstrate that CLT encourages the development of both communication and independence. However, its implementation is hampered by limited resources. Dervishaj and Presi (2024) highlight that: „digital creative methods“ and co-teaching arrangements provide co-working and engagement. Similarly, Jani and Celaj (2024) identify technology-mediated instruction as a motivational factor that supports positive behaviors. The deployment of communicative tasks, virtual exchange opportunities and projects in Elbasan classrooms might facilitate the more dynamic and learner-centered approach to EFL learning.

CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT AND TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

National and international initiatives, ranging from the 2022-2030 digital education initiative to the ongoing ELTA Albania workshops, highlight increased support for ICT training and teacher professional development at the institutional level. These steps will improve this with increased training for teachers in Elbasan, and thus more opportunities to take innovative approaches when the method is integrated.

CHALLENGES

Infrastructure and Inequitable Resources

The SCAR report (2025) stated that the majority of Albanian EFL teachers lack adequate technical support resources. Osmani and Tartari (2024) confirmed that enthusiasm for digital learning is frequently greater than schools' technical capacity. Elbasan has urban vs rural school divides that illustrate the uneven preparedness for innovation.

Teacher Training and Mixed-Ability Classes

Mehilli Kolaj (2022) suggests that teachers are generally not prepared to meet the variety of learner needs, due to a scarcity of materials and low motivation. According to Sefa and Xhaferi (2023), there is also a dependence on traditional teaching methods. According to Balla (2023) over reliance on technology can also lead to a lack of depth of learning. For the Elbasan schools, this finding emphasises the importance of ongoing, specialized professional development relevant to the subject of differentiated instruction and communicative forms of pedagogy.

Exam-Driven Instruction and Motivation

Albania's EFL culture is still mainly an exam-centered society and teachers may find themselves unable to adapt flexibly for the good of their profession. As a result, learners may view the English language as a topic they need to go through exams rather than a medium for communication. However, this tug-of-war between assessment and real learning still pushes people forward. Equity and Digital Divide According to World Bank (2025), socioeconomic inequalities still exist, since rural schools often have limited access to the internet and resources. For Elbasan, particularly in suburban or rural areas, fair access to digital learning is a serious problem.

DISCUSSION

The Elbasan case is emblematic of larger trends within the Albanian EFL context: innovation at work alongside constraint under pressure. Real progress includes students' enthusiasm, a national commitment to digitalization and the growing number of professional development projects. Engagement and confidence of learners would be vastly improved for teachers who utilize interactive platforms, blended learning and communicative tasks. But the issues are still sticking. Inequitable access, inadequate instruction and training and infrastructural failures also limit further innovation. In contrast, test focused instruction and mixed-ability classrooms also stifle experimentation and creativity. Innovations have to be brought in at a slow pace and right place from day one - baby steps, scaling it slowly but surely and steadily to make progress a little bit but to allow for sustainable growth. The motivation factor is also important.

Engagement: If EFL learning connects to real-life actions, such as landing or starting a job, traveling or studying, students tend to focus more. CLT and computerized tools that support this link as long as job tasks are relevant and meaningful. Finally, there is a strong need for leadership and policy support. In Elbasan, the school leaders should provide adequate ICT equipment usage, coordinate regular workshops on this, and also help to develop the cooperative learning environment. National policymakers will all need to devote budget toward providing funding to schools, which have the ability and talent, but face the challenge of implementing that in order to close the digital divide. It's getting teachers in to work with the local schools in the implementation. That must be an inclusive partnership if innovation is to spread among students across the country.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article explores the innovative products and challenges associated with molding English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in Albanian secondary schools, particularly in Elbasan. It highlights the rapid advancements in digital and pedagogical innovation, alongside the ongoing systemic challenges. To enhance EFL provision in Elbasan and beyond, the following measures are recommended:

- **Develop Infrastructure:** Ensure access to the internet and adequate stocks of equipment and digital resources for students, especially in rural and resource-limited environments.
- **Gradual Innovation:** Implement changes in phases—start with a pilot program, conduct reviews, and then expand based on feedback.
- **Continual Professional Development for Teachers:** Focus on training that emphasizes digital pedagogy, communicative tasks, mixed-ability teaching, and learner-centered assessment.
- **Foster Student Curiosity:** Connect classroom activities to real-life communication, encouraging students to draw from their experiences and aspirations.
- **Align with Examination Expectations:** Integrate communicative abilities into assessment methods to balance innovation with accountability.
- **Promote Equity:** Ensure that all schools receive technology and support, so no institution is left behind.
- **Inspire Reflective Leadership:** Leaders should supervise educational practices, seek feedback, measure outcomes, and adapt strategies as necessary.

