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Motivations and Self-Perceived Career Prospects of Undergraduate Sociology Students

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Abstract

Sociology undoubtedly plays an important role in the world of sciences, as it provides an opportunity to examine the society in which we live and our social relationships using widely accepted means with real scientific value. As Giddings has noted, 'sociology tells us how to become what we want to be' (Giddings, 2011). However, discussions of the social sciences can be controversial, as they are sometimes perceived as 'inferior' to natural sciences. To alleviate this discrepancy, it is essential to supply professionals with useful knowledge in the field of sociology, understand their motivations and ensure the best career prospects for them. In this pilot study, 18 sociology B.A. students answered seven open-ended questions in the form of a short essay regarding their motivations in terms of faculty choices, initial expectations and the fulfilment thereof, their aims in the study of sociology, preferred areas of employment, willingness to undergo further training, five-year plans and their opinions about the prospects of newly graduated sociologists in Hungary compared to graduates from other areas in terms of the usefulness of knowledge gained, perceptions of their professions and earning opportunities. According to the results of this study, the future plans of the participants were very different, but all of them believe that an undergraduate sociology degree provides extensive knowledge about the functioning of society and has helped them to form attitudes that they consider to be extremely valuable on the labour market.

Keywords: career prospects, education, motivations, sociology, undergraduate programme.

Introduction

Sociology as a science is essential for understanding the functioning of society. By definition, 'sociology is a social science that studies human societies, their interactions, and the processes that preserve and change them. It does this by examining the dynamics of constituent parts of societies such as institutions, communities, populations, and gender, racial, or age groups. Sociology also studies social status or stratification, social movements, and social change, as well as societal disorder in the form of crime, deviance, and revolution' (Form & Faris, 2020). Thus, one could make the claim that sociology training plays an important role in social development and that sociology courses aim to train professionals who are able to understand and analyse social processes, thus contributing to the development of society.

The short description of the sociology BA programme at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, Hungary includes the statement that 'successful graduates of the program should have a solid grasp of the concepts and principles of sociology and have mastered (at the
appropriate level) its methods, and they should be able to identify and interpret social problems meaningfully' (ELTE, 2020).

However, the role of sociology – and the role of the social sciences overall – among the range of sciences still may not be as clear as that of the natural sciences or engineering. As Durkheim states, according to his positivist view of science that has greatly influenced the field of sociology, there are objective facts about the social world that can be expressed in statistics, and these facts are not influenced by the personal beliefs of the researcher (Durkheim, 1897). On the other hand, social action theorists argue that the social world is socially constructed itself, and, from a postmodernist point of view, the social world cannot be observed directly, only through language, which raises the question of different possible meanings (Thompson, 2017). Ironically, the discipline that deals with the nature and operations of science is a branch of sociology: the sociology of science.

Sociologists – together with representatives of other disciplines – take on the task of helping us to better understand the world around us. During their training, it is essential to supply them with motivation and ensure the best career prospects for them. The present pilot study aims to provide a snapshot of the motivations and self-perceived career prospects of undergraduate sociology students, hypothesising that they will have experienced misconceptions related to overall societal perceptions of sociology, identifying potential patterns in their motivations and career prospects and eventually observing whether these patterns are worthy of further examination on a larger scale.

**Methodology**

To assess the motivations and self-perceived career prospects of undergraduate sociology students, 19 participants – the entirety of an elective course-unit at Eötvös Loránd University in the second semester of the academic year 2019-2020 – were asked to write an essay of at least three pages responding to the prompt 'What are my prospects as a sociology student?' that answers seven open-ended questions.

The questions were as follows:

- Why did you choose undergraduate training in sociology? (What factors played a role in the choice?)
- What were your ideas and expectations in the beginning?
- Have your ideas been fulfilled, and have your expectations been met? (In what ways have they or have not?)
- What primary goal did you hope to achieve with this training at the time of application, and did this goal change during your training? (If it has changed, can you tell when and why exactly?)
- What field would you like to work in, and do you have any plans for further study?
- When are you expected to graduate? Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What do you think the prospects of newly graduated sociologists are today in Hungary, and how different do you think these are compared to those of students graduating from other programmes (regarding the usefulness of knowledge gained, perceptions of the profession,
earning opportunities or anything else that comes to your mind compared to any other major or discipline)?

The participants were encouraged to make open and honest statements about their personal thoughts and feelings. Ultimately, 18 students returned their essays before the deadline for anonymous data processing. All of the participants were second- or third-year sociology BA students in full-time training at the time of data collection that took place between 6 and 11 May 2020.

Analysis

The sample of 18 sociology students consisted of 13 women (72.2%) and five men (27.8%). 10 of them were second-year students (55.6%) and eight were third-year students (44.4%) between the ages of 19 and 28.

In response to the first question, 'Why did you choose undergraduate training in sociology?', nine participants (50%) answered that they had been interested in history in secondary school and thus became interested in the functioning of society. All participants (100%) mentioned that they would like to gain a deeper understanding of the world around them. 'For me, it's a personal mission to understand people and myself, but I don't like the individualist approach of psychology', said one of the undergraduate students. However, three participants wrote that their first choice during application was a psychology BA, but they did not manage to fulfil the requirements; they realised later that this was 'a lucky incident', as they find sociology to be a 'more comprehensive' discipline. The effects of media were also apparent in the choices of the students. 'I've heard sociologists talk about different social issues on the radio many times and found it interesting. I thought I was going to learn something similar', one wrote. All of the participants (100%) mentioned some kind of uncertainty regarding their profession at the time of application, but the level of this uncertainty was highly variable. 'I went to a high school that provided many opportunities for social and community involvement. We organised camps for children in the summer and during the year in a completely voluntary way', explained one participant who sees themself 'as a community organiser' in the future.

This level of uncertainty was observed to be so high that it was difficult for some students to even conceptualise what they would like to study or do with their lives. 'Why should I know that at the age of 18?', asked one. The diversity of sociology was included among the primary motivations for study. 'Social science involves almost all of the sciences, so I saw an opportunity in it that even if I didn’t get a job as a sociologist after graduation, it still provides a basic intelligence that I’ll be able to adapt more easily, even to a job', said a participant. 'I wanted a degree that could make pretty much anything out of me', stated another. In some cases, current social issues motivated these young adults to choose sociology as their major: 'I wanted to understand what migration is, I wanted to understand why we communicate about it the way we communicate about it, I wanted to understand the emotions going on in people, what they were afraid of, I wanted to understand hatred because I thought there is no such thing as hate from the gut'. All of the students (100%) declared that they chose a sociology BA because they felt that they could gain comprehensive knowledge from it, which could be applied in many areas: 'I read the training programme descriptions, and I sorted based on what knowledge I could gain. In the end, I chose sociology because I felt the knowledge I could gain in this major was the most comprehensive'.
To the second and third questions, ‘What were your ideas and expectations in the beginning?’, and ‘Have your ideas been fulfilled, and have your expectations been met? (In what way have they or have not?)’, all participants (100%) answered that they thought it was important to obtain a degree both because of personal development and because of its value on the labour market. Additionally, the applicability of knowledge was important to students. ‘I expected to learn new and interesting things that I could then use in my daily life and that would make me understand a little better the people around me and how things work. At 90 per cent of the time, I learn things that I find very interesting, and I feel like I’ve managed to find the major that truly suits me best’, shared a participant. The well-known difficulties of first-generation university students were also conveyed. ‘I had no idea what to expect. I am the first in the family to go to university so my parents couldn’t really help me’, pointed out one student, who ‘didn’t expect how close sociology is to many other sciences’ and was excited to study ‘philosophy, psychology, social psychology [and] anthropology’, admitting that their goals ‘actually came about after the admission’.

Students emphasised the importance of sociology by expressing the fact that sociological knowledge can be implemented in daily life situations easily. ‘My expectation that I wanted to understand the world around us has already been fulfilled. Very often in ordinary discourses, I notice the return of acquired thoughts in a given context. So not only [has] my knowledge expanded, but my way of thinking also became much more causal, more complex, more actual’, wrote one student. On the other hand, more than half of the participants (61.1%) observed that ‘the training programme is especially characterised by reading the literature, too much of it’. The theoretical side of sociology caused one to remark: ‘I envisioned the training completely differently. I imagined that there would be a lot more hands-on education at the university than lectures. In my vision, the training consisted of a lot of fieldwork to experience as much as possible, to increase our practical knowledge greatly’. Almost all of the participants (94.4%) objected to the dominance of theoretical subjects in the programme (‘I got a little too much of Marx, Durkheim and Weber’). Meanwhile, they emphasised how important they consider the various seminars and projects to be (‘within the framework of our 15-credit project class, in which my team researched solidarity between the homeless, I realised that would like to work in an atmosphere after graduation in which I have the opportunity to add something to the social sciences’). However, the amount of educational materials related to the past was criticised by several participants: ‘I was hoping that by the end of the course, there would be more contemporary issues as we live in the present’. It was also noted by one sociology student that ‘if the goal is to educate thinking young people who also dare to express their different opinions, I think small groups of five to 10 would be the most ideal for this’.

Among the popular expectations expressed was the intention to meet and network with like-minded people. ‘I wanted to make friends and connections, experience a bit of the university student life’, wrote one participant. On the other hand, having a job made it difficult for several students to fulfil this expectation: ‘I had difficulty establishing the right network of contacts, without which I did not have access to enough information. Thus, one quickly realises how much social capital matters’. Ultimately, all of the participants (100%) claimed that the sociology BA programme fulfilled their expectations at least ‘partly’. ‘Miraculously, the training exceeded my expectations. I soon fell in love with it and learned a lot about how the world works. Even if not completely, I could still immerse myself in psychology and social psychology as well’, indicated one student whose first choice of degree programme would have been a psychology BA.
The fourth question, ‘What primary goal did you hope to achieve with this training at the time of application, and did this goal change during your training? (If it has changed, can you tell when and why exactly?)’, brought significant differences between students to the surface. ‘My goal was to be able to understand and help as many people with difficult fates as possible. Perhaps a solution can be found to the question of how the problems of the Roma minority could be solved in the poorer regions of Hungary (Heves, Borsod, Nógrád, Szabolcs), and this goal has remained the same since’, stated a participant who ‘grew up in a small village where the proportion of Roma people is 65%’. The goal of providing help was mentioned by others as well. ‘For me, the primary goal is to deal with people: my work should have an impact on people’s lives – if not personally, then indirectly. It also means to help people effectively’, said another undergraduate sociology student. In some cases, students had initially formulated a concrete life goal: ‘with my sociology training, my main goal was to get a basic education that would start me in life and help me realise what I wanted to be. I definitely thank the latter for the course, because before I came here, I had only a stray idea that I would like to hold training and courses for social sensitisation in the future’.

Other participants expressed completely different goals. For example: ‘My goal when I applied for this training was to get a degree. It may sound a bit harsh now, but I didn’t have a sublime goal or aspiration like social improvement. It was more of a rational decision’. However, some students with an initial goal such as this eventually became committed to sociology. As one noted, ‘My goal with the training, in the beginning, was only to get a degree. This has changed to the extent that I no longer just want to get through, just avoiding the reclassification to a fee-paying student, but I want to complete all subjects as well as possible’. The uncertainty of professional choices also affected personal goals in some cases: ‘I wanted to gain time to figure out what I was going to do in life. It worked out to some extent, as I had the opportunity to try myself in a job that requires a sociological vision in the business sector and helps people’. This student indicated that they would be glad to continue their job after graduation.

In certain cases, participants’ goals changed within the field of sociology. ‘For two semesters, my goal was to be able to study criminology and then go into that master’s program as well. This goal changed when I saw the need to learn all kinds of laws and regulations. Then, I decided that I’m more interested in the organisational sociology specialisation’, one participant mentioned. In contrast, some participants’ ultimate goals moved beyond the framework of sociology: ‘After the end of the second semester, it became clear to me what I was going to do in life. It worked out to some extent, as I had the opportunity to try getting to know the world around us, so it can provide a good foundation’.

To the fifth question, ‘What field would you like to work in, and do you have any plans for further study?’, half of the participants (50%) mentioned that they would like to pursue master’s-level studies in fields such as sociology, survey statistics, social policy, human ecology, community and civil development, human resources and design theory. ‘I can’t finish my studies by completing a sociology BA’, explained one. Two students (11.1%) indicated that they would like to pursue another bachelor’s degree (in psychology and in communication and media studies), one (5.6%) stated that they were considering a postgraduate specialist training course (possibly in human resources) and another (5.6%) mentioned a planned gap year after graduation. Three participants (16.7%) plan to obtain a PhD, two of these (11.1%) in sociology and one in history (5.6%). All participants (100%) hope to use their knowledge
of sociology in the labour market. Two (11.1%) indicated that they were considering going abroad at some point to gain more experience. Regarding the field of work, ambitions of becoming a statistical researcher, policymaker or headhunter as well as ‘working in the public sector’, ‘working for a civil organisation’ and ‘working for an appealing company’ emerged. Working as a market researcher was considered attractive by two students (11.1%). ‘I don’t want to work for anyone else at all unless I get something in addition to financial gain that can be valuable in the long run’, a student pointed out. ‘Unfortunately, the public sector can only be accessed through politics for a dedicated social politician who wants social change. It would be foolish to deny this. Anyone who wants to work as a social politician in public or municipal administration will ultimately be appointed by a politician, so social policy is not independent of ideology, either; ages and parties influence job opportunities’, explained another participant.

To the sixth question, ‘When are you expected to graduate? Where do you see yourself in five years?’, eight students (44.4%) answered that they were to graduate in a few months, nine (50%) in the next year and one (5.6%) two years later due to uncompleted courses. ‘In five years, I want to be a person who feels responsible for society, actively intervenes in social processes and uses my knowledge of sociology to help humanity at my best’, stated a participant. ‘If all goes well, I’ll graduate with a master’s degree in human resources and work for a bounty hunter company, and maybe I’ll learn something next to it that I can utilise later, saving money to start my own business and then a book publishing company’, shared another. ‘I would really like to join an NGO that meets my values. I haven’t found the right one for me yet, but I’m primarily interested in the organisations that deal with the protection of the environment and the protection and support of the disadvantaged people’, said a third participant. Not every participant’s plans were clear. As one participant stated: ‘To the question of where and how I will see myself in five years, I can’t answer. I can’t even imagine where this whole thing is going to go, but hopefully, I’ll hold on to things and activities that are important and fun, like volunteering, creation and learning’. On the other hand, some participants were already on track to fulfil their five-year plans: ‘In five years, I hope to be able to settle somewhere and earn enough to make a good living out of it. Incidentally, I have been just hired for an internship for data cleansing and machine learning’. Aspects of private life also emerged, as this answer demonstrates: ‘I hope there will be someone on my side with whom I can share my life’. One student who pursued a political career wrote: ‘If I burn out, I would like to set up either a social enterprise or a self-sustaining eco-farm in a village in a disadvantaged region to support local people and the community’.

To the last question, ‘What do you think the prospects of newly graduated sociologists are today in Hungary, and how different do you think these are compared to those of students graduating from other programmes?’, one student wrote that they are often asked ‘What is sociology good for?’ by others. ‘The public judgment on sociology, I think, is rather negative, but not primarily because it would be less useful or relevant than other disciplines, but because the vast majority of people don’t even know exactly what it means to study sociology or to be a sociologist’, according to the observations of one participant. ‘I had an acquaintance who, when they heard I was going to study sociology, said it was as useful as an underwater basket weaving course’, complained another. ‘I don’t think that, as newly graduated sociologists, we would have very good prospects nowadays in Hungary, although I feel that there is a great need for sociologists, especially in the midst of emerging crises such as global warming and the refugee crisis’, pointed out a third student. ‘There are a thousand kinds of
sociologists. It is a very big profession’, warned the fourth, ‘with several specialisations. It can be relatively easier to get a job [in some], and with others, it's harder, although I believe (maybe naively) that if someone is outstandingly good at something and can really put themselves out there, they can get a job anyway’. ‘Today's Hungarian society and the labour market don't reward or value social scientists so much. But there is a market sector that absorbs those who are proficient in statistics, data visualisation and data analytics’, mentioned another participant. Six students (33.3%) referred to the importance of the reputation of the university. ‘ELTE [Eötvös Loránd University] has the highest prestige in Hungary. The degrees obtained here are thoroughly acknowledged’, one declared.

When comparing sociology to other majors, all participants (100%) agreed that sociology is equally as important as any other discipline and that the undergraduate sociology programme provides useful knowledge. ‘Basically, I think that [...] very few majors will mark a sure path to take [upon completion]’, highlighted one. ‘[N]ew graduates need to realise that having a paper in their hands is just a springboard, but there is no guarantee that the employers will grab them with both hands in the job market, not if they are a sociologist nor if they graduated as an engineer’, another student warned.

Conclusion

Despite the small sample size and nature of this research as a pilot study, it is able to provide a credible picture of the motivations and career prospects of undergraduate students in sociology as well as to draw attention to the misconceptions surrounding sociology and sociology training. The results of the essay analysis support the hypotheses that undergraduate sociology students experience misconceptions related to the overall societal perceptions of sociology and help to identify patterns in their motivations and career prospects. The observed patterns are definitely worthy of further examination using a larger sample of undergraduate sociology students.

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References


The Concept of Narration in the Place Brand Identity

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Abstract

The place branding as an integral part of competitive place development strategy became a topic for municipalities and cities of Latvia relatively recently, at the beginning of 2000. In particular, the issue of place identity exploration in Latvia has become a key subject, linked to the sustainable demonstration of the attractiveness of the place, narration of unique benefits in order to increase place’s economic value and social welfare in behalf of place residents and other stakeholders. The author seeks answers to a range of interdisciplinary research questions related to the topic of place branding - how to create a place brand identity that is relevant to place residents and express the sense of place (identity); what are the main conditions of place brand development and what intangible and/or tangible attributes of identity provide convincing place brand identity narratives? The empirical part of the article is based on the methodology of qualitative research, in-depth semi-structured interviews with Latvian place branding experts, and analysis of the content of brand identities of Latvian cities and municipalities. The research insight was how place branding as a strategic marketing process is mastered by the local municipality and involved stakeholders, provides a critical view on the local practices, and strengthens the appreciation of the importance of place brand identity narratives.

Keywords: narrative, place branding, identity, sense of place, storytelling

Introduction

To succeed in a constantly changing world places must reinvent themselves to stay competitive and define mutually sustainable relationships with their people. According to Mihalis Kavaratzis one of the main resources of the place brand construction is narrative. In matter of fact, Kavaratzis suggests that place brands are better thought of as narratives or ‘place stories’ (Kavaratzis, 2015: 5). The concept ‘narrative’ is a set of valuable capital due to place-bound context and meaning formation of the respective place. For the place brand to become a narrative or to be designed as a narrative, the concept ‘narrative’ needs to be unraveled and explore in context of the terms of ‘place’ and ‘identity’.

The concept ‘narrative’ has multiple relations between various disciplines including literary and culture studies, media studies, art history, sociology, and semiotics. Narrative as a term encounters not only academic texts but rotates in our everyday consciousness as habitual and regular ingredient. According to the thought of system theory narrative reflects the society’s perception of itself at the operative level. Niklas Luhmann describes society as an active and lively system, which reproduces notions of oneself (self-reference) in communication, which also creates autopoiesis - self-renewal system. (Luhmann, 1996: xx) Thus, it not only
contributes to the renewal of society, but also creates and reproduces identities as well as meanings and relationships. "No system unity can exist between mechanical and conscious operations, between chemical operations and those that communicate meaning." (Luhmann, 1996: 39) Because of the given self-reflecting and self-describing characteristics narrative becomes an important social source, professor Walter Fisher, the author of concept 'narrative paradigm' highlights the symbolic aspect of the narrative describing the concept as 'symbolic actions' - words and/or deeds - that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them. (Fisher, 1987: 58) The symbolic actions as an asset is also recognized by the place branding expert Simon Ahholt noting that symbolic actions are emblematic for the place brand identity in the same time a component of the place story (Anholt, 2010: 13). Narrative has an intrinsic communicative power due to its historical and theoretical framework. According to Anne Pellowski, the author of several books on theory and practice of storytelling, describes storytelling (narration) as an entire context of the moment was an early entertainment, indicated more than 5,000 years ago (Pellowski, 1990: 3). The earliest origins of storytelling suggest that there is an evidence of several theories, including self-entertainment. The other theories: the need to explain the surrounding physical world, the need to communicate experience to other humans, to encode and preserve the norms of social interactions that a given society lived by, as well as an ideological and religious component of believes to the present world. (Pellowski, 1990: 10). Simon Ahholt emphasizes the extensivity of symbolic actions in context of policies as "suggestive, remarkable, memorable, picturesque, newsworthy, poetic, topical, poetic, touching, surprising or dramatic" (Anholt, 2010: 13). According to Kavaratzis there is a close interrelation between symbolic representation and physical place-making and increasingly high need to consider the customers therefore, residents the co-creators of both representation and place (Kavaratzis, 2015: 161). Similarly, to Jerome Bruner this co-creation is "the most natural and the earliest way in which we organize our experience and our knowledge" (Bakhurst and Shanker, 2001: 27). Bruner emphasizes the importance of language but also highlights other symbolic artefacts and institutional influences in construction of narratives. Conceptually Bruner comprises that the culture is "the symbolic systems that individuals [use] in constructing meaning" (Bakhurst and Shanker, 2001: 27). Therefore, "we represent our lives (to ourselves as well as to others) in the form of narrative" (Bakhurst and Shanker, 2001: 23). Narrative becomes an identity content and at the same time a storage of countless identities of our cultural origins. Concerning more practical understanding of the concept of narrative in context of place brand identity, it is a research methodology of the tangible and intangible attributes of the place identity. Two sides - tangibility and intangibility of the place identity is a common set of characteristics of place identity. Therefore, the process of narrating a story is useful in research for the content of place identity and co-creating the social reality comprehending both existing and inherited signifiers of the communal sense of place.

The diversity of genres and forms of narrative is another conceptual aspect in the context of place brand identity. Narrative is present in various forms of pictorial and verbal forms: myth, legend, story, tradition, history, news, conversation and so on, as well as, in every place, age, time and society. Regarding the narrative as a place there must be an extent value and rhetorical impact in order to find or design a credible narrative. One of terms that provides a credibility to narratives is a 'masterplot' or 'master narrative' (Abbot, 2008: 47) 'Master narrative' is understood "as a skeletal and adaptable" (Abbot, 2008: 47) powerful cultural force of the stories. The one the foremost thinkers in current folkloristic scholarship, Simon Bronner emphasizes the contribution of folklorists in cultural diversity and variations of
narratives generated by ordinary people in different cultural groups who chose not to follow national or even universalized “master narratives” (Bronner, 2011: 20). The narrative at its essential mode is a verbal presentation process of telling stories and events or actions. Professor H. Porter Abbot describing narrative emphasizes the difference between terms ‘event’ and ‘story’ - “the difference between events and their representation is difference between story (the event or sequence of events) and narrative discourse (how the story is conveyed)” (Abbot, 2008: 15). Narrative discourse is characterized as true or false, historical, or fictional. Thus, the concept of an authentic narrative is often referred to as a credible aspect of place brand identity to maintain deeper mental and social relationships with an origins of place identity. Quite often places lose their origins and credibility of the meaning captured in a narrative within a time. Therefore, regarding to places as social constructions in marketing terms, the credible narrative becomes vital element that holds symbolic meanings created by people of the place, shared experiences, mediated in variety of controlled and uncontrolled communication channels. One of the most natural yet credible communication way is word-of-mouth. Narratives can become updated versions of the common memories, rituals, traditions, and stories, and other interpretations of culture that have sustained value of sense of place. The concept of narration has a potential of continuity through cultural heritage and reinforced values in different degrees of tangibility as physical settings and intangibility - emotional bonds created through social experiences and interactions.

The concept of identity within sense of place and place branding

With a reference to the aim of this article to explore the specifics of the concept of narrative within a place brand identity, it is important to understand the concept ‘identity’. The term ‘identity’ is a multidimensional and interdisciplinary construct infecting diverse articulations in the humanities and social sciences. The vast literature on nationalism un national identity, examines the concept as complex of varied means by which nations become aware of themselves (Aronczyk 2013: 15). Other words in context of place brand identity it is a construct of “who we are”. Anthony D. Smith, historical sociologist of the interdisciplinary field of nationalism studies, defines five fundamental features of national identity: an historical territory (homeland); common myths and historical memories; a common, mass public culture; common legal rights and duties for all members and a common economy with territorial mobility for members (Smith 1991: 14). Smith admits that the nation provides a social bond between individuals and classes by providing repertoires of shared values, symbols, and traditions (Smith 1991: 16). Smith emphasizes that identity is perceived as a thought of ‘belonging to culture’, it can be rational and based only on a sense of belonging to a common history and experience in which language takes an important role. From folklore studies point of view, Simon Bronner notes the concept ‘traditions’ [reference to common knowledge that has a symbolic gesture produced in actions] and term ‘folk’ that describes modifier signals, expressive forms such as stories, games, rituals, houses, and crafts that are learned and transmitted in the unofficial social settings of family, play, work, and community (Bronner 2011: 20). Therefore, Bronner’s understanding of the tradition appear to be collectively understood and similar to Smith, involving common heritage, continuity in time, implied social connections and recreation. Tradition may occur as something new and old at the same time and something new within the old forms. The term ‘traditional’ in the context of shared values connotes stability, ordinality and security. Exploring various social and cultural influences of the identity construction the notion of ‘human nature’ must be considered. Not only in means “of the belonging to a tradition, to a particular discursive space,
with its own order, reality, and truth, is necessary condition for the sort of experience” (Freeman, 1997: 212) but also a deep ties to the place. The author of the book “Place and Placelessness” Edward Relph (1976) cites author Simone Weil: “to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of the community” (Relph, 1976: 39) Thus, referring to A. D. Smith’s notion ‘homeland’, the notion ‘home’ is often exploited as a synonym of the nation and also describing the identity of the place. Metaphorically ‘home’ as a self-describing construct integrates both, tangible and intangible attributes and is used as a concept in brand identities of several Latvian cities and municipalities. In traditional means ‘home’ identifies a meaning that is proven through times, welcomed and secure place of the family and ancestors. Besides Relph describes ‘home’ as an authentically significant and inseparable asset (Relph, 1976: 39). This deeply internal aspect provides an experience to cultivate individual identity and at some extant can be mediated externally. In general people tend to define an individual’s identity in the context of a network of affiliation as part of larger system such as family, group of friends, associates, or fellow residents (Pogorzelski, 2018: 172). According to Peter Davis and his work “Eco museums. A sense of place” refers on theories of Edward Relph describing various levels of place identity starting from my place, street, community, town, county, region, country, and continent (Davis, 2011: 22). Respecting these overlapping interpretations, the place identity culturally is defined as a “combination of the features and other elements or experiences. To that we must add the meaning of these tangible and intangible components - why are they important to that place? - and understand the relationship of these factors” (Davis, 2011: 23). Similar view expresses Kavaratzis: “Place identity is a concept used in other disciplines including environmental psychology and geography” (Kavaratzis, 2015: 66). Furthermore, Kavaratzis notes that place identities are inherently fluid, and they tend to change (Kavaratzis, 2015: 67). One of the most common characteristics of the brand identity is based on difference. Therefore, the concept of uniqueness relies on the sense of place. To understand the meaning of the uniqueness there is one constant process - meaning-making processes between people and their place. Such terms as ‘belonging to place’ and ‘sense of place’ are used as synonyms of place identity. The term ‘place’ is a desirable object of research in various disciplines such as cultural and heritage studies, anthropology, ecology and geography, psychology, and sociology. Place and people are entwined with theories and interpretation of identity. Peter Davis cites Meinig (1979) “that (Western) people see landscape as nature; as habitat; as an artefact; as a system; as a problem; as wealth; as ideology; as history; as place or as aesthetic ” (Davis, 2011: 20). Another acknowledgement of the place is being in the place or experiencing it. According to Laurajane Smith experiences of the particular place plays a significant role in understanding the meaning of place heritage. “Heritage as place, or heritage places, may not only be conceived as representational of past human experiences but also of creating an affect on current experiences and perceptions of the world. Thus, a heritage place may represent or stand in for a sense of identity and belonging for particular individuals or groups ” (Smith, 2006: 77). Socially engaging experiences, a kind of narrated knowledge is intangible culture heritage - “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage” (UNESCO Convention, 2003). Culture heritage provides an essential source of shared identity interpretations and experiences of the place. There is a social link between people and place, and between people and people. The term ‘sense of place’ holds the characteristics of social interactions and
reproductions of a community, and stands for the characteristics of the social capital, symbolic capital, and habitus of a place (Bourdieu, 1977). However, exploring the theories of the sense of place there are several issues how to identify and evaluate various dimensions of the place. For example, how to evaluate and compare quantitatively the “aesthetic quality of different landscapes,” and to “quantify scenic beauty” (Carlson, 1999: 30); the Relph’s reference to ‘authenticity’ “still connotates that which is genuine, unadulterated, without hypocrisy, and honest to itself” (Relph 1976: 64) is challenging not to get caught in stereotyped conventions. Therefore, it is more challenging to research and emphasize the emotional, cognitive, and aesthetic intangible attributes of sense of place in order to create the master narrative. Less demanding is the complex of tangible attributes of the place that include such place elements as historical buildings, artefacts, landscapes with intangible features such as traditions. These mutual interactions express tangible context of local habitat and surrounding values.

Referring to a place marketing approach introduced by Philip Kotler in early 90ties in the 20th century, the brand identity was defined as a meaning designing of place to satisfy the needs of the target markets (Kotler 1993: 99). The concept of brand identity has come to the fore in recent years with an increase in academic work as well as practitioner growing interest. According to Melissa Aronczyk academic discourse of nation identity studies has slightly changed to political and social project of special representation and as a producer of value and values - has been altered by its conception as a brand (Aronczyk 2013: 14). Similar though expresses Simon Anholt, referring to places (countries) that “they need to exercise some power of attraction... unique, individual identity, their culture, their history, their land, their traditions, their genius and their imagination. This is what competitive identity is all about” (Anholt, 2010: 37) and this approach is more challenging because it is understood as policy- based. Place branding expert Keith Dinnie defines place brand identity as shared assets of the place, its personality, and desirable attributes. Mechanisms and environment must be conducive to encourage community participation and support of the brand strategy (Dinnie 2011: 13) and as “an affective bond or link between people and specific places” (Kavaratzis 2015: 42). Many aspects of sense to place as an asset of the place brand identity is still underexplored in academic literature: how to define unique symbolic meanings and discourses that surround the place, its people and can be used as a core of the symbolic and ideological representation of place identity? Keith Dinnie emphasizes the notion of shared identity as a crucial to creating a place brand - a summary that captures the truthful story and uniqueness of the place (Dinnie 2011: 57).

**Empirical study**

To explore the main issues of creation place brand identities of Latvian cities and municipalities the four in-depth interviews were conducted with Latvian place branding experts of various fields: brand communication strategies, visual identities, and brand concepts. The empirical study also includes the content analyses of 27 Latvian place brand identities, specifically slogans and identity stories. The issue of identity creation and maintenance of Latvian cities and municipalities is relevant on the eve of the Administrative Territorial Reform, which is due in the mid-2021. This reform will include the transformation of 119 counties into 42 municipalities.

Regarding the multifaced characteristics of the sense of place and its unique assets it was proposed in theoretical framework that the research of place identity attributes within intangible cultural heritage. The traditional culture values and symbols of the place identity
provide an orientation in heritage values as well as reflect the basic diverse characteristics. The assumption of the heredity of past meanings and its continuity in present environment is quite crucial. In means of creation place brand identity it refers to designing an up-to-date narrative. Place branding experts admitted that they do not see strict boundaries between tangible and intangible cultural heritage when it comes to research for the unique attributes of place identity. It goes without saying that values of cultural heritage that are recognized internally and externally are more acceptable and credible. This acceptance very much correlates with the place residents' perception with the place image at the wider level - national identity:

City Kuldiga has UNESCO heritage river Rumba and capitalize on culture heritage in their identity. Then at the next level of place identity symbols, we look for images, elements that describe the national identity.

Continuing about unique attributes of the place identity the branding experts referred to the strong prioritization of tangible place-specific attributes: landscapes, architectural and/or historical buildings, even animals and birds. This inference quite often is reinforced with the lack of competitive and sustainable place brand vision and strategic development:

In most cases, defined attributes of place identity are situational. Local governments are divided into dreamers and in those who have large budgets. The most of them act situationally and functionally. Most often they are shocked by the question, what are your strategic goals? As far as Valmiera and Cesis are ambitious on foot, they are strategically sharp. The others, like Gulbene, only a small part of residents who want to change things, but the vast majority - seniors want stability, nostalgia of swans (symbols in Gulbene city coat of arms), only small part of places try to understand who they are?

Besides geographical place attributes a common concept that appear in Latvian place brand identities is definition of 'home'. The notion of homeland, family, roots of the kin is the emotional reference with a component of pride when argued about belonging to place:

To the question of what you are proud of: the vast majority answer - it is cool to live here, but I cannot tell you why? The say it is my home, here is my family. If you externally can provide the place attributes to be proud of why you live here, then he will think. Geographical and cultural heritage matters, there are places with history, beautiful nature, and destinations, and then there are sad places that need help, who have a hard time finding narratives, finding perspectives.

The complexity of various stakeholders of the place, characterized by different levels of relationships and interpretation of the place identity occurs as a form of multiple and fluid meanings. These socially constructed interpretations of the place identity can be influenced by the trustful communication sources and credibility of the narrative of place identity. It is a matter of a strong indications of the shared identity elements that place residents have agreed on and accepted:

The most common problem often occurs within the residents are tired of place stories because they hear it every year, because it seems for eternity. Due to their ethnographic behavior or their slightly low self-esteem, they need repeatedly demonstrate that what they experience is exceptionally good.
Previous assumption also illustrates the importance of process of place branding. It is first and foremost an internal co-creational and educational process of all involved parties of the creation of place brand. More important, it is not only a co-creation at the stage of place brand identity creation but also in place brand revitalization and maintenance. Therefore, the formation of unique master narrative is crucial in means of the policy-based capacity of the place and recognition competitive and spacious narratives:

The fact that 119 municipalities are pulling up their brands is a horror. It is difficult to imagine 119 unique place brands. Most of them are large parts of artificial structures, such as Staicele "City of storks." It is necessary to think of and to know seven moves forward. Therefore, Sigulda's concept of "excitement" allows a wider range of identity narrative and its interpretation.

The interviews with the branding experts reflect the transmission from the specific place marketing projects to strategic place brands and also demonstrates an appearance of broader and ambiguous concepts of place brand identities. This assumption demonstrates a progressive understanding of the place brand as a live construct and strategic marketing tool:

Transferring place identity stories to brand identity is a big challenge, the question is about the local capacity in brand implementation. The brand stories of Rezekne and Talsi have potential, stronger ideas of power to change. There is a growing awareness in the minds of local government and service providers as we put more emphasis not on the making and more on implementation of the brand. Otherwise place brands remain at a decorative level.

As mentioned before the place identity interactions that occur within physical settings have different degrees of tangibility and could be represented through narratives as a communication form. Place could be regarded as a social construction. Indeed, both conceptual directions of place brand identity assets together create the sense of place. It indicates the positive transition towards to the awareness of concept 'master narrative':

Narrative as the brand's identity form works for all audiences. Often, narrative is more important than visual identity. Local government tells stories. Creating a narrative is an enormous amount of work that we pay undeservedly little attention to. One is to write a heartbreaking story about who you are and develop a story, and the other is to continuity of the work with current and external audiences about the messages - who we are?

Narrative is viable when it is consistently co-created and experienced. Branding experts emphasize the role of professionalism and the ability to offer strategically bold and credible place identity narratives, as well as the place government's confidence and capacity to provide these narratives consistently and maintain a high level of engagement:

The shyness of brand implementers appears in applications of place narratives, because it is often easier to create a beautiful logotype. The job of branding experts is to teach to nurture the narrative, with self-confidence, to develop further, to reflect this narrative and to stop being shy. We do not know how to conduct a critical dialogue, as soon as there is opposition or criticism, doubts appear, this is the moment when narrative is important. Narrative significance is high, but it is low in existing place brand identities.

This article investigates the key components of a place branding focusing on the concept of narrative and place brand identity. The specific conceptual attributes that combine to construct a place’s brand identity, origin, values, personality, residential composition, and
shared identity assets overlap and reflect in the image of the place. Unfortunately, the master narrative of the place brand identity in majority of cases of Latvian place brands represent visual decorativeness and lack of sustainable narration. The term ‘decorativeness’ is understood as an expression of a brand identity in a form of technical guidelines and metaphorical description. The challenging issue is the identification of the unique place identity attributes and to engage place’s people in the process of co-creating their place’s brand in order to develop an identity that is credible, competitive and sustainable in the minds of all stakeholders it serves. Therefore, the concept of narrative requires a further empirical exploration of the relationships and experiences of the place and its people.

References

Social Movements in Europe, from the Past to the Present

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Abstract
Over time, the concept of social movement has evolved as society has changed, but has always implied collective action in the public space. The form of social contestation has changed, according to the conjuncture of each historical period. In 18th century, the transition from the Old Regime to Liberalism provoked movements considered by some authors as “primitive” or “premodern”, as they were spontaneous, sporadic and depoliticized. Industrial society of the 19th century gave rise to the labor movement and trade unionism, which from then on organized the social movements. In the 20th century there were changes and innovation in the collective way of acting, there was the emergence of a series of social movements that differ from the traditional in terms of the objectives and actors involved, such as the pacifist, ecologist, feminist movements, acting on the fringes of parties and unions. The 21st century has witnessed a set of movements that begin on social networks, such as Generation Scratch, Outraged, Occupy Wall Street, Screw the Troika, and quickly outgrow local scales to become global. Through the use of a theoretical and conceptual framework derived from the theories of social movements and taking into account the current transformation of collective action that has been witnessed in the 21st century, we intend to verify if we are facing a new social phenomenon or another phase of “repertoire” change.

Keywords: social movements, past, present, evolution, repertoire

Introduction
The 21st century was born under the aegis of contestation. A number of social movements have been plaguing the world in recent times. Therefore, it is interesting to revisit the concept in order to understand its own historical evolution and what has changed over time in social movements. Tilly (1978), precisely, assumes that social movements require historical understanding and tried to understand them in the convergence between Sociology and History (1981), very much in the style of the Braudelian "longue durée", to capture permanence or change, the immobility or innovation. Seen from a historical perspective, social movements have presented themselves over time as forms of collective action in which certain actors have intervened, in a given political, socioeconomic and cultural context.

There are two theoretical currents (Gohn, 1997) for the interpretation of social movements: the European and the North American. Both have a classic and a contemporary paradigm of interpreting movements. The European one was initially based on the historical-structuralist current and later on the theory of New Social Movements. The American, until the sixties, based her interpretation on social movements in the functionalist theory about collective
behavior and in the contemporary Theories of Resource Mobilization (TRM) and Political Process (TPP).

In Europe, the classical approach was based on Marxism, largely based on class struggle, in which social movements resulted from the conflict between dominators and the dominated. This interpretation did not justify the movements that emerged in the sixties, resulting from post-industrialization, in which the demands were no longer centered on material issues but on new ways of affirming rights and ways of life. The movements that emerged at that time were, therefore, called New Social Movements (N.S.M.), as they moved away from Marxist reductionism, with collective actions now having other motivations on the basis of which were identity and cultural issues, which allowed forging collective behavior.

The American paradigm developed around the Chicago School and classical theory said that it was sociopsychological factors that explained collective behavior. The deviation from normal and traditional relations due to the social anomie derived from industrialization was what led to collective action motivated by unconscious and irrational impulses. These positions were also revised in the 1960s in the face of the emergence of feminist, pacifist (against the Vietnam War), ethnic movements. Psychology was rejected as a way of explaining collective action and theories emerged, such as the Theory of Resource Mobilization and Theory of Political Process (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001) that considered that the explanation for the emergence of movements was not found in irrationality or social alienation of the participants but rather in the political opportunities or threats, in the material and non-material resources available socially in a given period and in the way they were used to achieve certain ends. In fact, the defenders of these theories consider that insertion in a community leads to more action than uprooting or alienation.

These theories (European and North American), from the eighties, nineties, came to be seen as complementary and conciliatory (Cohen, 1985; Della Porta and Diani, 1999; Diani, 1992), reason why we will try to understand the Europeans movements through the use of a theoretical and conceptual framework derived from the theories and historiography of social movements and using the concept of the “repertoire” of the American sociologist Charles Tilly. For Tilly, what happened historically in collective action was a change in the “repertoire”. The author defines a “repertoire” as a “set of forms of action” (Tilly, 1978: 156) and each era has its own structures of mobilization and action, generally forged from the oldest actions (1995: 27-28). Changing political and social structures usually results in a change in the “repertoire” (Tilly, 1995, p. 35).

In this sense, given the current transformation of collective action that has been witnessing in the 21st century, will European social movements be in yet another phase of innovation / adaptation in the “repertoire” or will we be facing a new “repertoire”?

1. “Pre-modern”, archaic or primitive movements

Social contestation has been a constant throughout history, generating various types of social movements depending on the period in which they occurred. The transition from the Old Regime to Liberalism provoked upheavals considered by some authors like Eric Hobsbawm or Edward Thompson to be “primitive” or "pre-modern". These protests arose from the confrontation between the capitalist system and the traditional social organization. Adaptation or inability to adapt resulted in social movements, among which banditry stands out, peasant revolutionary movements of the millenarian genre, rural secret societies
(Hobsbawm, 1978: 11), studied by Hobsbawm in Spain and Italy, classifying the author this type of protest as “archaic” or “primitive” forms of social unrest. Within the same type of pre-modern revolt are also the food riots, studied by Thompson for England (1979, pp. 62-134).

These pre-modern agitations have not been the subject of much analysis, nor have they been given great importance, because they are outside the classification established for modern social movements, that is, those that have occurred since the end of the 18th century. These are protests that could best fit into the occasional phenomena that arose in the Middle Ages, but the truth is that they took place in the 19th and 20th centuries, having therefore coexisted with modern protest movements. Those involved in these primitive movements had not yet found a specific language to express their aspirations about the world and, therefore, their actions were considered pre-political. Their culture was mainly oral because they were mostly illiterate (Hobsbawm, 1978, p. 12).

These people, who were neither born nor raised in a modern or capitalist world, were faced with the penetration of the relations of production and the logic of capitalism in their traditional world. The confrontation between these two realities produced conflicts, expressed in an archaic way and without political pretensions, in which kinship and other tribal ties had an important weight in the delimitation of the groups in conflict.

These societies, although pre-industrial, have long known the state, class distinctions and exploitation by landowners and traders; hence its protest is already a class protest. The fact that there are kinship ties and tribal solidarities is what fits them in primitive societies, but with class consciousness. And it was precisely the fact that they were class movements that interested the authors mentioned above.

For Thompson, the confrontation with a new capitalist practice changed the "moral economy" that governed traditional market practices in the 18th century, broke the paternalistic tradition and gave rise to social movements.

As in Europe, in Portugal there were several “primitive” social movements in the 1st half of the 19th century (Silva, 2007). Phenomena such as banditry or food riots took place during the period when the liberal and capitalist society was implanted. Banditry, not being a typical social movement, cannot fail to be considered a social phenomenon, because, although it was marginal, it was still important as a collective action of a group of individuals who defied the established order (Hobsbawm, 1978, p. 12) in an attempt to perpetuate the past, as their biggest problem was adapting to the new world they saw emerging. In the same way, the liberal state, by appointing people from outside the regions for administrative positions, created a certain distance between the local power and the populations, which facilitated the introduction of the laws of the capitalist market, without complacency by the traditional morality of the popular, generating food riots.

One of the arguments that is used to differentiate “archaic” and “modern” forms of protest is that the former do not undermine the foundations of the established social order and contribute to maintaining and reinforcing traditional and paternalistic ways of life, as Thompson says. In addition, they did not give rise to modern, organized and politicized social movements, which is why they fit in the classification of pre-politicians and reformists, and therefore are not revolutionaries (Hobsbawm, 1978, p. 15).

These forms of collective action, although they are usually labeled as "traditional", "primitive", or "pre-industrial", seeming even reminiscent of the past, show, however, in the first half of
the 19th century, a clear role within the protest especially popular. At the same time, economic, political and social transformations brought new ideas and experiences that would deeply and permanently affect society, changing the character and forms of conflict. The progressive political reforms, the advance of capitalism and the modernization brought with industrialization, determined the gradual disappearance of the old forms of protest, because the persistence of the customs and rights of the past no longer made sense in a changing world. Local, spontaneous, sporadic and apolitical contests were replaced by "modern" protests, with national ideology and extension. The movements, according to Charles Tilly's terminology, go from “reactive” - because they have a limited “repertoire” of action, they include defensive practices in the face of external pressures (food riots, anti-fiscal protest, resistance to military service, hostility against machinery, land occupations, etc.) - for "proactive" actions, mainly from the middle of the 19th century, that is, more organized forms through an associative base: strikes, demonstrations, unions, giving rise to a new “ repertoire ” (Tilly, 1978, pp. 143-155).

2. Labor Movement

In the 19th century, industrialization has given rise to a new class, the working class. When it emerged, this group had no rights guaranteed by law, such as working hours, wages, or job security. They also had no right to demonstrate or strike, although these manifestations were happening throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

The gap created between the capitalist bourgeois and the workers led to the class struggle and the organization of the workers through the workers' movement. The proletariat, over time, grew stronger and gained class consciousness, formed workers' associations and later unions, and with them the planned strikes emerged. The conflictual situation that was created in the industrial society between bosses and workers motivated by low wages, excessive working hours, poor working conditions, was expressed in the streets through demonstrations, marches, rallies or strikes (Silva, 2015). The strike was the extreme resource, because by breaking daily work relations it created a split, further evidencing class, economic and ideological conflicts. Even if the strike had its origins in economic divergence, it ended up joining strikers with militants from some party and became a means of political propaganda. However, the strike was and is the primary weapon of the collective action of unionism (Dias & Fernandes, 2016, p. 41), in the sense of pressing for a beneficial solution for workers.

This associative movement strengthened the workers' organization, giving rise, in the second half of the 19th century, to a distinct, organized, politicized, unionized type of social movement that organized demonstrations and strikes at the national level, showing the conflictual situation existing between workers and capitalists. As in the rest of Europe, in Portugal, the conflict was motivated, essentially, by low wages, excessive working hours, poor working conditions. To demonstrate their dissatisfaction and demand better living conditions, the workers stopped working and protested, whether or not they were members of an association. In this country, the industrialization process was late and the workers were born with industry from the middle of the 19th century. This situation did not allow the formation of a class conscience among the workers, in the sense of the union of all factory workers, which is why it was only at the end of the 19th century that labor associations started to exist and only at the beginning of the 20th century (1910) the workers were entitled to strike. Here, similarly to what happened in the rest of Europe, the first workers' associations had a mutualistic character, with a cultural purpose and mutual support (Cabral, 1988, p. 19), as assistance in
illness and death, memory of the old brotherhoods of crafts. This was the only chance of association, since the grouping by trades was prohibited in 1834 and was only authorized in 1891. Despite this prohibition, there were many strikes in the second half of the 19th century in the country. The right of association decreed in 1891 brought a certain union to the workers’ movement, although the workers were not easily associated (Silva, 2015).

In Europe, the workers’ movement was the expression of the conflict generated within industrial society, between capitalists and workers and is considered the first modern social movement.

Modern movements lose spontaneity, they are not movements that appear and disappear with the same speed as archaic ones, strikes can last for days, weeks or months, depending on the confrontation and the obtaining of complaints. They are organized movements that are based on the acquisition of better wage and work conditions, moving from economic and social demands to policies, especially after they are union organizations. The union gives legitimacy and legal framework to the strike, whether professional or general strikes. In the latter, the political character is well evident.

Both the primitive movements of the beginning of the 19th century and the strike movements of the second half of the century, although distinct, have a common element between them: the challenge to the world in which they lived. The former are forms of contestation due to the inadequacy of a liberal and capitalist world that disrespected the traditional way of life. The second is the reaction to the exploitation of a capitalism that only aimed at profit and that had at its base the bourgeois class that also dominated politics. The forms of protest used are completely different, the former are “reactive” and the latter “proactive”, which changed the “repertoire” from the 18th to the 19th century. The consolidation of national states and the new industrial and urban society gave birth to a new form of politics and thus a new “repertoire”, since it changes in accordance with the political and social structure (Tilly, 1995: 35). It was at the beginning of the 19th century that forms of organization were forged, such as parties, unions, strikes, rallies, demonstrations, considered socially legitimate to express demands (Tilly, 1995, p. 37).

3. The New Social Movements

From the sixties of the twentieth century, as society changed (Porta and Diani, 2006), new social phenomena were emerging. The social movements that emerged were derived from post-industrialization, no longer centered on labor movements and their struggle for economic and political transformation, nor framed by unionism, but were based on other value systems “structuring the consciences and identities of individuals and groups” (Teixeira, 1993, p. 811); conflicts became social and cultural. At the time of the first mobilizations, some theorists still thought that there was a return of the workers’ movement, but it soon became apparent that they were not based on class but on other values such as civil rights or lifestyle. Authors like Touraine (1978) and Melucci (1996) understood social movements as a form of sustained collective action, from which actors who share identities or solidarities face dominant social structures or cultural practices. These authors considered the movements
that emerged as New Social Movements (N.S.M), for having cultural motivations, being secondary to the search for advantages within the political system (Melucci, 1980, p. 220).

When they ceased to be movements of a class to be class movements, there was an atomization of the social movements themselves, hence the feminist movement, the ecological movement, the pacifist movement, emerged or intensified.

They are more segmented movements, driven by a new middle class (Habermas, 1986), which add members according to the ideologies of the groups, aim to affirm identities or improve the quality of life and which are inspired by non-materialistic values but universalist values, such as peace, the environment, autonomy and identity.

In the case of the feminist movement, it is the rights of women: legal and citizenship, which lead to collective action for them to be recognized contractual, property and voting rights.

The ecological movement fights for a new form of rational and sustainable development, changing forms of production, exploiting resources with environmental counterparts, irrational and inconsequential consumerism.

Pacifist movements fight for ideals of peace, in a non-violent way through resistance, boycotts, diplomacy.

In Portugal, as a result of the dictatorship that the country lived in the sixties (1933-1974), known as Estado Novo and led by António de Oliveira Salazar, the cultural movement that most asserted itself was the student one, although there was also some female contestation and worker. Even under dictatorship, students had contact with what was happening in the world, namely the “May of 68”, which gave strength to the movement of students to unite and fight for freedom of association, the end of the colonial war and the opening from civil society to student academies. These students demonstrated in favor of new values, like many young people around the world, hence they were against war as a principle, and not just the war of the Portuguese colonies (Silva, 2014). In 1968, they met in front of the United States Embassy against the war in Vietnam. These protests were violently suppressed, but they strengthened the student movement (Cerezales, 2011).

The New Social Movements have in common the fact that they are politicized forms of contestation, although they did not aim for a political revolution, hence the non-integration in parties or unions and the demonstration in the public sphere, through rallies or parades, non-institutional processes of action, recruiting its actors in different social media. The aim was to make themselves visible to bring public opinion to their cause and have political effects. As Claus Offe says to be able to emancipate from the State, political rights must be acquired (1992, p. 166). These are movements that aim to acquire democratic privileges. These new protagonists, young people, students, women, professionals, focus their struggle no longer on living conditions or redistribution of resources but on the quality of life and the diversity of styles of living it.

Throughout the 20th century, the nature of capitalism changed, but not the political-economic-social structure. The center ceased to be industrial production and workers, thus giving way to new themes and agents for collective mobilizations, although coexisting with previous ones. Therefore, the “repertoire” remains, but with “a variable set of performances” (Tilly, 2005, p. 20).
Taking into account the culture, identity and political conditioning of a given society, actors improvise in social interactions (Tilly, 2008).

4. Inorganic movements

The social movements witnessed in the 21st century, call into question the way democracy itself is being exercised in the current era, given that the “main objective of democracy must be to allow individuals, groups and collectivities to become free subjects, producers of its history, capable of bringing together in its action the universalism of reason and the particularities of personal and collective identity” (Touraine, 1995, p. 263).

It is not a challenge to have more rights but to exercise those that exist, full citizenship, which offers the freedom to express opinion and the privilege of participating in the political, economic, social, educational area. There are several types of movements of this kind in the European space: “Geração à Rasca”, “Que a Lixe a Troika”, “Occupy”, “Indignados”.

In these movements, individuals, as citizens, intervened in the public sphere and spoke about issues that related to them, such as the crisis, unemployment, exploitation, as people belonging to a collective. They were manifestations of displeasure from civil society in relation to real life situations that they considered unworthy for citizens and that they should express for living in democracy and for being an active part of that democracy. According to the demonstrators, citizenship should not be exhausted in the electoral act.

The mobilization was identical in all. The challenge was launched on social media, and thousands of Europeans took to the streets to protest the precariousness of work, the austerity measures imposed by governments, the reduction of taxes, the lack of dignity in which citizens lived as a result of decisions policies.

Through social networks, camps, street protests, they expressed the feeling of different quarters of society in relation to the crisis, to governments, to the political class, making it clear that they could not always be the same to charge and the same to continue to pay.

These movements claimed to be non-partisan, without affiliation to parties and unions, secular, peaceful and without formal organization. Despite this, they suffered some repression due to the fear of contagion that caused elites, resulting in some police clashes. Their lack of insertion in any organized structure was also a target of fear because they were movements that channeled various social groups that no longer believed in political parties, regardless of which political family they were in, nor in unions to represent them. These “brand new” movements are not very heterogeneous, with little negotiable objectives and maintain an ambiguous relationship with political power (Cabo, 2008: 51). They believed that change was taking place in new ways, without leadership or bureaucratic organizations but resorting to solidarity.

The social movements of the 21st century present a different configuration from the so-called N.S.M, in the form of organization, dimension, disclosure, national and international media impact. It is through social networks that they organize and manage to mobilize thousands of people in several cities in the same country or even from different countries. They reach a dimension that goes beyond regional and national scales and become planetary movements, in search of new forms of democracy (Farro, 2004). Communication technologies, especially social networks, have incorporated new forms of activism, netativism (Di Felice, 2012), which escapes the institutional powers, as they emerge from diverse social, political and cultural
configurations (Babo & Silva, 2019), introducing changes in the form of social action. However, the mobilizations from the internet, although inserting new performances of action, do not break with traditional forms, as seen by the need for co-presence in a physical space, the symbolism of the action (historical places, posters ...), the street emotion through speeches and music. At the same time, the use of the internet endows these collective actions of visibility and speed by the instantaneous nature that mobile devices allow, shorten distances and empower citizens. They are mobilizations that start from social networks, thus facilitating collective action in urban spaces, innovating in the “repertoire” but not changing it. As Tilly advocates, “repertoire” involves “shared understandings, memories and agreements” (Tilly, 1995, p. 30), just as it happened in these movements. The mobilization in a network implied novelty in the existing forms of action or “repertoire”, but without entirely breaking with the old ways (Tilly, 1995, p.27-28). These protests, being structurally situated, remove the historical and cultural void that led to a great singularity or to a change of “repertoire”, which can be framed in cycles of protests, albeit with modular innovation (Tarrow, 1998).

Conclusion

Collective action, as the European and American paradigms emphasized, was motivated by several factors, from the acquisition of rights to their maintenance. In these last protests, citizens contest for a new world. Therefore, today, the movements are more complex, as Melucci says “many of the contemporary conflicts are the expression of excluded social categories that want to be socially represented” (Melucci, 1996, p. 104-105), and mean that there are more and more “actors in conflict”.

In this century, Social Movements have become the catalysts for social conflict, due to their "institutionalization" as a necessary social actor for the improvement of democracy. Thus, in the crossing of the nineties and the beginning of the 21st century, social movements acquired a key role as a political actor in a democratic State, due to the importance recognized as a legitimate bearer and dynamic representative of demands from different sectors of civil society (Machado, 2007).

As long as the liberal political-economic-social model is in place, it is difficult for the forms of action to change completely, with new “repertoires” appearing. In the current manifestations in Europe there is a flexible “repertoire”, in which there is continuity and improvisation (Tilly, 2008, pp. 13, 14) in the forms of claim, since the forms of action are based on “social relations, meanings and actions mixed in known and recurring patterns ”(Tilly, 1995: 30). However, today we live in a technological society, in a network (Castells, 1999) which, according to thinkers like Di felice, is giving rise to new “communicative forms of living” that alter our habitation condition, our relationship with the environment, with the territory, building a “post-urban” society (2009). According to Di Felice, the paradigms of modernity are no longer adequate to understand our days. In this sense, it is possible that a new “repertoire” of collective action is being forged, but until now social movements are not a totally new phenomenon and still require historical understanding.

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Employers’ Expectations of University Graduates as They Transition into the Workplace

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Abstract
Research on work readiness indicates employers are increasingly pointing out that soft skills are as important as discipline specific knowledge and technical skills when hiring recent university graduates. However, many university students think excellent grades are the main reason they get the jobs. The disconnect between what employers expect and what students imagine is significant to the extent that many recent university graduates are unable to be employed in the jobs they want, and many employers have challenges dealing with recent university graduates who are not work ready. In 2018, a soft skills pilot study was conducted with internship supervisors who work with the Human Development and Family Studies Program at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. An online survey was sent to 65 internship supervisors, and three focus group sessions were conducted as a follow-up of the survey. In 2019, Phase 2 of this study polled 76 employers who participated in a university career fair on what soft skills they expect university graduates to have at the time of hiring. This paper reports on findings to two questions: 1) What employers think of undergraduate university students who have completed an internship with them, and 2) What soft skills employers expect of recent university graduates who are transitioning into the workplace. Findings indicate that in addition to soft skills, employers also regard personal attributes and qualities as equally important at the time of hire.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Employability Skills, Work Readiness

Introduction
Many recent university graduates assume that excellent or good grades will significantly increase their likelihood of securing a job of their choice. While this may be true in the first rounds of screenings as employers examine whether job applicants meet minimum requirements, evidence suggests that employers are increasingly expecting more than academic knowledge and technical expertise when hiring job applicants (Robles, 2012). In fact, evidence in the research literature suggests that employers regard soft skills as important as academic training and technical know-how when considering which job applicants to employ (Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Levin, 2012).
Soft skills are the series of skills that are necessary in order for an employee to be functional and effective in the workplace (Gross & Latham, 2012). Examples include problem solving and critical thinking skills (Dean & East, 2019; U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). Soft skills also include the people skills like having the ability to get along with others in the office, being a part of a team, and knowing how to communicate properly, effectively and respectfully in writing, orally, virtually, and non-verbally.

Besides soft skills, employers also regard personal attributes as equally important in order for an individual to be work ready. These personal attributes include having a sense of empathy, being respectful of others, and having a sense of responsibility. Other examples of personal attributes include being punctual, having integrity, and having a good work ethic.

Some employers also point out that it is not just about having the technical know-how and the qualities and traits, but also that certain traits increase the goodness of fit between the individual applying for a job and the people in the workplace (as opposed to the goodness of fit to the job). Such personal attributes may include being flexible, having a good attitude, and the willingness to go beyond one’s usual call of duty (Liptak, 2005).

**Literature Review**

From a student’s perspective, a university education may be regarded as a time for the acquisition of knowledge and technical knowhow in preparation for a job and a career. From an employer’s perspective, a university education is also a time to prepare students to be ready for the workplace (Pereira & Costa, 2017; NCIHE, 1997).

Research on work readiness point out how important it is to have the necessary skills that a person needs to have in order to do a job, especially when the job requires specific or special training. Some of these skills include knowing how to analyze data using a certain computer software, knowing how to assess if a child is abused based on standardized assessment tests, or determining if an adolescent is at high risk for teen dating violence. On the other hand, soft skills and personal attributes enable a person to get along and work with others in the workplace. These are the generic, people skills that are necessary in order for employees to be effective and functional in the workplace no matter what the discipline or nature of work is.

In their study, Cunningham and Villaseñor (2016) examined a sample of 27 studies and found a remarkable consistency across the world in the skills demanded by employers. Cunningham and Villaseñor discovered that while employers value all skill sets, there is a greater demand for socio-emotional skills and higher-order cognitive skills than for basic cognitive or technical skills, and that these results are robust across region, industry, occupation, and education level (2016).

Other researchers have also indicated that soft skills and personal attributes are as important as hard skills in various other fields of work or industries. For example, employers in the fields of nursing (Ng, 2020), engineering (Shekhawat & Bakilapadavu, 2017; Lear, 2011; Thilmany, 2009) and accounting (Ghani, Rappa & Gunardi, 2018) regard soft skills and personal attributes as important as hard skills. Similarly, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the U.S., has found it necessary to help its scientists, engineers and their project teams to build soft skills because they recognize soft skills as factors that help improve communication, performance and morale for their technical teams. These skills are regarded as critical to the success of their missions (Pellerin, 2009).
More recently, Google’s in-house research project on hiring, firing, and promotion found that among the eight most important qualities of Google’s top employees, STEM (science, technical, engineering and mathematics) skills were the least of the important skills (Strauss, 2017). The other seven most important qualities of Google’s top employees were all soft skills: Being a good coach, communication skills, possessing insights into others and different values and points of view, empathy toward one’s colleagues, critical thinking, problem solving, and drawing conclusions and making connections across complex ideas.

Employers are beginning to recognize the significance of people skills and personal attributes, and how they affect or contribute to a quality of life in the workplace, especially when people spend as much as one third of their day (or life) in the workplace. Soft skills and personal attributes may not only determine the quality of relationships in the workplace, but may also affect productivity and morale. Other researchers have also discovered how soft skills may be predictors of workplace and career success (Liptak, 2018).

Perhaps most notable of all is that some recent university graduates inaccurately think that they have the soft skills in order to be successful in a job search and in the workplace because they had taken writing and public speaking courses at the university. On the contrary, there is a disconnect between what students and recent graduates think, and what employers know and have experienced (Shivpuri & Kim, 2004). According to a study done by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU), 500 hiring managers, or non-executives (directors, managers, supervisors, and office administrators) whose current job responsibilities include recruiting, interviewing, and/or hiring new employees) indicated that while the following skills are regarded as very important for the workplace, less than half of recent university graduates are prepared (2018). The soft skills that the 500 hiring managers said recent university graduates lack include the ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing, critical thinking and analytical reasoning abilities, the ability to find, organize, evaluate information from multiple sources, and the ability to work independently (AACU, 2018).

**Methodology**

This descriptive study has two components. The first component is an online survey using a purposeful sampling of internship site supervisors and three follow up focus group sessions regarding their assessments of the students who have completed a 180 hours internship program at their agency.

Undergraduate students in the Human Development and Family Studies Program at the University of Hawaii at Manoa are required to complete a 180-hour internship at a community site. The purpose of the internship is to provide students with a bridge between theory and practice. During the internship that spans the course of one semester (approximately 4 months), students are placed at community sites for 12 hours a week. The students get to shadow agency employees and given responsibilities to carry out tasks as guided by the internship supervisors.

The 25-question online survey was sent to 66 internship site supervisors asking them to rate the student interns’ academic and technical knowledge, communication skills (writing, verbal, listening), and personal attributes (work ethic, emotional intelligence). Rating of the student interns’ knowledge, skills, and personal attributes was done on a Likert Scale (4 = Excellent, 3
= Good, 2 = Average, 1 = Unsatisfactory). A total of 32 out of 66 supervisors completed the survey with a response rate of 48 percent.

Three follow up focus group sessions were conducted with a total of 18 supervisors. The focus group participants were given a summary of the online survey results, and were asked to comment on these findings. The purpose of the focus groups was to collect more in-depth information and to determine if the responses from the focus groups would validate the findings from the online survey.

The second component of the study is a student poll of employers who participated in a university career fair. Twenty-eight students in a university soft skills class were required to attend a university career fair that had been organized by the university career center. During this on-campus career fair visit, the students were asked to approach at least three employers and ask what soft skills and personal attributes the employers would look for when hiring recent university graduates. A total of 76 employers participated in this career fair. The employers come from the private sector, non-profits, and federal, state and county government agencies.

**Analysis**

Data from the online survey were compiled for frequencies and tabulated. The mean and standard deviation values for number of years of the survey respondents have worked in this occupation, and the mean years this person has worked in a supervisory or in a more senior position (manager, director, administrator) were calculated as part of the descriptive statistics. Mean scores and standard deviation values were also calculated for the ratings that the supervisors gave of the students who interned at their agencies.

Data from the focus groups were transcribed and reviewed for themes that emerged. The review of the focus group data was done separately by the two investigators to account for inter-rater reliability.

Data from the career fair was compiled and grouped into categories as the themes emerged. The frequencies of the skills and personal attributes were then recorded and percentages calculated.

**Results**

Three quarters of the survey respondents are females, and about 65 percent of the respondents are 41 years of age and older (Table 1). More than half (62 percent) of the online survey respondents have worked in their occupations for 10 years or longer. Approximately 40 percent of the respondents have worked for over 20 years. The longest that a survey respondent has worked is 40 years, while the most junior of the respondents has only worked for one year.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Survey Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>25 – 30 years</th>
<th>31 – 40 years</th>
<th>41 – 50 years</th>
<th>51 – 60 years</th>
<th>61 – 70 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 32
Females = 24
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years worked in this occupation</th>
<th>Mean (years)</th>
<th>STD (years)</th>
<th>Max (years worked)</th>
<th>Min (Years worked)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years as a supervisor or higher</th>
<th>Mean (years)</th>
<th>STD (years)</th>
<th>Max (years worked)</th>
<th>Min (Years worked)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type of Organization Survey Respondents Work at.  n = 32

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Organization</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Profit</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>59.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Profit</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: (e.g., Hospital, university)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Online Survey Internship Supervisors’ Ratings of Student Interns
4 = Excellent, 3 = Good, 2 = Average, 1 = Unsatisfactory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keeps disruptive emotions and impulses in check</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintains standards of honesty and integrity</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strives to improve or meet a standard of excellence</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aligns with the goals of the organization</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes responsibility for personal performance</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates flexibility in handling change</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works at nurturing important relationships</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolsters the abilities of others</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes clearly in an organized, grammatically correct manner</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows her or his strengths and limits</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes appropriately in style, content for intended audience</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiates and manages change</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Career Fair Data Frequencies and Percent of Skills and Personal Attributes
n = 1,339

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soft Skills and Personal Attributes</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
<th>Frequencies (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude and Work Ethic</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Well with Others</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,339</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion
Data from the survey indicate that about 35 percent of the survey respondents think that the student interns are not work ready. The employers place a high value on soft skills when seeking qualified job candidates, and almost 62 percent also said they are unlikely to hire recent university graduates who are academically strong but lacking soft skills.

The survey respondents rated the student interns good or better on 50 percent of the items listed in Table 2, while the student interns were rated between average and good for the other 50 percent of the items. While the internship supervisors rated the student interns relatively high on many items, the focus group sessions provided some very valuable insights to the contrary.

Overall, the students have much to improve with respect to what employers expect of new university graduates. The following are the themes that emerged from the focus group data: 1) Attitude and Work Ethic; 2) Communication Skills; 3) Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills; and 4) Work Well with Others. These themes were also mirrored by responses from approximately 76 employers who were polled at a university career fair.

**Theme 1. Attitude and Work Ethic**

A crucial aspect of internship is being prepared before the start of the internship. Students are advised to find out as much as they can about the agency or organization that they would be interning at. Yet some students would either not make the effort to do this, they would do so in a cursory manner, or would wait too late to do the research before the start of the internship.

Supervisors frequently remarked that the intern arrived at the interview or at the start of the internship not being adequately informed about basic things like the agency's vision and mission, who they serve, and what services they provide.

The supervisors who participated in the focus group sessions stated that students often mistakenly regard the internship as temporary and inconsequential, and that student interns erroneously see themselves as helping the agency, rather than the agency providing them with valuable opportunities to get to know important things that students may not learn from classes taught in university classes. These important things may only be experienced in person on-site, and they include finding out about the dynamics of the office, personally meeting the clients that they serve, getting first hand experiences about the challenges of the profession, and meeting the partners in the network of service providers.

Sadly, the student interns sometimes view their roles without much commitment, which is evident in their attendance, punctuality, and completion of tasks with little regard and attention. The nonchalance with which students regard their internship opportunities and experience is surprising.

Having a positive attitude along with being personable and enthusiastic was also noted by the employers surveyed at the career fair as attributes they look for when hiring. This includes employees being pleasant and easy-going, and conducting themselves with confidence. Employers overwhelmingly stressed the importance of hiring and retaining employees with a strong work ethic; those who take initiative, are hard-working, and who work with integrity and commitment. Attributes such as being honest, punctual, reliable, and responsible were frequently mentioned. In addition, flexibility and adaptability were highly regarded, along with following directions and willingness to learn. This shows an overall regard for employees
who have the attitude and desire to work hard at what they do, having almost an innate sense of what needs to be done, the importance of listening carefully to instructions and following the instructions properly, and having the persistence to carry out a task to completion.

**Theme 2. Communication Skills.**

The ability to communicate appropriately, in style, tone (writing, verbal, and listening), and in a timely manner, was also highly regarded, and yet these are skills that many interns lack. Employers at the career fair stressed that writing skills, including being able to write clearly with correct grammar, is something they look for when hiring. Expressing yourself clearly, and with confidence, when in front of others, were also stated as desirable attributes.

Supervisors gave numerous examples when student interns sent emails that were unprofessional—the emails did not address people properly and respectfully, were written with an informal style, or had grammatical errors. One supervisor remarked that “it is as if this intern was sending me a text message on her mobile phone like she would send a text message to her buddy.”

Other forms of communication are the indirect, unintended forms of communication that occur frequently, and these are forms of communication that employers regard as important to be aware of and “big deals.” These non-verbal forms of communication include dressing inappropriately for the workplace, a show of disinterest or lack of enthusiasm in their facial expressions, and texting on their mobile phones during staff meetings or during work hours. Clearly, employers expect recent university graduates to be mature with the self-awareness to refrain from engaging in such behaviors.

**Theme 3: Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills.**

Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are an important part of interns' work performance, yet supervisors stated that interns often do not take the initiative to figure things out. This waiting for supervisors to give them all the answers poses an ongoing challenge for supervisors. It should be noted that problem solving was also mentioned by the employers polled at the career fair; more specifically, this included having the ability to think on your feet using critical and strategic thinking.

**Theme 4: Work Well with Others**

Not surprisingly, collaborating and working well with others, often defined as teamwork, was also one of the themes that emerged from the data. Employers expect recent university graduates to be thoughtful, mindful, flexible and helpful, and pointed out that many student interns do not have these qualities. Arguments can be made that these are learned behaviors and students can be taught to be more open minded, and be willing to extend a help to a co-worker.

While this is a study on soft skills, it is becoming clear that skills are not only what employers are expecting recent university graduates to have; the data suggest that personal attributes like having a good attitude, a strong work ethic, and knowing how to be part of a team are as important as knowing how to carry out a task that requires technical or academic training. While skills can be taught and practiced, questions remain about whether the many personal attributes can be learned from becoming self-aware. As mentioned by one internship supervisor, “We would rather hire the attitude, and train the skills.”
Despite commenting on how some recent university graduates are not work ready, employers also recognize that many of these students are young, have little work or volunteer experience, and may have never worked full time. All that considered, employers still expect that in order to be work ready, students and recent university graduates need to be aware of the soft skills and personal attributes that make for a good fit between job applicant and not just the job, but also the workplace.

**Study Limitations**

This pilot study employed the use of convenience sampling to collect data. Hence, the findings are useful only to the extent as they reflect the perceptions and opinions of the study respondents, and it is inappropriate to generalize the findings of the study to a general population of students or employers.

The findings are interesting and useful insofar as getting a glimpse of what internship supervisors and employers in this sample expect of graduating students at the time of hire. Certain soft skills and personal attributes are not as tangible and distinct, making them difficult to define, quantify and measure. Therefore, the value of the findings of this study is limited to its use as a guide to refining or focusing our conversations between the university and the employers.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study suggest that job search and career success may have little to do with IQ or academic knowledge. The findings also indicate that the idea of being work ready is not merely a matter of having soft skills, but also that personal attributes of the job applicant are equally, if not more, important than having the academic knowledge, technical know-how, and experience. Given that this is a pilot study, recommendations may not be appropriate until more studies can be completed.

Nonetheless, the data already point to the following as worthy of thoughtful considerations: 1) Universities play a pivotal role in preparing students to be work-ready, and should take the lead to ensure that students have the desirable skills and qualities that make them employable, and, in the long run, retainable, in order to achieve career success; 2) Increased partnership and collaboration between employers (or industry leaders) and university faculty to ensure that university graduates not only have the field-specific academic knowledge and training, but also the skills that are essential for career success at the time of hire.

**References**


Strengthening the Importance of the Citizen in Territorial Government: 
A Necessity for Development and Modernization of Albania - A Libertarian Approach to Territorial Issues

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Abstract
Albania is a developing country that has embarked on the path of transition from a society of monist governance and centralized planning economy to a society of liberal democracy with free market economy 30 years ago. It is not moving at the pace it intended in the early 1990s, because of the etatist mentality of the country’s political elite, but often also of experts in certain sectors. This has happened in these years also in the sector of territorial planning and development, where etatist understandings have impeded the empowerment of citizens in the processes of drafting territorial planning and development decision-making. This has led development taking place in two different ways, on one hand governments have attempted to control development by forcing citizens to interact with the territory according to the rigid rules imposed by the government, and on the other hand the citizens have carried out construction developments in a fragmented manner, and without any harmony between each other and the obligations of government. In this paper we aimed to build another approach for future development in Albania aiming at integration into the European Union. This path should be development based on previously adopted territorial planning instruments, drawn up in democratic and parliamentary processes. Governance must understand and accept the new and different role it played 30 years ago in territorial development issues, and recognize citizens as co-actors in the processes of drafting territorial and urban planning instruments.

Keywords: individual freedom, government power, classical liberal, citizen empowerment, citizen involvement in planning processes.

Introduction
In all western countries of liberal democracy, but also in other countries with not the same level of democracy as the former, the level of citizen empowerment in territorial governance has been increased (sectors of territorial development of government), involving the citizen more and more in the process of drafting territorial planning and decision-making for urban development. This is a decades-long tradition for European countries and the United States of America, but in the last two decades countries like those in Latin America and China have been experimenting in this direction (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011). We have begun this article with a brief introduction to the historical contradiction between individual freedom and government authority from its inception. How the individual in the beginnings fought to
expand his power in the face of political authority, and to expand governing activities where his thought and opinion were valued and included in government decision making (Mill, 2005). Further, we have introduced the two types of coordination of society’s actions; one, the ‘police state technique’, as a coercion of society and its compulsion by political power to follow the rules unilaterally set by political power itself; and the other, the ‘technique of liberal democracy’, where the co-ordination of individuals’ actions in society resulted from the free will of individuals to cooperate voluntarily (Friedman, 2005). The Albanian society, which has spent 46 years in a one-party Communist Party regime that decided on everything and everyone, knows the first technique very well, but the path taken 30 years ago requires knowing and experimenting as much as possible with the second technique (Biberaj, 2000; Lami, 2013). The article follows with a presentation of the good practices of western countries of liberal democracy, but also of countries with more fragile and similar democracy to Albania, in terms of empowering the citizen in territorial governance, through involvement in the processes of designing territorial planning instruments, interested parties and citizens affected by the developments provided for in these instruments. As well as a valuable theoretical contribution to citizen participation in governance, it presented and argued the eight levels of citizen participation in the processes of drafting territorial planning instruments and in the governance decision-making procedures for urban administration (Arnstine, 1969). Further, in this article, we briefly present the importance that European Union institutions attach, through policy documents - at the level of technical expertise, of local authorities, national authorities, and European Union institutions - to the involvement of citizens in the processes. territorial planning and decision making in the urban sector (CNU, 1996; UNECE, 2008; EU, 2004, 2010). The article goes on to explain the level of citizen representation – as an interested party, or individual citizens - in territorial planning processes, according to the level of governance that has its own functions as that type of planning (central or local). In the following, the article briefly presents the current practices of citizen involvement in concrete planning processes developed in Albania. Furthermore, some conclusions are provided on the most important legal but also cultural challenges that Albanian governments in the future must face in order to empower the citizen in relation to the governing authority, through the involvement of interested parties and citizens in the drafting process of territorial planning instruments, and other benefits emanating from this liberal and democratic approach. The article is concluded with some recommendations for the Assembly of the Republic of Albania, central government and local government in the future Albania.

The historical contradiction between the freedom of the individual and the power of government

The contradictory relationship between individual freedoms and government power is one of the most distinctive features of social evolution since the earliest periods of human history, especially those of Greece, Rome, and England. In antiquity this conflictual relationship was established between citizens or some classes of citizens, on the one hand, and the government on the other. As Mill would define it, “Freedom was to defend against the tyranny of political rulers. Rulers were conceived (with the exception of some of the popular [democratic] governments of Greece) as a necessary antagonistic position with the people they ruled” (Mill, 2005, p. 5-6). Without going into the contextualization of history, at this period it is about the rule of the leader of the tribe or caste who had gained their power either as an inheritance
from his successor or through the conquest of new territories that were not under previous control from the predecessor whom they had inherited the power to rule.

In this formative context, the rulers did not exercise their power for the benefit of the citizens governing them, and at the same time the people ruled by them did not dare or wish to discuss the superiority of their rulers. The role of the oppressor by the rulers over their subjects was considered and accepted by them, on the one hand as indispensable and, on the other, very dangerous, as it could serve the subjects to protect them from external enemies or it could harm them if used against their freedoms. As Mill would explain this contradiction metaphorically "To prevent the weakest members of the community from falling prey to countless predators, it was necessary for the stronger predator [the ruler] to be authorized to protect them. But as the king of predators [the ruler] would rule over the prey [the subjects] no less than the little predators, it was necessary to maintain a permanent defensive attitude against his beak and claws" (Mill, 2005, p. 6). In this context, the individuals of antiquity considered and valued their freedom.

To remain at Mill's approach, which emphasized "as long as the people were content to fight one enemy with another and be ruled by a master, on the condition of being more or less guaranteed of his tyranny, they did not bring their aspirations [for freedom] beyond this point" (Mill, 2005, p. 7), we can say that guaranteeing this situation required a guarantee from the ruler. It therefore required the provision of certain immunities, the breach of which would be regarded as a breach of duty by the ruler and at the same time create the right of the subjects and justify their resistance or rebellion against the ruler. These immunities were considered freedom or political rights (Mill, 2005). As a second step, but also as a later tool towards freedom, came constitutional obligations. According to them, it became indispensable, the need of their preference by the community or some kind of community representative body directly, for some of the most important acts of government and the exercise of governing power.

Thus, we can say that the first elements of representative democracy and citizen involvement in governance were born, but they were also anaemic and infant stages (Mill, 2005). Moreover, as Mill would point out: "In most European countries the ruling power was to some extent subject to the first restrictive modes [immunities called freedom or political rights]. But this was not the case for the latter [constitutional obligations], and their attainment, or when they were already somewhat possessed, their complete attainment, became everywhere the chief aim of the lovers of liberty" (Mill, 2005, p. 6).

Further in time, as the issue of individual freedoms and political rights progressed, there came a time when people no longer saw the ruler as a natural need and accepted the fact that their rulers were an independent, and often opposed power with their interests (Mill, 2005). Here began the dynamics of the transition of government from the rule of a permanent king, a power which was hereditary, and the citizens needed to accept what they had, into an interim government. For the people it was better for the governing elite of the state to be people who were concessionary in exercising power, or were their delegates and revocable from office, with the consent of the people. In this way, the people were regarded as the only ones who had the complete assurance that governments would not use power to the detriment of the citizens.

This substituted, as Mill would have pointed out, "earlier attempts to limit the power of the rulers" (Mill, 2005, p. 7), thus, to empower the citizen in government. However, if the
government were elected by the citizens then the value of the concept of limiting the power of the ruler whose interests were contrary to those of the people would be lost. The point was to argue that while it was required, as Mill would point out, "that rulers should be aligned with the people, that their interest and will should be the interest and will of the nation. The nation did not need to be protected by its own will. He was not afraid of becoming his own tyrant. If the rulers are accountable to him and are immediately replaceable by him, then he can entrust them with the power which he himself dictates how to use" (Mill, 2005, p. 7).

Ways of coordinating human activity in society

By the time the democratic republics began to be installed in many countries of the Western world and in this sense the government elected by the people was broken into the new subject to be observed and criticized by the people who were enamoured with the freedom of the individual and his involvement in governing affairs. As Mill would point out, "it was already thought that locutions such as 'self-government' and 'people's power over the people themselves' did not express the real state of affairs. The 'people' who exercise power are not always the same as those over whom they exercise power. The 'self-government' that is spoken of is not the rule of each one of himself, but of each one from all the rest." (Mill, 2005, p. 7).

Thus two innovations arose, first, the fear of majority tyranny, which was considered and still considered frightening because it operates through acts of public authorities (Mill, 1859), and liberalism which would essentially protect the freedom of the individual and empower of his political will in government, as Friedman would put it, "As liberals [classical], we consider freedom of the individual, or of the family, as our ultimate goal in judging social adjustments" (Friedman, 2005, p. 13), or, as Spencer would point out, "[classical] liberals usually backed individual freedom against state coercion" (Spencer, 2005, p. 19).

According to classical liberals, there are only two ways to coordinate human activity, the first is the central direction from the governing authority through coercion, and the second is the voluntary cooperation of individuals. The former are techniques of the police, military, autocratic and totalitarian state, and rely on the thesis that, as Friedman would put it, “purpose justifies the means” (Friedman, 2005, p. 25).

So undemocratic governments justify their actions, in the sense that Friedman gives them, the means of coercion against the individual they use, on the grounds that the high purpose they have set for themselves for the good of society justifies the means of violence they use to force individuals to accept what is dictated to them. This thesis in itself is not logical, because it means that the purpose in question is not the ultimate goal, on the contrary the ultimate goal is to use the suitable means (Friedman, 2005).

The second ways of coordinating human activity are techniques of liberal democracy and free markets (Friedman, 2005). As Friedman would point out, "For the [classical] liberal, the appropriate means are free discussion and voluntary cooperation, which implies that any form of coercion is inappropriate." (Friedman, 2005, p. 25).