In conclusion, Albania's EFL landscape is at a pivotal moment. The path forward clearly lies in innovation; however, achieving sustained success will require collective efforts to address fundamental challenges. If these strategies form the basis for reforming EFL education in Elbasan, they could propel the country towards a more dynamic, engaging, adaptive, and future-oriented educational model that emphasizes equity, teacher-centered support and meaningful learning outcomes.

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THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT AND POST-OHRID INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE ALBANIAN LANGUAGE IN NORTH MACEDONIA

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ABSTRACT

This article interrogates the nexus between language policy, identity politics, and institutional transformation in post-conflict North Macedonia, with a particular focus on the evolving status of the Albanian language as a marker of collective rights and state legitimacy. Following the Ohrid Framework Agreement (2001) - a landmark political accord that concluded the armed conflict and redefined the principles of interethnic governance, the Albanian language progressively attained official recognition through a series of constitutional amendments and legislative enactments, culminating in the Law on the Use of Languages (2019). By tracing the trajectory from symbolic acknowledgment to juridical codification, the study conceptualizes this development as an evolutionary process of linguistic institutionalization. Unlike other provisions of the Ohrid Agreement, such as equitable representation within the security sector and public administration, the implementation of language rights unfolded with marked temporal delay and uneven intensity. This asymmetry, the paper argues, reveals the hierarchy of post-conflict priorities, wherein measures perceived as essential for immediate stabilization were privileged over those concerning identity and cultural parity. The Law on the Use of Languages represents the culmination of nearly two decades of incremental policy reform, extending the use of Albanian to the central and local levels of legislative, executive, and judicial authority. Yet its enforcement exposes persistent gaps between legal formalism and administrative reality and the new political challenges too. Through an analytical reading of institutional capacity, bureaucratic

practice, and political discourse, the article contends that the effective normalization of bilingual governance remains both an identity-affirming and developmental challenge.

Keywords: *Albanian language; linguistic institutionalization; post-conflict governance; Ohrid Framework Agreement; identity politics; language policy; North Macedonia.*

OPENING REMARKS: LINGUISTIC OFFICIALIZATION AND INSTITUTIONALIZED ETHNICITY IN NORTH MACEDONIA

The officialization of the Albanian language in North Macedonia represents a critical juncture in the transformation of Albanian collective identity from a primarily cultural form of belonging into an institutionalized political category. Drawing on Rogers Brubaker's conceptualization of ethnicity as a category of institutionalized practice rather than a fixed social essence, language emerges here not merely as a marker of identity but as a mechanism through which ethnicity is stabilized, administered, and reproduced within the structures of the state (Brubaker, 2004). Linguistic officialization thus constitutes a process through which ethnic identity is translated into a durable institutional form, embedded within legal norms, bureaucratic routines, and systems of political representation. From this perspective, the distinction between ethnicity and nationhood becomes analytically central. While ethnicity operates through cultural continuity and informal social reproduction, nationhood presupposes state-backed institutional recognition. As Balibar and Wallerstein (2000) argue, the nation exists only insofar as it is supported by state structures capable of legitimizing collective belonging. The official status of the Albanian language therefore signifies a shift from ethnic presence to institutionalized ethnicity, wherein linguistic rights function as instruments of political inclusion.

Historically, the Albanian language functioned as the primary axis of identification among Albanians in North Macedonia, experienced as a shared cultural heritage that sustained ethnic boundaries (Horowitz, 1985). Its legal and constitutional regulation—beginning in Socialist Macedonia and continuing through the Yugoslav constitutional reforms of 1974 and 1989—reflects the broader federal logic of territorially differentiated language regimes. Within Yugoslavia, language rights were contingent upon administrative boundaries, producing asymmetric patterns of recognition across federal units. Yugoslav socialism sought to suspend ethnic politics through ideological homogenization, subordinating ethnic identity to socialist universalism. As Banac (1984) notes, this ideological project masked enduring tensions between assimilation and pluralism. The oscillation between limited recognition and repression of linguistic rights across constitutional periods illustrates how language policy served as a barometer of political centralization.

Following independence in 1991, the Republic of Macedonia initially reproduced this restrictive logic. The exclusion of Albanian linguistic claims from the constitutional and legislative framework reflected an exclusivistic conception of statehood incompatible with ethnic pluralism. Despite international pressure—particularly from the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities - political resistance persisted, contributing to escalating tensions and eventual armed conflict.