This is the essence of libertarianism, free and responsible citizens, gather voluntarily, discuss issues that concern them and agree on how these problems can be improved or eliminated. The typical area of human freedom encompasses three aspects: first, the absolute freedom of thought and opinion in all areas, which are inseparable from freedom of expression without any restriction of such thoughts and opinions; second, the freedom of weaving his own life plan according to the character and as we please with the only restriction that this plan does
not harm another individual; third, the individual's freedom to befriend and associate with other individuals (Mill, 2005, pp. 18-19).

Levels of civic involvement in the processes of drafting territorial planning instruments

Collaborative methods of planning and those of civic engagement in planning processes are an issue of fundamental importance in spatial planning in the world today. Western and liberal democracy states, but also others that do not have a long tradition of democracy, have evolved methods of involving citizens in planning processes with the aim of strengthening its role in governance and decision-making. Interactive, collaborative approaches as methods for involving citizens in governance and participatory planning have been widely introduced in the United States, Italy, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Scandinavian countries and even in countries such as China and Brazil (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011).

The Netherlands is where these practices began to be attempted, as Boonstra and Boelens would emphasize, “some attempts have been made since the 1960s to involve citizens from the outset in the spatial development process, and interaction has been advocated between government agencies, entrepreneurs, and civil organizations, or, between public, business and civil stakeholders, as a multi-participant approach to planning” (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011, p. 101). Involvement of citizens in planning processes includes several areas of spatial strategies, territorial planning and administration and management of issues, problems and urban imbalances. Two are the basic ways through which civic engagement is targeted in territorial planning processes, the first is to increase active citizen participation, and the second is the division of responsibilities for urban and territorial affairs between governing institutions and civic communities (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011).

To remain on the Boonstra and Boelens approach, they would point out that “Citizen participation in governing decision making has a long history of at least 45 years [55 years] in Dutch planning. It was first introduced by the 'New Left' of the Dutch Social Democrats in the mid-1960s. It aimed to be an emancipating and democratizing movements that was included in the US (as a result of the demonstrations for Vietnam), France (student revolt), Germany (the Dutschkes march through the Institutions) and post-war riots in other Western countries ” (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011, p. 107). New left-wing politicians in the Netherlands, aiming to improve the political system from the inside, went against the existing program of the Social Democratic Party, where they were embroiled in the argument that "it was no longer in line with the ideas and dreams of the new generation "(Boonstra and Boelens, 2011, p. 109). Thus came the first level of participatory planning called 'Public Hearings' applied in the 1970s, when the 'New Left' took over the party leadership, and many of its members came to power as governors, and more later also as ministers.

This was an important step for empowering the citizen in government, but far from the realistic need, because as Boonstra and Boelens would point out, "it merely introduced in practice only the real possibility of citizens to criticize and respond to spatial proposals made by governing agencies." (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011, p. 110). As the practice of 'Public Hearings' was soon regarded as ineffective, new ideas emerged and were implemented in Dutch practices of planning processes aimed at empowering the citizen. Thus came the second level of citizen empowerment in territorial governance we call 'Collaborative Planning', implying cooperation in public-private sector planning processes, as Boonstra and Boelens would argue, "local or regional governments, even nationals choose to cooperate with key business stakeholders (key project developers or investors) and also with civil society in order to develop..."
a realistic plan in which each interested party has their own responsibilities” (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011, p. 114).

The third level of empowerment of the citizen's role in government decision-making has been widespread lately in countries with fragile democracies such as Latin America and China. We call it 'Budgeting Initiatives' and means financing through public budgets, or co-financing public and private budgets for projects initiated by citizen communities (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011). However, it is theorized that civic participation in spatial planning processes is not productive and is thought to have produced disappointing results. According to Boonstra and Boelens, it is argued that "participation in spatial planning remains controlled by public governments and that these public governments do not appear to be very adaptable to initiatives arising from the dynamics of civil society itself" (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011, p. 99). In their paper 'Self-organization in urban development: towards a new perspective in spatial planning', they propose another model of citizen empowerment in territorial governance by presenting 'the notion of self-organization, referring to the initiatives that emerge from civil society itself, through community-based autonomous citizen networks, outside government control, which participates in the development of urban textures’” (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011, p. 99).

A valuable theoretical contribution to citizen participation in government was made in 1969 by Sherry Arnstein through her paper 'A Ladder Of Citizen Participation', published in the scientific journal “Journal of the American Planning Association”. In this paper she presented and argued that there are eight levels of citizen participation in the processes of drafting territorial planning instruments and in the procedures of regulating decision making on urban administration. Arntsein called them levels of participation and presented them in the form of a scaling typology of civic participation, in which each individual scale corresponds to a certain level of citizen power in designing a governance plan, program, or project. The eight pedestrians (i.e. levels) of the scale of civic participation are, manipulation, therapy, information, consultation, flattery, cooperation, delegation of power and civic control (Arnstein, 1969). Many countries use the Arnstein scale to improve the level of citizen involvement in local development processes.

Citizen involvement in planning processes as a European principle

The emphasis of planning that includes and empowers the citizen is placed on all documents with political approaches of world and European planners, including, but not limited to, the Congress on New Urbanism in their document 'The Charter of New Urbanism', in which it would be stated "We are committed to stabilizing the relationship between the art of building and making communities, through the participation of communities in planning and design" (CNU, 1996).

In addition to the technical and scientific dimension, countries of liberal democracies attach great importance to the involvement of citizens in territorial and spatial planning and decision-making processes. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe would give it very specific importance, especially for transition countries in its document 'Spatial Planning: Key Development Instruments and Effective Governance, with Special Reference to Transition Countries'. As highlighted in this report, it urged developing and transition countries "to increase broad participation, improve community involvement and build support for sustainable planning policies and programs" (UNECE, 2008, p. 12).
In the same vein, the European Union, in the 'Urban Acquis' document, adopted at the Ministerial for Territorial Cohesion, which took place in Rotterdam in 2004, would emphasize that one of the mechanisms for successful urban policy should be considered the concept of "Leadership from above to be balanced by empowering communities from below". Among other things, the 'Urban Acquis' document stated that "Citizen participation should be based on a dialogue with experts to stimulate citizenship in the urban environment" as a way to prove in practice the importance of citizen involvement in governance (EU, 2004).

During the last decade many documents highlighting the importance of civic engagement in territorial planning processes have been agreed at various political levels, to name only the two most important as 'Spatial Planning; Key Instrument for Development and Effective Governance with Special Reference to Countries in Transition' of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE, 2008), and the 'Territorial Agenda 2020, towards a Comprehensive, Smart and Sustainable Europe of Different Regions', agreed at the Ministerial Informal of the Ministries responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development on 19 May 2011 in Godollo, Hungary (EU, 2010). These documents and others we touched upon were the beginnings of a long process which will continue in the future, especially in developing countries such as Albania, which are indispensable in taking steps in this very important direction of democracy and development.

Albanian practices of citizen involvement in transition planning processes

The territorial governance of the transitional years did not have a political aim of involving stakeholders and citizens in the processes of drafting national strategies on national level issues (Aliaj, 2008; Fuga, 2012). They have not understood their new role in matters of territorial planning and development, throughout the transition to democracy, as the IHS Alumni et al., presents us. "The state is no longer the only decision maker. Today's urban reality is the product of all the interference of particular people, companies and organizations living and working in the city" (IHS Alumni et al., 1998, p. 3). Territorial governments in transitional Albanian have not understood the importance of empowering the citizen in the process of drafting territorial planning instruments, as Fuga would point out, “involves [the citizen] at a higher level of magnitude among public opinion, political decision-making and power” (Fuga, 2012, p. 75).

This has produced the exclusion of stakeholders and citizens affected by the proposed development by implying that citizen knowledge and opinions on their needs and desires are not important and not valid. Mill would counter this etatist concept, “Judgment is given to people to use. Because, can people be told that they should not use judgment at all because they can use it wrong? To prohibit [authority] what they think is harmful does not mean that it excludes them from error, but that [authority] is carrying out the task that belongs to them [the citizens]” (Mill, 2005, p. 25). But in contrast, the view and opinion of stakeholders and citizens are decisive in the processes of drafting territorial planning instruments because the city is built by people and for people (IHS Alumni et al., 1998; Aliaj, 2008; Imami et al., 2008) and their exclusion brings a planning that is not valid in practice. And as a logical breakdown of territory, it develops into two plans, first the plan that the etatist government imposes, and second the fragmented and atomized plans of each individual and group of individuals representing their particular interests (Aliaj, 2008). That is to say, development is not based on an instrument accepted and recognized by all parties working on the territory.
Involving interested parties and their citizens or groups affected by development is a democratic and inclusive exercise carried out at both levels of government, as UNECE would highlight: “Participation in the planning process is greatly improved where co-operation meetings bring together different interested parties, and at different levels of planning (strategic or local)” (UNECE, 2008, p. 37). But also, as IHS Alumni et al., would point out, “Participation can be of different forms” (IHS Alumni et al., 1998, p. 42). The involvement of interested parties, such as government or civil society organizations, organizations of experts in specific fields of knowledge or science, as well as of private enterprises in different development sectors, in national-level planning has been positively appreciated by international institutions, as we can in particular reference UNECE, which would guide "It [participation in the planning process] can also be useful at strategic levels, which include representatives of organizations" (UNECE, 2008, p. 37). But interested parties and citizen participation, as we shall see below, is decisive at the local level of drafting local territorial planning instruments.

For the territorial development of the Albanian Parliament four laws were adopted in the period 1993-2014: law 7693/1993 ‘On Urbanism’ (Official Journal, 1993); law 8405/1998 ‘On Urban Planning’ (QBZ, 2010); Law 10119/2009 ‘On Territorial Planning and Development’ (QBZ, 2019); law no. 107/2014 ‘On Territory Planning and Development’ (QBZ, 2019). These laws have undergone numerous and frequent changes, where it is worth noting that Law 8405/1998 ‘On Urban Planning’ was amended ten times, and Law 10119/2009 ‘On Territorial Planning and Development’ changed several months after the adoption of the Law, prior to the entry into force with full force, by Law No. 10 258, dated 25.3.2010 ‘On some additions and amendments to Law no.10119, dated 23.4.2009, ‘On Territorial Planning’. Although 'hyper-legislation', as Spencer would define the frequent rearranging and changes of legislation (Spencer, 2005), characterized the transition governance in the field of territorial development, it failed to provide the appropriate role to the interested parties and citizenry, in the processes of drafting territorial planning instruments, according to the governing level (HIS Alumni et al., 1998; Aliaj, 2008; Imami et al., 2008; Fuga, 2012).

Without going into the analysis of the legislative text or mentioning of certain articles of laws, it can be said that due to the obligations of the European Union institutions, the concepts of stakeholder and citizens involvement in the planning processes have been introduced in the Albanian legislation. This has been a progressive process, starting with a minimalist element in the law of 1998, to reach an almost acceptable level in the provisions of the law of 2014, as a result of the process of approximation of the legislation with that of the EU. Governing practices, however, prove the opposite, as the processes of drafting local plans have not been open to stakeholders or citizens affected by planned developments (HIS Alumni et al., 1998; Aliaj, 2008; Imami et al., 2008; Fuga, 2012). Contrary to what UNECE would instruct, when emphasizing “Participatory practice works best at the local community level where stakeholders are clear about the constraints and open spaces for decision making” (UNECE, 2008, p. 37).

As Aliaj, reflecting on the United Nations Human Development Report in 2006, would emphasize, "cities must continue to democratize the decision-making of their governments in order to make them more responsive and reactive to citizens" (Aliaj, 2008, p. 90). In contrast, the fourth phase territorial governance, which covered the years 2013-2020, undertook a program to draft general local plans of the 61 municipalities of the Republic. This program has been going on for years and until now 38 Local Government Units have a legally approved planning instrument, while the rest is in the process of drafting or approving this instrument (AKPT, 2015-2020). It is clear that this action, albeit driven by the central government's
positive desire to equip each local government unit with territorial planning instruments, is an action with a “paternalistic approach” (Friedman, 2005) that undermines local autonomy of local government. But most importantly, for this part of the paper, by concentrating the project on the National Territorial Planning Agency, which is an institution subordinate to the Prime Minister, it removed this autonomy from the citizens of the cities for which each of these instruments is being drafted.

To understand this, it is sufficient to observe the process of drafting the Local General Plan of the Municipality of Tirana. This general territorial instrument was designed by the studio of an Italian architect with the assistance of a group of Municipality specialists, in a process closed to interested parties and affected by the developments envisaged therein as UNECE teaches us “In the early stages of designing a strategy or spatial plan, before planning authorities have decided on a particular solution, it is an advantage to include and engage a wide range of interested parties in discussing issues and in the formulation of proposals. (UNECE, 2008, p. 37).

The only interested party engagement process that sector law recognizes as 'Public Hearing' was a single meeting, to present the documents and maps that made up this planning tool to City Council members who are direct representatives of citizens in the 'City Assembly' and a number of local urban and architecture experts who were selected according to the political preference of central government, Tirana Municipality or central government leaders (TCHA, 2016).

This meeting, considered a 'Public Hearing', took place in a one-sided format, with only the political authority of the Municipality or the private studio contacted by the central government to draft the instrument having the right to engage in a discussion. In the meantime, as the leader of the largest opposition group in 'City Assembly', Olli stressed the few invited guests to ask questions or make proposals were generally previously selected by the governing authority (TCHA, 2016). Moreover, as the leader of the other opposition group in 'City Assembly', Brahimllari presented, none of the few suggestions, controlled by the state authority, were considered or reflected in the final product of the planning instrument (Vizion Plus, 2016). Evaluated on the Arnstein scale, although the legal designation of this process corresponds to its fourth step, 'consultation' (Arnstein, 1969), this process was a mix between the first three steps of citizen participation, manipulation, therapy, information.

Conclusions

Territorial governance (the governing sector dealing with territorial issues), although Albania has been aiming for 30 years to move away from socialist modes of development based on central planning, to move towards development based on an inclusive free market economy, has not been introduced in the legislation and in governing and administrative practices that have this social goal. Involving citizens and interested parties in the processes of designing spatial, territorial and urban planning instruments is one of the most productive methods to empower the citizen in governance decision-making, even according to the institutions of the European Union and other liberal democracy countries. Although the sovereign's stated political intent has been clear: to accelerate integration into the European Union by adopting its principles, and to follow the guidelines given to member states or in the integration processes towards it, and in particular good practices that come from its member countries; yet it seems that the Albanian transition governments have not followed this path required by the sovereign.
The insufficiency of the three levels of its application so far, as presented earlier in this paper, to give the voice that the citizen deserves in governance matters should lead us in two directions. First, let’s look for better ways and models whereby the citizen’s opinion is fully incorporated and widely considered by planning instruments and governance decision-making, and secondly, let’s try to implement those European and Western good practices, even in countries that do not have a democratic tradition like Albania.

Citizens’ empowerment must be developed at both levels of government, in civic engagement, according to the planning instruments they design and adopt, and in line with their scope. At national (central) level it can be implemented in the form of interested parties’ participation (mainly non-governmental or entrepreneurial organizations, in those sectors covered by the planning instrument), in the processes of drafting territorial development strategies. But what best represents the intention to empower the citizen is his involvement in local territorial planning processes. In these processes the citizen can understand, touch and express his opinion directly on the issues that concern him, or the community which he belongs to. Albania demands a profound legal reform and in particular cultural changes on the issues of territorial planning processes. They should be open to incorporating the view and opinion of interested parties and citizens affected by proposed developments in those planning instruments.

In particular, local planning processes where issues that are dealt with most directly by the citizen and affect them directly should be turned into an agenda of interested parties and citizen deliberations, according to specific topics to be devised and made public. The doors of the City Council meeting room should be open to include all social organizations on various topics, such as heritage, economic, cultural, environment, health, art and sports. All university science departments and city intellectuals should be drawn into the thematic debates. And in parallel, the municipal administration acting as the moderator of the deliberations, the provider of official information and data, as the representative of the interests of minority and non-involved groups, as the technical secretariat that protocols all agreements reached in the deliberations, turning them into either maps or written materials.

Local territorial planning instruments should be regarded as a celebration of the city, with the aim of achieving a spiritual and cultural regeneration of the citizen, community and society. We need to escape the etatist and concentrative mentalities to open up to the processes of deliberative democracy. Albania’s transition from a society of centralization and concentration of decision-making and power should open the processes of planning and decision-making for territorial developments to the thinking of the citizen. Albania needs to move away from ‘paternalistic’ approaches to governance and considering governing authority as ‘upper owner’ and place the citizen and his opinion at the centre of planning for future development and in the perspective of the city. We need to move away from the etatist mentality of concentrating the power of knowledge, arguing that citizens do not know and cannot have opinions as valuable as the people of administration or bureaucrats of government.

The city has to be made by the citizens and for the citizens and this is the fundamental reason that at the heart of cities’ development perspectives must be the opinion, needs and desires of the citizens. The situation of Albanian cities, with a multitude of problems and urban imbalances, proves this in the Albanian practice of urbanization and urban redevelopment in the transition years. This contradiction has arisen since we, on the one hand, have agreed to
enter liberal democracy and a free market economy, but on the other hand we do not understand that governance has a different role from the previous one in urban affairs.

Citizen empowerment through involvement in planning processes also brings other benefits. First, social benefits, because civic engagement will contribute strongly to the social coherence of a fragmented society, such as the local Albanian community, due to large migratory movements in the transition years. Citizen participation and inclusion improves social conditions in two ways: through empowerment in governance decision making, as we touched upon earlier; and by empowering them to communicate their need, desire, opinion and point of view, which can serve every aspect of social life. For the Albanian society, after a long period of denial of free thought in communism, this communication enhancement practice is well worth it. Secondly environmental and urban benefits, because the involvement of citizens in planning processes, enhances a 'sense of belonging' of citizens to their environments, very necessary for Albanian society because as a consequence of the communist regime, they find it difficult to believe that 'common property' is their property. The third benefit is political, because engaging citizens in discussions of needs, deficiencies, problems and imbalances makes them aware of the real possibilities of governance to meet their needs; but also for governments to understand the real needs of citizens, from the way citizens view them, and to narrow the gap between them as much as possible. This beneficial aspect, too, is very important to the post-communist Albanian society, which often views governance as a thing completely separate from itself.

**Recommendations**

In this context, we recommend to the Parliament of the Republic of Albania to ask the Council of Ministers or through its internal mechanisms to draft a new legal basis for territorial planning, with particular emphasis being given to comprehensive planning. In this new and necessary legislation, the processes of drafting planning instruments should be transformed into democratic and constitutional processes through the involvement of interested parties, such as governmental and non-governmental organizations, organizations and expert associations of different professions and enterprises of various development sectors; as well as community groups and other citizens affected by the potential development proposed by these territorial planning instruments. Involvement by the interested and affected parties of the potential development should be considered according to the level of governance and the level of territorial planning instruments.

Interested parties, such as governmental and non-governmental organizations, organizations and expert associations of different professions and enterprises in different sectors of development, but not only these, should be involved in the processes of drafting strategic and national level planning instruments. However, this does not mean that the community, and groups of citizens and citizens, should be excluded from the process of drafting national instruments.

Communities and citizen groups and citizens should be particularly involved in the process of drafting national territorial planning instruments. However, this does not mean that other interested parties, such as governmental and non-governmental organizations, organizations and expert associations of different professions and enterprises in different sectors of development, should be excluded from local planning processes.
I recommend to the central government to seriously consider the dimension of interested parties and citizen involvement in the processes of drafting territorial planning instruments and to reflect this concept clearly and exhaustively in the provisions of a new draft law on territorial planning and development. I also recommend that, from the process of drafting strategic and national-level instruments throughout its governance, to broadly practice the wide involvement of interested parties, including, but not limited to, governmental and non-governmental organizations, organizations and associations of experts of different professions and enterprises in different sectors of development. The central government should consider and include in their planning products their thoughts and opinions as they express their specific needs, wants and capabilities.

I recommend to the local government to give a special and very important place to civic engagement in its planning practices. Local government should value civic engagement, not only as a legal obligation, but also as a practical necessity for planning and territorial development instruments to be complete, and have realistic opportunities to implement them fully in line with how they are drafted. Local government should turn the processes of drafting local territorial instruments under their administration, as a celebration of democracy for their city, where all interested parties, professional organizations, communities and citizen groups, even individual citizens, interested or affected by potential development, to be participatory.

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The Urban Dimension of the Albanian Transition Cities Was Damaged as a Result of the 'Big Government' and Not Its Absence: An Assessment in Relation to the Planning Instruments!

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Abstract

Albanian inhabited cities and centres have undergone chaotic developments in the years of transition, and this has come as a result of development not based on previous territorial and urban planning. Thus, construction, urban and territorial development in the transition years has not been the result of the implementation of previously approved territorial and urban planning instruments. This has come as a result of the lack of territorial and urban plans (local or national), which would precede construction and urban development with the aim of making this development smart, sustainable and comprehensive. In this context, we have made an observation in attempt to find the reasons for the lack of territorial and urban planning instruments in relation to governance. Our concern is focused on the question: has the scope of governance been so narrow that it has left out the task of drafting and approving territorial planning instruments; or was their absence for other reasons? As will be presented in this paper, transitional governments have not lacked: neither sectoral legislation that obliges the implementation of planning instruments; nor public institutions charged by law specified by duties in this field; nor public budget funding and foreign donors for their design. In contrast, it has been the characteristics of the left 'big government' and the public irresponsibility that characterize what have hindered the drafting and adoption of territorial and urban planning instruments.

Keyword: big government, small government, classical liberalism, modern liberals, territorial and urban planning instruments.

Introduction

One of the most basic concerns of the Albanian transition society is the way in which Albanian cities have changed as a result of fragmented and unplanned development. This is a concern that affects the quality of urban life of every Albanian citizen, but even after three decades it has not been addressed from a political and governmental standpoint. In this article we are interested to understand the political and governing reason of this very unpopular product of construction and urban development of Albanian cities and inhabited centres.

In this sense, we will start with a very brief presentation of the theoretical difference between the political left and right regarding the role and extent of governance. This will give us a general understanding of the concept of 'proper government measure' according to the two poles of the political spectrum. As we will see, for contemporary liberals the 'right measure of government' is 'big government', while for classical liberals it is 'small government'. The
difference between these two concepts lies and is expressed in three elements: the scope of legislation, public institutions and budgetary funding for performing a specific governing function.

Further, we will see how the chaotic and fragmented development of cities and other inhabited centres has come as a result of the lack of planning instruments or the widespread inadmissibility of their parties, in cases when they existed. In this context widely accepted by many authors, whom we will refer to throughout the article, we will try to assess the political and governing reasons that explain the lack of planning instruments or the widespread inadmissibility of interested parties. As we will see later, transitional governments have lacked neither sectoral legislation, nor public institutions with tasks in this sector, nor funding for the design of planning instruments.

The reason for the lack of planning instruments and the practical result of development in their absence, has not been the ‘small government’ of a classical liberal approach; but on the contrary, it has been the statist ‘big government’. Hyper-legislation, hyper-administration and over-financing have accompanied numerous processes of drafting territorial planning instruments, but have failed to produce the appropriate and widely accepted instruments. It is these types of instruments that can ensure a smart, sustainable and inclusive development, which would provide cities and residential centres that offer a higher quality of urban life to citizens.

**The difference between the political left and right in the role and size of government**

After three anti-authoritarian revolutions inspired by John Locke’s Second Treaty of Government, which brought the Constitutional Monarchy to Britain, American Independence and the First French Republic, the liberalism he advocated is an apotheosis of individual freedom and unequivocal contestation of authoritarianism (Locke, 2005, p. 20). Since then, classical liberalism has contributed to a constant struggle for the inalienable rights of the individual and a political system based on: legitimacy, limitation, separation and accountability of power (Locke, 2005, pp. 77-218). Many political philosophies or their application to various governments in the history of the world, have modified its principles and gone further to the ideological axis "left-right". This has happened, starting with the liberalism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Spencer, 2005; Friedman, 2005), or that of the late 20th and early 21st centuries with Habermas and Rolls (Fuga, 2003). For this reason, in this article, we have accepted the principles of Classical Liberalism as a benchmark through which we will assess the ways in which transitional governments in Albania have addressed territorial and urban planning issues.

The essential difference between the left and the right lies in the fact that while the left is for a large government, the right is for a small government (Spencer, 2005; Friedman, 2005; Fuga, 2003; Biberaj, 2000; Gjura, 2015; Civici, 2013; Lami, 2013). This essence of the difference between them, formulates the divisions in all other secondary aspects. The concept of “big government” defended by the left as ‘government of the right measure’, needs and at the same time seeks for: a broad governance scope, which reduces the role of the individual in society; concentration of governing functions in the hands of the highest level of government; extensive network of state institutions that need hyper-legislation to exercise these governing functions; and consequently high state expenditures for the administrative maintenance of these institutions, and the exercise of these functions (Friedman, 2005; Spencer, 2005; Civici, 2013).
Some of the general notions of the left for 'big government as government of the right measure' come to us from the late 19th and early 20th century liberal approaches, which called for the expansion of governing activities, and centralization of governance functions and scope (Spencer, 2005; Friedman, 2005). As well as the Habermasian philosophy that introduced the concept of "civil rights" or "positive rights", which, being in addition to Locke’s "natural rights", obviously force the government to enlarge in order to protect them, but also reducing the role of the individual at the same time. Likewise, and with the same requirements, comes the Rolls concept of "corrective law" which overlapped "liberal law" to achieve a "right to justice" (Fuga, 2003).

Whereas, the concept of "small government" that is defended by the right as 'government of the right measure', detached from Spencer's opinion, requires: "reduction of forced cooperation and expansion of voluntary cooperation... narrowing of state authority and expanding the space where every citizen can act uncontrollably... protecting individual freedoms and against coercion by the state" (Spencer, 2005, p. 19). For Locke "The power of society or of the legislature which it creates can never be presumed to extend beyond what is necessary for the common good" (Locke, 2005; p. 162). According to him, a state is obliged to govern according to stable and in force laws, proclaimed and recognized by the people and not through improvised decisions; to do justice with impartial and fair judges, who must resolve disputes through these laws; and use community force within the country only to enforce such laws (police) and abroad to protect the community from foreign attack and occupation (Locke, 2005).

If we were to refer to Friedman's approach, on the tasks of government we could quote “the basic roles of government in a free society [are]: to provide a means by which we can modify rules, to mediate differences between us in terms of ensuring the enforceability of the rules by those few who would not otherwise play the game "(Friedman, 2005, p. 29), and“ its [government’s] main function should be to protect our freedom, both from enemies abroad and from our fellow citizens: to maintain law and order, to guarantee the implementation of private contracts, to promote competitive markets "(Friedman, 2005, p. 2).

These definitions on the fundamental importance of individual freedom and the role of the state, also present the first task of a libertarian which is the preservation of freedom, which for Friedman "is a subtle and delicate tree" and to control the role and size of government, which according to him if not controlled can turn into a Frankenstein that destroys the freedom of the individual and the society in whose protection it was created (Friedman, 2005). Because, according to Friedman, “Government is necessary to protect our freedom, it is a means by which we can exercise our freedoms; however, because of the concentration of power in political hands, it is also a threat to freedom" (Friedman, 2005, p. 2).

While Spencer, referring to the political opinion of Jeremy Bentham, who was an English philosopher, jurist and social reformer who was considered the founder of modern utilitarianism, would underline the role of the state "Bentham tells us that the government fulfils its mission by creating rights to give individuals, the right to personal security; the right to protection of honour; the right to property" (Spencer, 2005, p. 80). So, if the government grows, in terms of increasing its role in the social sphere and the governing sphere of activity, what happens in reality is that the government ‘swallows' our freedoms. This phenomenon is also distinguished by Spencer when he stated that "Unlimited power over citizens, which, quite reasonably, was attributed to a ruling individual because it was believed that he...
represented God, is now attributed to a ruling group about which no one says that represents God" further presenting the harms of not rightfully limited power and the need to limit the role and measure of government (Spencer, 2005, p. 99).

The same view is held by John Stuart Mill, in his book “On Freedom”, on the need to set boundaries for government, although it may be "elected by the people and accountable," as self-government would be conceived at the time, or "the power of the people over the people themselves." For Mill, governments must be kept in check because "Like all tyrannies, the tyranny of the majority was and still is considered scary, mainly because it operates through acts of public authority" (Mill, 2005, p. 9). In short, the size and role of government should be kept in constant control, because it not only tends to reduce citizens’ freedoms, but also that for this purpose, it uses public instruments and authorities, which are financed by taxpayer money. As Mill would underline, "Power itself is illogical. The best government has no more right than the worst. Power is just as harmful or more harmful when exercised in accordance with public opinion than when exercised in opposition to it" (Mill, 2005, p. 23).

**Territorial and urban development of the transition and lack of territorial planning instruments**

Today’s Albanian cities and all territories adapted for development present a series of problems and urban imbalances which is evidently negatively affecting the quality of life of citizens (WB, 2007; Fuga, 2004, 2012; Aliaj 2008; Imami et al., 2008). There are two instruments that a government uses to exercise control over urban and territorial development, and they are: planning instruments, or different types of urban and territorial plans; and development control instruments, the most important of which is the construction permit (Faja and Alimehmeti, 1983; IHS Alumni et al., 1998; Imami et al., 2008; Faja, 2008; Aliaj, 2003, 2008). The whole process of urban and territorial development administration takes place on these two pillars, and these are the state controls, although with different names at different times, that have been established by the Albanian laws since that of 1978 (Official Gazette, no. 3, 1978) to that of 2014 (Official Gazette, no. 137, 2014). In this article we will observe the issue of urban condition of cities from the point of view of territorial and urban planning instruments.

The urbanization that included the country was the development unprecedented by the previous planning and this was one of the reasons that produced this massive damage to Albanian cities during the transition period (Misja and Misja, 2004; WB, 2007; Aliaj, 2008; Imami et al., 2008; IHS Alumni et al., 1998). In this context, IHS Alumni et al. would underline that "Insufficient planning and coordination, in the medium or long term, will result in higher costs of urban development" (IHS Alumni et al., 1998, p. 13). Governments, both central and local, failed to design planning instruments, according to their level of governance and in accordance with their governance functions (IHS Alumni et al., 1998; Aliaj, 2008; Imami et al., 2008; WB, 2007). The World Bank in 2007 would point out that "The few master plans [planning instruments] that exist date back to the time of communism and do not meet the requirements of the time for land use and are ill-adapted to the market economy." (WB, 2007, p. 53).

Derraj would also talk about this situation in 2008 when he would underline that “in Albania at the moment it is difficult to talk about an effective administration of the territory [through previously approved plans] by the authorities as at the central level, as well as in the local one” (Imami et al., 2008, p. 52). According to Derraj, the processes of urban and territorial
development "are based [only] on technical norms which record the distances between the facilities to be built, the allowed density, as well as what are the administrative steps that construction should follow" (Imami et al., 2008, p. 52). In short, Derraj emphasizes that development has been allowed based on certain conditions of urban design and in the absence of urban or territorial planning. While emphasizing that "the territorial development of a country should be based on plans, which are organically linked to each other" (Imami et al., 2008; p. 53).

The lack of urban and territorial plans would be presented by Fuga in 2012, when while talking about the great increase of the population in Tirana and its decline in the rest of the country, he emphasizes that the time has come “to make these policies [urban and demographic] with national and local plan” (Fuga, 2012, p. 154). Simply put, Albania of rapid economic, political, social, cultural, demographic development, and in this sense also construction, as a result of the separation from the nails of socialism of central planning, lacked throughout the years of transition the instruments of territorial planning, such as development policies, plans and regulations, which would orient this rapid development towards sustainability, but also would influence this rapid development to be both smart and comprehensive at the same time.

In support of this argument, suffice it to say that the last General Territorial Plan, then called the General Regulatory Plan of the Capital, was approved by the communist government (IHS Alumni, et al., 1998; Faja, 2008; Aliaj, 2008). It was drafted by the Institute of Urban Design in 1989 and approved on 1 February 1990 by the Government led by Prime Minister Adil Carcani (Kotmilo and Kotmilo, 2017; Aliaj, 2008). Even today, Tirana does not have a Territorial Plan to precede a comprehensive, smart and sustainable development, which will help us build another Tirana from what we have, as Aliaj would point out in 2008 “Tirana refers to to date an urban plan, which was not only drafted 20 years ago, but was conceived in the time of another system” (Aliaj, 2008, p. 106), but also IHS Alumni, et al., 1998, when they emphasized that "The existing Regulatory Plan [of Tirana], not being oriented by real objectives, could not master the development of this situation" (IHS Alumni, et al., 1998, p. 28).

Even Faja in 2008 would present that all Albanian cities were developing in the years of transition in the absence of planning, because their last plans were drafted in the years of communism (Faja, 2008). This situation of unplanned development previously planned, is identified for all major Albanian cities and is such, in the absence of planning instruments, for both levels of government (Imami et al., 2008; pp. 52-55). The central government has failed to develop territorial planning instruments in relation to the development sectors that belong to it as a field of activity, such as national infrastructure or the distribution of the population throughout the territory. In 2008, Derraj would underline that "In Albania we continue not to have a Spatial Plan at the national level" (Imami et al., 2008; p. 53).

Also, local governments have failed to draft and approve general, sectoral or cross-sectoral instruments of territorial development for the territories in their jurisdiction, or partial urban studies for their structural units, in accordance with the General Territorial Plans (Aliaj, 2008; Imami et al., 2008). In this context, Derraj would state that "Most Albanian cities (municipalities) operate with Regulatory Plans approved before the '90s" (Imami et al., 2008, p. 53). Simply put in the form of a sentence, beyond the propaganda presentations that the parties have prepared on this topic, in transition Albania there was a lack of development planning (IHS Alumni, et al., 1998, pp. 28-29; Aliaj 2008, p. 106; BB, 2007, pp. 53-54).
Lack of planning instruments and legislation, institutions and public funding for this governing function

While the lack of planning instruments, or urban and territorial plans, is evident, and that this has produced a lot of damage to the urban and territorial dimension of the country, the question is what were the causes of their lack. Were they missing as a result of the libertarian ‘small government’, and in this way should we develop a left ‘big government’, which will provide us with the missing plans? To understand this we will return to the classics of liberalism, and specifically Spencer, who when explaining his concept of "Hyper-legislation" as a phenomenon of the ‘big government’, introduces hyper-legislation and hyper-administration as its characteristics. (Spencer, 2005, pp. 104-158). Both of these are associated with high costs for financing the exercise of hyper-administration activities, in the implementation of the hyper-legislation for which they were created (Friedman, 2005; Spencer, 2005).

Observed in this context, in order to blame the libertarian ‘small government’ for the lack of urban and territorial plans, we need to find a lack of public funding, legislation and institutions for doing so. Contrary to this scenario but in line with reality, a lot of money of Albanian, European or American taxpayers has been spent: on maintaining state institutions and agencies with specific tasks and functions in territorial planning; in national and international tenders and competitions with the aim of drafting these plans. For the drafting and approval of planning instruments, as separate projects, there was no lack of funding, part of which was funding in the form of grants or loans of international institutions (IHS Alumni, et al., 1998; Aliaj, 2008).

IHS Alumni, et al., In 1998, while talking about the need to address the unplanned development situation would introduce that “In response to this planning situation, USAID has supported a Land Management Program focused on concrete issues, including existing staff and the community as baseline data”, or further “The Austrian Government was also active in preparing a Plan for Tirana” (IHS Alumni, et al., 1998, p. 29). Aliaj would present this fact more clearly, when he underlined that “Since 1989, when the last regulatory plan was approved, various donors have funded at least 7-8 planning initiatives helping to draft regulatory, strategic and specific plans for the region and the city of Tirana” (Aliaj, 2008, pp. 106-107).

Although none of these planning documents have served in practice, in most cases they have not been approved by the political authority of Albanian governments, payments for foreign or Albanian consultancy have been made (Aliaj, 2008). As Aliaj would point out, while writing on the topic of public costs for territorial planning "Without mentioning the absurd fact that the Albanian government has paid these consultations from funding such as donations or loans (in this case they must be paid through taxes), strangely it does not de jure accept the final products of this assistance, even though it has reimbursed the service money for foreign consulting firms ?!” (Aliaj, 2008, p. 107).

Only for Tirana, three instruments of general territorial planning have been financed: The plan of the administration of Mayor Rama, which failed to be approved at the final level in the National Council of Territorial Regulation of the Republic of Albania; The plan of the administration of Mayor Basha, which was drafted by the local administration in a comprehensive process, and was approved by the decision of the National Council of the Territory on February 15, 2013; and the Plan of the administration of Mayor Veliaj, which was drafted under the direction of the Italian architect Boeri, was approved by the Municipal
Council of Tirana on December 29, 2016, and further approved by the decision of the National Council of the Territory on April 20, 2017. (National Agency for Territorial Planning [AKPT], 1993-2017).

There are few cities for which the process of drafting the Local Territorial Plan has been funded only once. Most, are the cities for which the plan has been funded more than twice. For the Tirana-Durrës Space, two funds have been provided for Spatial and Regional Studies (AKPT, 1993-2017, 2015). Coastal tourist areas, from Velipoja in Shkodra to Ksamili in Saranda, have been budgeted at least once by the Master Plan, not to mention the Kavaja Rock, Golem, Karpen, which have been paid three times for tourist planning. The South Coast from the Bay of Vlora to the Cape of Stillo, have been funded three ‘Master Plans for Tourism Development and Coastal Protection’, part of which have been approved by the Territorial Adjustment Council of the Republic of Albania or the National Territorial Council (AKPT, 1993-2017; Imami et al, 2008).

In addition to funding initiatives to design territorial planning instruments, there has been no shortage of public institutions that have been established and funded to perform planning functions. Under the Ministry of the line of the Territorial and Urban Development sector, the ‘Institute of Urban Studies and Designs’ (ISPU) has functioned, which has been organized and has functioned with the task of drafting National and Local planning instruments. According to Article 8 of Law 7693/1993 'On Urban Planning' (Official Gazette, 1993), but further also in Article 13 of Law 8405/1998, 'On Urban Planning', it was determined that “ISPU is the state body at the national level that drafts urban studies and designs defined in the urban planning regulation” (Official Gazette, 1998), while in chapter V of the urban planning regulation approved by VKM no. 722, dated 19.11.1998, defines the role and tasks of the ISPU, among others "ISPU is a specialized state body at the national level in the field of spatial planning and urban planning studies at the national, regional and local level” (Official Gazette, 1998 ). Following the adoption of Law 10119/2009 ‘On Territorial Planning and Development’, the National Agency for Territorial Planning [AKPT] was established (QBZ, 2010) which performs similar tasks.

Public institutions set up and funded to exercise duties and responsibilities in the field of urban and territorial planning have also existed at the local level of government. The three laws mentioned above oblige the Local Government Units to include in its administration units with duties and responsibilities in the urban planning sector (Official Gazette, 1993, 1998; QBZ, 2010). To take the example of the municipality of Tirana, it includes in the organizational structure of its administration a General Directorate of Territorial Planning and Development, which includes four directorates with 10 sectors, and dozens of officials who are paid from taxes to perform planning tasks and territory control (Municipality of Tirana [BT], 2020).

Conclusions and recommendations

As we briefly presented earlier in this article, the lack of territorial planning instruments has not come as a lack of governance, or as we have called it because of the "small" libertarian government. The failure in planning did not come from the lack of a state, but from the leftist ‘big government’, which allows itself to maintain non-existent institutions and waste the public money of Albanians and the generosity of internationals, without giving any product (Aliaj, 2008). It was the leftist ‘big government’ with its own characteristics, such as extensive
bureaucracy and preferential decision-making of political and administrative leaders (Spencer, 2005; Friedman, 2005), that prevented the drafting of territorial and urban planning instruments, which allowed unplanned development.

This is in line with what Aliaj would say when writing about the reasons for unplanned construction "due to the inability of post-communist governments to provide legitimate alternatives to citizens who already have a legitimate right to free movement" (Aliaj, 2008, p. 96). But, more here, the statist mentality of the public administration influences, as if Aliaj would say “To this is added the almost conservative mentality of professionals, who still today have not managed to overcome the limitations of the mentality and education of the period of centralized economy” (Aliaj, 2008, p. 96).

In contrast, a “small” and effective libertarian governance, at both levels of government, guided by modernizing, liberalizing and decentralizing approaches and principles is a need for the aim of designing, approving and implementing territorial planning instruments in comprehensive democratic processes of interested parties and affected by potential developments in the territory under study. Such governance would reduce the role of governments (central and local) in planning processes and involve citizens or interested parties in these processes. It also increases the level of democracy and empowerment of the citizen in political decision-making processes and contributes to a construction development widely accepted by all development-affected parties. Development based on planning instruments designed and adopted in a comprehensive and democratic process, provides three essential characteristics. It is sustainable, in economic, social and environmental terms; it is smart; and comprehensive with the aim of realizing the economic and political freedoms of the citizens.

Despite the modestly important conclusion we have reached in this article, it must be acknowledged that addressing this topic requires further observation. In this sense, we recommend researchers in the field of urban sociology or political science focused on public policy, to use this ‘doorway’ opened by this writing, to understand more on this very important issue of national and social development. We also recommend political parties, both in government and in opposition, to conduct political analysis to understand more, but also to include the modest conclusion of this article in their election or governing programs.

**Bibliography**


Exploring the Use of Youtube by Symphonic Orchestras as An Educational Platform During the Pandemic of Covid-19

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Abstract

The use of various digital platforms and social media applications has significantly been rising worldwide in the recent years. In 2020, during the covid-19 pandemic, many of these online platforms became important tools to support the distance learning especially for children, hence, underlying the need for authentic, safe, reliable, and easily accessible online resources of information. Before the pandemic, most of the renown symphonic orchestras have been offering to their community a wide range of educational music programs designed for various age groups from toddlers to adult listeners. Most of these orchestras also support official YouTube channels to self-promote and connect with a wider audience. YouTube is a popular social media application offering a rich selection of uploaded music video content which may be utilized as an easily accessible tool for music education. The aim of this research is to explore whether the symphonic orchestras share their expertise and educational content on their official YouTube channels to create safe and trustworthy resources designed particularly for children, thus supporting the online music education during the time of the covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: music, online, education, orchestra, YouTube, technology, covid-19

Introduction

In modern society, people of all ages regularly use their smart phones, tablets, and computers. It is common to see a family dinner where children are watching videos using a tablet or to see people in coffee houses working on their laptops. Online applications became trendy and acceptable outlets allowing people to share their ideas and interact with one another (West, 2012). In recent years, the worldwide use of online platforms increased significantly. YouTube, visited each month by over 2 billion logged-in users, is certainly one of the most popular social media applications (YouTube Press, n.d.). Unlike some of the other social media platforms with age restrictions, YouTube is not only accessed by adults but also by children of various age groups. A research regarding the use of YouTube among parents of children between 16 to 36 months of age, indicates that most parents use YouTube, even with their toddlers (Ko, 2018).

Social media applications do not only change the way people communicate with one another, but they also transform conventional learning systems. They assist informal learning which is the act of learning outside of the formal school setting (Bull et al., 2008). In 2020, during the covid-19 pandemic, many of these online platforms became important tools to support the distance learning. YouTube emerges as one of the main sources for informal learning since it
provides a broad selection of easily accessed videos. In previous years, numerous academic researches about the educational value and the possible applications of YouTube as part of K-12 curriculum were conducted. In her doctoral dissertation, Rossini (2016) provides a comprehensive literature review taking into consideration teachers blending formal K-12 education structure with informal learning structures using social media tools. YouTube turns into a helpful tool also for teachers to create lesson plans, to find educational materials that support the concepts studied in the classroom and to better engage the students (Jones & Cuthrell, 2011).

YouTube, with its extensive music content and endless repetition options helps music education as well (Cayari, 2011). In recent years, numerous studies were conducted to analyze the impact of YouTube on music. In some of these researches, the content listed under the category of music education is examined (Whitaker et al., 2014); the various ways virtual music communities use YouTube to enhance informal music learning are also studied (Kruse & Veblern, 2012). Several of these researches concentrate on the role of YouTube regarding the musical learning experiences of younger children. It is suggested that audio and video recordings may be used as a tool to enhance child-centered music teaching curriculum, giving the young students the opportunity to re-listen and re-watch the activities previously done in classroom (Niland, 2009). In a research conducted among parents of toddlers, YouTube is perceived as beneficial in developing children’s music skills (Ko, 2018). However, it is difficult to navigate among the vast number of available music videos. Many parents are concerned about the inappropriate material their younger children may be exposed to while watching YouTube unattended (Ko, 2018). In the early months of 2020, most schools had to shut down across the world due to covid-19 pandemic and had to continue education using various forms of online learning. This sudden change in the educational system emphasized the need for authentic, safe, reliable, and easily accessible online educational resources designed especially for children.

Symphonic orchestras are prominent and historic music institutions. As the famous conductor Alan Gilbert (2015) states in the Guardian article, symphonic orchestras play a significant role as providers of music education. Before the onset of covid-19 pandemic, most of the renown symphonic orchestras have been offering to their community a wide range of educational music programs designed for various age groups from toddlers to adult listeners. Majority of these programs are designed to educate children of their community and to develop the love and appreciation of music from an earlier age. Most of these orchestras also support official YouTube channels to self-promote and connect with a wider audience. The purpose of this research is to explore whether the symphonic orchestras share their expertise and educational content on their official YouTube channels, to create safe and authentic online sources designed particularly for children, thus supporting the distant music education during covid-19 pandemic.

**Methodology**

Google search is one of the first mediums people go to while they are in quest of information. Most parents and students looking for information supporting the music learning would most likely do their initial inquiries online. A similar approach is used to access the available online information. Firstly, Google searches are conducted to find symphonic orchestras from various countries offering educational programs to their community. The official websites of over forty internationally recognized symphony orchestras from Europe, the USA, Canada, China,
and Austria, are reviewed considering the type of educational programs they offer to their community. The common approaches and exceptions among these programs are examined. During this research, only websites in English, French and Turkish languages are taken into consideration. Secondly, YouTube channels of these symphonic orchestras are explored, focusing mainly on the uploaded educational content, especially after the onset of covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. Among the large number of symphonic orchestras studied, the ones offering a wide and exemplary range of music education programs and having over 65,000 official YouTube channel subscribers are presented in this paper in alphabetical order.

**Berliner Philharmoniker (Berlin, Germany)**

Berliner Philharmoniker, dating back to 1882, is one the prominent orchestras of the world (History of Berliner Philharmoniker, n.d.). The orchestra offers a variety of educational activities including family and children’s concerts, open rehearsals, choral projects, lectures as well as workshops for children and young musicians with the aim of making music accessible to as many people as possible in their community. These projects, initiated by Sir Simon Rattle and financially supported by Deutsche Bank, are designed to encourage people of all ages to engage in music and to learn to listen with refined ears (The Education Programme, n.d.). During 2020-2021 season, because of the ongoing covid-19 pandemic, Berliner Philharmonic announced only a limited number of live educational concerts on its web page. Nevertheless, 60 videos from selected educational projects are uploaded to “Media Library” located under the “Education” section of the official web page providing online educational resources. Berliner Philharmoniker offers another online service titled “Digital Concert Hall” (www.digitalconcerthall.com) where registered subscribers may listen and watch the most celebrated concerts of the orchestra digitally. Some of the previously recorded educational programs may be accessed on this platform free of charge and upcoming educational concerts may be accessed by subscribing to the channel.

The YouTube channel of Berliner Philharmoniker launched on January 19, 2009, with its 367,000 subscribers is an actively used online platform (Berliner Philharmoniker, n.d.). Extensive playlists of composers, conductors, soloists, concert seasons, popular uploads, and information about the orchestra’s recordings as well as masterclasses are created for viewers. However, the rich educational programs offered by the orchestra are not shared on the official YouTube channel.

**Chicago Symphony Orchestra (Chicago, IL, USA)**

Founded in 1891, the renown Chicago Symphony Orchestra, reaches a wide audience with its seasonal concerts, national and international tours as well as best-selling recordings (About the CSO & Symphony Center, n.d.). The Chicago Symphony Orchestra also provides several different educational programs for people of all ages and various backgrounds under the roof of the Negaunee Music Institute. “Once Upon a Symphony” intended for children between ages 3 to 5 and “CSO Family Matinee Series” for children 5 years and older are inspirational events designed as introductions to live music performances. Special concerts such as “Vienna Boys Choir” and “Merry, Merry Chicago!” are created for children 5 years of age or older. In addition to these projects, “School Concerts” are arranged to introduce K-8 grade students to symphonic music. Furthermore, open rehearsals are organized for students in high school (Negaunee Music Institute, n.d.). According to the announcement accessed in October 2020 in the “Tickets & Events” section of the official web page (https://cso.org/20-21), Chicago Symphony Orchestra cancelled all scheduled programs between September 2020 and March
2021 due to the ongoing covid-19 pandemic. Since live performances are cancelled, the orchestra created “CSO for Kids” section on their website, which aims to provide fun and educational remote learning sources for children of various ages (CSO for Kids: Remote Learning Resources, n.d.). The orchestra also provides music lovers with the opportunity to watch the performances via the online platform of “CSOtv” which may be accessed via https://cso.org/csotv/welcome/. In CSOtv, “CSO for Kids” section is created to provide free access to music related videos designed for children.

The Chicago Symphonic Orchestra’s official YouTube channel was launched on April 11, 2007. The channel which has 122,000 subscribers, presents a rich selection of playlists including season trailers, interviews with guest artists, and with members of the symphony as well as clips of performances (Chicago Symphony Orchestra, n.d.). “Video Program Notes” presenting information about the pieces to be performed in the concerts and “Music NOW” about the acclaimed new-music series are two of the interesting playlists. “Virtual Recitals 2020/2021” and “Virtual Day of Music 2020” are some of the newer additions. “Negaunee Music Institute” playlist includes 36 uploaded videos providing an insight to the educational programs offered by the Institute. Family oriented Christmas programs are also advertised in short videos. Although some of the educational content is added to the YouTube channel, the extent of the educational children’s programs is not yet presented.

**London Symphony Orchestra (London, UK)**

The London Symphony Orchestra, Britain’s first independent and self-governing orchestra which gave its first concert in June 1904, is now considered as one of the leading orchestras of the world (Chronology: 1900s, n.d.). London Symphony Orchestra is also esteemed for its educational programs. “Concerts for Under-5s”, “Family Concerts” suitable for ages 7 to 12, “Monday Morning Music Workshops” for babies and for children under the age of 5 as well as workshops for parents and babies from newborn to 6 months are counted among many educational activities. These interactive, creative, and fun activities are geared towards creating interest and early knowledge in children about music, orchestra, and instruments.

LSO Discovery recently created an online resource providing a variety of music activities to support learning at home as well as at the school. These activities may be accessed on the “LSO Discovery” section of the official web page (About LSO Discovery, n.d.).

The YouTube channel of London Symphony Orchestra launched on May 19, 2006, with its 120,000 subscribers is one of the most popular orchestral YouTube channels (London Symphony Orchestra, n.d.). It offers clips of concerts, backstage interviews with the performers of the orchestra, conductors, and soloists as well as behind the scenes videos. Playlists include A-Level seminars, behind the scenes, favorites, and a variety of informative selections about the compositions. Masterclasses and video clips from the performances of modern compositions are also added. Listeners may also access live performances via the channel. “Coffee Sessions” playlist including the performances of orchestra members was added during the covid-19 lockdown in April 2020. The London Symphony Orchestra also plans to share some of the concerts on their YouTube channel during the Autumn season of 2020. Although new additions were done to the playlists since the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic, the extensive educational programs are not yet added to the YouTube channel.
New York Philharmonic Orchestra (New York, NY, USA)

The New York Philharmonic founded in 1842 is the oldest symphony orchestra in the United States and is one of the most celebrated orchestras in the world (History, n.d.). The New York Philharmonic reaches a wide audience with live concerts and with broadcasts on television, radio and online. The orchestra also organizes numerous educational programs and activities for its community. “Young People’s Concerts” incorporate a wide range of concerts designed for children of all ages. These concert series, with the addition of games, various activities, storytelling, and interactive encounters become delightful, fun, and educational experiences (Young People’s Concerts, n.d.). Long term partnership of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra with various education institutions in New York and around the world is realized under the “Learning Communities” and “Partnerships” programs (Partnerships, n.d.). These programs help orchestra members share their knowledge and experience with teachers and students. New York Philharmonic recently added “NY Phil Learning @ Home” to their official web page to support remote online music learning at home (NY Phil Learning @ Home, n.d.). This section offers various online sources including concert and lessons to engage young audiences, families, and teachers.

The official YouTube channel of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra is activated on January 8, 2008. With 68.400 subscribers, it is an actively used channel providing a wide selection of playlists (New York Philharmonic, n.d.). Performances, rehearsals, seasons selections and tours are some of the popular playlists offered. Playlists dedicated to specific performers and composers are also presented. Until March 2020, only a few videos about the educational programs offered by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra were uploaded. Following the lockdown due to Covid-19 pandemic, new playlists such as “NY Phil Plays On” and “We Are NY Phil @ Home” were created. “Very Young People’s Concerts @ Home” and “Young People’s Concerts @Home” playlists which are designed specifically for children are also added to the channel.

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (Amsterdam, Netherlands)

The idea of building a new concert hall in Amsterdam was put on motion in 1881, the Concertgebouw was opened in April 1888 (History, n.d., Concertgebouw). Since then, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra continues to give concerts as one of the most celebrated orchestras in the world (Meet the Orchestra, n.d.). In the Concertgebouw, a wide variety of age specific concerts are offered for children. “Baby Concerts” for up to 16-month-old, “Toddler's Concerts” for children from 2 to 4 years old, “Beethoven’s Birthday!” for 6 years old and older, “Be Bach” for 8 years and older audience are some of the exemplary concerts that are offered under “Family Concerts” (Family Concert, n.d.). During “RCO Meets Europe” project, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra performed side by side with 28 European youth orchestras and gave masterclasses in several countries sharing their experience and knowledge (RCO Meets Europe, n.d.). Live educational concerts are programmed for 2020-2021 season while taking the necessary health measures for covid-19.

The official YouTube channel, launched on March 29, 2007, supported by 65.900 subscribers, includes playlists presenting information about concert seasons, excerpts from concerts, behind the scenes videos and masterclasses (Concertgebouworkest, n.d.). “Complete Works” playlist gives access to recordings of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. “Historic Footage” playlist including excerpts from historic concert recordings from 1930s to 1960s is also interesting. The playlist titled “Young” includes rehearsals and interviews with members of
“Concertgebouworkest Young” which is the international youth orchestra formed of European musicians between the ages of 14 to 17. However, consisted only of 28 videos, this playlist offers a limited insight. Short video selections from “RCO Meets Europe” project is also presented in the YouTube channel. A playlist title “Zwitsal Slaapliedjes” (Sleep Songs) including 6 videos consisting of performances of short classical compositions is added in July 2020 for children. However, the wide selections of concerts that are organized specifically for children of all ages are not uploaded to the channel yet.

Discussion and Conclusion

The potential of YouTube as an educational tool emerges as the subject of numerous studies. Many of these researches agree with J. Waldron (2013) who supports the idea that YouTube videos, promoting a participatory culture, fulfills a significant teaching role. YouTube may contain valuable material regarding music instruction, but it also contains an abundance of videos without any educational value. Since being able to choose the appropriate and high-quality material among the large number of videos requires music literacy, it is difficult for most parents and students to get hold of the accurate and useful information (Spearman, 2000). Thus, it is important for trusted establishments, such as symphonic orchestras to provide high quality educational content on YouTube to provide easy and safe access to educational material.

Symphonic orchestras invest time, money, and knowhow to promote music education in their community. They put special emphasis on creating programs such as children's concerts, family concerts, school concerts, open-rehearsals and masterclasses which are specifically designed for children of various ages. These orchestras also invest in creating official YouTube channels to self-promote and to connect with a wider audience. These channels commonly include video selections from concerts, rehearsals, tours as well as season previews, interviews with orchestra members, conductors, guest performing artists and composers. Videos providing background information about the compositions performed during the concert season are also uploaded. However, videos containing their prolific and creative educational programs designed for children are not shared at all or briefly shared in the official YouTube channels.

Symphonic orchestras may take advantage of YouTube to boost the impact of their educational programs by reaching a much larger community. Music education programs of symphony orchestras are generally planned as community service and are not intended for financial profit. In this light, symphonic orchestras may upload previously recorded family and children’s concerts to their YouTube channels. They may create various playlists intended for different age groups creating easy access for parents and children. They may also program live YouTube broadcasts re-creating some of the interactive programs previously put on stage in front of a live audience. Symphonic orchestras may significantly expand their community reach by using their official YouTube channels more effectively. Thus, they would emphasize their role as one of the significant contributors of music education by providing high quality, safe and well-constructed informative content for families, teachers, and children.

The recent covid-19 pandemic forced most of the K-12 schools to abruptly switch to remote education worldwide. This sudden change underlined the need for trustworthy and easily accessible online educational resources and urged many institutions to create these necessary online sources. Since March 2020, it is observed that symphonic orchestras also started to add new educational materials designed for children to their official web pages and to their official
YouTube channels to support online music learning. It may be predicted that in near future YouTube will be used more often to support formal and informal music education. Thus, future research may be conducted about the most efficient, systematic, and inspiring ways of presenting the educational material already prepared by the symphonic orchestras in their official YouTube channels, expanding their sphere of influence and creating high quality, reliable, safe, authentic and easily accessible music education sources for children.

References


Choosing a Competitive Advantage Under the Constraints and Possibilities of the External Environment: An Empirical Study in the Retail Trade Sector in Elbasan, Albania

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Abstract

The effects of macro and micro environmental on the decisions of choosing the operations strategy in the manufacturing industry are part of a number of scientific researches. In addition to this industry, the service industry, mainly in recent years, has attracted the attention of researchers, including the way it develops operations strategies. Based on the experiences of the manufacturing sector, in this paper we will try to analyze the relationships between external environmental factors and decisions on the choice of operations strategy. The conducted study highlights important relations between these variables. Thus, technology, as one of the most dynamic macro-environmental factors, through its elements such as retail computer systems or even innovations, dictates the choice of operations strategy. While other elements, such as labor supply does not appear to have the same impact as technology on choosing the right strategy of operations in the retail sector in our country. In order to prove the hypothesis raised in this study we used the factor and the path analysis. The primary data collected through the questionnaire built specifically for this study were processed with the SPSS program.

Keywords: External environment, operations strategy, retail trade

Introduction

The external environmental, which is increasingly presented to us as dynamic and complex, operates outside the boundaries of organizations and affects their operations. These factors reflect the conditions and trends of the society within which business organizations operate. All together, whether micro or macro, they dictate restrictions and offer different opportunities. Management becomes even more effective with a careful recognition and study of these factors, in order not only to avoid the undesirable effects generated by them, but also to exploit their potentials.

Companies seeking success in today's market, which is already known as a highly competitive market, must, among other things, formulate operations strategies in accordance with the external environment with which they interact.
Operations strategies focus on how competition is changing and at the operations that need to be carried out, so that companies successfully meet current and future challenges. They also relate to the development and long-term improvement of the operations processes and resources in order to build the foundations for competitive advantages. If a business does not properly assess the strategic effects that effective management of operations and processes has, we can say that it is bypassing a very good opportunity for success. In other words, those businesses that seem to compete successfully, or have sustainable success in the long run definitely have clear, innovative operations strategies and in accordance with the environment in which they live.

Ward and Duray developed a conceptual model that established a relation between the business environment, competitive and operational strategies as well as high performance (Ward, P.T. and Duray, R., 2000). Furthermore, other researchers have conducted similar studies for developing countries in order to identify the environmental elements that influence the operations strategies implemented by manufacturing companies. (Amoako-Gyampah, K. and Boye, S.S., 2001)

Part of the group of factors that require management attention are the increase of business costs, the increase of consumer awareness, the uncertainty or unpredictability of competitors' actions, the consumer preferences, the improvement of transport efficiency and logistics, as well as the governments' pressures, regulatory supervisors, trade unions and developments in information and communication technologies. (Lo, T.W., Lau, H.F. and Lin, G., 2001)

Our country, due to the considerable number of small businesses, the number of which in 2018 was 162,835 businesses of which 93,048, or 57%, are sole proprietorship, offers sufficient space for researches of this kind. In the retail sector, according to the Institute of Statistics (December 2018), the sales index increased by 3.7% on an annual basis. This is the highest retail growth in recent years.

This study is focused on retail sector in Elbasan. Elbasan is a city n the very center of Albania. Its population is around 270 000 citizens and 13 400 active enterprises. Its purpose is to investigate how different environmental factors influence the choice of competitive operations strategies in terms of coping with a harsh, complex and dynamic environment. We will try to identify specific relationships between elements of the external environment, such as business costs, labor supply, competition and technology, and the content of operations strategy which focuses on the competitive advantages of a business organization, such as low cost, quality, flexibility and delivery.

**Literature review**

Fierce competition, technological developments, consumer preferences and perceptions, regulatory background, the lack of stability in fiscal and monetary policy, trade unions and the increasingly difficult relations with suppliers make the environment in which organizations operate an equally complex and dynamic one. External environmental factors are factors that operate outside the boundaries of an organization and that affect its operations. The spectrum of macro and micro environmental elements reflects the conditions and trends of the society within which the business organization operates. Managers study these factors not only to avoid their undesirable effects, but also to effectively exploit the potential opportunities created by them. (LLaci, 2010, p. 39). Thus, for example, if we refer to the laws and regulations in force, it can be noticed that when businesses operate in countries with strong laws and regulations, they tend to search and find out more about strategies (Santema, S.C. & Hoekert,
Marijke & Rijn, Jeroen & Oijen, Aswin., 2005). The same authors note that companies with a centralized decision-making structure pay less attention to research on strategies, as it is believed that by being more centralized they are informed more efficiently using other channels rather than strategies. The businesses in countries, whose societies are afraid of the uncertainty of the future and who try to avoid it and the risks that it is accompanied by, need more rules and laws. Societies that do not avoid the risk and the uncertainty of the future are more open and welcome the challenges of competition and convey more and more information to the public (SP, 2012).

Various researchers have concluded that operations strategies are an important contributor to successful business competition in both domestic market and exports (Singh, H., & Mahmood, R., 2014). High productivity of the production function is seen as a key contributor to business success (Singh, Sanjay & Kagwala, Mohamedi & Parker-Thornburg, Jan & Adams, Henry & Majumder, Sadhan, 2010). This importance has been studied together with the ability of strategy to adapt to environmental changes generated by technology and market demand fluctuations (Dombrowski, Stephan & O’Carroll, Ronan & Williams, Brian., 2016).

On the other hand, the strategy is conceived as a managerial mechanism used to reach conclusions which coincide with the company's mission and objectives (Hitt, Michael & Ireland, R. & Hoskisson, Robert., 2013). Functional level strategies support business and corporate objectives and strategies; they are the competitive advantages that the company possesses. Manufacturing operations support business and corporate strategy by providing resources and conditions to achieve its objectives (Slack, 2007). The unique architecture of each strategy is what ensures an essential strategic contribution to achieve and maintain a competitive advantage. All this leads us to conclude that business organizations do not have one, but several operations strategy. Each of them has a unique and individual emphasis that is dictated by a number of factors such as trading partners, supply system configuration, costs, demand behaviors, etc (Venetike Nakuçi, Ali Turhani, 2012).

Each of the performance objectives has an external aspect, which leads to customer satisfaction, and an internal aspect, which leads the organization to efficiency and sustainability. Quality, for example, is the most visible part of what an operation does. High quality products and services mean higher customer satisfaction and therefore the customer is expected to return again. Speed is related to the time customers have to wait for receiving their products and services, but also to the value of the goods on the shelves. The speed target brings among other things, even the reduction of the inventory and risk. If we refer to reliability or security we could interpret it as the security that customers receive goods and services when promised. Security saves the organization time and money, and gives stability. The vast majority of operations performed by a business organization are able to change in order to meet the requirements of its customers. This ability to change is related to the competitive advantage of flexibility, i.e., the ability to offer a wide range of products and services, by changing the level of production and activities carried out. The flexibility speeds up the response, saves time and maintains the certainty that operations will take place as planned. When treating competitive advantages we can not ignore costs as one of the most long-standing advantages. If business organizations compete directly on price, low cost will undoubtedly be their main objective. The way a manager influences the costs of operations depends largely on the origin or place where they arise. In this way, cost structures and categories take on special importance. Cost is affected by all the performance objectives mentioned so far, therefore within the operation, one of the ways to improve the cost is exactly
the performance improvement of other objectives, namely quality, safety, delivery and flexibility.

The need to adapt the operations strategy to external environmental factors is supported by some empirical studies, which show that different environmental dimensions make manufacturing and service organizations react differently. The mediating effect of competitive strategy suggests that environmental dynamism has a significant impact on production strategy, but this impact is articulated through and modified by competitive strategy (Ward, P.T. and Duray, R., 2000). Other authors have identified strong relationships between environmental factors, such as labor supply, fierce competition, state laws and regulations, political concerns, and market dynamism with operations strategies included by competing priorities (Badria, M.A., Davis, D. and Davis, D, 2000). The unpredictability parameters or instability of environmental dynamics play a crucial role in determining the types of flexibility strategies (Anand, G. and Ward, P.T., 2004). High environmental dynamism fosters more operations strategies, which further emphasizes the need for high delivery performance, flexibility and competitive quality priority. Due to the proximity of the service business to customers, service operations need to be extremely sensitive to customers and markets. The operations strategy needs to be changed and adapted to maximize market criteria for success and to choose strategic dimensions such as efficiency, price, effectiveness, quality and flexibility as required by the market. Variables such as stock, physical space of the sales environment, the system in terms of operations recovery, standards and staff, otherwise known as 5Ss, are recognized as essential drivers of the benefits of this type of business (Pal A John and Byrom W John, 2003).

The operational mediocrity is due to a lack of knowledge on the real availability in the store and out-of-stock situations at the point of sale and the ignorance of the consequences that these situations create (Raman, A. & Dehoratius, N. & Ton, Z., 2001). The current debates point to the fact that the combination of production factors in the grocery retail; such as staff, space, assortment, etc, are what explain the existence of certain types of retail stores, and lead to specific outputs. Sometimes these factors are the reason why some of these businesses operate with very low profit margins. What we want to emphasize is the fact that the consequences of the lack of effectiveness in operations and related strategies are evident. The discussion on retail operations should not be avoided, rather it should be given more attention by researchers and not only. Nowadays retailers face up and take quite complex decisions. Decisions involving not one but several issues, such as deployment, assortment, target market selection, supplier negotiation, challenge motivation, technological innovation, competition, applicable laws and norms, all of these are now realized under a competitive and global environment. (Michael Leavy and Barton A. Weitz, 2001).

**Retail sector in Albania**

The high informality and unfair competition are the main issues facing the retail market in our country. Lack of market regulations and operation outside any standards, especially in food industry is one of the problems. Creating, respecting and controlling standards would create a more efficient and effective operation, increase quality, service, security, promote international trade, etc (Qefalia, 2010). Albania is part of a group of countries with a very high degree of informality and, consequently, tax evasion. The black economy at these levels has brought negative effects related to unfair competition, created by businesses that evade taxes (Teuta Balliu, Aida Gaçe, Mimoza Kotollaku, Vol 1, Issues 2, 2012).
According to the EU Council data during 2018, 55% of Albanian businesses have had an annual turnover of up to 500,000 Euros, a study which emphasizes once more the importance of this sector in the Albanian economy (https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/38667).

The same study of the Council of Europe states that the biggest problems faced by business in our country are related to the skills of employees and experienced managers, competition, finding clients and costs, which includes both labor costs and production costs (https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/38667). The World Bank estimates that even though Albania has adopted a wide variety of rules to monitor abuses; their implementation remains weak due to ongoing informality in the workforce. According to the business environment observation and enterprise performance, competition from the informal sector was the second biggest problem for Albanian companies. More than 40% of firms surveyed by the World Bank reported competing against informal firms in the sector. This unfair competition is high among SMEs, as 41% of them report competing with unregistered businesses compared to 27.8% of large firms.

On the other hand, according to the Institute of Statistics, INSTAT, for 2019, the sales volume index in the retail trade has increased by 3.5%, compared to the same quarter of the previous year, this in excluding the retail trade of hydrocarbons. The group of "Food, beverages, tobacco in non-specialized and specialized trade units", has an increase by 3.2% in the sales volume index, compared to the same quarter of 2018. The sales volume index, for the group "Non-food items in specialized and non-specialized trade units", has increased by 3.8% compared to the same period of the previous year. As for the group "Trade of hydrocarbons in specialized trade units", the sales volume index increased by 2.3%, compared to the same quarter of 2018. In the first quarter of 2019, the seasonally adjusted sales volume index, in the group "Retail trade, excluding retail trade of hydrocarbons in specialized units", has not changed compared to the fourth quarter of 2018. The seasonally adjusted sales volume index in “Food, beverages, tobacco in non-specialized and specialized trade units” group increased by 0.3% compared to the previous quarter. The sales volume index, seasonally adjusted, in retail trade, for the group "Non-food items in specialized and non-specialized trade units", has increased by 0.7% compared to the previous quarter. In the group "Retail sale of hydrocarbons in specialized trade units", the seasonally adjusted sales volume index, increased by 2.5% compared to the fourth quarter of 2018.

Graph 1: Retail trade volume index
Methodology

I order to carry out this study we initially developed a conceptual structure to link the business environment and operations strategy (see Figure 1). This framework defines the business environment as a potential driving force in choosing the appropriate operations strategy. The business environment is presented by four factors which are not controlled by the management of business organizations, such as business cost, labor supply, competition and technology. Meanwhile the operations strategy reflects one or more of today’s four competitive advantages, low cost, quality, flexibility and delivery.

![Conceptual structure of linking environment to the strategy of operations](image)

Figure 1: Conceptual structure of linking environment to the strategy of operations

There are a number of studies that have developed conceptual models that link the business environment to operations strategy, and among them there are researches where environmental factors are explicitly involved in the study of service operations strategies, especially in small and medium business. Therefore, it is worthwhile to continuously encourage research linking the business environment with the operations strategy in the retail sector.

The research question of this study relates to how environmental elements influence the selection of operations strategy.

Its hypotheses are constructed precisely with reference to the above structure. Their aim is to examine the specific nature of any relationship that exists between the constraints and opportunities of the business environment and the dynamics, and the operational strategies selected by the business itself. We are interested to know if there are direct paths between each of the external environmental factors and the choices of previously identified operational strategies. In order to understand the nature of the relationship between these factors the following hypotheses have been raised:

H1: Business cost has a significant impact on the choice of operations strategy with low cost, quality, flexibility and fast delivery.

H2: The labor supply has a significant impact on the choice of strategy of operations with low cost, quality, flexibility and fast delivery.

H3: Competition has a significant impact on the choice of strategy of operations with low cost, quality, flexibility and fast delivery.

H4: Technology has a significant impact on the choice of low cost operations strategy, quality, flexibility, and fast delivery.
Descriptive and analytical analyzes have been used to achieve the purpose of this quantitative research, and the data used are primary and secondary ones. The secondary data are obtained from various literatures in the field of business management, operational management and operational strategies. Whether the primary data were provided by a questionnaire built specifically for this paper. They were further processed with the statistical program SPSS. Factor analysis and statistical analysis SEM (Structural equation modeling) were used to analyze the data and derive its results. The data were provided by business organizations in the retail sector in the city of Elbasan. The sample consisted of retail traders operating in both the food and non-food sectors. A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed, of which 83 were completed, a figure that shows about 69.1% of the answers. After reviewing them, we found that 9 out of 83 questionnaires were not completed properly and could not be used, concluding that 74 questionnaires were further analyzed. Four dimensions are included in this study certainly referring to previous studies. These dimensions are conceptually related not only to the obstacles or difficulties, but also to the facilities offered by the external environment:

business costs, or otherwise concerns about the rising cost of inputs in the operations process, for example labor, rent, transportation and utility costs.

labor supply, often referred to as job availability, which is mainly related to concerns about market shortages of skilled workers and technicians, as well as managerial and administrative workers.

competition as a reflection of concerns about changes in the market such as increased competition, declining demand for products, low profit margins, tougher quality standards set by the market, and the division of state laws and regulations.

technology which as a whole can be seen as current production knowledge of products and services. Its impact is reflected in new products, modern machinery and equipment as well as new services. The technological changes of recent years and their application on decision-making have completely changed the nature of the workplace. Technological factors will become even more important in the future. Technology as one of the most dynamic elements of nowadays is analyzed referring to the technological sales system, electronic data exchange system which enables business-to-business connection as well as new logistics systems which refer to the speed of response to demand side in order to keep pace with demand and coded commodity bars which enable unique identification and tracking of all components and products through a supply chain.

As we have previously pointed out, the strategy of operations is related to the competitive advantage in the market, and this is why we are focused on today's four competitive advantages, which are widely used as measuring instruments of operations strategies. More specifically we focused on cost, quality, delivery and flexibility.

The questionnaire used the "importance scale" that an organization gives to an element in order to remain competitive. (Kirsty Williamson, Graeme Johanson, 2017). Scales range from from 1 or "not at all important" and up to 5 or "very important". We used four questions to assess low cost, looking at the degree of importance placed on reducing high-level costs, inventory levels, and increasing utilization of equipment and private sales. Quality was assessed with three more questions. The questions were focused on the extent of importance attached to providing appropriate specifications about goods and services, improving the
performance and reliability of goods or services, and the managerial function of quality control of goods and services, requiring suppliers to pass a formal certificate of quality control and improvement system. We have tried to analyze the delivery performance by the speed, reliability as well as the improvement of the service after the purchase. We also tried to explain flexibility through the flexibility of goods and services, the mix of flexibility, the flexibility of volume and the flexibility of offers.

Results

All the questionaris were fulfilled by diferent business manager. All of them have more than five years experience in the retail sector.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) includes, among others, as special cases path analysis and covariance structure analysis. Path analysis is an extension of the regression model, used to “test the fit of the correlation matrix against two or more causal models which are being compared by the researcher”. The model is usually depicted in a circle-andarrow figure in which single arrows indicate causation. Path analysis offers some distinct advantages including the identification of direct and indirect effects in a complex system of variables, and the convenience with which intervening variables could be included in the model. Ward and Duray (2000) employed a path model to link environment, competitive strategy, manufacturing strategy and performance (Ward, P.T. and Duray, R., 2000). So, we decided that path analysis would be an appropriate technique to use in this research. The results of data analysis are presented below. First the results of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) are reported. Then, we examine the impacts that environmental factors have on the operations strategy choices through the path analysis.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Principal component analysis with an oblique rotation was first undertaken on business environment and operations strategy measures to examine the underlying dimensions of the constructs. Factor analysis for the environmental factors produced four dimensions with eigenvalues greater than one (see Table 1). Moreover, Table 2 shows the results of operations strategy choices encompassed by competitive priorities. As shown in Table 1 and 2, some business environmental variables were deleted in analyze because of the low reliability. This might have occurred due to unique business culture in our retail industry, sample size, and perception of the respondents. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was used to examine the reliabilities among the items within each factor. If slpha coefficient is higher than 0.60, generally is considered acceptable. From Table 1, we can see that the loadings of the first four factors were larger than 0.60, representing an acceptable significant level of internal validity. The first factor including two items was entitled business cost. The second factor contained three items that reflected the labour offer. The next factor, competition, included two items that related to demanding quality standards as well as government laws and regulations. The next factor, labelled technology, contained three items including rate of changes in retail technology and innovation of new service development. Since all these four factors loadings were of an acceptable significant level, all these items were retained for further analysis. The factors who have indicated a low reliability (below 0.60) were excluded from further analyses. The item ECOST3 - rising transport cost was also deleted from further analysis, since it had significant loadings in more than one factor.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Factor Loadings</th>
<th>Alpha &amp; Cronbach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 1: Business cost</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOST1 - Work cost</td>
<td>0.764</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOST2 - Rent cost</td>
<td>0.699</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 2: Labor offer</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGP1 - Managerial and administrative expenses</td>
<td>0.798</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGP2 - Technicians expenses</td>
<td>0.765</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGP3 - Skilled worker expenses</td>
<td>0.744</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 3: Competition</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECON4 - High quality standards</td>
<td>0.841</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECON5 - Laws and regulations</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 4: Technology</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETEC1 - Online sales</td>
<td>0.723</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETEC2 - Changing retail technology</td>
<td>0.825</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETEC3 - Service innovations</td>
<td>0.728</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Factor Loadings of Business Environment (EFA)

As shown in table 2, the 13 items of operations strategy loaded on four factors. The items loaded on the first factor, low cost, involved the operations strategy of reducing operations cost. The second factor, quality, included three items about providing high quality products and services for customers. The third factor reflects the competitive priority of flexibility. The last factor includes three items about offering reliable and fast delivery and after sales service for customers, and was named delivery. The alpha coefficients for the four factors were 0.642, 0.594, 0.680, and 0.861 respectively. These values are either close to or exceed 0.60 criterion generally considered adequate for exploratory work.
We used the hypothesized model to test model fitness by performing a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) on the survey data. In assessing model adequacy, we used several recommended tests: the Chi-square value normalized by degrees of freedom ($\chi^2 / df$), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the goodness-of-fit (GFI). A GFI and CFI greater than 0.90 are generally considered as a satisfactory fit, a value greater than 0.95 as a very good model fit. An RMSEA between 0 and 0.05 indicates a good fit and that between 0.05 and 0.08 an acceptable one. And, the Chi-square value normalized by degrees of freedom ($\chi^2 / df$) should not exceed 3.

As shown in Table 3, the results of CFA provided significant support for business environments conceptualizations ($\chi^2 = 35.285; df = 35; (\chi^2 / df) = 1.008; RMSEA = 0.038; CF1 = 0.953; GFI = 0.929$). Table 3 also indicates that CFA results provided good fit for the four-factor (low cost, quality, flexibility and technology) solution for operations strategy. Hence, these results can be considered significant in statistical terms.

### Table 2: Factor loading of operations strategy (EFA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Variance explained (%)</th>
<th>Cronbach alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DELIV 2 - Delivery promises</td>
<td>0.886</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DELIV 3 - After sales services</td>
<td>0.912</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3: Summary of fit statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operations Strategy</th>
<th>Variance explained (%)</th>
<th>Cronbach alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 . Low cost</td>
<td>58.698</td>
<td>0.637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 . Quality</td>
<td>63.108</td>
<td>0.589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 . Flexibility</td>
<td>60.521</td>
<td>0.676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 . Delivery</td>
<td>76.987</td>
<td>0.839</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Goodness of Fit Statistics: $\chi^2 = 79.352; df = 57; (\chi^2 / df) = 1.392; RMSEA = 0.056; CF1 = 0.929; GFI = 0.908

Path analyses

The results of path analyses are shown in fig. 2. The path coefficients (standardized regression coefficients) are shown on the arrows. The path analytic model indicates that the technology has the direct positive and significant effects on the degree of emphasis placed on low cost ($\beta = 0.62, p < 0.01$), quality ($\beta = 0.47, p < 0.01$), and flexibility ($\beta = 0.55, p < 0.01$). The data also suggest that the predictors of quality are competitive and technology. Competitive has a
slightly significant impact on the choice of quality as a component of operations strategy ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.10$). As we can be see, business cost appears to slightly influence the operations strategy choices of delivery performance ($\beta = 0.228, p < 0.10$). However, environmental concern about labour offer does not appear to have any direct effect on the operations strategy selections. Our hypotheses relating business environmental factors and operations strategy choices require the existence of at least one path between an environmental dimension and an operations strategy choice. The observed positive and significant direct impacts of the environmental dimensions on the operations strategy indicated that H1, H3, and H4 can not be rejected, but H2 can be rejected. Business environmental factors, including business cost, competitive, and technology, appear to affect operations strategy selections made by retail firms in our country. Labour offer has no direct significant effects on any of the operations strategy choices.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

In this paper we have observed some important paths or links between the dimensions of the business external environment and the strategies of operations performed by retail businesses. One of our findings is that business cost has a significant direct impact on delivery performance. The cost of doing business in our country is increasing. Increased rental and transformation costs and current global crisis add to the cost of doing business. Various studies point out that business cost is the difference that has a significant effect on distribution performance between different businesses. Similarly, service and retail sector businesses which face rising business costs also responded with a greater emphasis on delivery performance.

The pathways model also suggests that businesses retail sector facing tough competition put more emphasis on quality. Consumers, especially in big cities, are becoming smarter and more
demanding in terms of quality and variety. More and more consumers have started to pursue better quality of life through higher quality products and fashion clothing.

The analysis also shows that technology has the most significant impact on operations strategy choices, affecting three out of four choices. It has strong positive effects on the degree of emphasis placed on low cost, quality and flexibility. Some of the strategic retail responses to technology are: increasing emphasis on cost reduction, quality and flexibility. Currently, retail trade faces several challenges such as; the growing need for information, innovation and faster development cycles and more difficulty in forecasting customer, product and service requirements. Moreover, with the development of the retail market, information technology will have an impact on the overall business efficiency of retailers and will affect operations ranging from online purchases to procurement and supply chains. Thus, retail traders aiming to succeed in the retail market need to consider technology, reduce operations costs through the effective application of information and technology, and create new products and services, and amazing results for their customers. However, the pathway model suggests that labor supply has no significant direct effects on any of the operations strategy solutions in this sector. This is not surprising when we consider the current business environment in which retailers operate in our country. Most retail traders that respond to the questionnaire may not feel that they are facing a critical job shortage, referring to the skills or qualifications needed by typical retail employees.

In order to survive in a complex and dynamic environment, appropriate environmental considerations must be considered when a firm develops a comprehensive operations strategy. Retail trade should be very careful about the current dynamic market environment, especially when developing effective and efficient operations strategies, such as providing customers with high quality products and services, reducing operating costs, and improving flexibility. Retail businesses need to provide reliable and fast delivery and increase after-sales service for their customers if they want to reduce the costs of doing business.

An important limitation of this research is that some variables, which we initially thought might be relevant to the business environment, had to be excluded due to low reliability. This may be a result of the unique characteristics of the retailer, the sample size and the different perception of the respondents. Furthermore, even though all businesses involved are retail traders, the following study should consider the fact that the market, services, and operations strategy are very different among retailers to respond to the same environmental stimulus.