The Ohrid Framework Agreement marked a paradigmatic shift toward a consociational model of governance. Drawing on Arend Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy, post-Ohrid North Macedonia institutionalized power-sharing mechanisms designed to manage deep ethnic divisions through elite accommodation, proportionality, and segmental autonomy (Lijphart, 1977). Within this framework, language rights became a cornerstone of political inclusion, transforming Albanian ethnicity into a formally recognized and institutionally protected category. In Brubakerian terms, the post-Ohrid state represents a transition from ethnic marginalization to institutionalized ethnicity, while in Lijphartian terms it reflects the adoption of consociational arrangements as a strategy for democratic stability in a divided society. Language, situated at the intersection of identity and power, thus emerges as a central infrastructure of governance and political legitimacy in contemporary North Macedonia.

THE OHRID FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT AND THE CHALLENGES OF INSTITUTIONALIZING BILINGUALISM

The Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) constitutes the foundational political and legal instrument through which the use of the Albanian language was formally embedded within the state architecture of North Macedonia. Conceptually, the Agreement represents a paradigmatic shift from symbolic linguistic recognition toward the institutionalization of bilingual governance, in accordance with the standards of literary Albanian and its codified orthography established in 1972. Rather than functioning merely as a peace settlement, the OFA proposed a comprehensive package of constitutional and institutional reforms aimed at reducing structural asymmetries between the Macedonian majority and the Albanian ethnic community in the domains of language use, political representation, decentralization, and education (Ragaru, 2008).

Drawing on Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy, the OFA can be understood as a corrective mechanism designed to stabilize a deeply divided society through power-sharing, proportionality, and segmental autonomy (Lijphart, 1977). Language policy emerges here as a central pillar of consociational governance, transforming linguistic rights into instruments of political inclusion and institutional balance. At the same time, Brubaker's conceptualization of ethnicity as an institutionalized category of practice allows us to theorize language not as a static marker of identity, but as a mechanism through which ethnicity is stabilized, reproduced, and governed within the state (Brubaker, 2004).

Section 6 of the Ohrid Framework Agreement explicitly links language use with Albanian-language education at all levels, conceptualizing them as an inseparable policy binomial (OFA, 2001). This linkage reflects an objective institutional reality: the effective implementation of official bilingualism is contingent upon the existence of academic infrastructure, qualified personnel, standardized written practices, and administrative capacity. The transition from spoken bilingualism to written, legal, and bureaucratic bilingualism thus emerges as one of the most complex challenges of post-Ohrid state-building. The spheres envisaged by the Agreement regarding the use of the Albanian language are extensive and

require significant institutional investment. These include communication with central and local government authorities, participation in judicial procedures, and the issuance of personal documents for citizens belonging to communities constituting more than 20 percent of the population (OFA, 2001). The breadth of these domains underscores the transformative ambition of the OFA, while simultaneously revealing the gap between normative recognition and practical implementation. It is analytically crucial to recall that the regulation of Albanian language use emerged from a peace agreement aimed at terminating armed conflict, whereas its constitutional and legislative legitimation was to be carried out under conditions of peace and parliamentary procedure (OFA, 2001). The parliamentary legislature of 1998–2002 adopted the constitutional amendments in line with the OFA, while the subsequent legislature (2002–2006) was tasked with passing the necessary legislative changes pursuant to Annex B of the Agreement. This staged institutional sequencing reflects both a strategy of political stabilization and the fragility of post-conflict consensus.

Political time, as theorized by Shapiro (2016), provides a valuable lens through which to interpret the delays and contestations surrounding the implementation of language reforms. Unlike physical time, political time is shaped by negotiation, power struggles, and shifting coalitions. Despite the OFA's initial timelines, parliamentary debates led to modifications of proposed constitutional texts, while legislative reforms were prolonged through complex negotiations mediated by international actors, including the European Union and the United States.

If the official status of the Albanian language constituted one of the most difficult provisions to negotiate within the Ohrid Framework Agreement, its implementation has proven to be an enduring institutional and scholarly challenge. The OFA should therefore be understood as a framework agreement in the strictest sense: a document that delineates the contours of political will while inaugurating a long-term process of legal clarification, institutional consolidation, and normative interpretation. The institutionalization of bilingualism remains an evolving project, situated at the intersection of identity, power, and governance in post-conflict North Macedonia.

FROM SPOKEN RECOGNITION TO WRITTEN POWER: THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ALBANIAN LANGUAGE PRACTICES AFTER OHRID

The institutional practices surrounding the use of the Albanian language and the implementation of its standardized orthography followed a slow, uneven, and highly stratified trajectory during the first decade of the Ohrid Framework Agreement's implementation. This gradual consolidation of Albanian language within state institutions must be understood through the logic of post-conflict sequencing: in the immediate post-Ohrid period, security concerns and the proportional inclusion of citizens of Albanian ethnic affiliation within the police and armed forces assumed political priority. These areas not only advanced more rapidly, but were also defined with greater legal clarity within the text of the Agreement itself, thereby relegating language policy to a secondary phase of implementation (Bieber, 2010; Lijphart, 1977).

Subsequent legislative interventions gradually shifted attention toward linguistic institutionalization, particularly where reforms had direct implications for everyday civic life. Amendments to the Law on Personal Identification Documents (Law Amending and Supplementing the Law on Identity Cards, 2004) formally introduced Albanian into official personal documentation, embedding language rights into routine administrative interactions between citizens and the state. From a Brubakerian perspective, such developments exemplify processes of institutionalized ethnicity, whereby identity claims are transformed into durable bureaucratic practices rather than remaining confined to symbolic or discursive recognition (Brubaker, 2004).

A further stage of consolidation occurred within the sphere of higher education in Albanian language through the adoption of the Law on Higher Education (2003), which formalized the use of Albanian within state universities. This legal shift resulted in the official recognition of the University of Tetovo and the subsequent establishment of Mother Teresa University in Skopje, significantly expanding the institutional infrastructure necessary for the reproduction of linguistic competence, administrative expertise, and professional authority in Albanian. As scholars on language policy emphasize, higher education plays a decisive role in transforming minority languages into functional languages of governance by producing the human capital required for bureaucratic implementation (Heller, 2007; Patten, 2014).

During the period 2002–2008, the official use of Albanian expanded incrementally into parliamentary procedures and local self-government. However, this expansion remained largely confined to the domain of spoken language. Albanian achieved visibility primarily as an oral medium of political participation, while its systematic use as a written language of governance—characterized by standardized documentation, consistent orthographic norms, and routinized bureaucratic procedures—remained limited. This asymmetry between spoken and written bilingualism reveals a fundamental tension within post-Ohrid language policy: the gap between performative inclusion and substantive institutional equality (Shohamy, 2006; Grin, 2003). The distinction between spoken and written language constitutes an essential analytical axis when addressing the official use of language in social and political life. Classical linguistic theory already recognized this differentiation. Aristotle's reflections on rhetoric highlight that each form of language operates according to its own stylistic logic, noting that the style of written prose differs fundamentally from that of spoken oratory (Aristotle, 2018). This insight gains renewed relevance when applied to the public sphere, where language functions not as private expression, but as a vehicle of authority, legitimacy, and institutional accountability. Empirical linguistic research further confirms this distinction. Comparative studies of public speeches demonstrate significant divergences between orally delivered discourse and its written, published form. Written language, unlike speech, can be preserved, regulated, monitored, and systematically analyzed, rendering it central to bureaucratic governance and legal codification (Wallace & Tannen, 1986). In this sense, written language constitutes the primary medium through which state power is recorded and reproduced. Within the early post-Ohrid period at the level of central government, even the use of spoken Albanian presented substantial challenges. These included a lack of qualified interpreters, insufficient professional

training, and persistent difficulties in the consistent use of legal and administrative terminology. Consequently, spoken Albanian often functioned less as a standardized communicative instrument and more as a performative assertion of political and social presence. Language thus operated simultaneously as an expression of linguistic identity and as a marker of political subjectivity within state institutions.

Taken together, these dynamics illustrate that the institutionalization of bilingualism is neither immediate nor automatic following formal recognition. Rather, it unfolds through prolonged processes of negotiation, capacity-building, and normative stabilization. The delayed transition from spoken recognition to written institutional power underscores the structural challenges inherent in translating language rights into durable bureaucratic practice. In post-conflict, consociational settings such as North Macedonia, written language emerges as the decisive threshold at which symbolic inclusion is transformed into substantive equality within the architecture of the state.

TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE LEGAL REGIME: THE 2008–2019 TRAJECTORY OF ALBANIAN LANGUAGE LEGISLATION

The official use of the Albanian language in North Macedonia during the period 2002–2008 was grounded primarily in the amended constitutional framework and a series of sector-specific laws adopted in the aftermath of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. These legislative acts—covering personal identification documents, higher education, population census procedures, and local self-government—incorporated language provisions in a fragmented and partial manner. While they enabled functional use of Albanian language across selected institutional domains, they failed to establish a unified legal framework capable of clearly defining the scope, obligations, and mechanisms of institutional bilingualism.