This study is conducted in the retail sector as a whole; further researches can take into consideration that the market, the services, and the operational strategies are really different among different retailers such as supermarkets, clothes and others, and maybe they react differently to the same enviromental factor.

Bibliography


Impact of Online Music Competitions on the Young Musicians’ Professional Skills and Their Musical Development During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Classical music competitions present a medium for the development and motivation of young musicians. In this context, they prepare young musicians to professional life and play an important role in their career. Online competitions became more popular due to the Covid-19 pandemic with an increasing number of high professional quality applicants. This research aims to focus on the impact of online music competitions on the young musicians’ professional skills and their musical development. The research will set forth the differences between online competitions and real life competitions from various aspects such as application process, video presentations, and efficiency of the young musicians in using available technology, jury formation, evaluation of the applicants’ performances by the jury as well as the applicants’ evaluation of their own performance among other applicants.

Keywords: online music competition, young musicians, technology, covid-19

Introduction

Music competitions which have existed since early ages have become popular in the 20th century and have added to their momentum a tool of advancement: the online format in the 21st century, reaching a peak during Covid-19, a pandemic which has been a threat to humanity world wide. Affecting life seriously and causing a collapse in the range and number of many activities, Covid-19 had a catastrophic impact on the lives of the mature professionals and young musicians. Their performance, career, and motivation were jeopardized. As Einstein had claimed in his famous quote, “in the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity”, this exceptional period of pandemic has taken us to crossroads with technology. Hence, this paper will examine online competitions from the perspectives of their brief history; organizational input, professional jury formations~ academicians, scholars and transparency of evaluation norms; young musician contestants; requirements for participation in competitions with appropriate use of technology; the quality of contestants' submissions; their self-learning, self-evaluation from the preliminary to final stage; worldwide viewers; and the merits of the overall musical experience of the online competitions from pedagogical and artistic perspectives.

The methodology in the presentation of information in this paper will be submission of research material, concerning the history of online competitions and their organizational design from reliable sources that are documented in the references. This information will proceed with observations of competitions, viewed either personally or obtained from
professional musicians’ critiques in scholarly journals. Observations as an international competition jury member, myself, together with those collected from organizers, other jury members or contestants, themselves will additionally add genuine methodological value to this paper. Feedback from contestants concerning all stages of preparation, application, performance, and submission will be another component of methodology that will lead itself to recommendations in the conclusion.

History

Starting with the history of competitions, it’s known that Greek and Roman societies considered competitions as a central part of the worship of their gods, associated with religious processions and a sacrifice. It’s observed that from the time of the first music competitions held in Athens in the fifth century B.C. to the Middle Ages, “the victors of the contests were called laureates and contests among troubadours, trouvères, minnesingers, and Meistersingers became common” (Iakovlev, 1966). In the 18th century, prominent composers competed in performances with their instruments such as the organ, clavichord, harpsichord, and the violin.

The modern form of music competition originated in the 19th century as the first national music competition was held in France in 1803. Later were established national music competitions for composers in England for Mendelsson Award (since 1848 – held in London once every 4 years), in Austria – for Beethoven Prize (since 1875 – in Vienna – annually), and others (Yakovlev 1974). What started the trend of an international competition in various European capitals at a regular basis was A. Rubinstein's organization of an international competition of pianists and composers in St. Petersburg, in 1890 and its regular repetition every five-years till 1910. When music competitions started to become widespread in Europe in the 20th century, they served as the basic means for discovering young talents. The establishment of The Federation of International Music Competitions with its headquarters in Geneva was an important event in 1957. Since 1959 the Federation’s issuing an annual bulletin with international competitions, their programs of rounds, the number and amount of prizes, instrument and age categories, and other details increased awareness for organizations of competitions (Iakovlev, 1966).

The most important contemporary international competitions included the P. I. Tchaikovsky Competition (Moscow), the Queen Elisabeth Competition (Brussels), the M. Long and J. Thibaud Competition (Paris), the F. Chopin Competition (Warsaw), the H. Wieniawski Competition (Poznan), the Young Opera Singers’ Competition (Sofia), the G. Enesco Competition (Bucharest), the Budapest Competition, the Prague Spring Competition, the Performing Musicians’ Competition (Geneva), the J. S. Bach Competition (Leipzig), the R. Schumann Competition (Zwickau), the Pianists’ Competition (Leeds), the Orchestral Conductors’ Competition in Rome, and the N. Paganini Competition in Genoa (Iakovlev, 1966).

The starting of World War II affected life to a great extent in Europe and as a natural consequence, the organization of music competitions came to a pause. Poland saw the first edition of the International Chopin Competition in Warsaw as founded by the Polish pianist Jerzy Żurawlew in 1927. A German air raid on Warsaw in 1939 completely destroyed the Warsaw Philharmonic building, but the competition endured the conflict and restarted in 1949, returning to a newly restored concert hall in 1955.
Among the oldest-running classical music competitions in the world was also the Queen Elisabeth Competition, held in Brussels. Created under the impulse of Belgian violinist, conductor and composer Eugène Ysaÿe and HM Queen Elisabeth of Belgium, it was held for the first time in 1937, the first laureate being Soviet violinist David Oistrakh (Volpi, 2018).

When World War II swallowed up Europe, the competition was suspended. This event was however very dear to the Belgian queen, and restarting it in 1951 was seen as an integral part of the healing process of the country. It was broadcasted via radio starting in 1951, with television programming beginning in 1960 and online streaming in 2001 (Volpi, 2018).

World War II devastated Europe, but one competition managed not to have their programme interrupted: The Geneva International Music Competition in Switzerland, which had started in 1939 under the name of Concours International d'Exécution Musicale (CIEM). Founded by Austrian musician Frédéric Liebstoeckl with Henri Gagnebin, the Director of the Geneva Conservatoire at the time, it had among its first winners pianist Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli and soprano Maria Stader. While the war spread across the continent, the competition persevered. Although it was no longer marked as international, it continued to harbor musicians from all over Europe, welcoming artists as refugees and helping them with the competition’s monetary prizes. Famous names who won accolades during the war included Hungarian-born pianist and conductor Sir Georg Solti and Austrian violist Paul Doktor. In 1946, after the end of the conflict, the competition restored its international credentials.

In France, the Long-Thibaud Competition opened its doors in 1943 and the name was changed to Long-Thibaud Crespin in 2011, when a voice prize inspired by operatic soprano Régine Crespin was added. Its founders, pianist Marguerite Long and violinist Jacques Thibaud, are quoted in an article published in 1947 on French newspaper, Opéra, talking about their desire to encourage young musicians by giving them hope. While it was impossible to dream of an international competition in an occupied France, they still went ahead with a national event in 1943 (Volpi, 2018).

The International Tchaikovsky Competition, founded in 1958 was perhaps the world’s best-known gateway to musical success. Thirty-two years after its foundation the Association of Tchaikovsky Competition Stars (ATCS) was formed, whose approximately 100 members were all prizewinners of past competitions, including such illustrious names as violinist Gidon Kremer and pianist Van Cliburn. The ATCS promoted concerts and festivals and funded scholarships, but one of its most ambitious ventures was the founding of the Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians, which was held for the first time in Moscow in 1992 (Sazonova, 1978). Its aim was not simply to identify talent early but also to support financially. Prizewinners were expected to tour Japan, Russia and other countries with the ATCS covering the expense. The second competition of the same Association, jointly organized by the Russian and the Japanese, took place in Sendai, Japan between August 24-September 10, 1995. Part of the philosophy of the competition was that it should move around the world to allow young musicians to participate more easily, returning to Moscow every four years (Chadwick, 1996).

In today’s world, international classical music competitions are becoming sites of the global cultural public sphere, whereas traditional festivals had previously served as “arenas where nations competed for supremacy” (Volpi, 2018). As competitions have become more globalized, they have created opportunities to foster cosmopolitan sociability and cultivate global values such as “cooperation and collaboration” (Lowe, 2018). Competition Versus Cooperation: Implications for Music Teachers What has added to this communicative function
is the Internet that has connected the peoples of the world regardless of geographical divides or financial status.

With the convenience and efficiency of the internet and online services being well understood in practical terms, there has been an increased popularity of technology in competitions. This new challenge has gradually increased competence and in correlation with it “quality” for organizers, jury members, contestants, and performance viewers, that is the silent audience attending concerts at the comfort of their homes.

As Dr. Taylor from Columbia University said in a New York Times article “Technology is not an end in itself, it is a means to accomplish what is important to you” (Auh, 2019), the Internet was a facility that musicians who could not attend competitions physically used at the beginning of 2000. However, in the following years its use had a peak, diminishing expenses of travel for the contestants and their instruments, or/and their parents’ in the case of young prodigies; their accommodation costs and provided the comfort of contestants’ own recordings. Technology’s being used as a valuable tool could not be ignored during the period of Covid-19 as it became a worldwide epidemic affecting people’s lives, many activities and their involvement in music as performers.

Observing the existence of the many online competitions since the beginning of the 21st century on the Internet through their websites, it can be said that there has been a tremendous increase in the number of online competitions, particularly for the young musicians, concerning various instruments and different age groups at different venues, not necessarily prominent European capitals, but cultural centers known with their reputation in music in the past.

The below given competitions are only some of the well known competitions in Europe that have helped young musicians’ voice to be heard and changed their lives with the merits of technology and online format even before the uproar of Covid-19:


One competition that has started to be online due to Covid-19 is: Young Musician International Competition ‘Città di Barletta in Italy whose organizational focus I, as their jury member, having witnessed their conscientious concerns, know very well: [http://www.culturaemusica.it/public/wordpress/?page_id=49&lang=en].

Besides websites that provide information about application formats, electronic audition submissions or evaluation procedures, the presence of a “web concert hall” is also an innovation of modern times in the study of competitions’ history. The idea for a Web Concert
Hall evolved while Yoon-il Auh, a 10-year-old violin prodigy in South Korea in 1971, worked on several projects with Dr. Taylor in later years, including one project an educational ear-training application called Wiz Ear and a Web database of audio clips from more than 200 of Bach’s cantatas. Dr. Tailor and Yoon-il Auh started the Web Concert Hall www.webconcerthall.com in 1998 and it has achieved its goal until now. Youn-il Auh recently divides his time between the site, his job as an associate director for distance learning at New York University and his own software company, Intrepid Pixels (Auh,Y. 2019).

**Competition Organizations & Juries**

The idea of music competitions as a healing and uniting force for the world is echoed in a statement by Yehudi Menuhin, who headed the violin jury at the Long-Thibaud Crespin Competition from 1993 until his death in 1999. In 1996 he was quoted saying: “we gather here, the jury members and I, not to measure the distance that separates the participants from each other, but rather to highlight the level of connection that they have achieved [...] at the service of music and humanity” (Volpi, 2018).

Every year, promising young musicians emerge as prize winners in major competitions around the world. These competitions allow their talent to be noticed, and subsequently bring in concert engagements and recording contracts. Some of these competitions have a long and prestigious history, while new competitions are also coming up in various parts of the world at different levels.

Victoria Borisova-Ollas, composer, winner of several national and international awards and Member of the Board of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music had emphasized the importance of online competitions in her words “The North International Music Competition is a great opportunity for young musicians to develop their skills as performers already at the early stage of their careers. Making music at the highest professional level is not an easy task. Let this wonderful event encourage you for a life-long mission of being passionate and successful professional performers!” (Borisova-Ollas, 2020)

What is the importance of an organization when the main focus is competitions? It’s definitely the organization of a competition that reveals its credibility and echoes its mission, strategies of work, evaluation processes, and awarding tools through a website that is its voice. The organization’s reliability, accuracy of work, convenience of its tools, and clarity of information presented are all important that serve for transparency and confidence in the product, which is the essence of the competition (Parncutt, 2018). Website of the organization is usually taken as the Competition website. It must start with a mission statement that explains the philosophy, the objective of the organization and the competition (Todes, 2014). It has to include information about the application process for the registration to be done easily, accurately, and on time. That means competition calendar that gives the deadlines; procedures to be followed for registration and the submission of the performance’s recording; instrument categories together with the need for accompaniment; solo, duo, or chamber music categories; age categories; number of rounds if required; time limits for age groups or instruments; composition of the jury, jury members’ names, titles and affiliation. Evaluation policy with variations for solo, duo, or chamber music must be precisely given to avoid ambiguity. Information about the awards for the Absolute, First, Second, Third prizes calculated by adding the scores given to each contestant from the evaluation table must be very explicit. Diplomas, scholarships, and mansions; presence of gala concerts are also center of attention topics. Three main prize-winners may also receive medals and grants from commercial
sponsors. There may be special awards for the youngest competitor as well as awards for the best accompanists and even the best teachers in each section. All this information on the organization or conference website might be of special value to reflect the voice of the organization and the competition.

As a competition may be unique to one instrument or may be divided into sections for different instruments such as the piano, violin, cello, flute, harp or others; and as there may be different age groups from a wide range of countries, juries must be composed of adequate number of international members—professionals, academicians, or contest winners—instrument and age group specifications always taken into consideration for quality of expertise. The composition of juries must aim at excellence in the profession.

Competition websites may also list their rules as articles to define the implementations required for the smooth-going of competitions. Some articles may serve as conflict resolution tools in the case of discomfort or misunderstandings. With global interests and search for standards within a global context, musicality and artistic values can be kept running parallel to technical skills. It’s wise for competition websites to indicate how they set their norms specifying their evaluation criteria. The norms set by international jury members for the evaluation of contestants’ performance determine the standards for both technical and artistic characteristic of the performance of each contestant regardless of age and instrument (Checka, 2018). The presence of this information on the competition website is useful for international viewers who keep a close eye on social media for their own evaluations.

Adding my experiences of having taken part in five international classical music competitions as a jury member for the cello, live (once) in International Competition Young Virtuosi-Sofia, Bulgaria (2011); once in International Benyamin Sömez Cello Competition-Fethiye, Turkey (2017); once in Young Musicians International Competition-Barletta, Italy (2017) before the pandemic Covid-19; and online--once in International Music Competition-Belgrad, Serbia (2020); (once) in Young Musicians International Competition ‘Città di Barletta in Italy (2020) again after the pandemic Covid-19, I can compare live and online competitions and say that online competitions do not definitely degrade the quality of the international music competitions.

Besides my observations as a jury member at international classical music competitions, my students’ participating in many international music competitions and their being the recipients of numerous First, Second or Third Prizes in the last 10 years have made me and my students acknowledged about the components of “well-organized music competitions” which mean “quality” from the perspectives of organizers, contestants, juries and viewers.

We believe today, with no more miles traveled, no money invested in contestants’ or their instruments’ plane or train tickets, and no costs of accommodation, no concerns for other means of transportation, online competitions will serve the same goals as do the live competitions, avoiding the risk of a pandemic. Today, with efficient digital access young talents can reach a potentially large audience as music competitions offer both excellent visibility and technical accuracy.
Participants & Learning Value

In the 21st century, we have come to the understanding that music means life and we care for the younger generations with a talent for music, for they mean hope. Seeing the deterioration of some values and the collapse of some systems especially threatened by a pandemic, we want to encourage young musicians to perform technically and artistically well, to grow, excel in their profession and build excellent careers. A competition can offer many benefits to young musicians and provide a platform where they can feel comfortable competing. We believe that developing confidence in themselves as well as in others, young musicians can realize their dreams and potential. This is an achievable goal. Our purpose is to discover artists of outstanding personality and provide awards which can help to launch international careers. Aside from rigorous training and natural talent, we look for performers with a strong artistic personality and stage presence. The emphasis is therefore not on the purely technical aspects of the performance, but also on the overall artistic impact of the performer.

Impact of online music competitions on the young musicians’ professional skills and their musical development is undeniable. The educational value in young musicians’ self-evaluation of their own performance as they choose their best recording is immense. Why academicians, jury members are in favor of online competitions; why the implementation has grown popular among applicants, and how quality is ensured through the processes of preparation and selection need to be focused on from an educational perspective.

When we consider the benefits gained from participating in music competitions, we see that they are an opportunity to overcome technical, musical, artistic, and mental challenges. In the special case of being “online”, these competitions grant the contestant the opportunity for self-analysis and self-evaluation. What the contestant experiences as he/she chooses the best recording of his/her performance to be sent to the competition is the best teaching a musician can get.

An online competition is also a chance to observe one's peers and judge their performance. The contestant can gauge his/ her own strengths and weaknesses against those of his/ her peers. Thus, the contestant is now his own judge to make his/her own “SWOT Analysis”. Seeing his/her Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. He/she learns and hence the young contestant is on the road to perfection. This is a highly celebrated victory!

Transparency and the Value of International Viewers

McLuhan claims that “the most notable difference of a new society of the twenty-first century from the previous societies has been the rapid spread of global information networks, the Internet and electronic communication technologies. The Internet has revolutionized how people work, disseminate the results of their work and new knowledge, and culture and peoples of the world have the opportunity to be much closer than in the previous era”. Interestingly, long before the mass distribution of the Internet M. McLuhan used the term "global village", which to some extent reflects the essence of the Internet. Thanks to the technological improvement there has been a significant compression of time and space, people around the world have become closer to each other. According to the scientist, "breakthroughs" in electronic communication technology provide new unity of all people on the level of emotional and bodily experiences, therefore, as a result of unprecedented technological development occurs electronized "global village" (McLuhan, 1964). In light of this paraphrase, a young talent’s musical performance can reach the prominent international
professors and professionals of a highly recognized competition jury, crossing oceans and continents and gets evaluated within the norms of the competition right after the performance and scores are seen on the screen when the evaluation finalizes. The young talent’s life changes within minutes as the organization announces the scores and the grants offered electronically. Time and space meet at a juncture as the 21st century’s little devil, Covid-19 smiles from a corner. The whole picture is transparent. International viewers are delighted to have watched a concert, not paying for a plane, or a train, not booking a hotel room, not rushing in the street to reach the Concert Hall. They get connected in a global village.

Conclusion

This study provides information about the importance and function of online formats of music competitions that have been developing in recent years for young musicians in the threatening and restricted world of Covid-19 that has affected the whole world. Gathering the whole world on a digital window, the internet prepares young musicians for real life stage performance, performance evaluation and critics; and thus, becomes a general rehearsal of real life for real live concerts. Through the competitions, young musicians have the opportunity to prepare themselves for professional life by observing their peers around the world, perceiving their different comments and understanding jury evaluations with the best possible adaptation on the online platform. We will witness the increase of these competitions altogether in the future.

All in all, with what has been collected from various professional written sources or through contestant feedback and personally experienced through live or on-line contests, it can be said that young musicians are offered a facility out of the catastrophe of Covid 19 that has affected the whole world. What can be recommended is that young musicians should use this facility wisely to benefit from the online competitions as the digital medium can enhance the student contestants’ performance mentality. They are equipped with skills development strategies that they discover themselves as they perform many times at their convenience and submit the best of their performance to the organization designing the competition. Young musicians are also given the choice to compare their performance with that of their peers, hence they should benefit from this transparency of performances as well as the evaluations of the juries. Another recommendation is, using this facility, student contestants can also broaden their repertoire and apply for many competitions. One final recommendation may be, being contemporary and coping with the requirements of modern times, that is digital technology, they can reach many other musicians; observe their work across borders, and feel they belong to a wider community of musicians.

References


Risk Behavior Versus Self-Care in Adolescents

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Abstract

The presented paper is focused on the issue of self-care as a possible predictor of risky behavior in the target population of adolescents. The first part of the paper is focused on the theoretical basis of risky behavior and then on the basis of self-care. Within risk behavior, the paper discusses the characteristics of this concept, the factors influencing the risk behavior of adolescents and also the basic forms of risk behavior in the target group. Within self-care, the paper focuses on defining the basis characteristics of the concept and subsequently on the self-care factors proposed for adolescents and on the self-care as a preventive factor. The second part of the paper focuses on the results of research in the researched issues. The research is focused on demonstrating the differences and relationships between the examined variables.

Keywords: Self-Care, Risk Behavior, Adolescents, the Forms of Risk Behavior, the Factors of Self-Care

Introduction

The concepts of self-care and risk behaviour are interconnected. During adolescence, risk behaviour is more frequent, but self-care can reduce it. The first part of this paper presents a model of risk behaviour with the focus on adolescence. Subsequently, the theoretical background for self-care in adolescence and the components of self-care are explained. Besides general self-care, specific self-care components focused on school and family are also relevant for adolescents. This part of the paper deals with self-care as a risk behaviour prevention factor. The second part of the paper is empirical and presents the research results. A correlation between the variables was discovered, which is important. Statistically significant gender differences were also discovered for both self-care and risk behaviour.

The model of risk behaviour

Identification of risk behaviour as a phenomenon was preceded by a broad range of social and cultural changes. These changes include weakening of the socialising and individual functions of family, urbanisation, impersonal relationships, constant changes in the labour market, and also digitalisation. In relation to these changes, early childhood is no longer the highest-risk stage of life – adolescence is (Kagan, 1991, in: Čerešník, 2019). Adolescents are the highest-risk group because they are undergoing personality changes. Under the social influence of their peers and broader social environment, they change their behaviour and experiment with a variety of addictive substances, or identify with different subcultures (Lichner, Šlosár, 2017). During adolescence, risk behaviour increases, which affects their physical or mental health.
(Nielsen, Sobotková et al., 2014). Through risk behaviour, adolescents try to reduce the undesired and achieve the desired, leave the common and familiar, and separate from their family, i.e. they search for ways to saturate their unfulfilled needs and seek people who can provide them with social comfort (Čerešník, 2019). Individual forms of risk behaviour usually involve a compromise between a short-term gain and potential long-term negative consequences (Orosová, Gajdošová, Madarasová-Gecková, van Dijk, 2007).

Risk behaviour is determined by the ratio between risk and protective factors. This ratio further determines whether occasional experimentation turns into a risk behaviour syndrome in adolescence. The protective factors can effectively balance out the influence of the risk factors. It can also be assumed that thanks to the protective factors, problematic behaviour will not develop in adolescents (Jessor, 1991). The function of protective factors is usually understood as their ability to directly influence risk behaviour. The goal of these factors is to affect the consequences of risk behaviour, disrupt the interaction between multiple risk factors, or even prevent the emergence of risk factors in the first place (Orosová, 2007).

There are two basic lines of thinking about risk behaviour. In the broader sense, risk behaviour is defined as a social construct comprising a variety of behaviours, which pose health, social, and psychological risks to an individual as well as their social environment (Siruček, Siručková, Macek, 2007). In the narrower sense, such behaviour puts the adolescent’s identity, health, or life at risk; complicates or prevents healthy, standard separation from parents; and damages the adolescent’s future self-esteem and self-worth (Kocourková, Koutek, 2003).

The causes and development of risk behaviour are multifactorial, i.e. certain interaction of biological, social, and mental factors comes into play (Vágnerová, 2004). The emergence of risk behaviour in adolescents also depends on individual and environmental factors (places where the adolescent spends their free time; place where they are growing up; school environment; peer environment) (Punová, 2012; Kipping et al., 2012).

Risk behaviour can be divided into the following five basic categories:

- **intellectual/mental**: related to manifesting knowledge and potential in front of the others, which may put the person at risk of alienation from their peers
- **social**: includes changes in the social or peer group; socialisation is very important during adolescence as the person is learning how to join a collective
- **emotional**: manifesting fear; other members of the social group learn about the adolescent’s vulnerability
- **physical**: taking risk to achieve a success and win a position among the peers
- **spiritual**: a change in religious beliefs may lead to developing risky spiritual habits (Neihart, 1999)

The aforementioned categories of risk behaviour may have vast consequences for the emergence and increase of socially pathological phenomena in different risk groups. However, it is generally assumed that such increase can be eliminated by means of properly targeted preventive programmes at primary and high schools.

Specialised literature specifies three main areas of risk behaviour symptoms. The first area relates to **addictive substance abuse** (the adolescent is motivated to overuse addictive substances in order to be included in the peer group); The second area includes **psychosocial**
manifestations (antisocial behaviour often referred to as behavioural disorders) and the third area affects reproductive behaviour (premature sexual life, promiscuity, risky sexual behaviour) (Jessor, Turbin, 2010; Čerešník, Gatial, 2014; Novotný, Okrajek, 2012). The research presented in this paper focuses on the aforementioned risk behaviour areas. Specifically, they are addressed in the questionnaire of risk behaviour, which was used to collect data on the individual forms of risk behaviour in adolescents.

The main and most frequent forms of risk behaviour in adolescents include delinquency and criminal behaviour, addictive substance abuse, bullying, hostility, risky sexual behaviour, eating disorders, behavioural disorders, self-harm and suicidal actions (Dolejš, 2010; Miovský et al., 2012; Macek, 2003).

The model of self-care in adolescents

Self-care is perceived as a form of protection from undesirable environmental phenomena. The interest in a comprehensive concept of self-care as a means to improve one's health and well-being is recurrent. On the other hand, it can also be used to reduce the negative effects of the environment (El-Osta et al., 2019). Specialised literature defines self-care as a set of activities performed on one's own initiative with the aim to self-regulate their functioning and development (Godfrey et al., 2011; Denyes, Orem, Bekel, 2001). However, no complex framework capturing self-care in its complexity is available so far. The fact that the concept still has not been unified may be hampering its further development.

Self-care comprises four main dimensions:

**Self-Care Activities** represent the dimension focused on “self”. It includes activities related to individual self-development. Appropriate intervention improves the individual's overall health and well-being. During adolescence, it is important to focus on activities that will not affect further development negatively.

**Self-Care Behaviours** focus on activities promoting positive behaviour in individuals. This dimension is individually oriented but can be extended to a community or society through positive interaction and suitable tools. Positive peer influence during adolescence can reduce risk behaviour at this stage of development.

The **Self-Care Context** as a dimension focuses on the individual's overall reliance on resources. Based on the level of reliance, intervention is targeted at the healthcare system in the country or at supporting the individual.

The **Self-Care Environment** is nation-wide. It depends upon the prevailing cultural and social attitudes. This dimension relates to public health in the whole country (El-Osta et al., 2019).

2.1 The components of self-care in adolescents

The components of self-care in adolescents focus on the specificities of adolescence as a developmental period. The components, which will be specified further on, focus on three areas: psychological, physical, and social, but they also have to do with the environments in which the adolescent lives (school, family, peers). Specialised literature distinguishes six main self-care components in adolescents.

School self-care strategies – school is considered a space for education, which has a major effect on the individual's formation. The whole system is determined by social relationships (Lee, Bryk, Smith, 1992). The school is a space in which students develop mutual relationships
and are subject to social influence; they also form relationships with teachers and authority in general (Obdržálek, 1999; Szijjártóová, Malá, 2008). Besides education, school also fulfils the need for socialisation, therefore, it is perceived as a social institution (Havlík, Kotá, 2002). The school environment creates and maintains complex networks of social relationships and significantly affects thinking, attitudes, and feelings. It also plays a role in the formation of culture, habits, and rituals (Juhássová, Debnáriková, 2016). Inchley et al. (2016) and Zelina (2000) emphasize that good education provides great prevention against behavioural issues, personality disorders, or loss of the meaning of life. External support plays an important role in learning how to perform self-care. Parental support is the most necessary when school-aged children are learning self-care (Kello, Martikainen, Eriksson, 2011).

Social climate in the school environment – the school climate affects the quality of interpersonal interaction, which indicates the level of performance, cooperation, and competition. The overall climate is created by the relationships between teachers, students, school management, and other upbringing factors involved in the process. Social climate can be divided into social climate in the school environment and classroom social climate. Social climate in the school environment is considered an organisational element as it is affected by the school as an organisation. A school that creates healthy environment provides an accepting, supportive, and beneficial climate and builds a quality reputation (Szijjártóová, Malá, 2008). Classroom social climate is created by the students themselves; their relationships, mutual support and cooperation are important.

Deliberate problem-solving strategies – this component focuses on the individual’s ability to deal with problems related to school, family, or their own personality. Positive problem-solving strategies enhance learning and school performance, increase creativity and improve understanding of complex situations (Stuchlíková, 2002). In general, maladaptive and adaptive strategies exist. Maladaptive strategies use ineffective procedures and result in failure, which further decreases the individual’s well-being. Adaptive ones are effective and play a specific role in creating psychological well-being, i.e. they are positive determinants.

Universal self-care – refers to day-to-day activities in an adolescent’s life. This component involves the individual’s level of independence in the self-care activity. In this case, universality refers to prevention of negative behaviour, balanced periods of activity and relaxation, and self-support for proper functioning (Hartweg, 1991). According to Jaarsma et al. (2003), self-care can be universal and it can be invited by health problems or the developmental context.

Adolescents’ free time – the ways in which adolescents spend their free time change along with society itself. Over time, the responsibility for the child’s free time and the way it is used is transferred from parents to other people (siblings, friends, teachers, tutors...). The individual’s scope of interest and activities is broadest during adolescence in comparison with other stages of life (Sak, 2000). Adolescents’ free-time activities can be divided as follows: cultural, extroverted, manual, sport (Kraus, 2006).

Family-oriented personal component – during adolescence, individuals start focusing on themselves and their relationship with people close in terms of age or interests. It is a period of emancipation from their own parents (Macek, Lacinová, 2006; Vágnerová, 2012; Macek, Štefánková, 2006). In family, efforts to gain more equality can be observed while among peers,
the adolescent tries to find their place (Macek, 2003). The changing quality of interpersonal relationships during adolescence is one of its basic psychosocial characteristics.

Factors of self-care are determined by the characteristics of an adolescent, self-care as such, but also support provided by parents, school environment, and peers (Kelo, Martikainen & Eriksson, 2011). At the time, the adolescent is in the process of creating their own self-image and self-assessment, i.e. these attributes are not stabilised yet, and the person is also learning self-efficacy (Macek, 2008) – all these aspects affect the factors of self-care.

**Self-care as a preventive factor**

Self-care can also be considered a preventive factor as it reduces risk behaviour symptoms. If self-care is lacking, the probability that risk behaviour symptoms will occur increases. Self-care as a factor preventing negative phenomena in behaviour works in the following way: early positive intervention in the form of preventive programmes, activities, and methods influences the individual and may reduce or even eliminate their risk behaviour.

Literature distinguishes three basic forms of prevention. They involve activities focused on self-care, which provide proper help, support, and company (Orosová, 2003; Schavel, Čišec̆ky, Olá̆h, 2010).

*Primary (universal) prevention* as the first form should be provided at schools before undesirable behaviour occurs. Primary prevention takes the form of workshops, preventive programmes, and lectures given by experts (Emmerová, 2003).

On the other hand, secondary (selective) prevention focuses on tackling a specific, already existing problem (Božeková, 2014; Kulifaj, 2017). It provides early intervention and identifies individual as well as group problems. Secondary intervention is focused specifically on the individual at risk. The goal of this form of prevention is to stop a disorder from developing further (Svetlíková, 2018).

*Tertiary prevention* aims to reduce risks resulting from socially pathological phenomena and improve individuals' lives. It comes into play if primary and secondary prevention fail. Tertiary prevention can take the form of preventive programmes focused on reducing and removing the existing symptoms of risk behaviour.

The main goal of prevention is to deliberately promote non-risk and socially accepted forms of behaviour instead of the risk ones. Self-care in prevention should influence all areas of individual development as well as the environment in which the adolescent lives. The goal of prevention is not only to temporarily avoid certain negative environmental factors, but also apply appropriate methods and perform activities promoting desirable behaviour. The legislative framework of social prevention specifies it as an inseparable part of social work (Galáš, 2006). Lack of self-care may trigger the development of socially pathological phenomena in adolescents. To sum up, lack of self-care is a potential risk factor.

**3. Research**

Self-care is a rather new concept when it comes to the adolescent population. In a broader sense, this study investigates the increased risk behaviour during adolescence. Specifically, it focuses on the relationship between self-care and reducing risk behaviour in adolescents as a target group, and in this part, the research results will be presented.
3.1 Methods

SCA – questionnaire about self-care in adolescents (Lichner, Petriková, Žiaková, 2020). The questionnaire was designed specifically for adolescents as the target group. The questionnaire consists of 35 items and the participant is asked to express their agreement or disagreement on a 6-point Likert scale; 1=strongly disagree to 6=strongly agree with the given statement. The 6-factor research instrument comprises the following factors: SOS school strategies, social climate in the school environment, deliberate coping strategies, adolescents’ free time, and their family. The reliability (internal consistency) of the research instrument was α=0.876. Internal consistency of the individual factors ranged from α=.

RBQ – Risk behaviour questionnaire (Lovašová, 2019). The instrument focuses on risk behaviour in adolescents. The questionnaire consists of 28 items and the participant is supposed to express their agreement or disagreement on a 5-point Likert scale; 1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree. Again, the questionnaire investigates six factors: xenophobic and aggressive behaviour, virtual reality, risk health habits, internet addiction, self-harm, risk sexual behaviour. The respondent is also supposed to complete “During the last year, the following happened to me...”. This instrument focuses on delinquency-related issues during adolescence, sexual risk behaviour, problems related to information technologies, eating disorders, and xenophobia. Internal consistency of the research instrument was α=0.863. Internal consistency of the individual factors ranged from α=0.653 to 0.809.

The questionnaire also collected sociodemographic data (age, gender, place of living, information on relationships with peers and family).

3.2 Research file

The research file consisted of 364 respondents (boys=112; girls=268; 5 respondents did not specify their gender). The mean age was 17 (4 respondents did not specify their age). (SD=0.818; Min=14; Max=19). The selection can be described as stratified random data collection. Selection in the classroom was not random as all the students present at the time participated as a compact group. The research instruments were administered personally during classes. The research sample consisted of high school students in the Slovak Republic. Educational background was divided as follows, 70 participants had studied at a medical high school; 41 at a business academy, 82 at a vocational high school; and 192 had studied at grammar schools.

3.3 Organisation of the research

The research was performed in January 2020. Stratified random selection was used (by drawing lots). Students from several type of high schools across Slovakia were invited to participate in the research. Specifically grammar schools, vocational high schools, business academies, and medical high schools. The second and third year students were addressed. The research was performed in the following municipalities: Trnava, Prieyvda, Nitra, Rakovice, Banská Bystrica, Trenčianske Teplice, Žilina, Martin. The questionnaire was administered in person during the classes and the students had one whole lesson to complete it.

3.4 Research results

In this part of the paper, the selected results of the research performed will be presented. It focused on high school students in the Western part of Slovakia.
The research goal was to investigate the relationship between self-care and risk behaviour in adolescents.

Tables 1 and 2 show the internal consistency of the research instruments; the highest value was measured in the “school self-care strategies” component in the questionnaire about self-care in adolescents. The factor with the highest internal consistency in the RBQ questionnaire of risk behaviour in adolescents was the one focused on risk health habits.

Fig. 1 *Internal consistency of the questionnaire of self-care in adolescents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-care components</th>
<th>School self-care strategies</th>
<th>Social climate in the school environment</th>
<th>Deliberate coping strategies</th>
<th>Universal self-care</th>
<th>Adolescents’ free time</th>
<th>Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>α</td>
<td>0.796</td>
<td>0.734</td>
<td>0.720</td>
<td>0.744</td>
<td>0.628</td>
<td>0.763</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 2 Internal consistency of the questionnaire on risk behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk behaviour components</th>
<th>Xenophobic and aggressive behaviour</th>
<th>Virtual reality</th>
<th>Risk health habits</th>
<th>Internet Addiction</th>
<th>Self-harm</th>
<th>Risk sexual behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>α</td>
<td>0.653</td>
<td>0.674</td>
<td>0.809</td>
<td>0.706</td>
<td>0.688</td>
<td>0.689</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3 Age distribution of research sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 3, the primary research sample consisted of adolescents studying at high schools. The target group was selected deliberately based on its developmental specificities and increased tendency to risk behaviour. The respondents’ average age was 17 years.

The focus was on the relationship between overall self-care and overall risk behaviour in adolescents. The Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient (non-parametric statistics) was used for statistical processing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCA</th>
<th>RBQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$r=0.324$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 4 The correlation between self-care and risk behaviour

*** p<0.001

Table 4 shows a statistically significant correlation between the concept of self-care and the concept of risk behaviour p(α)=0.000. The relationship between the investigated variables is medium strong but negative. Negative correlation indicates that as one variable increases, the other decreases. It means that increased self-care reduces risk behaviour in adolescents.

Subsequently, gender differences were investigated in all self-care components. The differences can be seen in Table 5. Gender differences in self-care components were identified using the Mann-Whitney U test. Based on these results, it can be stated that statistically significant differences were found in two self-care components. Specifically, deliberate problem-solving strategies and adolescents’ free time. Other self-care components showed certain gender differences as well, however, none of them statistically significant.

Fig. 5 Gender differences in the self-care components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCA component</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>Med(x)</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>p(α)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCA1</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
<td>0.972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCA2</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>-1.063</td>
<td>0.288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCA3</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-3.179</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCA4</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>-1.676</td>
<td>0.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCA5</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>-1.862</td>
<td>0.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCA6</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>-0.230</td>
<td>0.818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** p<0.001


The following table shows gender differences in adolescent risk behaviour. Statistically significant differences in components focused on xenophobic and aggressive behaviour, risk health habits, and self-harm were confirmed. Some differences were found in other components as well, but none of them statistically significant.

Fig. 6 Gender differences in the risk behaviour components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RBQ component</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>Med(x)</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>p(α)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RSI1</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>12.54</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-3.819</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>10.11</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBQ2</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>-1.114</td>
<td>0.265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>5.74</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The investigation proved gender differences in self-care and risk behaviour within the target group.

**Discussion and conclusion**

In this part of the paper, the results will be compared with other research focused on similar subject matter. Kirk and Pryjmachuk (2019) researched self-care in adolescents with persistent mental problems. Their research sample consisted of adolescents under 18 years and their main research method was the meta-analysis of research findings. The study showed that self-care improves mental health in adolescents and reduces the consequences of mental disorders. The research also showed that self-care reduces the costs of health care in mentally ill adolescents. Masoumi and Shahhosseini (2019) performed a similar study focused on challenges related to self-care faced by adolescents. Their summarising study analysed a database of previous research. They found that self-care in adolescents differs based on age, gender, and other demographic factors. The main finding was that the expert working with adolescents must be properly acquainted with universal self-care. Besides other factors, the research presented here focused on the gender differences in the individual self-care components. A statistically significant gender difference was confirmed in the component focused on adolescents’ psychological attributes (SCA3). Other components showed certain differences, but none of them statistically significant. The findings confirmed that to reduce the probability of risk behaviour, it is necessary for adolescents to perform self-care activities.

Pašková, Stehlíková, Valihorová (2018) performed a study of risk behaviour in early school aged children from the teachers’ perspective. The research sample consisted of primary school pupils (N=316) and 20 teachers at the first stage of primary school. The “Risk behaviour in pupils” scale (Mezeň et al., 2000) was used to measure risk behaviour and the authors also measured the gender differences in the individual forms of risk behaviour using the Mann-Whitney U test. Results showed significant gender differences in almost all forms of risk behaviour (asocial, antisocial, impulsive, maladaptive, negativistic behaviour). They used the same RBQ questionnaire of risk behaviour (Lovašová, 2019) as this study. The research also confirmed gender differences in the individual areas of risk behaviour in adolescents (xenophobic and aggressive behaviour, virtual reality, risk health habits, Internet addiction, self-harm, risky sexual behaviour). Interestingly, our research revealed a higher rate of risk behaviour in girls than in boys. On the contrary, Pašková, Stehlíková and Valihorová found a higher rate in boys. The discrepancy may result from age differences between the research samples in these two studies.
Selecká, Václavková, Blatný, and Hrdlička (2017) focused on the typology of antisocial behaviour in adolescents. They used data from the SAHA project and investigated the gender differences in the given type of behaviour. Their results showed that boys and girls differ significantly in almost all aspects of antisocial behaviour and its symptoms (smoking, alcohol, other drugs, sexual activity). The cluster of problem-free individuals in their research file is larger among girls. Again, in our research sample, girls showed a higher rate of risk behaviour than boys.

The presented paper aimed to define self-care in adolescents as a target group. The importance of self-care to reduce risk was confirmed in the research sample. It can be assumed that self-care has a positive effect and reduces risk behaviour symptoms. Based on the presented theoretical and empirical findings, it can be stated that the area of self-care needs to be developed. Its potential could be used positively for preventive and intervention programmes as well as in new methods of working with adolescents as a target group.

References


The paper is a part of the VVGS-2020-1414 “Tvorba dotazníka pre meranie úrovne starostlivosti o seba u adolescents/Design of a questionnaire measuring self-care in adolescents“ research project.
Risk Behaviour on the Internet in the Context of Loneliness in Adolescents

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Abstract
The aim of this paper at the theoretical level was to characterize risk behaviour on the Internet including its forms. In the theoretical part of the paper, the authors clarified, among other things, the issue of loneliness and outlined the most common causes of loneliness. The authors defined loneliness from the viewpoint of adolescence as a developmental period. At the empirical level, the aim of the authors was to identify differences in the incidence of risk behaviour on the Internet in adolescents in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics. Another goal was to point out the correlations between risk behaviour on the Internet and loneliness.