Given that every substantive shift in the official use of the Albanian language has been closely intertwined with specific political configurations, the adoption of the first Law on the Use of Languages in 2008 must be understood as the direct outcome of a particular moment of political realignment. This development followed the formation of a new governing coalition after the May 2007 political agreement between the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) and VMRO-DPMNE¹. The agreement committed the parties to advancing the Law on the Use of Languages through parliamentary procedure and to defining a list of laws subject to double-majority (Badinter) voting², thereby embedding language regulation within the broader architecture of consociationalism power-sharing.

¹ DUI (Democratic Union for Integration – as main political party of ethnic-Albanian spectrum, VMRO-DPMNE – as main ethnic-Macedonian party of right spectrum. The governments of 2008, 2011 and 2014 were coalition governments of both parties.

² Vote Badinter – is constitutional category introduced after the Ohrid Framework Agreement. According to this regulation the set of legislation concerning the rights of ethnic communities requires double vote in parliament, the simple majority and the majority of the vote of ethnic communities other than ethnic-Macedonian.

The 2008 Law formally defined the use of the Albanian language across a wide range of institutional domains, including Parliament, the judiciary, electoral procedures, the Ombudsman, communication with ministries, broadcasting, infrastructure, local self-government, finance, education, science, and culture (Law on the Use of the Language Spoken by at Least 20% of the Citizens, 2008). However, a close reading of the law reveals its negotiated and restrictive character. In parliamentary practice, Albanian remained primarily a spoken language, while written materials were provided only upon request. This arrangement reinforced the asymmetry between spoken recognition and written institutional authority.

The amendment of the Law in 2011 expanded linguistic visibility by allowing parliamentary working bodies to be chaired in Albanian. Yet the law continued to exclude central executive institutions, government sessions, and official state signage from its scope. Crucially, it framed language use as an individual right rather than an institutional obligation, requiring citizens to request responses in Albanian rather than mandating proactive bilingualism by the state. Comparative analyses have identified this model as falling below the standards of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, due to its reactive and individualized approach to linguistic rights (Kadriu & Sela, 2017). The insufficiency of this legal framework was formally acknowledged in the Analysis on the Implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and Social Cohesion conducted by the Secretariat for the Implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement within the Government. The report identified a restrictive interpretation of linguistic rights and explicitly recommended the adoption of a new law that would clarify Constitutional Amendment V and translate its principles into enforceable institutional practice (OFA Review, 2015).

The law proposed by the Government in 2017 and adopted in 2019 emerged within a reconfigured political and geopolitical context, shaped by the Prespa Agreement with Greece and the country's accession to NATO. During its proposal phase, the law was incorporated into the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis and entered parliamentary procedure as part of the legislative corpus linked to European Union accession. This positioning situates the regulation of Albanian language use within the logic of European conditionality, where minority rights and multilingual governance function as key democratic benchmarks.

From a theoretical perspective, the trajectory from fragmented post-Ohrid legislation to the 2019 Law on the Use of Languages illustrates the gradual institutionalization of Albanian ethnicity through law. Drawing on Brubaker's concept of institutionalized ethnicity, language emerges as a mechanism through which collective identity is stabilized within bureaucratic routines. At the same time, Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy illuminates how language legislation reflects elite accommodation, mutual veto, and negotiated compromise rather than linear legal rationalization. Consequently, the evolution of language law in North Macedonia should be understood as an ongoing process of state transformation, shaped by political contingency, international norms, and the dynamic nature of linguistic practice itself.

THE 2019 LAW ON THE USE OF LANGUAGES: INSTITUTIONALIZATION, ENFORCEMENT, AND STATE TRANSFORMATION

The adoption of the new Law on the Use of Languages in 2019 represents the most comprehensive redefinition of official language use in North Macedonia since the Ohrid Framework Agreement. The law establishes that the language spoken by at least 20 percent of the citizens, together with its alphabet, holds official status across the entire territory of the state and within all governmental bodies and institutions exercising public authority (Sela et al., 2021). This formulation signifies a decisive shift from earlier legal regimes that confined official use to specific institutional domains or conditioned it upon individual request. Unlike prior legislation, which emphasized selective or reactive language accommodation, the 2019 law systematically expands the scope of Albanian language use to encompass the executive branch, including the Government and its working bodies, as well as a broad range of public institutions. These include fiscal reporting, postal services, invoices issued by public payment institutions, judicial and enforcement bodies, notarial services, and institutions responsible for the execution of sanctions. Furthermore, the law mandates the use of Albanian in public signage, including town squares and border crossings located in regions where the language spoken by more than 20 percent of the population is in official use (Law on the Use of Languages, 2019).

A defining innovation of the 2019 law lies in its institutional architecture. The law provides for the establishment and operationalization of two central bodies: the Agency for the Application of the Language Spoken by at Least 20 Percent of the Citizens and the Inspectorate for the Use of Languages. These institutions are tasked with promoting, protecting, and ensuring the uniform application of the Albanian language across all relevant state structures. Their creation marks a qualitative transition from symbolic recognition to enforceable governance, embedding language rights within permanent administrative mechanisms.

The Inspectorate for the Use of Languages occupies a particularly significant role within this framework. As the body responsible for monitoring compliance with the law, its functioning was further regulated through the adoption of a dedicated legal act immediately following the approval of the Law on the Use of Languages (Law on the Inspectorate for the Use of Languages, 2019). This sequencing reflects a clear legislative intent to move beyond declarative commitments and toward systematic oversight, accountability, and enforcement. The Inspectorate thus operates as a regulatory instrument through which linguistic equality is translated into measurable administrative practice. From a theoretical perspective, the 2019 language regime represents the culmination of a long process of institutionalization. Drawing on Brubaker's concept of institutionalized ethnicity, the Albanian language is no longer positioned merely as a marker of identity or a subject of political negotiation, but as an integral component of bureaucratic routine and state authority (Brubaker, 2004). Language becomes embedded within the everyday functioning of governance, producing durability and predictability beyond electoral cycles. Simultaneously, the law

can be interpreted through Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy, insofar as it consolidates power-sharing guarantees into the core functions of executive, judicial, and administrative authority (Lijphart, 1977). The shift from individual linguistic rights toward institutional obligations enhances the resilience of consociational arrangements by reducing dependence on political goodwill and embedding negotiated compromises within binding legal and administrative structures.

Moreover, the adoption of the 2019 law must be situated within the broader context of European integration and geopolitical realignment. Introduced as part of the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis, and following the Prespa Agreement and NATO accession, the law reflects the influence of European normative frameworks that treat minority rights, multilingual governance, and institutional inclusivity as core democratic benchmarks (Kymlicka, 1995; Patten, 2014). In this sense, language policy operates as both a domestic instrument of state transformation and a signal of external normative alignment.

Taken together, these developments indicate that the 2019 Law on the Use of Languages represents a structural turning point in the evolution of language policy in North Macedonia. By combining comprehensive legal scope with dedicated enforcement institutions, the law secures not only the formal recognition of the Albanian language but also sustained institutional stewardship over its official use. Nevertheless, as language remains inherently dynamic, the long-term effectiveness of this framework will depend on continued political commitment, administrative capacity, and societal engagement.

BETWEEN INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND CONTESTATION: LANGUAGE POLICY, CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW, AND THE VENICE COMMISSION AFTER 2019

The adoption of the 2019 Law on the Use of Languages did not bring closure to debates surrounding the official status of the Albanian language in North Macedonia. Rather, it inaugurated a new phase in which linguistic contestation shifted from legislative negotiation toward constitutional interpretation, institutional resistance, and external legal scrutiny. This trajectory reflects a broader dynamic characteristic of post-conflict and consociational systems: once identity-based claims are embedded within binding legal frameworks, political struggle is displaced into juridical, bureaucratic, and procedural arenas. From a constitutional standpoint, the 2019 law generated political dispute due to both the breadth of its provisions and the procedure of its adoption. Critics argued that the law exceeded the constitutional parameters established by Amendment V, while proponents maintained that it represented a necessary clarification of Ohrid's principles, which had previously been interpreted in a restrictive manner. This tension exposes a structural ambiguity inherent in the Ohrid constitutional settlement itself: while Amendment V affirms expanded language use, it leaves unresolved the precise extent to which institutional bilingualism should penetrate the core structures of state authority.

Following the political agreement on the formation of a new government in North Macedonia in 2017, the coalition partners³ reached a consensus to advance the Law on the Use of Languages through parliamentary procedure and to submit it for an advisory opinion to the Venice Commission. After the law entered into force, a noticeable expansion in the use of the Albanian language within governmental institutions followed. This expansion, however, unfolded alongside significant practical challenges related to the existing administrative capacities required for effective implementation. The institutional infrastructure necessary to operationalize the law—particularly in terms of trained personnel, translation services, and standardized administrative procedures—proved insufficient, highlighting the need for parallel capacity-building measures accompanying the legal reform.