Keywords: Risk Behaviour on the Internet, Internet, Loneliness, Adolescence, Adolescents, Forms of Risk Behaviour on the Internet

Introduction
The Internet and the risks it poses globally cannot be considered brand new, but they remain highly topical. Most research focused on experiencing loneliness so far has indicated that risk behaviour on the Internet may occur as a result of individual loneliness, which represents a predictor of risk behaviour and risky use of the Internet (Caplan, 2007; Ceyhan a Ceyhan, 2008; Kim, LaRose a Peng, 2009; Morahan a Schumacher, 2003). Only few studies have investigated the relationship between loneliness and risky use of the Internet from the opposite direction. Some studies focused on specific forms of risk behaviour as a predictor of experiencing loneliness (Yoder, Virden and Amin, 2005). Banerjee and Rai (2020) have pointed out that significant social-economic, political, and psychosocial impacts from the current situation can be observed. Billions of people were quarantined to contain the infection. However, social isolation leads to chronic loneliness and boredom, which may have negative effects on physical and mental well-being (Banerjee and Rai, 2020). In such situations, an individual seeks substitute resources to eliminate loneliness. The Internet belongs among these resources as an inseparable part of not only adults’ but also adolescents’ lives today. These times are marked with changes, which affect everyone. COVID-19 is being addressed not only in medicine, but also in humanities and social sciences. It is because COVID-19 is closely connected with social isolation. Adolescents had to adapt to the online environment in education and started using the Internet even more than before. The information and communication technologies (ICT) have truly become an inseparable part of their everyday life. Social interaction with teachers, classmates and friends shifted suddenly and unexpectedly moved to the Internet. What is the impact of this change on adolescents’ mental
health and the development of their personal identity? This paper clarifies the relationship between risk behaviour on the Internet and loneliness. The level of loneliness experienced before the COVID-19 pandemic started will be described in the discussion. Other changes related to the current situation will be pointed out and this study will be compared with previous research.

**Risk behaviour on the Internet**

Risk behaviour on the Internet in the context of adolescence can be described as participation in situations, which increase the probability that the adolescent’s personality or other people will be negatively affected. These negative effects include emotional issues, victimisation, deterioration of social or academic performance (Valcke et al., 2011).

Risk behaviour on the Internet can be addressed from a number of viewpoints as the Internet provides a broad variety of possible uses. It means that adolescents can engage in risk behaviour in a range of areas on the Internet. All these areas would be impossible to address in a single study. Therefore, this research focused on the activities performed most frequently by adolescents on the Internet that pose a potential risk. Hamburger and Artzi (2003) have pointed out that people use the Internet in different ways based on their personal preference.

The research performed by Gregusová, Tomková and Balážová (2010) has identified gender differences in the activities performed by adolescents on the Internet. They found that girls prefer to chat and engage in social networks while boys prefer playing online games. In terms of risks, boys may be more at risk from online game or pornography addiction as well as online shopping scams. Girls are more at risk from interaction with other people on social networks. Such risks include sexual harassment and contact with sexual aggressors. Benkovič (2007) has stated that the most frequently visited websites relate to gambling and dating.

**Types of risk behaviour on the Internet**

From the psychopathological point of view, risk behaviour can be divided into these categories:

- behavioural disorders
- mental disorders and behavioural disorders caused by the use of psychoactive substances
- habit and impulse disorders
- non-addictive substance abuse
- disorders related to sexual object preference (Čerešník a Gatial, 2014)

However, this categorisation is not ideal, as some potential risk behaviour areas are missing. For example, non-substance addiction such as Internet addiction, social network addiction, shopaholism, etc. These issues pose mainly a social and interactional risk (Čerešník a Gatial, 2014).

Another risk behaviour categorisation specifies two basic groups. The first one includes behaviour causing mental and physical issues in adolescents, and the second one is related to the influence created by other people and often associated with social risk (Macek, 2003).

The concept of risk behaviour usually includes non-substance addictions such as gambling, ICT misuse, etc. (Miovský et al., 2010). Besides general divisions, ICT-related categorisations
have been emerging recently. The “new” forms of risk behaviour have been defined. They result from modern communication addictions which represent the primary consequences of this type of risk behaviour (Lichner and Šlosár, 2017). Young (1999) has determined four categories of specific Internet addiction forms: They include virtual sex addiction, virtual relationship addiction, online gambling and shopping addiction, information addiction, and computer addiction.

The basic characteristics of non-substance addictions are very similar to the best known non-substance addiction so far, a habit and impulse disorder – pathological gambling. It includes these symptoms:

- strong desire for pleasant experience and deep involvement
- difficulty controlling the activity
- preferring the activity to other activities
- performing the activity despite emerging problems (Benkovič, 2007)

The progress in society reflecting the development of ICT along with premature adolescence should not be used as an apology or explanation for the adolescent's failures. Instead of creating specific primary prevention programmes focused on a single problem, it is necessary to focus on development and support of the adolescent’s personality. Proper attention should be paid to developing social skills so that the adolescent learns to realize they are responsible for their own behaviour (Madro a Kohút, 2016).

For this research, Blinka's categorisation (2015) of the Internet areas in which problems may arise will be used

- virtual sexuality
- virtual relationships
- information
- social networks
- computer addiction

These components cannot be referred to as risk behaviour on the Internet as such since, they merely refer to categories that pose a risk. However, their individual characteristics integrate the symptoms of risk behaviour on the Internet. Virtual sexuality as such is not considered risk behaviour on the Internet, but some of its manifestations are. For example, the overuse of pornographic websites, sharing nudes in private messages or publishing them on public websites. Risk behaviour in virtual relationships may manifest as complete involvement, preferring them to real-life relationships and the inability to see the difference, or using a false identity to establish virtual friendships. Information-related risks include the urge to constantly look for information, trust in disinformation, misusing information for one’s own benefit, etc. The main point of social networks is to facilitate communication. In this area, risk behaviour includes excessive communication in the virtual environment at the expense of real-life, aggressive, vulgar, and other negative forms of communication. Internet compulsions are also an interesting phenomenon in the virtual environment; this term refers to excessive online gaming, unregulated online shopping, etc. (Blinka 2015, Young 1999).
Risk behaviour on the Internet also includes cyberbullying and real-life meetings with people met in the online environment (Guadix-Gámez, Borrajo a Almendros, 2016). Paluckaitė and Matulaite (2016) have divided risk behaviour on the Internet into five basic forms: risky sexual behaviour, communication with strangers, sharing personal information, cyberbullying, and access to age-inappropriate websites.

To sum up, specialised literature offers numerous categorisations of risk behaviour on the Internet. Some of them overlap while some do not. However, all of them share one attribute – the presence of negative phenomena frequently faced by adolescents. A negative phenomenon refers to any negative content or behaviour across which the adolescent may come in the virtual environment.

**Loneliness in adolescents**

Today, adolescents can use a variety of ways to interact with other people. They can use anything from text messages and online social networks to extracurricular activities to socialize. However, their feelings of loneliness and isolation are increasing. Many adolescents have stated that they feel lonely even in the presence of their family and friends (Margalit, 2011).

Peplau and Perlman (1982) have characterised loneliness using three characteristics:

- loneliness is subjective – it results from our own interpretation of events
- loneliness can be seen as a consequence of certain deficiencies in interpersonal relationships
- loneliness is unpleasant

Intense physical, cognitive, or emotional developmental experience, an identity crisis, or the need for individualisation and autonomy may lead the adolescent to experience loneliness. There are also individual attributes that may enhance loneliness. For example, low self-respect, deficient social skills or self-confidence, unrealistic expectations from social relationships, and frequent conflicts with parents (Tabak and Zawadzka, 2017).

A partial goal of this study is to seek appropriate intervention to eliminate loneliness resulting from risk behaviour on the Internet. It is of key importance to find out why the adolescent escapes into the virtual environment in the first place, because their reasons are the primary factors affecting the emergence of further issues resulting from the adolescent’s decisions.

**Research**

The primary goal of this research was to empirically identify the correlation between risk behaviour on the Internet and loneliness. It also aimed to identify the differences in incidence of risk behaviour on the Internet in terms of sociodemographic characteristics of adolescents. Last but not least, the research focused on identifying predictions for risk behaviour on the Internet related to loneliness in adolescents.

This part of the paper describes the research performed and the methods applied.

**Methodology**

The research was performed using quantitative methodology. A questionnaire was used to perform quantitative research. The questionnaire battery consisted of multiple parts. The first part aimed to collect data on risk behaviour on the Internet, the second part identified the level
of loneliness, and the third part focused on demographic data and other information necessary for the research.

A Risk Behaviour on the Internet (RBI) questionnaire created by the authors themselves (Vašková and Lovašová, 2020) was used to identify the incidence of specific forms of risk behaviour on the Internet. The respondents were asked to mark their answer on a 6-point scale (1–Never to 6–Always). The Cronbach's alpha of the RBI questionnaire was 0.885. It consists of 37 items divided into 3 basic dimensions. The three dimensions integrate different forms of risk behaviour on the Internet.

**Virtual sexuality** – overuse of pornographic websites, sharing nudes in private messages or publishing them on public websites. (Cronbach’s alpha=0.785)

**Social networks** – excessive communication in the virtual environment at the expense of real-life, aggressive, vulgar, and other negative forms of communication. (Cronbach’s alpha=0.796)

**Internet compulsions** – excessive online gaming, unregulated online shopping. (Cronbach’s alpha=0.783)

The standardised UCLA loneliness scale (Russell, 1996) was used to identify the level of loneliness experienced in adolescents. The scale consists of twenty statements measuring the subjective feeling of loneliness and social isolation. Half of the statements reflect satisfaction with social relationships and half reflect dissatisfaction. The respondents can mark the answer on a 4-point scale (1–Never to 6–Always). The Cronbach’s alpha of the original UCLA scale was 0.89–0.94. The Cronbach’s alpha measured by the research team was 0.89.

The questionnaire battery also included sociodemographic characteristics necessary for the purpose of the research.

**Research file characteristics**

The research sample consisted of 200 respondents. 124 female and 76 male respondents participated. The respondents were selected using cluster random sampling. The gender distribution of the research sample can be seen in the chart below.

![Gender Distribution](chart.png)

62% Female, 38% Male

The sample was also divided according to age. The research file included adolescents in middle to late adolescence, i.e. 13–21 years of age. The age distribution can be seen in Table 1. The average age of the research sample was 16.62 years.
Statistical processing of the results and their interpretation

In this part of the paper, the research will be presented. It focused on (1) gender differences and (2) age differences in the behaviour on the Internet. Besides differences, correlations between loneliness and individual dimensions of risk behaviour on the Internet were investigated. A combination of correlation and causal-comparative research methodology was used and the results were processed using the SPSS statistical program. Results can be seen in the tables below.

The first part of the questionnaire aimed to identify the rate of risk behaviour on the Internet in adolescents using the authors’ own RBI questionnaire. The respondents with higher scores showed higher rates of risk behaviour on the Internet. The respondents with lower scores showed lower rates of risk behaviour on the Internet. The maximum and minimum scores were 222 and 37 respectively. The average value of the answers on the scale from 1—Never to 6—Always in the research sample was 1.94.

The second part of the questionnaire aimed to identify the level of loneliness in adolescents. The maximum and minimum scores were 80 and 20 respectively. The higher the score, the higher the level of loneliness. The average score in the questionnaire focused on the subjective feeling of loneliness was 2.18.

Gender differences in the incidence of risk behaviour on the Internet

The Mann-Whitney U test for two independent samples (Z=-0.329) was used to identify gender differences in the incidence of risk behaviour on the Internet. The table below shoes that p(α)=0.742, therefore no statistically significant difference in terms of gender could be observed. Females in this research demonstrated more risk behaviour on the Internet than males, but the difference is insignificant. It can be stated that there are no statistically significant gender differences in risk behaviour on the Internet, although certain differences can be observed.
Age differences in the incidence of risk behaviour on the Internet

Besides gender differences, age differences in risk behaviour on the Internet were also investigated using the Kruskal-Wallis test for multiple samples. Age differences in the incidence of risk behaviour on the Internet do exist as shown by this research, p(α)=0.034 indicates a statistically significant difference. The results indicated the highest rate of risk behaviour in fourteen year old (X=2.41) and the lowest rate in twenty-one year old adolescents (X=1.56). It could be explained by the fact that at the point when early adolescence turns into middle adolescence at 14, major puberty-related changes are taking place. During this period, the interest in peers of the opposite sex increases and cognitive processes are developing. Erikson (in Langmeier and Krejčířová, 1998) has stated that at this time, adolescents face feelings of insecurity, self-doubt and doubt their place in society. In the context of fighting these feelings of insecurity and self-doubt, the adolescent may think the Internet the most suitable place to solve their problems. On the other hand, in 21-year-old adolescents, the social aspect of their identity is significantly enhanced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk behaviour on the Internet</th>
<th>age</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Med(x)</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>χ</th>
<th>p(α)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>16.66</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>2.02</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>1.80</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The correlations between loneliness and individual dimensions of risk behaviour on the Internet

For the purpose of investigating the correlations between loneliness and the “social networks” dimension, the Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient for non-parametric statistics was used. The value of the correlation coefficient (r=0.183) indicates there is a weak correlation between loneliness and the “social networks” dimension. The correlation is statistically significant as shown by p(α)=0.009. It means that the higher the level of loneliness experienced by the adolescents, the higher their risk of risk behaviour on social networks. The relationship works vice versa as well: The more risky the adolescents’ behaviour on the Internet, the lonelier they feel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loneliness</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>p(α)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social networks</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>0.183</td>
<td>0.009**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p(α)<0.01

In the context of this result, further differences identified in loneliness experienced in relation to the time spent by the adolescents on the social networks can be pointed out. The Mann-
Whitney U-test (Z=-3.065) shows there are statistically significant differences (p(α)=0.002) in loneliness depending on the amount of time spent on social networks. The averages show that adolescents who spent more than 6 hours on the social networks a day (X=2.34) score higher in loneliness, i.e. they feel lonelier. The more time adolescents spend on social networks, the more time to share their emotions and thoughts in the form of posting they have. The more time for posting they have, the more the risk that they will start behaving in a risky manner increases. These activities can be perceived as a way to compensate for their loneliness using Internet social networks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of time spent on social networks</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Med(x)</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>p(α)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>less than 6 hours</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>3108.0</td>
<td>-3.065</td>
<td>0.002**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 6 hours</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p(α)<0.01

Another goal was to investigate whether there was a significant correlation between loneliness and the “Internet compulsions” dimension. The correlation coefficient indicates a weak correlation, however, statistically significant. It can be stated that there are statistically significant correlations between loneliness and the “Internet compulsions” dimension. Kolibová (2013) has stated that Internet compulsions undoubtedly relate to the amount of time adolescents spend on the Internet, which can also be considered a risk factor. Internet compulsions usually takes the form of unregulated online shopping or online gaming. In this research, 14-year old adolescents spent time gaming the most frequently – 4.79 hours daily on average. As for online shopping, 14-year old adolescents also scored the highest – 2.07 hours daily on average. Toporcerová (2019) has claimed that playing videogames and using new technologies illustrate how lonely and vulnerable the young people are when they are exploring the digital world.

Intensive and long-term online gaming leads to addiction, and in turn, loneliness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>p(α)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>0.214</td>
<td>0.002**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet compulsions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p(α)<0.01

**Loneliness and Risk Behaviour on the Internet**

Last but not least, this research investigated whether there were any significant correlations between loneliness and risk behaviour on the Internet. A weak correlation was found between these two variables (r=0.205), however, statistically significant (p(α)=0.04). The results indicate that the lonelier the adolescent feels, the more risky their behaviour on the Internet. There are multiple reasons, e.g. if the adolescents feels lonely in real life for some reason, they seek resources to compensate this deficiency elsewhere. These resources can often be found on the Internet, which offers seemingly quick and effective solutions to the adolescent’s problems. The results also indicate that the more risky the adolescent behaves on the Internet, the lonelier they feel. It can be cause by complete involvement in the virtual world, which is a form of risk behaviour on the Internet. On the other hand, loneliness resulting from risk behaviour on the Internet may also relate to exclusion from the peer group that does not agree with the individual’s behaviour on the internet.
Discussion – Loneliness in Adolescents (and COVID-19)

Križanová and Verešová (2020) researched experiencing loneliness in adolescents in the context of attachment to their parents and peers. The research file consisted of 305 respondents; 171 females and 134 boys aged 15–20. The goal of their research was to identify the relationship between loneliness experienced by adolescents and their attachment to parents and peers. The UCLA loneliness scale was used to measure loneliness. Qualitatively, the scores in loneliness experienced were divided as follows: 20–30: none to low loneliness; 31–42: moderate loneliness; 43–51: high loneliness; 55–67: very high loneliness; 68–80: extreme loneliness. The minimum and maximum scores on the UCLA scale were 24 and 73 points respectively. The average score was 41.41 points. Therefore, on average, moderate loneliness was measured. On the other hand, in this research the minimum and maximum scores in the same loneliness scale were 22 and 72 points respectively. The average loneliness score in this research was 43.6 points. Moderate average loneliness was identified in this research as well. Both studies were performed at roughly the same time. Lichner's (2018) research aimed to identify how loneliness affects risk behaviour in both traditional and new forms and predict how loneliness and risk in adolescents are correlated. Lichner's research used the UCLA loneliness scale, and the minimum and maximum scores in the study were 20 and 75 respectively. The average loneliness score was 37.41 points.

To sum up, three studies focused on loneliness have been reviewed with the following average loneliness scores: 41.41; 43.6; and 37.41. The higher scores in the first two studies may result from the fact that both were performed in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic started. Lichtner’s research was performed before the pandemic. The individual differences are also interesting. As mentioned in the introduction, the COVID-19 pandemic is connected with individual isolation from the surrounding world, which may gradually increase loneliness. Although the differences in average loneliness scores are big, they need to be interpreted with the context in mind. The longer the individual isolation, the bigger the differences may become.

Conclusion

Every adolescent needs a safe and secure space in their life when they face problems they cannot solve on their own. Usually, adolescents seek help in their family. Deep and stable emotional family relationships help the adolescent maintain emotional balance. Besides family, school is also important given the amount of time the adolescent spends there. To feel emotionally stable, the adolescent needs proper conditions, which will support them in developing a healthy identity. Peer relationships also play an important role in this respect. If these components are working properly, problems arise. These can take the form of loneliness since the adolescent’s needs are not saturated. The Internet offers lots of opportunities but a sensible approach to its use is necessary otherwise the adolescent may start engaging in risk behaviour.

This research proved certain correlations between risk behaviour on the Internet and loneliness. Statistically significant correlations between loneliness and individual dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loneliness</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>p(α)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Risk behaviour on the Internet</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>0.205</td>
<td>0.04*</td>
</tr>
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</table>
of risk behaviour on the Internet were found. Therefore, it is of key importance to investigate the factors that cause adolescents to start engaging in risk behaviour on the Internet to select appropriate and effective tools for the elimination of such behaviour. These factors should be further researched.

Bibliography

The paper is a part of the VEGA 1/0285/18 “Rizikové správanie adolescentov ako klientov sociálnej práce v dôsledku ich osamelosti/ Risky behavior of adolescents as clients of social work due to their loneliness” research project.
Platforms for Online Learning: A Product Specification

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Abstract

Learning Management Systems (LMS) or Learning Content Management Systems (LCMS) are the core of e-learning platforms and have evolved according to the development of new information and communication technologies. In this type of software there are many products on the market, some developed by the institutions themselves (in-house), others are free and open source software (FOSS) and others are more commercial, varying in functionality and technology, but almost always adhering to the standards used in e-learning so that learning objects fulfill their purpose of being usable and reusable. This paper introduces you to current LMS / LCMS, main functions, distinctive features, related standards, and their current status. Then there is a presentation of Machine Learning as a branch of Artificial Intelligence and Cognitive Computing as a fusion discipline between computation, cognition, psychology and artificial intelligence, to end in a proposal for the incorporation of these technologies in a new generation of e-learning platforms, all in an integrated framework of interoperability and governance.

Keywords: Cognitive computing, learning content management system, learning management systems, learning objects, machine learning.

1. Introduction

Computerized systems for learning have a history dating back to the last century, for example, PLATO (Programmed Logic Automated Teaching Operations) was developed in 1960 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and was one of the first generalized computerized assistive systems. Having systems like PLATO by origin, learning and training have adopted these technologies as support, as a complement and even as an environment for their activities, with all the pros and cons that can be had.
Modern e-learning is based on electronic platforms, its core is learning management systems (LMS). These systems, present for almost two decades, have been evolving in characteristics and functionality by incorporating advances in information and communication technologies and design, moving from material repositories with access control, to platforms with administration and analysis capabilities. At the same time, other types of applications that gravitate to the learning environment have also been created and developed, such as administrative systems and social networks, for example, that communicate through interfaces with it, to give them functionality or information about the environment that is not available in them, giving rise to the application of classical learning theories and also those of the 21st century (Harasim, 2017), such as connectivist and collaborative.

Also, and in the past decade, other technologies that were not possible before due to the high computing capacity necessary for their instrumentation, such as Big Data, advanced analytics (Big Data analytics) and artificial intelligence instrumentation that the century in the past they had been conceptualized but remained in written projects or as laboratory prototypes.

The massification of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the simulation of human intelligence through computers, was announced for 1995 under the flag of Japan, which did not happen, but AI has arrived, first silently through its incorporation into various products such as anti-spam mail filters, vision in robots and advanced video surveillance systems, and to a very limited extent in some dictation software, but now there is a huge wave of AI applications, found in all types of computer and communications, from smart cell phones to supercomputers, and for all kinds of applications: health, production, logistics, administration, education, agriculture, and even in the configuration, monitoring, operation and support of the computer and communications systems themselves.

These new technologies are not only possible in all types of computer equipment, but are also now accessible to those who have the knowledge to use them, since there is software for artificial intelligence both FOSS (Free Open Source Software), as well as freemium and commercial. This opens up an immense possibility of using AI in all kinds of applications, including e-learning platforms.

Methodological aspects

2. E-learning platforms

From an information and communication technology (ICT) point of view, a platform is made up of the hardware, the operating system, and the specific purpose application in question. So, when talking about platforms, it is implicitly referring to the integration of at least these three elements, which is important because the total computing capacity will be determined by them.

Michael Piotrowski (2010) gives the following definition: “An e-learnig platform is a system which provides integrated Support for the six activities –creation, organization, delivery, communication, collaboration, and assessment- in an educational context”. Thus, an e-learning platform can be seen as a managed repository of educational elements, the learning objects.

Currently two are the predominant types of systems for e-learning: LMS (Learning Management Systems) and LCMS (Learning Content Management Systems), which can also be divided into academic and corporate. The LMS are based on repositories of digital content, called learning objects, which resemble libraries where the volumes are electronic files in
different formats, those supported by the e-learning standard that the platform supports, in addition these platforms have creation functions of courses and trajectories, application and qualification of exams, exam simulators, user registration and more. LCMS, although the term is currently used as a synonym for LMS, can be seen as a version with greater functionality than an LMS, since they not only have the functions of an LMS, but also include the entire cycle of creation, publication, delivery and measurement of content usage.

What distinguishes this type of platform from other types of information systems is its instructional content, while others store data, information or knowledge, these systems store information and knowledge in the form of learning objects, that is, capsules of necessary content and sufficient for the achievement of an educational objective. This feature requires special types of storage in order to support interoperability and authoring tools.

The main standards used in the content of e-learning systems are AICC, SCORM, xAPI and cm5. The oldest standard is AICC (Aviation Industry Computer-Based Training Committee) which uses the HTTP protocol, and although it has not evolved some LMS and some authoring tools still use it. The de facto standard is SCORM (Sharable Content Object Reference Model) of which there are four versions, of which two are currently in use, 1.2 and 2004. A newer standard that allows user “experiences” to be recorded, online or offline online, and that has capabilities for mobile learning, social learning, offline learning, and collaborative learning is xAPI. Even more recent is cm5, launched in 2016, which brings together the benefits of SCORM and xAPI in a single standard, which means that content created under this standard can be used on mobile devices and even offline. It is worth mentioning that, although SCORM is the most popular standard, due to its limitations some platforms such as Moodle, although they plan to continue supporting SCORM, will make their new developments in xAPI.

Steven D. Foreman (2018), makes a good description of this type of systems and the various aspects to consider in their selection, implementation and operation, as well as in their possible operation with other repositories, but above all tries to give a simple vision of what constitutes an LMS / LCMS, however these aspects correspond to the technological platform, but that what truly gives value to the platform is its content, the instructional material in the form of learning objects, which must be planned and built based on the instructional design (Muñoz and Quiroz, 2019).

In this type of software, LMS / LCMS, there are a large number of products, some are their own developments (SEND by UAM Xochimilco, for example), others of the FOSS type (Moodle and Canvas as the most representative) and many others of the commercial (like BlackBoard and Docebo to mention two of the most popular). It really is a very competitive sector, in which there are two main types, for academic use and for business use, although some are used in both cases, such as Moodle.

Klaus Schwab (2016) argues that platforms are dominating the dynamics of productive and commercial activities due to their cost-benefit relationship, since the increase in operations only marginally increases their operating cost. This is applicable to e-learning platforms, an increase in the number of enrolled and active students does not increase the operating cost of the platform in the same proportion, remembering that this cost is not only the cost of the hardware, but also that of the software and support staff.
3. Comprehensive platforms

Although LMS / LCMS systems have repositories of learning objects in various formats (text, audio, video, etc.), it should not be overlooked that many other contents can even be found on other platforms. Quiroz and Muñoz (2018a) in a systemic approach to e-learning that starts from a comprehensive ecosystem, also propose a comprehensive e-learning platform (Quiroz & Muñoz, 2018b) that having an LMS / LCMS as a core is complemented with other resources technologies, both with academic content and applications as well as with analytical tools that give or expand this capacity in the LMS / LCMS, all in a systems governance environment, because there must be policies, criteria and rules to integrate and operate the systems in order to avoid chaotic operation, poor performance or neglect of one or any of them.

It must be taken into account, however, that there are interoperability issues between systems and applications, because communication between them must be ensured; as well as continuity in the operation, because it is necessary to ensure that the system works most of the time (for example, 99.99% of the time, which is the expected figure in a business-class information system), and for this, that Measures are in place for the continuity of operation, either with redundant systems or with a backup and recovery system that in the event of an equipment failure or an external attack allows the content to be recovered without much loss due to the time elapsed between the backup and its recovery. Also, that this platform has protection systems against cyber attacks, such as intrusions and malware.

![Comprehensive e-learning platform](source: Quiroz & Muñoz (2018b))

The most advanced LMS / LCMS have the ability to incorporate the use of external repositories through communication protocols such as LTI (Learning Tools Interoperability) and there are proposals for comprehensive platforms, called XXX, but we must not forget that they should
be considered as any another type of information system, with the same rigor in the selection, implementation, operation, maintenance and security criteria.

4. Machine Learning

The Machine Learning (ML), also known as machine learning, is one of the branches of artificial intelligence, which fundamentally consists of the analysis of data to identify relationships, patterns and groups, and as Sergios Theodoridis (2020) says: “Machine Learning is a name that is gaining popularity as an umbrella for methods that have been studied and developed for many decades in different scientific communities and under different names, such as Statistical Learning, Statistical Signal Processing, Pattern Recognitions..., and Computational Learning. The name “machine learning” indicates what all these disciplines have in common, that is, to learn from data, and then make predictions”.

Thus, machine learning is a collection of methods that can be used not only to analyze data, but to learn from them and use that knowledge in many activities that would ordinarily be done manually, for example, in the diagnosis and configuration of data networks, database administration, mail filtering, fraud detection, recommendation systems (in e-commerce), etc. As can be seen, the use of machine learning is very broad, and of course it also has applicability in education, in any of its modalities: face-to-face, virtual or hybrid, both in the academic part and in the administration part.

Machine Learning makes use of three types of mathematical methods: regression, classification, and clustering. David Forsyth (2019) said that: “Regression accepts a feature vector and produce a prediction, which is usually a number, but can sometimes have an other forms. You can use these predictions as predictions, or to study trends in data...”, also said: “A classifier is a procedure that accepts a set of features and produce a label. Classifiers are trained on labelled examples, but the goal is to get a classifier that performs well on data, which is not seen at the time of training. Training a classifier requires labelled data that is representative of future data”. Clustering is the task of grouping similar objects and is used to find structures in data that are not obvious to the naked eye.

The mathematical methods used in machine learning are probabilistic or statistical instrumented through algorithms, and among the most used are Bayesian classifier, nearest-neighbor, decision trees, Support Vector Machine, random forest, principal component analysis (PCA), canonical correlation analysis, k-means, linear regression, logistic regression, hidden Markov models, dynamic programming, nearest neighbor, and many others, almost all of them based on the measurement of variability, correlation and closeness between the elements to be processed, and be it data, sounds or images, that is to say in structured or unstructured data.

There are three types of machine learning: supervised, in which the system is trained with sample data to recognize the expected results, in this type decision trees, regression algorithms, K-Nearest Neighbors and random forest are frequently used; non-supervised, is one in which learning occurs from the analysis of data without an expected response, but rather the result obtained from the different inputs is analyzed, for this type of learning the most common methods are clustering algorithms, neural networks and Markov models; The third type, reinforcement machine learning, is one in which the results obtained from the methods used are qualified to establish valid learning, mainly using hidden Markov models and dynamic programming.
5. Cognitive computation

Cognitive computing is interdisciplinary, it combines cognitive science, the science of the mind, and computational science, the science and technique of the design and application of computational systems. Cognitive computing is a new era of computing, it is the third evolution of computers, the first being electromechanical tabulating machines built to do a single task; the second, programmatic machines, that is, general-purpose machines that can be programmed for some task according to John Von Neumann’s concept of stored program; and the third, cognitive computing systems, designed to extend the limits of human cognitive capacity and interact in a natural way with humans. It is not visualized that the second generation disappears, but is complemented with the products of the third, so that more and more computer products with cognitive capabilities will be seen, that is, the incorporation of cognitive computing functions in the information systems developed based on explicit programming.

Researchers from IBM consider that cognitive computation and human capacities are complementary (Alfio Gliozzo, et al., 2017, PP. 6), because while the human being is characterized by having common sense, understanding, imagination, morality, abstraction, generalization and reverie, cognitive computing is useful for locating knowledge, identifying patterns, natural language management, machine learning, elimination of biases and a work capacity only limited by the capacity of the computing system in which it is executed. It should be noted that cognitive computing includes machine learning, complemented with other technologies that facilitate its interaction with the environment, such as image recognition and natural language management, as mentioned before.

John E. Kelly III (2015) says that “Cognitive computing (CC) refers to systems that learn at scale, reason with purpose and interact with humans naturally. Rather than being explicitly programmed, they learn and reason from their interactions with us and from their experiences with their environment.” Cognitive computing systems follow a decision process similar to that of humans: (1) they observe the phenomena, (2) they interpret the evidence and generate a hypothesis, (3) they evaluate the hypothesis and (4) they decide by selecting the one they consider the best option and act; all on structured and unstructured data.

As cognitive computing is an area of great interest for scientific, technological and commercial development, there are many companies developing products for this field. IBM, a pioneer in research in cognitive computing, designed a cognitive processor (IBM, 2011) and its IBM Watson system is widely known for its successful implementation for diagnosing and recommending cancer treatments. Other large companies such as Microsoft, Google, Amazon Web Services, CISCO, Tata Computing Services and SAS, among many others, have also developed software or hardware for this type of system. Google, for example, has already developed three generations of TPUs (Tensor Process Units, specific purpose processors for the execution of tensorer algorithms) and the most advanced smartphone processors no longer only include CPUs and GPUs, but also neural networks, applicable to machine learning and deep learning. This means that products for cognitive computing will be increasingly available and accessible, and therefore can be used in a greater number of applications, including education.
6. Discussion: Towards an intelligent platform

Existing machine learning and cognitive computing technologies can be applied to e-learning platforms to equip them with intelligence in the form of higher analytics, learning, and reasoning.

Some LMS are beginning to incorporate machine learning algorithms to analyze the data recorded by the use of different resources by students, based on them, groups of like-minded students are created, but their use may be greater than this. Applying machine learning to the data of the activities of the students could also identify their individual progress patterns to predictively establish the possible problems in their performance. Additionally, machine learning can be applied to the instructional content of the system to analyze the learning objects and establish, for example, the relevance in the predecessors and the appropriate successor sequence, as well as evaluate their quality.

Regression algorithms - for example, logistic regression could be applied to predict student performance based on variables such as the school of origin, their learning profile, performance in previous cycles, etc. Those of classification to create trees with probabilities in the different sequences of courses and contents. And those of clustering to establish groups between students, but also between learning objects, among other things to identify exceptions and seek integration between them.

These are just some of the possible applications of machine learning in e-learning platforms, although they could also be integrated as part of the platform’s ecosystem in its educational modules, in the form of an advanced analytical tool for student learning activities.

In a second generation of intelligent e-learning platforms, incorporating cognitive computing, the systems would have the ability to analyze student data, formulate hypotheses about their trajectory and school performance, make deductions and propose personalized sequences of learning objects and even of topics, which would lead to an approach to trajectories and personalized curricula by the system, which could initially be validated by the teachers, as long as the adjustment in the training of these systems lasts.

Applied to learning objects, they could be analyzed at the content level to determine a usage and content quality rating based on the criteria established, in order to determine the possible need to adjust and replace them. Likewise, with the ability to understand natural language and making use of the content of the learning objects, bots could be built to attend to the basic queries of the students and turn the teacher over only those that they cannot attend, in addition to the platform itself in a complement in the teaching-learning process by becoming expert systems and simulation systems.

These analytical capabilities, through machine learning or cognitive computing (which includes machine learning) of diagnosis and proposal, would far exceed the dashboards and reports that they currently generate.

Conclusions and recommendations:

So far, e-learning platforms have followed the strategy of incorporating the advances and trends of information and communication technologies, which has also resulted in the possibility of aligning them with instructional design and learning objects, but fundamentally establishing themselves as repositories with capacities for evaluating students and administering courses and other learning activities, with capacities for performance indicator
boards and reports very much in line with BI (Business Intelligence) systems, and with limited use of machine learning.

Although depending on the technological, financial and institutional resources, both machine learning and cognitive computing are technologies that are already available and that therefore would be applicable in education, both in the teaching-learning process and in platforms e-learning themselves. The use of FOSS-type software could be a very good spearhead for this because for small projects, in addition to not requiring very powerful computer equipment and costs, the software itself can be used at no cost, such as the aforementioned TensorFlow and Keras for deep learning and natural language processing, and machine learning libraries for R and Python. Naturally there is a learning curve for this software, but the approach to the models and the mastery of mathematical methods would be even more challenging, although the reward would be very high, the discovery of the knowledge stored in the data.

When including ML or CC, either as part of the platform or as satellite systems to it, the interoperability, performance and governance issues mentioned above for end-to-end platforms must also be considered, as they will naturally require greater computing power and storage than current platforms, and the complexity of administration and operation will also increase, but with an added value that can be the trigger for a much more effective and efficient use of LMS / LCMS platforms.

References


Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Virtual Teaching

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Abstract
Following the first Covid-19 cases in Greece, the Ministry of Education decided to close all educational institutions on 10 March 2020. On 12 March, the Chancellor of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, where the author currently teaches, urged the academic community to create virtual classrooms and begin distance learning. The purpose of this contribution is to investigate undergraduate students’ perceptions of virtual classrooms and distance learning. To this end, a qualitative research was conducted, including 50, third year undergraduate students of the Department of French Language and Literature. Students’ perceptions, were investigated through a mini-interview. Responses were recorded, transcribed and categorised according to specific criteria. Students compared in-person and distance lessons, referred to the pros and cons of both types of teaching to support their arguments focusing on the content of the lecture or seminar, the type of activities as well as the lecturers’ ability to use technology. Finally, in this paper a section of lessons learned from the teacher’s point of view are included.

Keywords: virtual teaching, virtual classroom, students’ perceptions, distance education

Introduction
The COVID-19 pandemic caused the most significant disruption to global education systems in history. The impact of this crisis on the quality and conditions of learning has been immense (Unesco, 2020). Educational institutions of all levels which were based only on face-to-face lectures had to swiftly entirely to online teaching and learning. Subsequently, educators were forced to create virtual classrooms so as to guarantee pedagogical continuity. Following the first Covid-19 cases in Greece, the Ministry of Education and Religions decided to close all educational institutions and University campuses on 10 March 2020. Accordingly, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTh) as most universities in Greece resumed the spring semester in the e-learning mode. After the suspension of the university’s educational operations, in the framework of the measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, the Rectorate Authorities of the AUTh invited, on 12 March, the members of the teaching and research staff to use the available digital tools to create virtual classrooms ensuring an uninterrupted process of education: « Distance courses: to be taken care of by the Presidents of the Departments and the Directors of the Sections, in order to exhaust all the possibilities for the distance learning of the courses. These courses will be considered equivalent to face to face ones and will be counted in the weeks of teaching provided by law. »

1 https://www.auth.gr/news/anouncements/27819
As for the tools and platforms, the distance learning was initially implemented through the use of either the Skype for Business service or the BigBlueButton. The aforementioned services were available to all members of the AUTh-students and teaching staff- through a relevant institutional agreement. Both tools are useful for teaching remote students online and provide real-time sharing of audio, video, slides, chat, and screen. BigBlueButton is available via an MLS system, the elearning.auth.gr, platform that hosts electronic courses of all the AUTh Departments within the undergraduate and postgraduate study cycle. Access is possible only for members of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki as well as for external users who are certified external collaborators. The Service is supported by the IT-Center and the Library & Information Center of AUTh. Later during the semester, for the courses with large audiences and especially for exams the ZOOM application was used.

Switching lectures from a face-to-face to a virtual one may be challenging as it demands a great deal of effort. Teachers had to revise not only the structure of their course but also the teaching and the assessment’s methods. For this reason, trainings were held by the IT-Center of AUTh which also provided both professors and students with video and tutorials to facilitate the use of the available tools and online systems and platforms. Distance courses, introducing components of systematic synchronous and asynchronous learning, at the Department of French Language and Literature, where the author teaches, began on 16 March. The majority of the teaching staff in this Department initially chose BigBlueButton. However, the author decided to choose Skype for Business to conduct her virtual classes.

The teaching of all the courses up to that moment in the Department was done exclusively face-to-face. However, the students who participated in the research had experience from asynchronous e-learning as many lecturers of the Department use https://elearning.auth.gr/ to upload teaching materials and tasks. During the lockdown this platform also used for different kind of online assessments as well as for the exams. The present study was conducted between May 2020 and June 2020 following two months of synchronous online classes. The evolution of synchronous communication and the generalization of the mobile devices would make it possible to reach the learner everywhere but also immediately and anytime and to combine both the benefits of face-to-face and virtual teaching. However, despite the benefits mentioned in the literature, we found it useful to investigate whether this was a positive experience for our students and what exactly were their perceptions of this type of teaching.

Specifically, in this article we aimed to answer the following key questions:

1. How do undergraduate students perceive their virtual teaching experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
2. What aspects of virtual teaching do the students perceive as beneficial?
3. What are the limitations of virtual teaching and learning in the students’ point of view?
2. Distance learning and Virtual Classroom

Distance education, since the middle of the 19th century until today, has made significant steps, based on the means of education offered at all times. Actually, thanks to the integration of digital technologies, distance education fully meets the profile of our students who, as digital natives are flooded every day by network and digital applications. Thanks to this relationship with the digital technologies, distance education or distance learning is also called e-learning or online learning.

The European Commission (2000) defines e-learning as “the use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet, to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services, as well as remote exchanges and collaboration”.

According to Horton (2006) there many forms of e-learning:

- Standalone courses taken by a solo learner.
- Learning games and simulations, i.e. learning by performing simulated activities that require exploration and lead to discoveries.
- Embedded e-learning, i.e. e-learning included in another system, such as a computer program, a diagnostic procedure, or online Help.
- Blended learning i.e. using of various forms of learning to accomplish a single goal.
- Mobile learning.
- Knowledge management which includes broad uses of e-learning, online documents, and conventional media.
- Virtual-classroom courses. Online classes structured much like a classroom course. Virtual classroom courses may or may not include synchronous online meetings.

Consequently, e-learning refers to a set of educational environments which make it possible to solve the problem of the spatiotemporal distance, thanks to the use of synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication supported by web tools which are integrated into educational platforms. Additionally, these tools offer the possibility of promoting social interactions between the different actors in these environments (Jézégou, 2010).

A virtual classroom, as Horton (2006) argues, is a special web application that allows users to connect to a common environment using collaboration and communication tools combining image, sound, text, presentations, and various other tools.

For Yang & Liu (2007) the virtual classroom is a modern online learning environment, which can not only be used to deliver educational materials, but also provide an interactive environment for learners.

Virtual classes are the only way to create a bridge between face-to-face and distance learning. When used wisely, virtual classrooms make it possible not to lose the advantages of the teacher-learner relationship.

Diemer (2012) mentions three important advantages of virtual classes: a. they make it possible to visualize the teacher-learner relationship. Maintaining the teacher’s posture
continues to provide tangible benchmarks to learners (this is a characteristic of the webcam); b. they are presented as self-learning and self-training modules (synchronous and asynchronous classes); c. they register learning over time (training is a process in which the learner evolves at his own pace).

The International Baccalaureate Organization (2020) argues that for an effective virtual course that ensures equal opportunities among learners, learners should have access to the following resources:

Access to devices, including mobile devices, appropriate for online learning.