In the interim, the opinion of the Venice Commission was delivered. While the Commission raised no objections to the underlying spirit and objectives of the law, particularly its aim to broaden the official use of the Albanian language, it expressed reservations concerning the limited institutional and administrative capacities available for its implementation. The Venice Commission thus framed the issue not as one of normative legitimacy, but as one of feasibility, proportionality, and legal certainty—emphasizing that the effective realization of language rights depends on the state's ability to ensure consistent and sustainable enforcement mechanisms. In its Opinion on the Law on the Use of Languages, the Commission acknowledged the legitimacy of the law's objective—enhancing linguistic equality and implementing Ohrid's principles—while simultaneously expressing concerns regarding legal certainty, proportionality, and institutional feasibility (Venice Commission, 2019). The Commission emphasized that language regulation must be sufficiently precise and foreseeable in order to comply with the principles of the rule of law, particularly when applied to judicial proceedings, sanctions, and administrative acts. Importantly, the Venice Commission did not contest the expansion of official language use as such. Instead, it cautioned that overly broad or insufficiently differentiated provisions could generate legal uncertainty and administrative inefficiency, thereby undermining both institutional functionality and the effective enjoyment of linguistic rights. From a theoretical perspective, the Venice Commission's stance occupies an intermediary space between Brubaker's concept of institutionalized ethnicity and Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy. Its recognition of the legitimacy of expanded language use aligns with the view that equality requires embedding identity within state institutions rather than confining it to symbolic recognition (Brubaker, 2004). At the same time, its insistence on proportionality and clarity reflects a constitutionalist corrective to consociational expansion, emphasizing that power-sharing arrangements must remain operationally coherent and legally sustainable (Lijphart, 1977).

At the domestic level, the Commission's opinion became an additional site of political contestation. Competing actors selectively appropriated its findings either to legitimize resistance to the law or to argue for its refinement rather than repeal.

³ The government of 2017 was coalition between SDSM (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia) and DUI (Democratic Union for Integration) plus some minor parties from the Macedonian and Albanian political spectrum.

Implementation gaps further complicate the post-2019 landscape. Despite the existence of a comprehensive legal framework and dedicated enforcement institutions, many state bodies have exhibited delayed compliance, partial implementation, or procedural minimalism. Comparative language-policy scholars identify bureaucracies as frequent sites of passive resistance, where formal compliance may coexist with substantive inertia (Shohamy, 2006; Grin, 2003). Written language, as the primary medium of administrative authority, remains the most contested domain, as its full implementation directly affects institutional routines, accountability mechanisms, and power hierarchies.

It may therefore be concluded that legal changes concerning the official use of the Albanian language are closely intertwined with political will and the broader political environment in North Macedonia. This interdependence becomes particularly evident in the submission of initiatives to the Constitutional Court seeking the abrogation of specific provisions of the Law on the Use of Languages. Such legal challenges have generated renewed political and ethnic tensions, demonstrating that language policy remains a sensitive domain within the constitutional order.

There is clear that the regulation of bilingualism will continue to function as a focal point of political and ethnic disagreement under shifting regional and international circumstances. Nonetheless, beyond these ongoing contestations, bilingualism itself remains a high political, social, and state value. As both comparative experience and European normative frameworks suggest, multilingual governance - when accompanied by adequate institutional capacity and political commitment - constitutes not a threat to state cohesion, but a cornerstone of democratic pluralism and inclusive statehood. Ultimately, the post-2019 period demonstrates that the institutionalization of language rights is neither linear nor self-executing. While the Law on the Use of Languages represents a significant normative advance, its implementation depends on the interaction between constitutional interpretation, administrative capacity, political will, and societal acceptance. The involvement of the Venice Commission confirms that language policy in plural societies operates at the intersection of domestic politics and transnational constitutional norms. Albanian language use in North Macedonia thus remains not just a simple legal category, but an evolving site through which citizenship, equality, and shared statehood are continuously renegotiated.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND CHALLENGES

As emphasized in the introductory remarks, the establishment of the Albanian language as an official language has been - and continues to be a collective commitment and a high social and state ideal for Albanians in North Macedonia, as well as an indisputable marker of collective identity formation. Following the declaration of independence of the Republic of Macedonia in 1991 and the *de jure* and *de facto* suppression of the official use of the Albanian language, nearly three decades of sustained engagement and struggle have unfolded with the aim of securing the Albanian language not only as a formally recognized right, but as a functional language within the everyday operation of

all public institutions. In this sense, language has remained the central axis around which Albanian collective identity in North Macedonia has been constructed and preserved, generating resilience and continuity in the face of what Brubaker conceptualizes as ethnic nationalizing projects (Brubaker, 1996).

Given the contextual and relational nature of ethnic communities (Horowitz, 1985), and the importance of institutionalizing such identities within modern states (Balibar & Wallerstein, 2000), constitutional and legal regulations governing the official use of the Albanian language represent concrete mechanisms through which identity theories are translated into institutional practice. These arrangements provide a framework for the coexistence and functioning of multiple linguistic identities within a single constitutional order - an approach long recognized and normalized within the legislative practices of the European Union, where multilingualism constitutes not merely a symbolic value but an operational reality (Moren, 2001).

Anchored in this enduring commitment to linguistic identity—and in the inseparable link between language and national culture that forms the emotive foundation of the nation (Banac, 1984) - Albanians in the former Socialist Republic of Macedonia embraced the standard Albanian literary language at the 1972 Orthography Congress in Tirana, a position that continues to define linguistic practice today. However, contemporary institutional and scientific challenges related to the Albanian language in North Macedonia are considerably more complex. The expansion of the language's official domains has been accompanied by the development of greater academic capacity and opportunity for the study, standardization, and maintenance of Albanian as a language of governance and public life to an extent unprecedented in earlier periods.

A further challenge arises from the 2019 Law on the Use of Languages, which mandates the use of Albanian in public spheres where it had not previously been employed. This expansion has exposed systemic weaknesses in implementation, underscoring the necessity of sustained capacity-building. In this context, strategic cooperation among universities within the state institutions becomes essential, both to develop the required professional and administrative expertise and to institutionalize Albanian as a working language across faculties and universities, rather than confining its use exclusively to philological departments.

The evolution of the official use of the Albanian language in North Macedonia demonstrates that language policy in plural societies is neither a purely legal matter nor a closed political episode, but rather a long-term process of institutional negotiation, contestation, and normalization. From its revolutionary articulation within the Ohrid Framework Agreement to its progressive legal consolidation culminating in the 2019 Law on the Use of Languages, the trajectory of Albanian language rights reveals the complex interaction between identity, power, and state-building in a post-conflict context.

This analysis has shown that early post-Ohrid arrangements prioritized symbolic and spoken recognition over written language and bureaucratic institutionalization, producing an asymmetry between formal inclusion and substantive equality. Subsequent legislative developments, particularly the language laws of 2008 and 2011, marked incremental progress but remained constrained by political compromise, an individualized rights-based logic, and the exclusion of central executive authority from

full bilingual obligation. These limitations confirmed that constitutional recognition alone is insufficient without coherent legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms capable of enforcing linguistic equality as a structural norm.

The adoption of the 2019 Law on the Use of Languages represents a qualitative turning point in this trajectory. By redefining the Albanian language as official throughout the entire territory of the state and embedding its use within the executive, judicial, and administrative cores of governance, the law advances the most comprehensive form of institutionalized language equality to date. The establishment of the Language Agency and the Inspectorate further signals a decisive shift from declarative recognition toward enforceable governance, anchoring language rights within permanent administrative structures.

At the same time, political disputes, implementation challenges, and the involvement of the Venice Commission demonstrate that institutionalization does not eliminate conflict but rather transforms its modalities. Linguistic contestation has shifted from political bargaining to constitutional interpretation, bureaucratic compliance, and alignment with European rule-of-law standards. In this sense, language policy emerges as a continuous site of negotiation through which competing visions of statehood - exclusivistic and pluralistic - are articulated and debated.

Any analysis of the official use of language inevitably converges on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis concerning linguistic relativity and the relationship between language and worldview. As articulated by Sapir, human beings do not live solely within an objective world, but are profoundly influenced by the particular language that serves as the medium of expression within their society. Languages thus constitute distinct conceptual worlds rather than a single world labeled differently at its points of entry (Lucy, 2001; Blackburn, 2022). This insight suggests that while our linguistic worlds may differ, it remains a fundamental civilizational task to cultivate mutual understanding across languages - particularly in an era in which linguistic globalization is likely to generate new debates on identity, power, and communication.

Ultimately, the official use of the Albanian language should not be understood as a finalized legal achievement, but as an evolving institutional practice embedded within the broader democratic development of the state. As language remains a dynamic social force, its regulation will continue to reflect and shape the changing meanings of citizenship, equality, and shared ownership of the state in North Macedonia.

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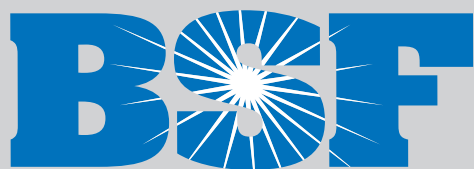
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