Internet access and adequate bandwidth as poor bandwidth can make many synchronous activities very difficult.

Effective, immediate and valuable feedback through quizzes and intelligent tutors as well as direct comments or discussion from peers and teachers.

Opportunities for independent learning through learning activities and discussions that capture students’ engagement.

Meaningful screen time and conferencing.

According to Yang and Liu (2007) a successful and efficient virtual classroom depends on self-paced learning, interaction between teachers and learners, contextual learning and discussion and, live, spontaneous learning resources.

Researchers also argue that the teacher’s ability to help students become autonomous and to enhance and maintain motivation for learning are important factors that influence distance virtual teaching (Hurd, 2006, Lo Presti, 2020).

Several arguments are listed in favor of virtual teaching such as accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy and life-long learning (Dhawan, 2020).

According to Horton (2006) in a virtual class the teacher has the possibility to adapt learning to learners and adjust content immediately in response to feedback from learners. Learning can be flexible and active because virtual classes combine lecture, visual and oral interaction, individual and team activities. In addition, he argues that the virtual class provides the discipline some learners need, as face-to-face contact with the instructor and peer pressure combine to keep learners on schedule.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In order to collect in-depth information about students’ views in virtual teaching, discussion and individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. The interviews took place via Skype for business because of the confinement after a three-month experience in virtual classrooms. The individual interview provided students with the occasion to describe their experience in their own words. Interviews lasted approximately 3 minutes and were recorded, transcribed and categorized according to specific criteria.
3.2 Participants of the study

A total of 50 third undergraduate students participated in the research. The participants, were students in the Department of French and Literature, of Aristotle University that attended the French Language course: Oral Speech Skills Development during the spring semester 2020. These students had not previously participated in a synchronous distance education experience. The researcher, as a teacher of this course, observed changes in students' behaviors compared to in-person seminars and subsequently decided to explore students' opinions about the virtual classroom. During the semester, these students attended an average of 8 distance synchronous learning courses using Skype for business or BibBlue Button. During the mini-interview the participants were asked to answer the following questions:

What is your opinion about virtual classrooms? Do you appreciate them or do you prefer the face-to-face courses?

Could you give specific examples from your personal experience highlighting the pros and cons of virtual teaching?

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data analysis was done in several phases. During the first phase, the recorded interviews were transcribed. A series of reviews and analysis followed. The first review aimed to remove elements that were not directly related to the research topic. In other words, this was a first reduction of the data. In the second phase, answers were recorded including the answers that were in favor of virtual classroom and distance learning, the answers that were against and those that considered both types of teaching to be equally effective. In the next phase, following in-depth analysis, the answers were grouped into either one of two main categories: a) aspects of virtual teaching that students perceive as beneficial and b) the virtual teaching and learning limitations.

3.4 Findings

Findings from the analysis of qualitative data are presented in this section.

3.4.1 Students' overall perceptions of their virtual classrooms experience

Although the participants think virtual teaching offer new ways of learning and was the best solution during the confinement as to not miss the semester, the majority of the participants answered they prefer face-to-face teaching (38 out of 50). Seven participants argued that virtual teaching can be as effective as the face-to-face one if there is interaction and if the teacher is comfortable handling the tools offered by the platform. Virtual teaching generated positive impacts for only five participants. Examples of students’ comments are found below:

- Virtual classrooms are somewhat effective, but I do not think they can substitute the traditional face-to-face course.

- Distance learning even when synchronous is incomplete and ineffective.

- Some teachers are very familiar with the technology. This resulted in some virtual classes to be highly interactive and motivating as they required the active engagement of students.

- Virtual classrooms gave me the opportunity to learn in different ways.

- I prefer the virtual classroom because I feel more comfortable. In contrast to the traditional classroom, I do not hesitate to ask things in front of everyone.
Virtual classrooms were a very good experience. I think we worked as well as in the traditional classroom.

3.4.2. Perceived Benefits of virtual teaching

Even though, the majority of students prefer face-to-face courses, they believe that the virtual classroom has several significant benefits. First of all, the participants, especially those who had a positive attitude towards virtual teaching, appreciated the design of the virtual environment and flexibility of the collaboration tools. Participants argued that collaborative tools enhanced their interactions with peers and teachers and provided opportunities for discussion and effective collaboration. Moreover, participants claimed that collaborative tools such as the chat and breakout rooms helped them overcome the shyness or the fear of asking questions. They were now more eager to make comments or give answers expressing themselves freely. Examples of students’ comments are found below:

I never contribute in the discussion in face-to-face classes because I am shy. In the virtual classroom however, I managed to make comments in the chatbox without feeling embarrassed.

Breakout rooms gave me the opportunity to interact with my teammates and motivated me to work harder.

-I certainly prefer to interact in the virtual space. I used the chatbox to communicate with my classmates and to make queries to the teacher.

When I make a face-to-face presentation in class, I get stressed, however when using the screen and the microphone I perform better.

I had never taken distance courses before. Now, that I am used to the tools, I prefer virtual teaching.

Participants also argued that in some virtual courses, especially in language and translation courses, teachers used creative online tasks and activities that increased engagement, motivation and participation. Furthermore, they argued that the courses where teachers flipped their classrooms presenting content asynchronously through videos and online activities, resulting in spending more time collaborating with one another during the virtual classroom and gave time for discussions. Examples of such comments are found below:

In some language courses teachers focused on sharing knowledge and information which resulted in the course being more engaging and interesting.

In some courses we had to complete tasks and activities asynchronously. Thus, the teacher had more time to group potential problems and give explanations during the virtual classroom.

When the teacher flipped the classroom, I could study the theory before and ask questions in the synchronous teaching.

Other benefits mentioned by the majority of participants, were that, by selecting the study location, they saved time and money since the need for expensive and time-consuming traveling was eliminated. They also pointed out that the stress caused by moving to and from university has been reduced. Comments below:

My family's finances have been worsened during the pandemic. Saving money from travel and other living expenses helped my family.
Before the pandemic, I spent an hour every day on the bus to go to University. With virtual classrooms, I spent this time studying.

I used to have a part-time job to cover my living expenses. During the pandemic, I lost my job but it did not bother me because I had no travel and accommodation expenses.

Finally, more than half of the participants, even those who were unfavorable, argued that distance learning helped them develop time management skills, increase self-confidence and become autonomous learners. Examples of such comments are found below:

I think that distance learning, during the pandemic, helped me improve my organizational skills. It was a challenge for to do homework assignments in time.

In the past three months since the covid-19 outbreak, I became more responsible and learned how to plan my day more effectively. I have no reason not to do. I was home all the day.

The immediate feedback from the online quizzes and activities helped me to improve my grades and my linguistic skills.

The following table summarizes the benefits that positively affected students' opinions in relation to the factors related to virtual teaching.

Table1. Perceived benefits of virtual teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility of the communication and collaboration tools</td>
<td>Interaction, collaboration, active participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content of the course, Method adopted by the teachers</td>
<td>Interaction, engagement and motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing location</td>
<td>Saving time and money Less stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance learning</td>
<td>Time management skills, self-confidence and autonomy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4.3. Perceived limitations of virtual teaching

Several limitations derive from the interviews and the discussion. These can be grouped as follows: technical problems, the lack of technological literacy of both students and teachers, as well as the lack of efficient teaching methods. the lack of face-to-face communication.

A primary negative element of virtual teaching was that the majority of participants reported problems with internet connection and therefore poor sound and screen image quality, lack of personal equipment (camera, headphones) and network speed and bandwidth at home. Examples of students’ comments are found below:

- In the area where I live, we have poor internet speed. This was aggravated especially during the confinement where the whole family was using the internet.

- Without headphones, the noise from the street and the bad connection prevented me from listening to the teacher.

- During the first month, the platforms were overloaded and we had to keep the camera off, so I had no eye contact with either the teacher or my classmates. Because of that, I was completely demotivated.
- The frequency of disconnections, distracted me significantly.

- With the camera off, without eye contact and poor volume levels, I felt alone at times.

Moreover, participants highlighted that inadequate pedagogical or ICT skills of the online lecturers demotivated them. According to students, for some lecturers it was very difficult to adjust their methods to the virtual environment and to use effectively the integrated collaborative tools. That affected negatively their engagement and motivation.

Furthermore, a small number of participants, pointed out that they were unfamiliar with the new technologies. Hence, it was very difficult for them to use the tools especially when they were presenting something to the class themselves. Examples of such comments are found below:

- I use the technology for Facebook or insta but during the virtual class I had many difficulties.

- Watching a power point for three hours and listening to the lecturer speak without giving an example on the board was really boring!

- If the virtual class is a continuous monologue, I certainly prefer the traditional one.

- If I had the choice I would never be enrolled on distance literature courses. The lack of interaction in some cases demotivated me.

Finally, participants argued that even a well-designed virtual classroom cannot substitute completely the face-to-face lectures. They also argued that the large number of hours spent in front of the screen, resulted to health issues. Examples of such comments are found below:

- Even though we had no choice and we had to complete the semester virtually, I missed the communication with my classmates before and after classes.

- The lack of in-person teaching, resulted in lack of communication or interaction before and after lectures. Therefore, I believe that distance education has a negative impact on social relations.

- the large number of hours spent in front of the computer every day, increased my myopia and led to back pains.

**Table 2. Perceived limitations of virtual teaching**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical problems</td>
<td>Distraction and lack of motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor network speed and bandwidth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inadequate teaching materials and methods</td>
<td>Lack of engagement and motivation</td>
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<td>ICT skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>Limited interaction and communication with peers and lecturer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duration of virtual teaching and learning</td>
<td>Health problems</td>
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4. Discussion and Conclusion

This article aimed to examine students' perceptions of virtual teaching after their experience during the pandemic. As it emerged from the interviews and the discussions the majority of the students who participated in the research were not in favor of virtual classrooms. According to the findings, the most important factors that significantly influence students' perceptions of the virtual classroom are as follows: the use of the integrated communication and collaboration tools, the content of the course and the pedagogical methods used by the lecturers, the ICT skills of the users, lecturers as students as well, technical problems and lack of equipment and of course the distance. Students argued that some modules, such as literature, are not appropriate for the synchronous distance education. In fact, the course design and structure can either enhance student’s engagement and motivation or demotivate them (Hartnett, St. George, & Dron, 2011). The findings showed that in some course’s long duration and the lack of interaction affect the students negatively. Students complained about technical problems, such as slow and unreliable internet connectivity. Students also pointed out that they missed in-person tutoring and human interaction with their teachers and peers.

At AUTh undergraduate courses are traditionally take place in-person, so the virtual classroom was not a choice but a necessity imposed by the pandemic. Consequently, some lecturers were not prepared to face the challenges of the virtual teaching. Furthermore, there was no time for training and familiarization with the platforms and tools and the updating of teaching methods and materials. The lack of ICT skills of both teachers and students negatively affected the degree of students’ satisfaction of virtual teaching. Consequently, to conduct effective virtual classrooms the teaching staff should be trained. Furthermore, the students must be helped to develop their skills in digital literacy.

To conclude, the author believes that the virtual classroom can be as effective as the traditional one as long as it is designed properly and the teaching materials are suitable and adequate for this type of teaching. Thus, we can enhance students’ motivation and engagement.

Therefore, further research might explore the correlation between students’ and lecturers’ perceptions of virtual teaching. Research also could focus on criteria for motivational and engaging learning activities in virtual classrooms as well as on the effective use of the collaborative tools. In fact, it would be helpful to look for design criteria in a virtual classroom that can increase students’ engagement and enhance students’ motivation.

References


Focus-Group Regarding the Psycho-Pedagogical Effects Felt by Children as a Result of the Parents’ Migration

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Abstract
The focus group method is a qualitative method which requires as technique the interview with a work group and a moderator. It is a research structure with scientific, social or public opinion commercial aim. In preparing the focus group I have determined the topic of the discussions based on an interviewing guide and I have determined the correspondence of the groups. Therefore, there had been five focus-groups, the discussions had a length of 75-90 min, recorded in an audio format, after receiving the subjects’ permission. There were 5 focus-groups: focus-group 1: parents that have experienced first-hand migration but have returned back (7 men and 3 women); focus-group 2: parents-grandparents of the children with a migrant parent, enrolled at a Step-by-step or After school program (7 women and 4 men); focus-group 3: primary school teachers, school counsellors of the students with at least one migrant parent (9 primary school teachers, 2 counsellors); focus-group 4: parents-grandparents that have in their care at least one child after the migration of the parent(s) abroad (3 men, 7 women or 4 parents and 6 grandparents); focus-group 5: 10 school counsellors (psychologists) of the schools from the surroundings of Hunedoara (including Calan town and Pestis, Teliuc and Ghelari villages). In conclusions, the migration of a parent brings negative effects over the psycho-pedagogical evolution of the kid; all followed indicators have had negative effects after the migration, with the exception of the one that speaks about life conditions. Whether they have or not passed through an experience of migration, all subjects have affirmed that the absence of a parent or both has repercussions over the normal development of the child.

Keywords: focus-group, the migration, parent, children, school

Introduction
The focus group method is qualitative method which requires as technique the interview with a work group and a moderator. It is a research structure with scientific, social or public opinion commercial aim (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

In our research, the focus group has at its base the following premises regarding the migration of a parent:
- determines a degradation of the familial environment
- induces an unfavourable educational climate
even if it improves the life conditions, it enhances the negative external influences
it brings a deterioration of work style, of general behaviour and school, in particular
contributes to a decrease of group participation
generates impairment of attitude towards others and the self

In preparing the focus group I have determined the topic of the discussions based on an interviewing guide and I have determined the correspondence of the groups. Therefore, there had been five focus-groups, with the length of 75-90 min, recorded in an audio format, after receiving permission of the subjects.

There were 5 focus-groups:

- focus-group 1: parents that have experienced first-hand migration but have returned back (7 men and 3 women)
- focus-group 2: parents/grandparents of the children with a migrant parent and are enrolled at Step-by-step or After school program (7 women and 4 men)
- focus-group 3: primary school teachers, school counsellors of the students with at least one migrant parent (9 primary school teachers, 2 counsellors)
- focus-group 4: parents/grandparents that have in their care at least one child after the migration of the parent(s) abroad (3 men, 7 women or 4 parents and 6 grandparents)
- focus-group 5: 10 school counsellors (psychologists) of the schools from the surroundings of Hunedoara (including Călan town and Pestiş, Teliuc and Ghelari villages)

Regarding group 2, it must be mentioned that in Hunedoara town, at “Matei Corvin” Technical College and at “Iancu de Hunedoara” Informatics College there is one class per level for the educational alternative Step by Step, and at “Matei Corvin” Technical College there have been for a few years groups of children that attend the After school program. The participants of the 5 focus-groups organized were, therefore, 52 Romanian citizens, of which 38 women and 14 men.

The participation of the subjects at the interview was based on volunteering, without any financial reward or of any other nature, which we consider it will assure the cooperation in the focus-group of the (grand)parents interested about children and their scholarly grades, about their education and experiences, people who are in contact with the school, with the teachers from class.

The analysis of the research results:

1. The familial environment and ties:

This element has been processed mainly by highlighting the rapports established among the family (harmonious rapports, of understanding between parents and children; rapports marked by small and temporary conflicts; strong disagreement among the family, frequent and powerful conflicts; a family already or on its way to disintegration). Most subjects (46) have expressed their opinion, according to which a family where one of the parents is absent is not a normal family. The exception was 6 psychologists from group 5, which, based on scientific literature they are familiar with, have avoided the proposed terms (unwoven family, normal family, etc).
Most have mentioned that these relationships were not affected negatively by the migration and they were about the same as before the migration.

“*Their father wasn’t interested in them even when he wasn’t abroad, he was getting drunk and only then was he giving presents to the children*”-the grandmother of student M.A.

“*The departure of the father was a relief for the mother and the children, because there were always great quarrels, beatings especially at drunkenness*” -the primary school teacher of student M.A.

3 subjects affirmed that the migration has contributed to the disintegration of the family or to its imminent disintegration. As concerning the relation between children and parent (migrants or not), most (39) affirm categorically that these relations have greatly worsened since the migration. Even if the migrants are in contact with the family, they usually talk to the remaining adults (the other parent or the grandparents) the recent problems and, even when talking to the children, they rarely (especially the father) have the patience and time to talk with the child. Migrants usually work overtime or lose a great part from their time communing from their workplace to their home (few Romanian workers live ear their workplace) which makes the hour children go to sleep be the same as the one when they return from work. The working conditions for emigrants are difficult, generating lots of stress and tiredness, which only worsens the relation parent-child. There are also cases of understanding and protectiveness coming from the other parent: “*I told them many times not to tell Dad all problems, be cause he gets upset, we only bother him even more and that even so he can’t solve them from there.*” (A.V.’s mother)

Conclusion

The migration of a parent has contributed greatly to the aggravation of the familial environment. No person has affirmed that following the migration the environment became better, both in regards to the relation between spouses as well as the relation child-parent.

2. The educational climate offered to the child

All didactic personnel included in the study have affirmed that the families of the children with migrant parents offer an unfavourable educational environment to their scholarship (46 participants). Another 5 persons have stated that there is an adequate educational environment, and the father of B.Z. declared that for his children, the educational environment has become more favourable by the migration of the wife. “*For a year and a half, since the wife has left to Ireland, we have enough money for everything the children need at school, there are no more problems. I take care of them at home, we make the homework together. I work as a night janitor to School nr. 7, the wage is not big, but I am all day with them (he has 3 children of 15, 11 and 9 years old). The eldest is not so good at his studies, it was always like this, but the others are good. If the wife can stay one more year, two there we can clear all instalment and then we will see what we will do later...*”

A part of the respondents (29) affirm however that this climate has not changed when the parents were home, but it was unfavourable even before the migration.

There are also 17 cases that recognize a worsening of the educational environment from the moment of departure. There are 8 cases where the homework is taken care of the older siblings and another 6 where the grandparents are more engaged in their education.
Conclusion: All the educational personnel noted that the educational environment offered to the child has deteriorated. Even when there seems to be the same or has improved, the absence of a parent is nonetheless noticeable in the education of the child.

3. Life and work conditions of the student

No participant confirmed that the students have excellent conditions; there are 9 answers that speak about precarious conditions, 11 at the brink, 10 acceptable and 22 good. The cases where the parents have a longer migration experience are those that highlight an improvement of these conditions following the migration. There are also 3 cases where the mothers have left for at most a year and the fathers that remained home with the children state that since the departure of the mother the life conditions of the children are worse.

“When the husband left, we hoped that in 2-3 years we will solve all financial problems and then we will be a happy family, maybe make a new kid. After 4 years I realize we are still not done with all our debts, there is also the care towards the ill grandmother; the kids grow up without a father... We aren’t alright!” (I.V.-mother)

“"We didn’t become rich, we just managed to clear off some taxes to the bank, we still have more... The husband sends money home, but it isn’t enough for me not to work too. Luckily with the mother who helps me with the little girl, otherwise... When I come tired from work I verify her homework, we discuss them on the telephone until then. But Roxana is a good girl, she usually makes her homework by herself and studies well.” (mother of A.V.)

“The mother sends him money from Germany for all stupidities, he has all he needs at school, but nobody takes care of him more seriously. The father is neglectful, alcoholic, and E. is most of the time unsupervised.” (Primary school teacher)

Conclusion: All interviewed subjects recognize the improvement of students’ life condition after the migration, but not of the work conditions for students and material sustaining necessary. Nobody agreed that the migration contributed to the assuring of some increased educational facilities (tutoring, extra-school activities that require financial sustaining, etc).

4. Behaviour during the class

According to the participants of the focus-group, the behaviour during class has become worse for 27 children. Primary school teachers and school counsellors, who know the best the students under the aspect of participating during lessons, consider that the departure of a parent can affect negatively the student’s ability to focus on the topic of homework. The causes may be multiple, some deriving from the shortening the available time to supervise the child from the remaining parent who still has the same problems, others because of the emotional shock received by the child, generated by the absence of a parent, which manifests itself including by inattention. In such cases, the intervention of a school counsellor (psychologist) is opportune.

“Before, he was very attentive, he actively participated being always with the homework done, with the necessary instruments and because the parents were everyday at school, they brought him and took him from school. Since the father left, the mother comes at school only when called or at meetings and having another 2 younger children, she doesn’t have too much time to take care of L.C. We have a notebook where to write everything, but sometimes the child forgets to
write (especially at the classes I don’t teach: English, religion, etc) and sometimes he mistakes the timetable, doesn’t bring what he needs, etc” (P.L.-primary school teacher)

“At first, 2 years ago, in May, when his father left, and E.I. was 7 years old, I thought he had a time of inattention caused by the shock of the father’s leaving, his playing partner. I even recommended the mother to take him to the psychologist, but he wasn’t. The first year finishes and in the second one he continued with this attitude, which became more passive. He isn’t too affected by bad grades, he isn’t too happy about good ones, is more meditative and may times I ‘lose him’ during class: he doesn’t know where to follow, he doesn’t always write in time from the board, etc.”(pr. sc. teacher N.M)

Conclusion: The fact that there are 9 cases where the behaviour during class hasn’t modified shows that some teachers know how to recede the negative effects of migration. We consider the attitude of some teachers to place the whole responsibility on the parents for the behaviour of the students during lessons to be totally unproductive.

5. Participation at group life

Regarding the participation at group life, a number of 16 participants have mentioned the migration has generated a slight degree of self-isolation, 21 affirm that, generally, there were no chances in the behaviour of the children, those who were withdrawn before, remained withdrawn, while those who were sociable have maintained this attitude.

“I cannot say she has changed her attitude towards friends, towards others. She is more emotive by her nature, until she gets used with the people, otherwise she is relaxed. From time to time she is daydreaming, she told me a few times she was thinking about dad, but beside that she is the same” (mother of I.V.)

The discussion continued however on the edge of the evolution of the role the child has in groups. This way, after the migration and the fact that the financial status has improved, some kids (12) have modified their position in group, meaning they became the most important in their group, being suppliers of financial resources or toys (balls, bats, guns, dolls, etc); 5 mothers have affirmed that, against this, their children became ‘prissier’, are more irascible, they get more easily upset among the group and have bigger pretensions at different objects, comparing themselves to their group friends.

“Not long ago, they started to look for him. Before they weren’t really coming after him, but now, since he has guns bought by his father from Germany, all kids from the neighbourhood are waiting for him to come and play outside.” (R.O.’s mother)

Conclusions: As an effect of the migration, the children have cut off contact with some persons whom they interrelated during the participation at cultural-sportive circles, but they have gained a somehow superior rank among their friends circles or among the family, acquaintances.

6. Attitude towards others

At this topic, most participants (28) affirmed, at the beginning that, if there is a change, is related rather to the age than to the migration of the parents. However, after diving further into the issue, the debates have shown that the migration of a parent has created some particular manifestations and attitudes different from the other children. The absence of a
parent is usually filled in by older siblings or other relatives (generally grandparents). Therefore, a part of paternal/maternal feelings tend to be assigned to these persons, sometimes even in their language, so that the grandmothers sometimes called 'mother' and the grandfather 'father'. 2 teachers have stated that, especially girls are more attached to them when the mother is abroad. There are cases where there was established a ‘ritual’ among the family to mention the parents during their physical absence. There are also reverse effects, in the direction of isolation towards the others and even manifesting a few minor phobias, particularly girls, towards adults of the opposite gender.

“When we all sit together to eat, there is always an empty chair for ‘father’ and the children know that the father is part of the family, even if he is physically absent and they see him only on Internet. When guests are coming, usually there is nobody sitting on that chair and if it is offered to somebody, they get told that is ‘dad’s chair’. Then, when he comes home, they all see to it that he regains his established place” (mother of G.A)

“We have whole rituals of ‘good night’ with photos and dolls to remember of the mother. The photo is kissed, the dolls are hugged. She sleeps with dolls dressed in mother’s clothes.” (C.V.'s father)

“A few times, M.A. came and hugged me and told me ‘You are my mother!’ The first time it shocked me, I didn’t say anything, but the third time I told her she has a mother that can’t wait to see her, that she suffers a lot her mother for her future, that after the 4th grade I will be only a memory for her, but that her mother will always remain her mother all her life. Even so, she has a few moments of tenderness with me she didn’t have while the mother was in country.”(Teacher P.R.)

Conclusions: The absence of the father or mother creates, in the first place, an empty ‘place’ in the family, place the child tends to fill with close acquaintances. “If these moments of tenderness the child has with others were to be recorded video, the parents would return home, out of jealousy, urgently.” (Counsellor F.A.)

7. Attitudes towards the self

The absence of a parent is felt by the children mainly by the sentiment that he is no longer given the necessary attention. Being an only child or he has siblings, either way for a child love means in the first place care.

The migration of the parents determines, by their absence, their kid to feel neglected. These feelings were confirmed by all the participants of the focus-group. 24 persons confirmed that this type of thoughts and feelings have affected the children the moment they received the information that their parent will leave for a longer time. With time, these emotions become blurry. The kids come to learn they weren’t neglected, the migrants contributing to the change of these opinions and attitudes by multiple means: discussions, constantly reiterated declaration with words that send the message of ‘love towards the kid’ in daily conversations, presents for different birthdays, rewards for good grades, etc. Even so, 18 persons declare that even now there are children that say they are neglected, that they are not important enough for the migrant parents. In fact, starting from the sentimental state where they feel cast aside, children end up diminishing their self-esteem.

“Many times I told my wife not to scold the kids when she talks with them on Internet, not to reproach them some failures, mistakes, etc so as not to increase their distrust in their own
capabilities. For months we had to fight to convince C. that mom left because she loves us and doesn’t want us to become worse.” (father, F.R.)

“'Dad left because I didn’t behave well and he was ashamed to go outside with me in park'. This phrase he told me many times, V. being sure he didn’t deserve being close to his father. It is painful to hear such words from a 6 year old boy and to prove him the contrary.” (F.V.’s mother)

Another aspect brought in discussion, initially unforeseen, but that was frequently repeated is the labelling realized by the other kids. Usually, children with parents abroad are welcomed in groups of equals, for they can supply material resources (money, toys) that the groups didn’t have in the first place. However, especially during conflicts and upsets, the children with migrant children are the most exposed to insults, reproaches, mockery from the other kids.

Some of the insulting words preferred by children regarding the absent parents are either invented by themselves, either taken from other children or adults, or even from mass-media (especially from TV): “beggars (31), strawberriers (25), thieves (23), traitors (18), un-Romanians (16), mother or father with no soul (15), bitches and leeches (13), gypsies (11), divorced (10), swan-eaters (3), refugees (5), carters (2), bozgors/ no country’s man (1)"

At the same time, the kids are named too: “left behind (37), without mother or father (36), abandoned (34), orphans (28), isolated (5), scoundrels (3)"

Conclusions: The parent that left cannot give the child the same self-trust he had while he was in country. The insults or reproaches of the others manifest themselves also regarding the migration, which brings a certain degree of vulnerability.

General conclusions gathered after applying the focus-group method

After the focus-groups that took place in research, there are several relevant conclusions:

- The migration of a parent brings negative effects over the psycho-pedagogical evolution of the kid; all followed indicators have had negative effects after the migration, with the exception of the one that speaks about life conditions.

- Whether they have or not passed through an experience of migration, all subjects have affirmed that the absence of a parent or both has repercussions over the normal development of the child.

- With small differences, most of the indicators have had the same perception among the participants of the focus-group (whether parents, grandparents, teachers). There is unanimity of opinions that the family where one parent is not home cannot be considered normal, no matter what everyone understands by normality.

- Surprisingly, the migration of parents brings a diminishing of frequenting artistic and sportive groups, especially among girls.

- The absence of a parent is felt by the child mainly by the fact that (s)he is no longer accorded the necessary attention. Very important is that what have had affirmed 24 persons: that these thoughts and feelings have fainted by different gestures made by the migrant: discussions, constantly reiterated declaration with words that send the message of ‘love towards the kid’ in daily conversations, presents for different birthdays, rewards for good grades, etc. What is even worse is that from the point where they feel neglected the children reach the point where they lack self-esteem, believing that actually they are
the reason their parents do not pay enough attention to them. At these there are also added traumas created by classmates and playmates, especially at quarrels and upsets, when they are addressed multiple insults, reproaches, mockeries from other kids.

Discussion

The use of the focus-group method allowed the building of a social environment which stimulated the answers. The social interactions between the interviewed individuals led to new ideas, towards a sincerity which was not present in an individual interview. The diversity of individual experiences were, for some, for the first time integrated in a social environment. The dynamics of the groups allowed the building of answers for the topic, which determined the disappearance of some subjects’ reticence, who were less willing to collaborate. The focus group favored the under standing of the mechanism which cause, uphold or annihilate particular attitudes and the information has a high level of fidelity and validity.

I have tried to nullify the group effects that take place either because of the group’s increased cohesion, either because the members of group are well-acquainted. Therefore, there were no other groups formed on other occasions, but they were for the first time integrated in such a social context.

The limits are determined by the fact that the results may have a relative validity compared to the general population. The information, data and elements obtained after the focus group have an empiric trait, in other words, they are presented in a form as unaltered ak possible, without being managed or influenced by the moderator.

Hence, a research of this kind must be associated with other qualitative methods (like case studies) but also with quantitative ones (quiz, questionnaire).

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Philosophical Essence of Democracy

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Abstract

Democracy is the product of the politico-economical systems of human society and is always evaluated from the point of view of the populace representation and their role. Continuously, to the democracy, are devoted countless number of theories which intent to explain the causes of the birth of democratic regimes and the power of civil society within such social systems. But in the philosophical plane, require answers a number of questions related to its origin and need, such as: Why did mankind leave the natural state of freedom when it was governed only by the instincts and the law of the jungle? What factors were imposed on the natural state of freedom and called to the stage of history the need for democracy? According to philosophers who refer to the determining role of elites, society is perceived as a single pyramid, at the head of which stands the elite of society itself. Philosophers, who refer to the role of pluralism, represent society as a number of billiard balls which collide with one another and with the governance itself, by producing the respective policies. Both views can be discussed. A society can be seen in the shape of a pyramid led by its elites. Robert Dahl called this kind of democracy a "polyarchy", which means led by the leaders of various groups who have managed to have an understanding with one another, while another scholar Arend Lijphart has called it "constitutional democracy". He argues that elites of every important group reach an agreement to run society under constitutional rules. This study provides a detailed analysis of the notion of "Democracy" seen from the point of view of elitism and pluralism. The breadth and depth of the subject consists of an intricate initiative in itself, for the fact that no study, old or new, or even all of the studies together on this subject, with all the depth and attentive care, can be complete, let alone conclusive, when they try to shed light on the etymological roots of humanity's democracy, on the abysses and the depths that it needs to overcome at present, as well as in its future. The study also puts forward a number of concerns related to the implementation of democracy as a theory and as a practice.

Keywords: Civil society, democracy, elitism, governance, people, pluralism, political system and polyarchy.

Introduction

The history of mankind has proved that the people's desire to live freely and with equal rights in front of the law has not recognized a better system than that of democracy. Yet its demands for even greater rights in everyday life as well as for an active and decision-making participation prove the need for its incessant progress. In essence, democracy can be summed up in two words: as a governance of the people and by the people themselves. The system of
Democracy is an ancient ideal with a long historical timeline. The principles and values which constitute the foundations of the modern institutions that accompany it, such as political freedom, general voting, political pluralism and representative assembly, have been created not just in one or two centuries. Abraham Lincoln has defined democracy as "a governance of the people, by the people and for the people". The views on democracy as well as the concepts of contemporary thinkers focus on some of the most important elements comprising democracy, not just in the theoretical field as a concept or as a formulation with a philosophical, political and legal content, but also as a realistic and functional system. For a more complete understanding of it, we will particularly dwell on the notion of the people and then on the ways and elements of its governance.

Democracy embodies a certain philosophical and political meaning, a social state and dominion which affect the entire pyramid of society from the ground to the peak. Whereas its implementation in practice summarizes a whole set of forms, in many cases even abusive or promulgated on its behalf. At the heart of these abuses or these hazards lies the misuse by totalitarian regimes and military dictatorships, similar to those which, through democratic labels, through theories and seductive words, try to achieve the support of the people. The strength of democratic ideas, the willpower and the human mind have been nourished with a profound and stimulating meaning in history; from Pericles in ancient Athens to Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia, from Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence in 1776 to Andrej Sakharov’s speeches in 1989. Democracy is also defined as "Governance by the people where the highest power belongs to the people and is directly exercised by him or by his elected representatives under a free electoral system." (Tapi'llari, 206 P.53,).

The physiognomy and the structure of democracy

Democracy embodies a certain political meaning, a social condition and dominion which affect the entire pyramid of society from the ground to its peak. On the other hand, its implementation in practice sums up a whole set of forms that grant life to it. The explanation underlined by Karl Marks about the society during XIX century, underlined the fact that society includes all material relationships between individuals within a period of development of productive forces. Society as a social organization stems from trading and production; it constitutes the basis of the state and superstructure. Marx emphasizes that the social structures of this society are dispersed in the economic structure. Society, therefore, is born of the bourgeoisie as this is the class which owns the means of production. Marx regarded it as a bourgeois society which was focused on realizing private interests and was immersed in corruption. "Marx in his battle against civil society, used as an additional weapon the idea that civil society is a society that alters the simple man, stripping him of property, identity, and dignity." (Tushi, 2007 P. 60).

Democracy nowadays is enriched and elaborated in accordance with the demands of the time and of the people. The term democracy is used not only to characterize political relations in a particular society, but also to judge and to determine the form of governance, its characteristics and political system. The notion of democracy arises over the understanding that people in their entirety, form the basis, the foundation and the pinnacle of the whole political life of society. They are the only source of power, while their interests and well-being constitute the ultimate goal of governance. In democracy, political power becomes legitimate only when it stems from the people. Power can be the result of the free will of the people as a whole, where every individual is free to make political choices which are significant to him. So
freedom is the indispensable condition of the concept of democracy. From this point of view, democracy can be defined as a system of ideas, practices and manners of action that lead to the institutionalization of freedom.

Democracy involves the dominion of majority and the respect for minorities for the fact that they are part of the population and therefore should not be treated unequally. From this point of view, democracy is seen as a form of political organization that ensures the rule of majority and the respect for the minority by creating spaces for free competition of political alternatives. Moreover, democracy is that form of political organization which enables political competition for the various alternatives of economic development, which provides free initiative and private property. However, a considerable number of regions with concepts of a dictatorial rule use the concept of democracy to disguise their malevolent intentions by hitting or reducing the fundamental human rights, to distort the essence of democracy through the application of only some of its elements, by misinterpreting and presenting the interests of a part as interests of the whole society. Sartori points out: "While a democracy has not yet managed to establish a stable consensus base, it is nothing more than a difficult and fragile democracy." (Sokoli, 2002, P. 103). Citizens are disappointed with the inability to create efficient institutions and sustainable economies. The legacy of communism is present in people's mindsets, as the structural organization of communism has destroyed the society. Political parties, hostile of one another, turn into realities which replace former social groups or former structures that served as firm foundations for Albanian society.

Therefore, democracy is a state constitution, regardless of the size of the state or country, in which power comes directly or indirectly from citizens on the basis of freedom and political equality as well as on the basis of broad political rights for the participation of all adult nationals for the election of the state pyramid organs from the base to the apex of it. The ownership and the exercise of power must be derived from the citizens.

Democracy as a political representation

One of the basic principles of democracy is political equality, which implies the demand for the political power to be distributed to the people in a broad and equitable manner. But what should we understand by the term "people"? Referring to the ancient Greek philosophers, it draws our attention the fact that with the term "people" they referred to the majority of underprivileged people and to those who lived in such proximate conditions. Indeed, in their concept, there is also a negative perception of the notion of people, such as the perception of Plato and Aristotle, who conceived democracy as the rule of the popular mass, as a rule of the crowd, which, as a consequence and according to them, acted to the detriment of wisdom and property. From here emanates even their judgment that the country and the people were many times better governed by the philosophers, the wisest people in the country. Surprisingly, although democracy has undergone substantial changes, it still maintains the appreciation that it represents the people’s need to be governed, as the people do not encompass the governing skills, hence they choose the representatives of political parties and groupings in the law-making and governing bodies.

Taking a quick look at the early concepts of democracy and the applied regimes in city-states of ancient Greek, it is easy to distinguish the fundamental changes that have undergone its concept in structure and content. Democracy nowadays is enriched and elaborated in accordance with the demands of time and the people. At present, the term democracy is used not only to characterize political relations in a certain society, but also to judge and determine
the form of governance, its characteristics and political system etc. Thus, the notion of democracy builds on the principle that people in their entirety form the basis, the foundation, upon which the whole political life of society arises. They are the only source of power, while their interests and well-being constitute the ultimate goal of governance. In democracy, the political power becomes legitimate only when it emanates from the people. Power can be the result of the free will of the people as a whole, where each individual is free to make the political choices that interest him. Thus, freedom is the indispensable condition of the concept of democracy. From this point of view, democracy can be defined as a system of ideas, practices and methods of action that lead to the institutionalization of freedom.

Democracy has an organic connection to our freedom and our rights. But every freedom has its vital space organized horizontally and vertically. "Freedoms" are different, though in essence they remain "constitutional rights" for every individual (citizen). John Locke merits a special position for the way he dealt with the concept of freedom. To him, freedom is separated into the freedom that operates under the will of the ego to make decisions and into the freedom subject to unsound, insecure, unknown and arbitrary will. Democracy involves the rule of majority and respect for minorities for the fact that they are part of the people and therefore should not be treated unequally. From this point of view, democracy is seen as a form of political organization that ensures the rule of majority and respect for the minority by creating spaces for free competition of political alternatives. Democracy is that form of political organization that enables political competition for the various alternatives of economic development and which provides free initiative and private property. However, a considerable number of regions with concepts of a dictatorial rule use the concept of democracy to disguise their malevolent intentions by hitting or reducing the fundamental human rights, to distort the essence of democracy through the application of only some of its elements, by misinterpreting and presenting the interests of a part as interests of the whole society.

Ancient Greek philosopher Pericles (Perikliu) underlined that democracy was related to tolerance, but it was not dealing with dominion of majority. Plato and Aristotle were both against democracy. Plato noted that democracy achieved the control of the governance by those who knew how to govern, thus, by populist demagogues, while Aristotle stated that governance by the people actually meant governance by the poor, of whom he feared that could expropriate the rich. Hobbes and Locke with the term democracy mean the political equality of citizens, but none of them expressly draw conclusions in favor of democracy. The definition of Lincoln, expresses the initial embryo of the ideal for democracy, rather than its real being. Democracy cannot be imposed on any society. However, it even is not a gift which can become a permanent property of someone. For democracy it must be fought and it should be protected every day.

The term and the meaning of democracy, thus, of the rule of the majority, must pass difficult "trails" when it comes to the notion of absolute majority, which also enjoys the right of decision-making as well. But, on the other hand, no right of any majority can be absolute. Lots of later philosophers, one of whom is John Locke, noted the danger that comes to the minority from the "dictatorship of the majority." Accepting the absolute right of the majority to impose its will on the minority means to establish a rule that over time turns against the principles of democracy itself.
Democracy can be: Direct Democracy and Democracy with Representative. In a direct democracy every citizen can participate in the issuance of state decisions without the mediation of elected or appointed officials. It is obvious that such a system is very propitious, as the number of individuals participating in it is relatively small, such as in an organization of a community or in a local branch of a syndicate where members can gather in one single room to discuss problems and make decisions by consensus or majority vote.

Under the conditions of a modern society, democracy embodies various traits from what was achieved in the society of Athens, while maintaining the characteristics of a representative, pluralistic democracy that is based on the concept of citizenship. The fundamental change with direct democracy lies in the fact that political decisions are taken by representative bodies and only in some specific cases, such as the case of referendums, political decisions are taken by the people. However, with all the need for change and perfection of democracy, we cannot fail to point out that its basic foundation remains the requirement to achieve the representation and protection of people’s interests even in the conditions when the elect exercise the power on people’s behalf. Democracy is the system that guarantees and harmonizes the duties and rights of individuals with those of society. Rights are the most basic and building blocks of democratic governance. In implementing representative democracy, voters do not make decisions for organizing their lives, but delegate these rights to their representatives. Despite the great advantages that representative democracy displays, it has not escaped Rousseau’s remarks, which pointed out with despair: "Nevertheless, from the moment when a nation is delivered to the representatives, it is no longer free." (Rousseau 2008, P. 313).

Under the conditions of a mistrust of the values offered by democracy with its principles and norms, disbelief was still immense for this kind of regime where people are self-governed. Philosopher and American scholar Alexander Hamilton proposed the phrase "representative democracy" which presupposes a new form of governance that combines popular sovereignty with the principle of political representation. Political representation implies the manner of its delegation and legitimacy. The elect speaks and acts on behalf of the elector. He provides the co-operation between the people, representing the foundation of democracy, and the mandates, his representatives. This connection is called "representativeness".

Conclusions

A democratic system represents a political system whose core is related to the wider participation of people in the exercise of public affairs and the erection of public policies for the creation of a general welfare. Authors of theories on democracy claim that a regime is called democratic when majority of people have the right to vote to elect their own leaders. Starting from this point of view, it can be affirmed that democracy is the greatest asset of political-social systems in the history of nations. Democracy is not only a concrete gateway to the defense of this precious heritage, but also an endless space for its continuous improvement. It is built and protected every day, not only by the elect, politicians and political parties, but also by all the citizens of a country who enjoy its benefits just like the warmth of the sun is enjoyed by all beings.

Bibliography


Exploitative Innovation and the Impact of Realized Absorptive Capability and Technology Orientation

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Abstract
This paper aims to identify the impact of Technology Orientation on the relationship of Realized Absorptive Capability and Exploitative Innovation. Using a sample of 194 firms located in Albania, we empirically test the mediating role of Technology Orientation. Nowadays, Innovation is not anymore a new phenomenon. In the literature a lot of studies have seen it with a close connection to technology. In some other study, in case of a dynamic environment, firms with realized absorptive capability are more predisposed to absorb technology and to be able to be update with it. Since technology is considered as an auxiliary tool to innovation, we considered it specifically for exploitative innovation which can increase even the efficiency of firms. The focus of this study is placed on knowledge-intensive sector in order to better capture the effect of these variables. The results demonstrate that the Technology Orientation has a full mediating role on this relationship. The Realized Absorptive Capability has not any impact on Exploitative Innovation in case of the lack of Technology Orientation.

Keywords: Realized Absorptive Capability, Technology Orientation, Exploitative Innovation, Albanian firms, Knowledge based industry.

Introduction
The business environment has become increasingly sophisticated and restricted. Therefore, it is complicated, given the fast changes in business environment nowadays, for an organization to create all the required knowledge to obtain the required innovation. One of the earliest authors that has write about innovation is Schumpeter (1934), he referees to it as a new combination of existing resources. As pointed out by Teece (2007), resource-based theory laid the micro foundations of the necessary skills to maintain firms’ superior performance in a dynamic environment with high innovation. In the same line (Hu, 2014) determines that a higher organizational ability to acquire and utilize new information leads to a higher capacity to launch innovations.

There is no doubt that the importance of innovation is directly related to performance as Drucker (1985) describe the innovation leads to changes that creates a new dimension of
performance. So, most of the literature that investigate on innovation concepts and its role in firms’ success, gives an importance role of innovation and frequently cites it as the key element of superior firm performance (Han, Kim, & Srivastava, 1998; Hurley & Hult, 1998; Weerawardena, O’Cass, & Julian, 2006).

**Content details**

Previous literature classified the innovation along two dimensions: (1) degree of novelty of new or existing technologies, products, and services that firms introduce into market before their own competitors (it may have already been available in other markets); and (2) degree of novelty of new or existing technologies, products, and services that firms introduce, but are already available from competitors in firms’ market (Popadić M., Černe, M., 2016). This can also be associated also to the concept of incremental and radical innovations (L.A.G. Oerlemans et al, 2013).

Among the literature on innovation an important role was given to the concept of exploratory and exploitative innovation. The notion of exploratory and exploitative innovation is seen as continuum of the concept of exploration and exploitation (Popadić M., Černe, M., 2016). March (1991) introduced the two concepts as follows: exploration includes things captured by terms such as search, variation, risk taking, experimentation, flexibility, discovery, and innovation. Exploitation includes such things as refinement, choice, production, efficiency, selection, implementation, and execution. The concept of exploration–exploitation is scarce with respect to technological innovations and thus is needed. In past, exploration–exploitation was linked through mergers and acquisitions, alliances, and other strategic changes (Lavie & Rosenkopf, 2006), with little attention given to the innovations (Greve, 2007).

Popadić et al. in their paper in 2016 made a clear distinguish between exploration and exploitation in innovation context. In doing so, they considered exploration and exploitation as outcomes of innovation, and exploratory innovation was seen as synonymous with radical innovation, while exploitative innovation with incremental innovation. Exploratory innovations are radical innovations because they are designed to meet the needs of new markets (Benner & Tushman, 2003; Danneels, 2002). For example, development of a distribution channel that is new to the market is a form of exploratory innovation. In turn, exploitative innovations are incremental innovations and designed to serve existing markets (Benner & Tushman, 2003). For instance, improving the efficiency of existing distribution channels is a form of exploitative innovations.

Exploratory innovations require development of new knowledge (Benner & Tushman, 2002). They enable firms to scan a variety of opportunities from the environment and create capabilities that are necessary for long-term survival and prosperity (Uotila, Maula, Keil, & Zahra, 2009). Moreover, exploratory innovation transposes in new processes, products, or markets (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). In turn, the goal of exploitative innovation is to build a firm’s current competitive advantage by efficiently managing the firm’s existing resources, skills, and capabilities to improve the designs of current products and services or to strengthen current customer relationships (Lubatkin et al., 2006; Sirén, Kohtamäki, & Kuckertz, 2012). So, through exploitation, firms learn how to exploit existing technologies while through exploration, firms are more focus to experiment, and innovate (Levinthal and March, 1993; Jansen et al., 2006). In some study both exploratory innovation and exploitative innovation have a positive effect.
on firm performance for example, this is found at (Jansen et., al 2006; Li et al., 2008; Rothaermel and Alexandre, 2009; Junni et al., 2013).

According to previous studies in this field, many internal factors facilitate exploratory innovation and exploitative innovation. The main that can be mentioned are the Absorptive capacity (AC) in its two dimensions’ potential absorptive capacity and realized absorptive capacity and the third variable Technological innovation (Mikhailov, A., & Reichert, F. M. 2019). Considering Teece (2010) the technological development is the key of success to captured customer needs as well as the value creation, if a new product or service is implemented in a firm, so in a dynamic environment this factor is very related with innovation. AC and innovation studies show that AC positively affects innovative performance. Cohen and Levinthral (1990, p. 128) define AC as “the ability of a firm to recognize the value of new, external information, assimilate it, and apply it to commercial ends”. They stated that research and development (R&D) spillovers can increase the firms’ ability to identify, assimilate and exploit knowledge from the environment. While Zahra and George (2002) provided another turn to the definition, they are separating the AC structure into two main dimensions: potential absorptive capacity (PACAP) and realized absorptive capacity (RACAP).

PACAP includes the acquisition and assimilation capabilities. It makes the firm open to the acquisition and assimilation of externally-generated knowledge (Lane and Lubatkin, 1998). On the other hand, RACAP involves the transformation and exploitation capabilities discussed earlier. It reflects the firm’s capacity to leverage the knowledge that has been absorbed.

Based on Jansen et al., 2006 the absorptive capacity begins with knowledge acquisition from the environment and ends with its exploitation. Even if PACAP and RACAP have different roles, yet their effect is not isolated, but rather complementary. Both subsets of absorptive capacity coexist and participate in the improvement of firm performance. Firms cannot possibly exploit knowledge without first acquiring it. Similarly, firms can acquire and assimilate knowledge but might not have the capability of transforming and exploiting this knowledge for profit generation. Therefore, a high PACAP does not necessarily imply enhanced performance. RACAP involves transforming and exploiting the assimilated knowledge by incorporating it into the firm’s operation (A.L. Leal-Rodríguez et al, 2014).

The focus of our study is the exploitative innovation as Albania’s firm are much more oriented in incremental innovations based on the reason that the firms on this developing county don’t have the possibility to change rapidly the technology and to develop the exploratory innovation but they are more focused to implement new technology and new process that requires their market, so they are investing in existing needs customers or markets, current and existing distribution channels. We want to investigate the impact of realized absorptive capability on Exploitative innovation. In addition, this study sheds light on the mediating role of technology oriented on Exploitative innovation.

Hence, we pose the hypotheses and theoretical model as below:

H1. There is a significant relationship on Realized Absorptive Capability and Exploitative Innovation.
H2. There is a significant relationship between Realized Absorptive Capability and Technological Orientation

H3. Realized Absorptive Capability and Technology Orientation both impact positively Exploitative Innovation

Fig 1: Theoretical structure model

Method and procedures

The sample in this study consists of 203 firms randomly selected from a defined framework of companies registered in the national business center in Albania on 2018. This framework was focused only on intensive knowledge sectors. According to the definition of the Eurostat on NACE Rev.2 the sample has considered nine different subsectors in manufacturing and services. The main reason for selecting only the intensive knowledge sectors was to capture the phenomenon under investigation about innovation (Von Nordenflycht, 2010). As Ashworth (2012) and Morollon, Loscos and Pardos (2010) explain the firms with high concentration of knowledge, information, technology and skills are more adapted to supplying solutions on a dynamic environment. Based on Bayesian outlier we removed nine cases, so the final analyze is made for 194 businesses. The most data are taken directly by the owners, administrators or firms managers, when we have been explained all the questions face by face. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was used to analyze the data.

Dependent variable

Exploitative Innovation based on (Jansen et al. 2006) is measured on four questions with seven-point scale, related only with the new product and services. The manager was asked to rate if their firms refine the provision of existing products and services; if their implement regularly small adoptions to existing products and services; if they introduce improved, but existing products and services for the local market and if the organization expands services for existing clients. The four-item construct yielded a Cronbach Alpha of 0.752 (standardized Cronbach Alpha coefficients), follows thin accordance with the recommended criteria (Nunnally, 1978) and (Hair et al., 2006) show that coefficients of 0.7 or more are considered adequate.

Independent variable

Realized Absorptive Capacity is operationalized on six items based on (Camisón & Forés, 2010; Flatten et al., 2011). The six items generate a Cronbach Alpha of 0.855 that is a very good
indicator for the construct. The firm managers have been asked to measure the items from 1 (if they were strongly disagreeing) to 7 (if they were strongly agreeing). They are asked for: 1. The ability that their employees have to structure and use newly collected information, 2. If the employees are used to preparing newly collected information for further purposes and making it available, 3. Are they able to integrate new information into their work; 4. Do they have immediate access to stored information, e.g. about new or changed guidelines or instructions; 5. Are they regularly engage in the development of prototypes or new concepts; and 6 do they apply new knowledge in the workplace to respond quickly to environment changes.

Mediated variable

Technology orientation is the independent variable that we have operationalized based on Zhou et al (2005). The three items that are used for this construct are based on the activity that firms are using. So the managers had value the: 1. the use of the most advanced technology in the development of new products; 2. Easy acceptance by the organization of technological innovation which is undertaken based on concrete results of a research work and 3. Technological innovation is easily accepted in the management of specific projects undertaken in the organization. The items generate a Cronbach Alpha of 0.742 that is a good indicator according to (Hair et al., 2006).

Control Variable:

Manufacture or service – this variable is measured as a dichotomy variable, the business are divided on service and manufacturing based on classification of NACE2.

Age - is the number of the years that the business has on the market.

Size of business – is measured by the logarithm of the employees that has the business.

Empirical model

Following Baron and Kenny (1986), a system of three equations is used to assess the meditational role of realized absorptive capability:

1) \( Y = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11}X + e_1 \)
2) \( Me = \beta_{20} + \beta_{21}X + e_2 \)
3) \( Y = \beta_{30} + \beta_{31}X + \beta_{32}Me + e_3 \)

Where, in this article Y is the dependent variable representing – firm’s performance, X is the independent variable – the technology orientation and Me is the mediator variable-realized absorptive capability.

Construct validity

To analyze the items that are used in the questionnaire we performed a factor analysis with varimax rotation (see appendix A). To test the validity of our independent perceptual variables is used KMO and Bartlett’s Test that is significant and has an adequacy measured of Sampling 0.783. The two components accounted 61.89% of the variance and loadings are above the acceptable standard of 0.32 proposed by Tabachnick and Fiddell (2007).

The results for Technology Orientation loaded reasonably high, exactly (.633, .860, .890). Also four the construct of Realized Absorptive Capability the items reasonable high (.843, .776,
.871, .759, 785, .835). About the Exploitative innovation the items loaded also high (.852, .610, .800, .774).

**Results**

We have considered only 194 business after we have eliminated the outlier. The respondents on this study were the owners, administrators or managers of the business where 35.1% of the respondents were female and 64.9% were male. Around 80% of business were located on Tirana, the capital city of Albania, and the other businesses were located in Durres that is also a city with a lot of businesses because of the impact that has the location of port in this city. In Albania, based on Instat (2020) around 41% of the businesses are located inside of this two cities. Most of the businesses interviewd are service focused and only 28.4% are manufacturing businesses. Even if the sample is randomly selected, the representation of the population is at a good level, refering to the age and division into production and service according to Eurostat (Nace2), as shown in the table below:

**Table 4: Comparison in % between Sample and Campion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Based on NACE2 (%)</th>
<th>Age (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manufacture</td>
<td>Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample (194)</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>71.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campion (3493)</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>70.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sobel test is performed to see the significant of the mediation effect on this equation. Based on the value of skewness and kurtosis the variable define as a normal distribution. The value of VIF are greater than one so this indicate a lack of multicolinarity. The following tables summarizes all the regression results for the three hypotheses:

**Table 5: Regression results for H1 and H2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dependent variable: Exploratory Innovation H1</th>
<th>Dependent variable: Technology Orientation H2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>S.E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.792***</td>
<td>.417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realized Absorptive Capability</td>
<td>.186*</td>
<td>.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R Square</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting R Square</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>6.609</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*0.01 ≤ p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001, †0.05 ≤ p < 0.1

**Table 6: Regression results for H3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dependent variable: Exploitative Innovation H3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(RealizAC-TO-EXIn)</td>
<td>(RealCA-TO-EXIn)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Variable | B     | S.E   | Beta  | B     | S.E   | Beta  | B     | S.E   | Beta  
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- 
**Constant** | 3.694** | .45  | *    | 3.627** | .45  | *    | 3.360** | .54  | *    
Realized Absorptive Capability | .084  | .07  | 2    | .083  | .07  | 2    | .059  | .07  | 5    
Technology Orientation | .307*** | .06  | 4    | .336  | .06  | 4    | .332  | .06  | 4    
Industry (service/manufacture) | .310†  | .16  | 3    | .129  | .16  | 3    | .373*  | .16  | 9    
Firm Size | .070  | .05  | 3    | .099  | .05  | 3    
Age | -.002 | .00  | 9    | -    | .00  | 9    | -    | .015  | 
R Square | .136  | .152 | .169 | Adjusting R Square | .127  | .139 | .146 | 
F | 15.042 | 11.361 | 7.219

*0.01 ≤ p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001, †0.05 ≤ p < 0.1

**Hypothesis 1**: Realized Absorptive Capability has a positive impact on Exploitative Innovation. The R-square indicates that around 3.3% of the variance variable can be explained in this model.

**Hypothesis 2**: Realized Absorptive Capability has a significant positive impact on Technological Orientation. The R-square in this model indicate that around 8.8% of the variance can be explained in this model.

**Hypothesis 3**: In the model that we can see both Realized Absorptive Capability and Technology Orientation, they don’t have both significant impact on Exploitative Innovation. Only the Technology Orientation has a significant positive impact on Exploitative Innovation. The R-square in this model indicate that around 15.2% of the variance can be explained in this model.

Based on (Baron and Kenny, 1986) as it is a significant relationship between the Realized Absorptive Capability on Exploitative Innovation (equation 1) and there is a significant relationship between Realized Absorptive Capability to the Technology Orientation (equation 2) we come to the conclusion that Technology Orientation is a complete mediator in this relation because the effect of the independent variable (Realized Absorptive Capability) is not significant on the Exploitative Innovation (equation 3) when is taken in consideration also Technology Orientation.

**Conclusions**

Our study aims to investigate the relationship between realized absorptive capability and exploitative innovation in 194 firms focused on knowledge intensive sector on Albania. As well known in many studies, technology is often seen as the main input of innovation or even as an essential element to make it successful. At the same time, as it is emphasized by the resource based theory, the firm cannot gain sustainable competitive advantages without dynamic capabilities in such a dynamic environment. Viewing the technology orientation as an important variable on innovation this study has concluded that no matter how important realized absorptive capability is, they cannot be transferred their potential to exploitative innovation without the mediation role of technology. So, based on this empirical study, the firms that follow the market and also tend to be innovative must be conscious that the main
element on this process is the access of technology or how they are oriented on technology to achieve their goals. Also the study has managerial implication, they should know that no matter how many resources and potential a firm has, if technological orientation is lacking the resources may be left unused.

**Limitation**

No studies come without limitations, so some limitations of our research should be noted. One of the limitations of the study is related to innovation, our study includes only exploitative innovation and does not include the explorative innovation. Another limitation of this study is the lack of other variable that explain exploitative innovation. Finally, in the future study more data are needed to ensure that the captured effect is the same.

**References**


Appendix A: Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items for independent variable</th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th>F3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We frequently refine the provision of existing products and services</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.852</td>
<td>.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We regularly implement small adoptions to existing products and services</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>.610</td>
<td>.334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We introduce improved, but existing products and services for our local market</td>
<td>.114</td>
<td>.800</td>
<td>.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our organization expands services for existing clients</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.774</td>
<td>.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We use sophisticated technology in developing new products</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>.322</td>
<td>.633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological innovation which is undertaken based on concrete results of a research work, is easily accepted in our organization</td>
<td>.218</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>.860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological innovation is easily accepted in the management of specific projects undertaken in organizations</td>
<td>.221</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The employs have the ability to structure and use newly collected information</td>
<td>.843</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The employs are used to preparing newly collected information for further purposes and making it available</td>
<td>.776</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The employs are able to integrate new information into their work</td>
<td>.871</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The employs have immediate access to stored information, e.g. about new or changed guidelines or instructions</td>
<td>.759</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>.115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The employs regularly engage in the development of prototypes or new concepts</td>
<td>.785</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The employs apply new knowledge in the workplace to respond quickly to environment changes</td>
<td>.835</td>
<td>.049</td>
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*Underlying the dimension as three factor: F1- Realized Absorptive Capability; F2-Exploitative Innovation; F3- Technology Orientation
Abuse of Law Doctrine in Tax Law

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Abstract

This paper was written in order of the reforming of the tax system's framework. Analysing phenomena such as tax evasion, tax avoidance, the use of legal loopholes to reduce tax liability in Italy was very challenging. The purpose of this paper is to verify, in the light of most interventions the latest case law of the European Court of Justice, if it exists in the field of direct and indirect taxes, a general principle of abuse of law. The existence of this provision will be analyzed in the context of the principle of legal certainty. We should analyse the concept of abuse of law as a normative problem and historical-evolutionary phenomenon. In this paper a special place is taken by the genesis of the concept of abuse of Community law and the general principle of prohibition of abuse of the right in function of a general anti-avoidance norm, its meaning, effects and role as a corrector of the system. We have addressed the role of jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice, dividing it into two parts: Abuse in field of harmonized taxation- Halifax Doctrine and Abuse in the field of disharmonized taxation -The leading case-Cadbury Schweppes.

Keywords: tax system, tax avoidance, doctrine of abuse of law, re-characterization.

Introduction

1.1 Methodology

Every serious research requires, first of all, the definition of the methodology that will be used for its realization and for the drawing of conclusions. The method of study is closely related to the chosen field of study, as the method above all must be appropriate to the field of study and the results required to be achieved. The methodology used for all the key issues addressed in this paper is largely qualitative. This paper also includes comparative methods on specific aspects of the paper. The main methodological principle in legal comparison is that of functionality, namely "la in law the only things which are comparable are those which fulfill the same function". Based on the above analysis, the methodology used to carry out this paper is presented as follows.

Doctrinal research (collection and processing of the literature). This phase consists of reviewing the literature related to the object of study, which includes the identification, collection and systematization of books, monographs, scientific articles, papers of national and international conferences in the legal field. The selection of literature is spread over a relatively considerable number of foreign authors as well as some local authors.

Analysis of the legislation. In achieving certain objectives in this paper we have relied on the method of analysis and synthesis. This method consists in formulating legal problems through
the analysis of legislation. In our legal system, legal norms are found in codes, laws and other acts. Since norms regulate general situations, the method of legal analysis serves to identify and solve problems of theory and practice, through the interpretation of these norms. Also, this method serves to clarify the ambiguity of norms, their placement in a logical and coherent order and to analyze their interaction other norms.

Comparative method. For a better understanding and interpretation of domestic legal norms, the realization of a comparative analysis between the domestic tax legislation and the legislation of those countries (Italian legislation), which has served as a model for Albanian legislation.

The method of analysis of case law is also a very important method, which serves to see the way of interpretation and practical application that Albanian and foreign courts have made to tax evasion and the doctrine of abuse of law. The analysis of the practice of foreign courts serves to see the way of interpretation and practical application of tax evasion by these courts, in order to have a better understanding of tax evasion and the methods of its ascertainment by the Albanian courts.

Quantitative method. During the work were reflected statistical data of criminal offenses in the field of taxes published in the official Annual Reports of the GDT. These data show an increase, year after year, in the number of criminal offenses in the field of taxation in Albania. As no statistical study of tax evasion has been conducted in Albania, this is one of the limitations of this paper.

1.2 Abuse of law concept

In recent years in European countries has been assisted in a process of deterioration of the national tax system. The reasons for this deterioration are various, but the specific weight is attributed to the constant normative change, conditioned by the conditions and emergency needs, which make these adjustments not systematically coordinated with the existing adjustment and the difficulty of the tax administration in interpreting cases. concrete evasion by taxpayers of tax liabilities [1].

In this context the abuse of right has arisen as a margin against these transactions aimed at gaining tax advantages. Until the 1990s, it was claimed that there was no general anti-avoidance norm in Italian legislation; the response to avoidance was entrusted to a number of specific anti-avoidance norms, which defined the types of behaviors that would be considered avoidance and therefore their effects were not recognized.

Therefore, it was considered a novelty the introduction of a general anti-avoidance norm [1], represented by article 10, of law no. 408/1990, which although limited its application to only a few cases, defined as avoidance all transactions carried out with the sole purpose, that of gaining tax advantages illegally.

In the late 90's, according to Palumbo in his book "Elusione fiscale e abuso del diritto, L’aggiramento degli obblighi impositivi tra legittimo risparmio ed evasione fiscale", stated that changes were made again, which consisted of the reformulation of this notion from article 37-bis of Presidential Decree (P.S) no.600, and aimed not at modifying the existing approach, but clarifying the concept of fraudolenza-dishonesty (illegality). This concept did not necessarily have to correspond to the criminal meaning of this term, in order to gain tax advantages, but it referred to all those actions, acts, transactions, related to them, that lacked valid economic
reasons, with direct impact in the deviation of obligations or prohibitions provided by tax legislation, and in order to achieve reductions in tax liabilities or their refunds.

In this way, the intention of the legislator to individualize a discipline similar to the civil one, provided by Article 1344 of the Italian Civil Code, on contracts in fraud (Contratto in frode alla legge).

As in civil law, are considered fraudulent law, actions which are defined as means to avoid the application of an orderly norm, using not simulation, but the objective elements of the contract in a particular way; as well as in tax law, constitutes a transaction in fraud of tax rates, the one who does not directly violate this rate, but avoids the "aggression" from the obligation or prohibition established, thus gaining advantages and thus violating the principle of the tax system. on solvency according to Palumbo.

It is necessary that the basic principles of tax law have been violated, that the behavior of the taxpayer be considered as evasion [2]. These principles are e.g. prohibition of double cost reduction, prohibition of tax increase, etc.

The Court of Cassation changed the line of argument developed in 2005, which focused on invalidity due to defect or illegality of cause, on contracts signed for fiscal purposes (dividend washing and dividend stripping contracts).

In conclusion, the following considerations can be formulated according to Palumbo analysis:

* There is no doubt that tax legislation should be able to identify and address the elusive behaviors of taxpayers even when they become overly sophisticated.

* It should be borne in mind that this reaction by the tax administration to oppose evasion cases should not be transformed into ad nutum non-application of written rules.

* Abuse of the right is evident in transactions carried out by taxpayers without valid economic reasons, to achieve tax advantages, where judging or testing valid economic reasons is done ex post, and is therefore extremely difficult both from the point of view of the burden of proof, as well as in terms of normative lack.

In order to determine the abuse of the right, in each case, the complex content of the transaction must be analyzed, which is formally in accordance with the normative definitions, but not substantially.

**Law as facultas agendi: l’abus de droit**

Abuse of the law, in the experience of countries part of the Civil Law legal family, has existed for almost a century and a half, when it first appeared in the liberal legal order of the second half of the 1800s, as an incorrect exercise of subjective right [2].

Otherwise it can be called as abuse of a facultas agendi, ie the exercise of individual and collective freedoms, in economic relations, applying the principle that what is not forbidden is allowed¹.

From the liberal point of view, subjective right was considered as the prerogative of the individual, as the recognition of his freedom. The crisis of the institutional principles of liberal

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¹ Qui suo iure utitur neminem laedit "and" nullus videtur dolo facere suo iure utitur ".

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societies and legal positivism (formal equality before the law) favored the birth and spread of the theory of abuse, which was a correction of the absolute declaration of real rights. Thus, the abuse of the right became a means of substantive control, of the discretion of the free exercise of private autonomy and developed in parallel, with the progressive expansion of legal forms of control in private law.

The modern theory of abuse of law consolidated the social responsibility of the legal order, thanks to the contribution of French doctrine and its codification. Rights have a social purpose, are relative and their exercise beyond their economic and social function constitutes abuse.

Through the prohibition of abuse the social function of law is achieved. The traditional definition of abuse includes the hypothesis of using or not using a right, which does not bring advantages in itself, but aims to create these advantages for others.

The object of abuse, in fact, is not limited to subjective rights in the narrow sense. The notion of abuse according to Piantavigna represents the means to determine the scope and limits of the subjective legal position of complex tax advantages.

The object of abuse can be positions that constitute an advantage (facultas agendi) or normative provisions (norma agendi). The second object is abuse in the broad sense, to distinguish it from what we have just explained, abuse in the narrow sense, (facultas agenda) as the first form of abuse.

The concept of frode alla legge (in deception of law) is one of the forms of abuse of law: the conceptual assimilation of two legal figures comes from the fact that abuse is often described as illegal use of the norm, which is avoided ratio (purpose).

Even the concept of frode alla legge, like abuse in the narrow sense, is a concept which arises in the field of civil law and is presented as an instrument of a hybrid character, produced by a long process of technical cleansing.

This concept provides a "bypass" of legal rules: the taxpayer abuses the freedom to adopt a certain treatment of his interests, using the variety of legal forms that the legal order makes available, in order to achieve a result, which usually, the legal system does not allow and indirectly does not approve [2]. The core of this concept is represented by the norm avoidance activity, which according to the principles should be applied and not by social harm; the element of causing harm is no longer so essential in the configuration of abuse.

3. The genesis of the concept of abuse in Community law

The course and problematics of the categories of tax evasion and abuse of tax law take on other characteristics in the international context. In international law, the principle of abuse arises [2] with the fading of the dogma of sovereignty and the recognition of the fact that states are subject to law, even when not created by agreement.

The problem of abuse of law constitutes an exigency for correction and development, which is existing in every legal order [3].

Community law (EU law) also considers the phenomenon of abuse as a priority. This seems to be the source of a nearly thirty-year-old jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice that has legitimized itself to oppose the presence of abusive behavior, even in the absence of a norm that explicitly defines this authority, both in the community order and in the national one.
Moreover, the genesis of the concept of abuse of law is explained precisely by the reason of the destructive normative context, typical of the European legal order [2].

The European legal system is an self-sufficient and complete system, for which the fact of the absence of an explicit norm is irrelevant, while the way of its evolution is completely original. Precisely due to the less developed character of the community legal system compared to the national one, a continuous exchange of experiences and legal institutes has been delegated between the member states (in the horizontal sense) and between them and the community system (in the vertical sense).

National legislation contributes to the realization of the completeness of the legal system, which represents the necessary criterion within the framework of effectiveness, without being hindered by the principle of uniformity. The principles elaborated by the ECJ, create starting points for future legal elaboration [3].

Luxembourg judges elaborate general principles as sources of law, thanks to the combined effect of fundamental principles, uniformity and the direct effect of Community law: "soft law" or soft law represented by common principles and values, is transformed by the European Court of Justice into a “hard law”, through the creation of judicial rules and compulsory export at the European level. In this return, where national legislation is “permeable” by the interpreted Community law, the general principles elaborated by the Court tend to be affirmed as values disseminated by the Community legal system. Thus, the system of community principle [2] adopted by the court, does not have an external origin, but it is a matter of principles of community law, with all legal effects, which are not "borrowed" from other legal systems.

It is interesting to observe how, according to this new provision, the elusive phenomenon is expressly traced back to the concept of abuse of the right: a broad notion, repeatedly investigated by doctrine and jurisprudence, which indicates the anomalous exercise of a right which, without realizing any valid and concrete interest for its owner, it causes damage or a danger of damage to other subjects, thus placing itself in radical contrast with the purpose in view of which that right was attributed by the law.

Before the introduction of the aforementioned art. 10-bis, the phenomenon of tax avoidance was contemplated by art. 37-bis of the D.P.R. 600/1973, as part of the provisions on the assessment of income taxes. As a result of the 2015 news, this provision was repealed and any reference to it must now be understood as referring to the current art. 10-bis L. 212-2000.

According to paragraph 1 of the new art. 10-bis, “one or more transactions without economic substance which, despite formal compliance with tax regulations, essentially achieve undue tax advantages constitute abuse of the right”. Consequence of the recognized abusive nature of a transaction is its non-enforceability to the financial administration, therefore entitled to disregard the advantages and therefore to determine the taxes due "on the basis of the rules and principles evaded and taking into account the amount paid by the taxpayer as a result of these operations".

The definition provided, rather generic in its outlines, is better specified by the following paragraph 2, according to which we consider:

“a) transactions without economic substance, facts, deeds and contracts, even connected to each other, unsuitable for producing significant effects other than tax advantages. In
particular, the non-coherence of the qualification of the individual transactions with the legal basis of the whole and the non-compliance of the use of legal instruments with normal market logic are indices of lack of economic substance;

b) undue tax advantages the benefits, even if not immediate, realized in contrast with the purposes of the tax laws or with the principles of the tax system ".

A further clarification - this time in the negative - is provided in the third paragraph of the provision, where it is pointed out that "in any case, the operations justified by valid extra-fiscal reasons, not marginal, also of an organizational or managerial nature, which respond for the purpose of structural or functional improvement of the company or of the taxpayer's professional activity ".

The concept of avoidance. In what sense is tax avoidance illegal?

Tax avoidance involves arranging a transaction or series of transactions in such a way as to gain a tax advantage, distinguishing between tax planning, which is lawful, and tax evasion.

Increasing cases of avoidance must be addressed and urgent and concrete measures must be taken. This poses a serious challenge to the effectiveness of tax laws.

Throughout the multitude of books, articles or reports on this subject have been observed contradictions and different streams of opinion on the nature and causes of tax evasion, ways of responding to it or addressing it, mentioning the fact that for some authors tax evasion is a problem which requires an answer on the part of the legislature [4]. Exactly this is the role of the science of law, that of studying the balances between socio-economic developments and the law, as well as that of interpreting the law in function of these changes.

The divergences in these views of different groups of scholars, doctrine or jurisprudence come as a result of the legal traditions of states pertaining to the rights and obligations of the individual in tax law.

The problems faced by the Italian system and other tax systems of the OECD member states have been numerous. Sometimes legal changes have tended to reflect a pragmatic approach, which solved only a part or none of the problems of the tax system. The main issues and the most vulnerable areas which have been and continue to be problematic for Italy as well as for other countries, including the Albanian case, are:

- lack of a clear and coherent policy to address the structural choices provided by tax legislation;
- the fact that the tax system exists as an economic reality in the business world and as a real and substantial cost that affects the form of most transactions;
- the existence and application of many formal principles for characterizing transactions and creating differences, which are more formal than substantial;
- different tax for different businesses and the lack of a coherent income tax framework.

The ways that have been followed to ascertain tax evasion have been different. In Italy, the interpretation of an anti-evasion provision has been used mainly, as to whether or not this provision constitutes a general anti-evasion rule, which would facilitate the process of tax evasion by the tax administration.
Referring to the Italian legislation, in this paper it will be determined that the general anti-avoidance rules are essentially “unclear” in their scope and application. The approach to a legal interpretation, within the scope of the legislation serves as a guide to understand and apply tax evasion and to provide a more complete and effective solution to the problem of tax evasion. The tendency to avoid, although ethically reprehensible, is considered a natural human behavior. The human being is in fact an "economic entity", which as such tends to perform those actions which require a minimum of investment, to achieve maximum profit. Also, according to [5] each entity operates on the basis of a cost-benefit calculation and aims at the minimum use of capacity, in our case, property.

From the economic point of view, again this kind of behavior is natural, while from the legal point of view, tax avoidance is an inadmissible phenomenon, because it is contrary to the principles of tax law and cause obvious and substantial "distortions", as in the economic plan, as well as in the social one [6].

In fact, there is not yet a complete definition of tax avoidance and the impact of the concept of abuse of law has made the exact individualization of this definition even more complex. Not only the concept of abuse of law [7], as the most innovative in tax law, but also cases of similarity with tax evasion, simulation, tax planning make tax avoidance, difficult to identify and ascertain.

However, as we will see in the following, from a detailed treatment, tax evasion differs from the above cases, both in form and content [8].

By tax evasion, according to [8] we will understand the situation when income is declared, but transactions are structured in such a way, using the legal space, that the tax liability is reduced. This reduction has not been in the intention of the legislator nor in the spirit of the law [7].

During the century XX, many cases of tax avoidance in Italy have been ascertained only with the use of some specific measures in specific sectors, which seemed more vulnerable to abusive cases. Attempts to formulate a general anti-avoidance rule ran counter to the principle of contractual autonomy and legal certainty. The real concern was that, if the tax administration were to be given the right to assess the effective link between the form of the transaction, [8]the substance and the economic result obtained by the parties, the improvement could have been worse, than the problem itself. In fact, the tax administration is not an impartial third party and its "power" facilitates the regulation of this problem [9].

In tax law, it is often difficult to distinguish between tax evasion, tax avoidance and legal savings or, as it is otherwise called, tax planning. Avoidance is in an intermediate position between tax evasion (or open violation of the normative provisions of tax law) and legitimate austerity (as a lawful exercise of the contractual freedom and autonomy of the parties).

Thus, avoidance consists in using the rules in an instrumental way, formally perfect, but which is essentially contrary to the spirit of the provisions, aiming, exclusively or mainly, at reducing the tax burden normally payable. According to [8]The taxpayer, who under normal circumstances would be subject to a special tax regime, avoids the application of the latter, fulfilling one or more transactions, which otherwise would not performed, or acts artificially under the conditions required by law, in order to enjoy a more favorable position, contrary to the purposes set by the law itself [8].
In an attempt to further clarify these two concepts, legal doctrine has attempted to highlight the essential features of tax avoidance. There are always four elements present in a tax avoidance case, which are:

- Anomalies of the transaction compared to the type of transaction that would normally have been performed, in the same or similar circumstances;
- The tax advantage achieved through the unusual transaction, compared to what the taxpayer would normally benefit from;
- Adjustment of the transaction in accordance with achieving the reduction or reimbursement of the tax liability;
- The exclusive (or prevalent) goal, which leads the parties to deviate from the normative determination. For the first and last characteristic (objective and subjective elements, respectively), the tax administration will have to analyze case by case the real reasons they have caused the taxpayer to deviate from performing the ordinary transaction [10]. While for the other two to re-evaluate the amount of the obligation paid less.

**Conclusion**

In terms of globalization and the transferability of factors of production, direct taxes constitute a tax area where countries develop competition among themselves to be more attractive to foreign investors. The harmonization of the Albanian tax legislation with that of the European Union is in an ongoing process. Considering the fact that at the moment when Albania receives the status of candidate country for membership in the European Union, indirect taxes go towards harmonization, Albania must remain competitive in the field of direct taxes.

In this paper was analyzed, reviewed and compared the concept of tax evasion in Italian legislation and in Albanian legislation. From the analysis of doctrine, normative predictions and jurisprudence some important conclusions were reached.

Starting with the Albanian tax legislation, it was concluded that there is a general anti-avoidance norm which needs changes, in order to increase the effectiveness of this rate, as a legal basis for addressing tax avoidance.

There are set out three criteria that must be met in order to determine the existence of a tax avoidance transaction:

(A) lack of valid business purpose;

(B) evasion of obligations or prohibitions;

(C) tax advantage (Benefit-reduction or refund of taxes).

From the analysis we performed, we can give a definition of the concept of tax avoidance. We are in the case of tax avoidance, when the taxpayer artificially creates the conditions for conducting a transaction which deviates from the normative determination by using the legal space, illegally, with the main or exclusive purpose - that of achieving a tax advantage.

Tax avoidance is in an intermediate position between tax evasion (open violation of normative provisions of tax law, failure to declare data and / or falsify them) and legitimate savings (tax planning as a lawful exercise of freedom and contractual autonomy of parties). The burden of the tax administration (as a third party), in these cases is to individualize the physiological
transaction that the taxpayer should have performed and the effects (of the advantage gained) that he has received from performing the transaction without valid economic reasons. Once the administration identifies this type of transaction, it must reclassify it by imposing the highest tax resulting from this requalification [8].

Contesting abuse can be divided into three stages:

a) Individualization of the abusive transaction
b) Reclassification of the abusive transaction
c) Determining the tax effects of income (not recognizing the advantages achieved).

The legal order with its operators, on the one hand the tax administration and on the other hand the court, must not allow legal norms to be circumvented, or used in that form, in order to achieve illegal tax advantages.

As far as the Albanian case is concerned, as mentioned, efforts are still needed to develop a consolidated doctrine and jurisprudence, which will have a simpler path in the case of a general written community principle. Until 2019, in the Albanian legal reality, the only way to ascertain tax evasion is Article 71/dh of the law "On tax procedures", which provides for the right of the tax administration to re-evaluate the transaction or related transactions without essential economic substance”. In 2019, the first general anti-avoidance norm was introduced, amending Article 71 of Law no. 9920/2008 "On tax procedures", as amended.

The implementation of indirect audit methods in Albania should be carefully managed. This approach is well accepted in international good practices, but for Albanian taxpayers and courts it will be a new experience. Auditors should be well trained in the application of indirect audit methods and given guidance detailed procedural. The first cases must undergo rigorous quality assurance reviews before a final assessment can be made.

Approximate estimates using indirect audit methods should be reasonable and non-arbitrary. The law should clearly authorize the use of indirect audit methods by the tax administration and reverse or reverse the burden of proof when the approximate tax assessment is based on indirect audit methods. The burden of proof is placed on the taxpayer specifically as to the adequacy of the recalculated tax base in such situations. Despite this, courts in many jurisdictions have ruled that the administration should make sincere efforts to determine the taxpayer’s income, i.e. it simply cannot assign an abstract figure. A rough estimate of the taxpayer’s income should be based on reasonable grounds and should also take into account the taxpayer’s specific circumstances.

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Issues of Measurability on the Transparency of the Administrative Procedure Among Clients

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Abstract

The requirement for the transparency of the administrative procedure and the expectations for this arise step by step during the relevant legislation of European countries. However, the concept of this often used adjective remains vague in many cases, making it difficult to put it into practice. However, the requirement is of great importance for modern public administration systems in the 21st century: transparency has been proven to play a major role in building and maintaining citizens' trust in public administration and public bodies. Therefore, in addition to the objective meaning of transparency, which can be explored from legislation and the relevant legislative document, it is important to use empirical methods to explore the perceptions of transparency in clients. Transparency of the administrative procedure is in many respects a subjective concept. After all, in addition to the legislation on the administrative procedure and the consistent application process, as well as their communication, it depends to a large extent on the perceptions, knowledge, information and experience of the main stakeholders, usually natural persons clients. The presentation and the related study aim to explore this sense of transparency with empirical methods and seek to make practical findings that are independent of national specificities.

Keywords: administrative procedure, client, transparency, empirical methods.
English Language Teacher Education from the Lens of Critical Pedagogy

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Abstract

In English (as a foreign) language teacher education, there have been numerous theories which have been applied, adapted, and reconstructed based on the needs and conditions of the learners and teachers from very early times so far, that is, from the appearance of Behaviourism in foreign language education in the 1940s to the present time. There have always been many transitions and shifts among and within these theories explaining the practices in English (as foreign language) classes. This paper examines how these theories and transitions can be considered from the lens of Critical Pedagogy and it interrogates whether the recognition of the Critical Pedagogy may help foreign language teacher education turn to be transformative and whether it may contribute to the development of the conditions for a better world within and outside the school with the help of teachers trained to be critical. The theoretical framework of this chapter is built on the socio-cultural view, socio-cognitive view, transformative view and Critical Pedagogy in foreign language education. However, earlier theories such as the Behaviouristic Approach, the Cognitive Approach, and the Communicative Approach are visited as background knowledge. Given that the socio-cultural approach portrays human learning as a social process and the origination of human intelligence in society or culture referring to the fact that social interaction plays a basic role in the development of cognition, the socio-cognitive view deals with how language is learned and should be treated; and transformative learning gives way to actual behaviour that learners should establish to contribute to and participate in the community where they live in; these theories in the framework shed light on developing understandings of the recognition of Critical Pedagogy in the foreign language teacher education. Regarding this overview, it is seen that socio-cultural and socio-cognitive transformation could be led by critical pedagogy, in schools initially, then in the whole society, addressing radical concerns and the abuses of power in intercultural contexts in the acquisition of foreign languages and in their circulation by the help of critically trained foreign language teachers.

Keywords: transformative foreign language education, critical pedagogy, critical reflection, EFL, EFL materials